Richter, Tonio Sebastian

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Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.
WHAT'S IN A STORY?

CULTURAL NARRATOLOGY
AND COPTIC CHILD DONATION DOCUMENTS*

Dedicated to the inalienable boys Julian Deckert and Alfred Knebel!

Victor did not seem surprised in the least. ... "Did you ever read The Taming of the Shrew?" "Of course." "Well, you know the drunken tinker in the introduction who is made to think he is a lord, and whom they put the play on for?" "Sure," I replied. "His name was Christopher Sly. He has a few lines at the end of Act One and that is the last we hear of him ..." ... "Exactly," said Victor. "Six years ago an uneducated drunk who

* The present paper forms the preliminary result of a series of lectures. Its preceding version was read on the The Inaugural Sather Conference 'Papyrology: New Directions in a New Generation,' Berkeley, University of California, 11-12 November 2005. I am most grateful to Professor Roger Bagnall for inviting me to this productive symposium and to its participants for their questions and comments. An important impetus came from Arietta Papaconstantinou whose recent studies in the Coptic child donation dossier (A. Papaconstantinou, Θεία οικονομία. Les actes thébains de donation d’enfants ou la gestion monastique de la pénurie', [in:] Mélanges Gilbert Dagron. Travaux et Mémoires du Centre d’histoire et civilisation de Byzance 14, Paris 2002, pp. 511–526 and 'Notes sur les actes de donation d’enfant au monastère thébain de Saint-Phoibammon', JJP 32 [2002], pp. 83-105) partly confirmed and likewise, challenged my own reflections on the topic. I am indebted to Prof. Adam Jones (University of Leipzig) who improved the English of my paper.
spoke only Elizabethan English was found wandering in a confused state just outside Warwick. He said that his name was Christopher Sly, demanded a drink and was very keen to see how the play turned out. I managed to question him for half an hour, and in that time he convinced me that he was the genuine article – yet he never came to the realisation that he was no longer in his own play.” ... “What about the other way?” Victor looked at me sharply: “What do you mean?” “Have you ever heard of anyone jumping in the other direction?” Victor looked at the floor and rubbed his nose. “That’s pretty radical, Thursday.” “But do you think it’s possible?” “Keep this under your hat, Thursday, but I’m beginning to think that it is. The barriers between reality and fiction are softer than we think; a bit like a frozen lake. Hundreds of people can walk across it, but the one evening a thin spot develops and someone falls through; the hole is frozen over by the following morning.” ... He sighed. “I suppose you think that’s incredible?” “Not at all,” I replied, thinking of my own experiences with Rochester, “but are you absolutely sure he fell...?” “What do you mean?” “He could have made the jump by choice. He might have preferred it...” Victor looked at me strangely ... A thought crossed his mind. “You’ve done it, haven’t you?” I looked him straight in the eye. ... “Once,” I whispered. ‘When I was a very young girl. I don’t think I could do it again. For many years I thought even that was a hallucination.”


1. FRONTIER TRAFFIC BETWEEN REALITY AND FICTION

The frontiers between reality and fiction apparently cross boundaries in space and time, but where they actually run is not quite easy to define. The figures of Jasper Fforde’s The Eyre Affair seem to live rather close to them. Their manner of switching between factual and fictional realms, strange as it seems, remarkably recalls the opinion brought forth by a branch of literary studies about what actually happens between societies and their narrative resources. The extent of interdependence between individual as well as social experience, practice, and communication within a given culture and its narrative universe has been described
by Mieke Bal as follows: ‘Like semiotics, narratology applies to virtually every cultural object. Not that everything is narrative; but practically everything in culture has a narrative aspect to it, or at the very least, can be perceived, interpreted as narrative. In addition to the obvious predominance of narrative genres in literature, a random handful of places where narrative “occurs” includes lawsuits, visual images, philosophical discourse, television, argumentation, teaching, history-writing.’ And Mark Currie goes even a step further, claiming ‘that culture not only contains narratives but is contained by narrative in the sense that the idea of culture, either in general or in particular, is a narrative.’ Containing a narrative is just one remarkable feature of Coptic child donation documents. The study of this particular dossier might thus profit from a narratological approach, and I hope to show in the following that further work on Coptic child donation deeds actually needs to examine the text world of these documents and to consider its relationship with the real world they


reflect. Whether a narratological perspective might prove relevant to other fields of papyrological research or not is difficult to say; but certainly papyrology itself includes realms of both reality and fiction, as it were, namely documentary as well as literary texts.

2. COPTIC CHILD DONATION DEEDS, THEIR FORM AND CONTENT

Coptic child donation deeds were among the first Coptic documentary papyri known at all. Specimens were brought to Europe since the 1850s, so that, by the time Walter Crum published his monumental edition *Koptische Rechtsurkunden des achten Jahrhunderts aus Djême*, Leipzig 1912, the child donation dossier had increased to 26 documents, *P. KRU* 78–103. Although dating from the 8th century, they are stylized according to patterns and customs of Byzantine private notaries (for an example, see *P. KRU* 96 in the Appendix). The addressee of all 26 texts is the monastery of Phoibammon near Jême. However, the catchment area of child donation goes beyond the town of Jême: cases of issuers naming

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their home towns indicate some twenty kilometres. The documents are datable between 734 and 785. Usually, they are issued by the children’s fathers. Six documents are formally issued by both parents, four of them only by the mother. Those women might have been widowed or divorced or even unmarried. Remarkably enough, two documents seem to be issued jointly by a number of men (P. KRU 80 and 98).

In all cases but one, a single male child is donated; on one occasion it is a pair of boys (P. KRU 99), perhaps twins. Only one text identifies the age of the donated child: the disease preceding his donation broke out when he was three years old (P. KRU 78.15). One boy had already attained adulthood and agreed to his donation (P. KRU 79). In another case, the boy to be donated had temporarily evaded his destination, escaping to Cairo, some hundred kilometres north (P. KRU 93), so he might not have been all that young. But usually the boys seem to be rather young children. For practical reasons, we may assume they were no longer being suckled; hence, the attested instance of three years could actually represent something like a minimum age.

At the beginning of the deed corpus, almost all documents have a remarkable preamble, voicing an idea about property and its use. One
variety reads: 'The royal laws command that everybody shall do with his property whatever he wants. Hence, I attended to the conformity with the laws etc.' In this argument, child-donating is passed off as a particular item of the general rights of ownership. The second variety reads: 'Since God's law engages and encourages everybody to do the good and the useful, whatever he wants, with his property, and no power ruling at any time shall prevent anybody from doing the useful for the salvation of his soul ...'. According to its argument, God's law generally breaks earthly law. These preambles, preventive as they are, probably point to a latent juridical problem with child donations which will be touched upon later (see below § 3.4).

The next paragraph in the documents is the narratio, a story about what had happened before and what moved the issuers to make their decision: The child to be donated had been struck down by severe illness. The despairing parents, who had (or had not) broken an earlier vow of donation, besought Phoibammon and made (or renewed) the vow to give their boy to the monastery, if he should ever get well again. On a primary level, the function of the narratio corresponds to similar narrative entities in legal documents, usually preceding the legal clauses proper in order to recall the past history of a business transaction or legal act. In Coptic documents, the two levels of time involved in any legal agreement are linguistically referred to by the conjunctions ἐνετδΗ 'since, after' and τεΝΟγ 'now'. The narratio of a Coptic acknowledgement of debt, for instance, reads as follows: 'Since (ἐνετδΗ) I requested you, and you obliged me and you gave me so-and-so much, now (τεΝΟγ) I am willing etc.' However, compared with such a 'mini-narrative', as it were, comprising no more than one or two facts/sentences, the child donation narratio appears excessive in pure length and richness of details. Moreover, these details

13 E.g. P. KRU 87, 94, εΫτ.: ἄναμοις ἡδαςκεκοι κεκεγε ντενετ δετευων ποο δετευων υμετετευων δε δαυατ ωυ κατακουλουβά ἄναμοις.
14 E.g. P. KRU 100 εΫτ.: εΠΕΙΔΗ ἄναμοις μιμουτε γενεγε δεν χερ εοτεγε λουην νην δετευων ποο πιακενοι ανπενενανετευων δε δεν ηπυλα κατα κατα νακανα νουλα κεδενε αρπενοιενη γαποκεναι ετετεμοκε.
15 E.g. O. Vindob. Copt. 23: εΠΕΙΔΗ ανπακακει νιοκ ακαμουε γαταγε ακαι εκα νιοκ ενοςκοτι ναι ... τεΝΟγ το κρετενοι ...
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are by no means restricted to events and actions, but include also direct and indirect speech passages conveying thoughts, wishes, moral values and knowledge of the first-person protagonists. Therefore it seems all the more remarkable that no single version of this narratio is really individual, that almost all the colours are stereotyped. The story of P. KRU 96 in the appendix below, for instance, occurs also in P. KRU 89 and 100, with very slight differences only.

The business clauses proper concern the monastery’s titles and the children’s state and duties. The monastery’s rights are defined in terms of ownership, such as: ‘The monastery is master of the boy’ (P. KRU 79, 80, 81, &c.), or ‘Nobody else shall be master of the boy during all the days of his life except the monastery’ (P. KRU 81,26), and so on. Certain phrases, like ‘to acquire him and to re-acquire him and to direct him and to manage him’ (P. KRU 80, 93), are taken literally from the formulae employed in property sales. Sometimes the monastery’s responsibility

16 Forming part of the so-called ‘character domains’ of the narrator, in terms of narrative theory and possible world theory (cf. M-L. RYAN, Possible World, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory. Bloomington/Indiana 1991; S. STRASEN ‘Narratologie und possible-world theory: Narrative Texte als alternative Welten’ [in] NUNNING & NUNNING (Hsgg.), Neue Ansätze (cit. n. 2), pp. 185–218; C. SURKAMP, ‘Narratologie und possible-world theory: Narrative Texte als alternative Welten’, [in] NUNNING & NUNNING [Hsgg.], op. cit., pp. 168–169): ‘Character domains’ are statements revealing the narrator’s knowledge-world, obligation-world &c., such as ‘We reflected in our hearts about God. «I do not wholly desert anybody on earth»’ (P. KRU 91.7–8); ‘as I knew the mercy of God and the healings which his Saint has done in his topoi many times’ (P. KRU 80.22); ‘We besought the angel of the holy altar that he ... might pray for him (the sick child) before Christ, and he (Christ) would give him health’ (P. KRU 84.19–20); ‘And this does not just happen to me, it has happend since the time of Samuel the prophet, whom his parents donated to the temple of the Lord’ (P. KRU 85.29–31); ‘as is told about her (i.e., Anna) in the book of the kings’ (P. KRU 89.25, 100.39); ‘I will tell you this great miracle of God, who is with his Saints’ (P. KRU 80.15–16); ‘In this time, ... God brought a severe illness upon my dear son, according to my sins’ (P. KRU 81.17); ‘I thought of the great amount of my wicked deeds’ (P. KRU 89.1, 100.14–15); ‘Forgive me the violation which I have done in my foolishness’ (P. KRU 86.23–24).

17 The boy’s state is often described by means of comparison: He is to become ‘just like an old (i.e. an adult?) servant/slave’ (P. KRU 98.7), ‘just like a servant/slave bought for money’ (P. KRU 82.16, 97.19); ‘just like all servants/slaves of the monasteries’ (P. KRU 81.27); ‘just like the children of all monasteries’ (P. KRU 92.13); ‘just like anybody who is vowed to a monastery’ (P. KRU 99.12–13).

18 Cf. STEINWENTER, ‘Kinderschenkungen’ (cit. n. 11), p. 185 + n. 9. Cf. also clauses like those: ‘If he – God forbid! (δέχαται γάρ γένοιτο) – will marry, his children whom he will beget
for feeding and clothing the child is explicitly mentioned (e.g. *P. KRU* 87, 90, 103). If parental rights of disposal have thus been replaced by ownership rights similar to property titles, the question arises as to what civic state these donated boys were in. In this regard, however, the Coptic texts are ambivalent. Just like the Latin term *servus*, the Coptic word *σάγων* could designate slaves as well as personally free servants. Certain expressions, such as ‘all the days of his life’, or ‘just like a *σάγων* bought for money’ give the impression of an entire loss of freedom. And at any rate, both general and detailed accounts of the boys’ duties clearly show that these children could not expect any education, nor were they expected to become monks one day: their only role was to perform simple donkey work and verger services.

Yet there is an obvious incoherency within the documents. Apart from the above-mentioned claims we also find clauses concerning cases where that donated boy after coming of age would leave the monastery, would live and work outside the monastery’s walls, would marry and have children. Some of these clauses deal with a
rent called ḏHMOCION, to be paid by the former servant to the monastery.\textsuperscript{23} As in Byzantine Greek papyri, ḏHMOCION in Coptic documents usually designates public taxes in general or property tax in particular.\textsuperscript{24} But, as Arietta Papaconstantinou has argued, in the clause under discussion the term may rather mean a kind of church tax.\textsuperscript{25} Be that as it may, such a relationship to the monastery could still be called clientship, but not bondage.

3. APPROACHES TO INTERPRETING COPTIC CHILD DONATION DOCUMENTS IN TERMS OF SOCIAL HISTORY, HISTORY OF RELIGION, AND HISTORY OF LAW

Up to now, a number of Egyptologists, Coptologists, and law historians have made efforts to reconstruct the social, religious, and legal setting of this unique dossier. It is impossible to survey this discussion in great detail, but I want to give a brief sketch of four scenarios which have played prominent roles in this discussion.

sized the fact that none of the documents contains both types of statements, the requirement of eternal service to be done by the boy, and the explicit limitation of the contract. But I am not quite sure if this difference should be interpreted, as Papaconstantinou does, in terms of two different degrees of commitment. I am inclined to reconstruct the legal situation of the boys from a synopsis of all documents, assuming the conditions were always the same, although the words of recording them could vary, be more or less detailed, explicit, &c.

\footnote{E.g., P. KRU 81.21ff.: 'and he shall serve the holy monastery, be it by the service of his body, or be it, that he gives his démosion for the lamps of the holy place, so that he will be servant/slave (G&YON) of the monastery during all the days of his life (or) he gives his démosion to the monastery every year.'; P. KRU 92.10ff.: '... so that he spends his entire life in this monastery as a servant/slave (G&YON) or even (ήγουν), when he comes of age (ήλικία), that he gives you his démosion according to what you will agree with him'; P. KRU 99.13ff.: 'If they want to live within the monastery, they shall serve it ... or - likewise desirable! -, if they want to live outside, they shall give their démosion to the monastery, and it shall be used for the expenses of the prosphora and the illumination of the altar.'}

\footnote{For the Coptic evidence (but without distinction of these two semantic varieties), see H. Forster, Wörterbuch der griechischen Wörter in den koptischen dokumentarischen Texten, Berlin – New York 2002, pp. 171-173.}

\footnote{Papaconstantinou, 'Notes sur les actes' (cit. n. [*]), pp. 102-105.}
3.1. *Oblatio puerorum*  

This Christian practice developed in the fourth and fifth centuries and was finally elaborated by Benedict of Nursia in terms of liturgy and church law. Having survived the following centuries in the Visigothic and Franconian church, the custom fell into disrepute and disuse during the monastic reform movement from the 11th century onwards. The *oblatio puerorum*, a major source of monk recruitment over centuries, was...


27 Basilius still required confirmation/rejection of the oblation by the promised when they had come of age, but *Regula Benedicti*, chapter 59, claimed the irrevocability of the oblation, and the 4th synod at Toledo 633. (ch. 49) stressed: *monachum aut paterna devoto aut propria professione facit*. The 2nd Trullan synod 692. fixed 10 years as the minimum age of *pueri oblati*. The synod of Aachen 817. required confirmation of the oblation by the *oblatus*. At last, the monastic reform movement (Cluny, Hirsau) principally refused the oblation of children.

28 An earlier German rendering of *oblatio puerorum* was 'Mönchung', a *nomen actionis* derived from the a verb *mönchen* i.e. 'to monk somebody'; cf. Laske, *Das Problem der Mönchung* (cit. n. 26).
typically conducted by men (or families) of rank who donated one of their children to the monastery usually together with a gift of money replacing the child’s share of the parental inheritance – an investment of potential human resources and money in order to earn social prestige and religious capital. The pueri oblati enjoyed a high-quality education before they finally became monks. It was the law historian Artur Steinwenter who pointed to similarities between the oblatio puerorum in the Latin western church and the Coptic child donation: the parents’ vow, the donation itself, and the conceptual connection of their own practice with the vow of the Old Testament figure Hanna, the mother of Samuel. But Steinwenter also conceded the limits of comparison, when he wrote:

‘Warum aber in Djême die Kinder nicht als künftige Mönche, sondern nur als Klosterknechte dargebracht werden, das erfahren wir aus all diesen Analogien nicht, und so müssen wir uns, wenn anders nicht leere

29 Cf. DE JONG, In Samuel’s Image (cit. n. 26), pp. 267–289, esp. her concluding remark p. 288: ‘One thing is clear: it was the opposite of abandonment. Those donating children strove to create lasting ties with the sacred and therefore attempted to retain the ties with their children rather than relinquishing them. Although it was obvious to all concerned that God was not an equal exchange partner, it was also evident that those giving away their children or land followed God’s precepts, and would therefore benefit both in this world and the next.’

30 From the so-called nutriti, the monasteries’ own ‘breed’, rised the flower of the contemporary intellectual elite, such as Bonifacius, Beda Venerabilis and Hrabanus Maurus.


Vermutungen aufgestellt werden sollen, damit bescheiden, daß die Frage mit den heutigen Mitteln der Forschung noch nicht gelöst werden kann.'

Unlike Steinwenter, I think this issue can be resolved (see below, § 5).

3.2. Hierodulism

François de Villenoisy compared the donation of children as attested by the Coptic documents to older Egyptian evidence of people committing themselves to temples. Walter Otto included our dossier in his studies on hierodulism in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt, and Heinz-Josef Thissen subtitled his essay on Coptic child donation documents: 'Zur Hierodulie im christlichen Ägypten'. The present writer too has elsewhere emphasized connections between Coptic child donation deeds and Demotic self-dedication documents. 'Hierodulism' in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt included several forms (and degrees) of self-commitment of adult persons to their favourite gods and temples. Even this brief definition reveals a substantial difference between pre-Christian hierodulistic practices and the donation of young boys by their parents. Moreover, the concepts of hierodulism and hierodules, although playing a role as phenomenological categories in modern religious studies, actually seem to correspond with neither a coherent concept nor a well-defined social entity in Egypt. Hence, whether or not one calls the boys of


\[36\] RICHTER, *Rechtssemantik* (cit. n. 21), pp. 136–142, excursus 'Die Anrede des heiligen Urkundendestinatärs und die göttlichen Destinatäre demotischer Urkunden'.

\[37\] This is the result of a research by R. SCHOLL, 'Zur Bezeichnung ἱερόδουλος im griechisch-römischen Ägypten', [in] *Atti XVIII CongIntPaP*, Napoli 1984, pp. 977–983, and IDEM, 'Ἡερόδουλος im griechisch-römischen Ägypten', *Historia* 34 (1985), pp. 466–492, on the word ἱερόδουλος as used in Greek papyri from Egypt. According to him, persons called
Phoibammôn 'hierodules', at any rate the heuristic value of the concept seems rather limited.

3.3. Child-Exposure


mother may have been lower, and there was the possibility of selection with an overall tendency favouring healthy, male children. The advantage of exposure as compared to infanticide was the more or less realistic hope entertained by parents forced to do this by economic reasons, that their child would be found and reared, be it only to be brought up as a slave. As is well-known, in Greek and Roman law the exposure of chil-

39 Cf. Harris, 'The Theoretical Possibility' (cit. n. 38) contra Engels 1980. The often-quoted papyrological reference P. Oxy. IV 744 (interpreted with A. Deimann, Licht vom Osten, Tübingen 1923 (4 ed.), pp. 134-135; 'When you give birth, if it was male, let it [living], if it was female, expose it'), recently has been challenged by West, 'Whose Baby?' (cit. 38).

40 According to by Harris, 'Child-Exposure' (cit. n. 38), there are two main types of exposure: Exposure A 'in which the exposers hoped, more or less realistically, that the child would be rescued' vs. Exposure B 'in which the expected result was death.' Exposure A 'was the fate of very many of the infants who were exposed for economic reasons,' while 'illegitimate and physically compromised were usually subjects to Exposure B,' Harris, op. cit., p. 11, wrote: 'The survival chances of an exposed infant depended on five variable factors, in addition to lack: (1) his or her initial physical condition; (2) how much the exposers did to help the infant to survive – and here there was a range of intentions, from lethal to desperately hopeful; (3) whether the community included persons willing to invest in bringing up the child as a slave (there were clearly places in Egypt and Asia Minor and probably in Achaea and Syria and Italy, where it was common for exposed infants to be collected); (4) the level of demand for slave labour; and (5) gender – boys were probably more likely to be rescued than girls.'
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... was a legal prerogative of the father.\(^{41}\) It was not until the legislation of the Christian emperors from the late 4th century onwards that exposure as well as infanticide were re-evaluated and became criminalized.\(^{42}\) An interpretation of the Coptic child donation as a disguised, christianized sort of exposure\(^{43}\) seems plausible in view of the obviously hard lot of the donated children, as is displayed in the business clauses. However, this view overlooks some well-known social data concerning child-exposure in antiquity, such as the fact that exposure exclusively involved (and meant by definition) the abandonment of new-born, entirely helpless children, besides the fact that usually boys were more likely to have the privilege of growing up in their families.

3.4. Sale of dependants

Sale of dependants, especially of children and wives, was also a common practice in antiquity, usually motivated by famine, a fate which whole villages could be suddenly confronted with in pre-modern societies based on a subsistence economy.\(^{44}\) The Coptic child donation deeds are shaped


\(^{42}\) Cf. \textsc{Memmer}, \textit{Ad servitutem aut ad lupanar}, p. 68: 'Valentinian, Valens and Gratian bedrohten im Februar 374 die Kindesstörung mit der Todesstrafe (CTh. 9.14.1 = C. 9.16.8). Einen Monat später pönaлизiert Valentinian den Tatbestand der Kindesweglegung.' Ibid., p. 70: 'Die strafrechtliche Verbotsbestimmung des Valentinian scheint nur die Aussetzung der eigenen Kinder erfaßt zu haben. Die \textit{expositio} des Sklavenkindes blieb erlaubt. ... Der aussetzende \textit{dominus vel patronus}, der das Kind gewissermaßen dem Tode ausgesetzt hat, wird der Rechte an diesem für verlustig erklärt.'


by the form of sales, and Byzantine legislation related to the sale of children seems to be reflected in the preambel, if we are right in interpreting its half-true claims as a sort of diversionary tactic. The close restrictions made by the *Codex Justinianus* 4.43.2 strongly limiting the sale of dependants and permitting parents as well as the children themselves to withdraw from the business might partially explain the above-mentioned in-

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56 Cf. Memmer *Ad servitutem aut ad lupanar* (cit. n. 41), pp. 80–81: Justinian dehnt die Verbotsbestimmung von 374 [cf. above, n. 42] auf den *dominus* aus, der den *partus ancillae* aussetzen läßt. Die Aussetzung neugeborener Kinder wird im justinianischen Recht als Mord qualifiziert. [Nov. 153, praefatio (a. 542)]. ... Das ausgesetzte Kind darf nicht in die Sklaverei gezogen werden. ... Damit ist jedem Findelkind die Freiheit gesichert. ... Der Finder hat keine Rechte an diesem Kind. Sein Verhalten ist aus dem *officium pietatis* heraus zu erklären, und dieses verbietet, daß er Vorteile aus der Aufnahme zieht [C. 8.57(82).3.4].

57 Cf. Memmer *Ad servitutem aut ad lupanar* (cit. n. 41), p. 82: 'Die erste Stoßrichtung führt zu einer mehrfachen Einschränkung des Kinderhandels: als alleinige *causa* ist der Kauf erlaubt, die unentgeltliche Hingabe [i.e., *donation*] bewirkt chensowenig wie die Aufnahme eines Findelkindes. Ferner dürfen nunmehr neugeborene Kinder verkauft werden ... und drittens werden nur die aus der Not heraus verkauften Kinder dienstpflichtig. Der zweite Maßnahmenbereich greift das Widerrufsrecht auf, das stark erweitert wird: Nicht nur die Eltern können die Auslösung durchsetzen, sondern auch das verkaufte Kind und sogar jeder Dritte. Die Lösung wird – wie schon unter Konstantin – an die Erstattung des Preises oder die Stellung eines Ersatzsklaven gebunden [cf. the same requirement in
coherency within the business clauses. However, there is only sparse evidence of the main motive for the sale of dependants, sudden economic pressure or indebtedness, in the documents themselves.

All these scenarios share the notion that the main interest was on the part of, and the first activity came from, the donators, the children's parents. By contrast, Arietta Papaconstantinou has recently emphasized the activity and the interest at the monastery's end, pointing to parallels in the realm of the Byzantine and western churches, and arguing that the monastery's authorities 'used the cult of saints to its advantage, as a counterbalance to economic difficulties encountered under Early Islamic rule.'

Any reconstruction of the social and religious setting of the child donation documents has to handle information not only taken from the business clauses, but also communicated in the narratio. The latter however, vividly told and detailed as it is, proves to be largely stereotyped, as mentioned above. The various ways of handling this information thus depend on different attitudes towards the 'boile-plate' quality of the narratio. Heinz-Josef Thissen, who considered child donation a christianized sort of child exposure, did not conceal his heavy distrust of the narratio, and Arietta Papaconstantinou even views it as a means of intimidation employed by the monastery's authorities for inducing people to do what they would not have done otherwise, while Sofia Schaten, who argues the penalty clause of P. KRU 95, quoted above, n. 27}.' So, the aim of this legislation actually was to convert exposure, type A (cf. above, n. 51), into sale of children.

This has been taken for granted as a constituent of the setting of child donation by STEINWENTER, 'Kinderschenkungen' (cit. n. 11), p. 204 and THISSLN, 'Koptische Kinderschenkungsurkunden' (cit. n. 35), p. 124.

A hint to this direction is P. KRU 89.28-29, where the issuer complains about θανατός ετησίων 'the burden of the financial (?) demands (?) which is upon us'.

PAPACONSTANTINOU, Θεία οικονομία (cit. n [*]), p. 511.

THISSLN, 'Koptische Kinderschenkungsurkunden' (cit. n. 35), p. 119: 'Hier sei zunächst vermerkt, daß der in dieser Urkunde geschilderte Ablauf des Geschehens: Gelübde - Vegessen des Gelübdes ... - Krankheit des Kindes usw, der so individuell wirkt, sozusagen die «Standardausrüstung» aller Kinderschenkungsurkunden darstellt.'

PAPACONSTANTINOU, Θεία οικονομία (cit. n [*]), p. 522: 'Si l'utilisation de formulaires-types est courante dans la pratique notariale, elle est plus inattendue pour les parties du document censées rapporter une histoire «personelle».' Ibidem, p. 526: 'Il est vrai que le
for a purely religious intention of the donators, takes it to be more or less reliable, to cite two extremely divergent views. Anyway, the overall tendency of these attitudes, different in scope and detail as they are, is to treat the issue as an alternative, reality or fictitiousness. In the following I will argue against this view, trying rather to balance out features of reality as well as fictitiousness within the narratio.

4. THE NARRATIO, ITS STRUCTURE, AND ITS NARRATIVE PATTERNS

Treating the narratio as what it looks like, just a story, we find its plot, i.e., the structure of narrative constituents advancing the story, occurring in two versions, a long and a short one; additionally an abridged short version exists.

charactère stéréotypé des documents, redigés pour l'essentiel par les notaires sur la base des indications fournies, occulte la réalité des sentiments parentaux. Les éléments de pathos et d'affectivité obéissent à une topique qui n'a rien de personnel, et que l'on retrouve d'un texte à l'autre.'


Steinwenter, 'Kinderschenkungen' (cit. n. 11) is ambivalent. One time he writes (p. 181): 'daß nahezu alle diese Schenkungen sich als Erfüllung eines Gelübdes geben.' Short time later he says (pp. 181-182): 'Allerdings kam es nicht allzu selten vor, daß hinterdrein die Eltern das Gelübde reute und sie sich der Erfüllung entzogen, bis diese ihre Sünde durch Gott gestraft wurde, indem das Kind schwer erkrankte.' [italics by T. S. R]. E. Wipszycka, 'Donation of Children', [in:] The Coptic Encyclopedia III (1991), pp. 918-919, at p. 918 wrote cautiously: 'There is no reason to distrust the sincerity of those declarations, although the possibility exists of other economic and social motives on the part of the parents.'

Note some explicit references to 'story-telling' in the child donation document, such as: ΤΙΑΤΑΜΟΣ ΕΚΝΗΣ ΝΙΜΦΗ ΝΙΜΟΥΤΕ ΕΤΑΝΗΝΕΤΟΥΛΑ (P. KRU 80,15) 'I will tell you these great miracles of god who is in his Saints'; ΤΙΑΤΑΜΟΣ ΑΧΝΗΣ (P. KRU 79,19) 'I will tell you exactly'.

The long plot is six times attested (P. KRU 80, 86, 89, 96, 97, 100), the short plot six times in its full version (P. KRU 84, 85, 88, 91, 93, 102) and four times in its abridged version (P. KRU 78, 79, 81, 98). In six documents the narratio is not preserved (P. KRU 83, 90, 92, 95, 101, 103), while four documents (P. KRU 82, 87, 94, 99) go medias in res without a narratio.
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<td>7. Donation of the child</td>
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Fig. 1. Plot structure of the long plot

The long plot (fig. 1) forms a regular, classically structured narrative: telling the story of the child's birth and the parents' first vow, an initial position is outlined. The story starts moving when the parents decide to break their vow, and it gets complicated by the subsequent illness of the child. The underlying causality between these two incidents, an important feature of narrativity, is sometimes explicitly stated in direct speech: 'I discussed it with his mother, saying: «Perhaps it is (because of) our vow which we have broken».' (P. KRU 89.9; 96.31-34; 100.22-23). In the second vow of the parents the story reaches its utmost point of suspense; the healing of the child marks the turning point; the action falls when the parents return to their home, and the end position is reached when they decide to donate their child to the monastery.

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<td>1. Birth of the child</td>
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Fig. 2. Plot structure of the short plot.

57 The elements are classified here according to FREYTAG’s pyramid, an application of Aristotle’s poetological analysis of the suspense economy of tragedies to narratives, cf. G. PRINCE, A Dictionary of Narratology. Lincoln – London 2003, p. 36.
58 Cf. PRINCE, A Dictionary of Narratology (cit. n. 57), p. 11 s.v ‘causality’. 
The short plot (see fig. 2) lacks the first vow within the exposition: instead, the disease of the child is sometimes motivated by the general level of sin attained by the parents at that time. The abridged short plot lacks an element quite important for the narrative consistency of the story: the healing of the child is not narrated. But it is actually taken for granted, since the parents’ vow contains (or, consists of) the usual business clauses regulating the child’s service in the monastery. So, the ‘I’ of the story, the narrator, returns the issuer without any formal break between narratio and business clauses. In the case of the long plot and the complete short plot on the other hand, the decision of child-donating works as a formal link between the narrative and the legal act, between a textual universe and the real world.

However, the child donation narratio is not only embedded in the overall structures of narrative as a genre, but is inspired and shaped by patterns from narrative resources of the Christian community of Egypt. It is the narrator himself who points out to us a religious and narrative prototype, when he says: ‘He who had listened to the prayer of Anna the prophetess, the mother of Samuel the prophet, has also listened to us.’ (P. KRU 89.30–32; 96.51–53; 100.30–32). Or, in a similar vein: ‘And this happens not just to me, it has happened since the time of Samuel the prophet, whom his parents donated to the temple of the Lord’ (P. KRU 85.29–31), or when the narrator modestly confesses: ‘... since we do not attain the measure of the blessed Anna, the prophetess and mother of the prophet’ (P. KRU 100.37–38). It is the Old Testament story about the childless Anna from the First Book of Samuel, Chapter 1, who promises: ‘O Lord, ... if thou ... wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the lord all the days of his life’. But this biblical narrative is not yet the immediate pattern of the narratio. Still more directly, it is squeezed, as it were, into a contemporary narrative matrix. This is at least allusively referred to when the narrator says: ‘I will tell you this great miracle’,59 as that matrix story, attested in a number of versions,60 is a miracle...
story. I quote it according to a panegyrikós on Viktor stratēlatês. Passing over the exposition and rising action, I start with the complication: ‘Suddenly a large stone fell from a corner of the house; it fell down upon the boy, and he died at once. When his parents heard this, they tore their clothes, they came and cried with loud voices, and found the child dead. Oh, how great was the grief at this hour! They shouted: «Woe is us, our beloved son! We are guilty of your death, since we have made and have broken a vow to donate you to the monastery of the Saint» ... But his father composed himself in a great, strong faith. He took the child on his shoulders, while his mother and his servants followed him, and brought him into the martyrion of St. Viktor. He laid him down at the altar and cried: «Lord Jesus, I know you are almighty, and you gave us this child. Now, do not act according to our foolishness, but have pity on our tears and bring back the soul to him, and we will be servants to you until the day of our death.» And due to the prayers of St. Viktor, the boy opened his eyes immediately, and great joy befell the father of the boy and his mother at this hour ... And he stayed together with his wife and his son in the monastery until the day of his death. And the child became a famous ascetic; later he held the rank of a presbyter.’

Thissen and Arietta Papaconstantinou then right in considering the narratio a tissue of lies, used merely as a pious cover-up for entirely different facts? I believe not, because the narratio actually does records things that were undoubtedly real. The fathers, couples, widows or unmarried women, the children, their horrible diseases, and the monastery itself, these all did really exist, and taken together they form such broad a base of reality that it seems justified to read each individual version of the narratio as a non-fictional autobiographical narrative. Admittedly, these autobiographies were not written by their protagonists, surely illiterate people, and they may not even have been told by them. Yet this does not in any sense contradict their classification as non-fictional autobiographical narratives. They just belong to the category of 'group autobiographies', autobiographical first-person narratives composed by more than one person, and consequently going beyond the perspective, knowledge and self-consciousness of the protagonist; but still they are autobiographical, at least no less autobiographical than, say, what a psychoanalyst would consider the autobiography of his patient. As for the shaping of these autobiographies by narrative patterns from literature, this is considered a particular, almost unavoidable feature of any autobiographical narration.

63 Chamberlain & Thompson, ‘Introduction’ (cit. n. 62), p. 9: ‘When Freud had completed Dora’s narrative, was it hers, or Freud’s?’
5. EXPERIENCE AND GENRE:
The Truth and Function of a Non-Fictional Autobiographical Narrative

Obviously, seeing reality versus fictitiousness as the two alternatives is not an appropriate perspective on the child donation narratio. Indeed, the point of autobiographical narrating lies just in the dead angle of this perspective, because autobiographical narratives are never not real and never not fictional. This is what Mary Chamberlain and Paul Thompson have called ‘the anomalous position of autobiography within traditional genres’. The question ‘How far should it be read as a narrative of real experience, and how far as a form of fiction?’ is answered by them as follows: Any live story, whether a written autobiography or an oral testimony, is shaped not only by the reworkings of experience through memory and re-evaluation but also always at least to some extent by art. Any communication had to use shared conversations not only of language itself but also the more complex expectations of ‘genre’: of the forms expected within a given context and type of communication. These reflections lead me to the hypothetical conclusion that the child donation narratio may have borrowed from popular genres in order to express personal feelings on certain issues which could not otherwise be addressed. But what feelings and what issues could not otherwise be addressed? I would like to focus once again on the most remarkable discord within the documents: the emotiveness and religious solemnity of the narratio, forming a conspicuous contrast to the trivial fate of child servants of a monastery. Moreover, this very discrepancy between textual fiction and reality marks a clear difference between the narratio and its narrative patterns, since Samuel as well as the promised children of the miracle stories became real servants of God: priests, monks, a ‘famous ascetic’. It is just this discord which Steinwenter addressed and in the question why the children at Jême were donated not as future

65 Chamberlain & Thompson, ‘Introduction’ (cit. n. 62), p. 3.
66 Chamberlain & Thompson, ‘Introduction’ (cit. n. 62), p. 3.
monks but as servants of the monastery. I suspect that the reason Steinwenter was seeking is a sad one. I am afraid the children of Pfoibammôn were no appropriate candidates. This assumption is supposed by some non-stereotypical ornaments woven into the prefabricated texture of the narratio. For instance, a boy who is apparently born after seven months and whose disease is called ‘demoniac;’ a child who had been thrown into the fire, it is told, by the Devil (perhaps an epileptic fit?), and who almost burnt; a boy who ran away from home (P. KRU 93.15–17); a number of children obviously living with male or female single parents (P. KRU 79, 80, 81, 86, 95). Is it permitted to generalize from these few clues? The result would shed light on the misery of overexerted, discouraged parents of children who had become a burden, parents thus being in a complex dilemma of emotional, social and religious components. The narrative matrix would have served to integrate difficult lives by means of its intrinsic power, the ‘persuasive power of coherent narrative,’ the therapeutic energy of a well-constructed story possessing a kind of immediate narrative truth and permitting us ‘to make sense out of nonsense’.

The interaction and communication between the monastery and the issuers of child donation

68 *Steinwenter*, ‘Kinderschenkungen’ (cit. n. 11), p. 207, see above, § 3.1 with n. 42.

The same crucial question was one of the starting points of *Papacostantinou’s reappraisal of the whole subject: ‘s’il s’agissait d’actes purement religieux, pourquoi les enfants n’embrassaient-ils pas la vie monastique?’ (Papacostantinou, *Θεία οικονομία* [cit. n. (*)}, p. 516).

69 P. KRU 86.18–19: δυσε οὐμιρη σαμι προοτι ναι ... ἀπεικονισάμην προοτ.

70 P. KRU 86.36–37: Δυσε ερώι οὐμιρη καλάμη.

71 P. KRU 97.7–9: ἑανωνος προτ παυμη έτημον έροτ ερώι ομοι άντε να δελλαν.

Even after his ‘salvation’ and reconvalescence from this accident, the boy was weakly: P. KRU 95.33 ff.: ‘He [i.e., God] will not permit that anybody shall bring Pesynthios out of this topos, since the illness which befell him has made him weak (δελλαν κα τοποτ άντε να δελλαν).’


documents, resulting in the child donation *narratio*, would have been a medium providing the parents themselves and their community with a concept to think about, and a language to talk about otherwise disturbing, isolating experiences. So, to speak with Fforde’s protagonist Thursday Next, they ‘could have made the jump by choice,’ they ‘might have preferred it.’

This hypothesis, whilst certainly not contrary to that of Arietta Papaconstantinou, yet implies a somewhat different emphasis. It takes into account an original interest on the parents’ part, and tries to interpret the interaction and interlocution forming the child-donation procedure to the monastery of Phoibammôn as a symbiotic, reciprocal sort of social activity, rather than a merely unilateral ‘stratégie de pression et d’intimidation’ induced by the monastery to its own economic advantage only. The crucial issue here which remains to be considered is the overall interdependence between individual as well as social experience, practice, and communication within a given culture and its narrative universe – the key question of cultural narratology.

74 Note that this description comes quite close to how *Papaconstantinou, Θεία οικονομία* (cit. n. [*]), p. 526, characterized the function of the *narratio*, although with another scope: ‘Il est vrai que le caractère stéréotypé des documents, redigés pour l’essentiel par les notaires sur la base des indications fournies, occulte la réalité des sentiments parentaux. Les éléments de pathos et d’affectivité obéissent à une topique qui n’a rien de personel, et que l’on retrouve d’un texte à l’autre’. Admittedly I would prefer to think ‘la réalité des sentiments parentaux’ no intrinsic entity but quite a complex construct formed and influenced a great deal by social and religious constituents.

75 Cf. passages identifying the narrators’ fate with that of their famous predecessors, such as: ‘and this does not just happen to me, it has happened since the time of Samuel the prophet, whom his parents donated to the temple of the Lord’ (*P. KRU* 85.29–31).

76 *Papaconstantinou, Θεία οικονομία* (cit. n. [*]), p. 526
APPENDIX

P. KRU 96:
DONATION OF A BOY BY HIS FATHER
TO THE MONASTERY OF PHOIBAMMÔN NEAR JÊME,
REPRESENTED BY ITS SUPERIOR SURUS

1. PROTOCOL

Invocation and date
† In the name of God, the Almighty! Written in the month Mesorê, (day) 26, Ind(iction year) 13.

Intitulatio of the issuer and address of the consignee
I, Phoibammôn, the son of Athanasios, who causes a writing assistant to sign for him and has requested trustworthy witnesses to witness this uninfringible, undestructable donation deed which cannot be troubled by the laws, I am writing to the dikaios of the holy martyr Saint Phoibammôn in the rocks of Jêmê, represented by you, Surus, the most godfearing diacon, and everybody who comes after you in the same monastery of Saint Phoibammôn as its superior:

2. DEED CORPUS

Preambel
Since God’s law engages and encourages everybody to do the good and the useful, whatever he wants, with his property:

Narratio
After the mercy God has ordered and my son was born, I thought of my sins and decided that, if he would live, I would give him to the monastery of Apa Phoibammôn for the salvation of my soul. But when the little boy
grew up and made good progress, I intended to break my vow that I had settled with God and his Saint. After that, the little boy fell into a great and very severe disease, and we had much grief about the little boy and we were envious to see all the healthy little children who are the consolation of their parents. We discussed – I and his mother – that perhaps God and his Saint had done this for us, since we had infringed the alliance that we had formed with him. We consulted together: ‘Let’s set off and take the little boy and go to the holy monastery and request the holy martyr: “Forgive us the boldness we have done!” Perhaps he will ask God and he gives healing to the little boy.’ Then we took the little boy and brought him into the holy monastery. We always besought God and his Saint, the holy Phoibammôn, we cried and besought the martyr: ‘Forgive us the sin we have done!’, and we always received the holy Communion together with the little boy, and after a period of one month, he who had listened to the prayers of the blessed Anna, the mother of Samuel the prophet, also listened to us. He gave healing to the little boy, and we went back home, praised God and reflected: ‘This little boy was counted among the dead before he received healing. But now, he has got well. So he may become a servant of the holy monastery, the place where he received healing.’

**Business clauses**

When we came here today, we thought: ‘Lest somebody from our village attempts to make difficulties for the little boy!’ (and) I started to issue this donation deed, and I forwarded it to our father, the Bishop, and the superior, that he may keep it in the library of the holy monastery, so that, if somebody should prevent the little boy from being a servant to the monastery, it can be brought and shown. If they read it, they will refrain from this big crime. Whoever among the Christians should dare to demand this little boy from the holy monastery, he will be under the judgement that the Lord has spoken through the mouth of Moses the Hierophant concerning those who would hinder the vow of the Lord. Furthermore, if the little boy dislikes being servant to the monastery, the place where he has been healed, then he shall give all he acquires by his handicraft to the monastery according to what will be agreed with the future superior.
3. FINISHING CLAUSES

Dismissio of the deed, stipulation and witness signs

As a safeguard for the *dikaios* of the holy monastery I have issued this donation deed, it is sure and valid at any place where it will be shown. It has been read to me by the notary, I enjoyed it and I confirmed it by writing assistants and trustworthy witnesses. I dismissed it in accordance with the laws. ↑↑ I, Patlôle, the son of Abraham from the Epoikion And(roniku), I am witness ↑↑ I, Koumète, the son of Paphora, I am witness ↑↑ I, John, (the son of) Sanagap from the Epoikion And(roniku) I am witness ↑

↑ I, Senouthios, (the son of) Johannake from Hermonthis, I am witness ↑

Completion note of the notary

↑ (Greek:) Written by me, Elisaios, the most humble priest, from Hermonthis.

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*Tonio Sebastian Richter*

Universität Leipzig
Ägyptologisches Institut
Burgstraße 21
D-04109 Leipzig
BRD
e-mail: sebricht@rz.uni-leipzig.de