

The Origins of Ancient Monasticism.
A socio-historical and linguistic perspective

„*The Origins of Christian Monasticism are embedded in Christian Asceticism*“. With this statement Karl Suso Frank opened up his study of the history of Christian monasticism (6th edition, 2010). According to his view monasticism developed gradually out of a movement of hermits or anchorites into a coenobitic community. This progression was enhanced through a strong religious motivation of self-fulfillment, which was often accompanied by a form of escapism. The concept of such a linear historical process still remains popular among religious scholars and ancient historians. In contrast to this asceticism-paradigm my research project draws on the socio-historical theory, developed by the medievalist Otto Gerhard Oexle, in order to discover alternative role models and lines of development of this innovative vision of community. For that purpose the focus of my research will be on one of the first coenobitic congregations, founded by the Egyptian monk Pachomius. His normative strife was not only of great importance for the evolution of Coptic literature but also for the dissemination and reception of monastic communities and attitudes in the western Mediterranean. The surviving multilingual dossier attributed to Pachomius and his followers, consisting of various biographical reports, letters, catecheses and especially a set of monastic rules, gives us a unique opportunity to study the the organizational structures, idiosyncrasies as well as religious and political networks of such a novel community. In addition to the analysis of the Pachomian dossier I will also place special emphasis on the use of Greek and Latin loanwords in the fragments of the Coptic rules to unearth additional spheres of influence.