

Introduction

This book explores social and economic concerns that contributed to the promotion of certain forms of Christian monasticism over others between roughly 360 and 451 C.E. Its focus is ascetic poverty and competing claims to material support made by ascetic laymen and church leaders. The monastic movement was just taking shape: How should monks interpret scriptural pronouncements on poverty? What relation was there between early monastic practice and apostolic tradition? What were the implications for members of the clergy? To what extent, and on what conditions, was material dependency acceptable in late Roman society?

Although we will pursue these questions mainly in Asia Minor, Syria, and Egypt, the issues involved are best introduced by the warning that Augustine, bishop of Hippo, sent to monks of Carthage in 401:

Slaves of God, Soldiers of Christ, may you thus ignore the deceits of that most fervent enemy, who, desiring with his customary foulness to obscure in every way your good reputation, . . . has scattered everywhere so many hypocrites in the garb of monks, who wander around the provinces never sent, never stationary, never settled, never stable. . . . all seek, all demand either the expenses of their profitable poverty or a reward for their pretended holiness. . . . Under the general name of monks your good and holy profession, which in the name of Christ we desire to spread throughout Africa as it has through other lands, is being reviled.¹

1. Augustine, *De opere monachorum* 28.36; ed. Joseph Zycha, pp. 585–86: O servi dei, milites Christi, itane dissimulatis callidissimi hostis insidias, qui bonam famam vestram . . . omni modo cupientes obscurare putoribus suis, tam multos hypocritas sub habitu monachorum usque-quoque dispersit, circumeuntes provincias, nusquam missos, nusquam fixos, nusquam stantes, nusquam sedentes. . . . et omnes petunt, omnes exigunt aut sumptus lucrosae egestatis aut

Augustine bears witness here to the pervasion of wandering monks throughout the Roman Empire at the turn of the fifth century. Such hypocrites, he claims, feigned holiness to reap material gains. Their begging threatened to discredit monasticism as a whole. Against their example he implored his readers to “show people you are not seeking an easy meal in idleness, but that you are seeking the kingdom of God through the straight and narrow life of [this monastic] profession.”² That meant manual labor, practiced within the confines of a monastery.

In these passages Augustine reveals a preoccupation with the impact of wandering, begging monks on public opinion and the problems they raised for the social acceptance of the “good and holy” monastic profession he wished to promote in North Africa. Similar concerns for public opinion were shared by church and monastic authorities throughout the Roman Empire, as we shall see. But the issues raised by such monks in the late fourth and early fifth centuries were far more complex. Augustine wrote *On the Work of Monks* not simply to exhort his readers toward a more respectable form of monastic life, but also to discourage them from emulating certain long-haired, itinerant ascetics who had reportedly gained a considerable following as spiritual teachers among local monks and ordinary Christian laymen. Such “long-hairs” did not work, that is, they did not practice manual labor. Instead they offered admirers spiritual edification in exchange for material support, while seeking to live like the “birds of the sky” that “neither sow nor reap,” or the “lilies of the field” that “neither toil nor spin,” in literal accordance with the “freedom from care” that Jesus encouraged his disciples to embrace in his Sermon on the Mount (Mt 6: 25–34; cf. Lk 12:22–31). It was against their notions of ascetic propriety that Augustine composed his treatise. In his view, they had not only misinterpreted and abused evangelic precepts by refusing to work, but by claiming a right to material support on the grounds that they were teachers, they were also claiming for themselves the apostolic privileges that rightfully belonged only to vested members of the clergy.

Inasmuch as it served to discredit such ascetic teachers, Augustine’s depiction of “hypocrites in the garb of monks” must not be taken at face value. The same goes for denunciations of wandering “pseudomonks” made by his Eastern counterparts at this time. As we shall see, such accusations and condemnations of ascetic vagrancy and begging were often expressions of

simulatae pretium sanctitatis . . . sub generali nomine monachorum vestrum propositum blasphematur, tam bonum, tam sanctum, quod in Christi nomine cupimus, sicut per alias terras, sic per totam Africam pullulare. Trans. adapted from Mary Sarah Muldowney, p. 384, who reads *cupiens* for the *cupientes* of CSEL.

2. Augustine, *De opere*, ed. Zycha, p. 586: ostendite hominibus non vos in otio facilem victum, sed per angustam et artam vitam huius propositi regnum dei quaerere.

a rivalry for social and spiritual authority. Indeed, often what caused concern was that the monks in question had gained prestige not only among their ascetic peers but also among the Christian laity, who rewarded them with alms. So observes the emperor Julian, whose treatise *To the Cynic Heracleius* preserves our earliest (ca. 361) explicit testimony for wandering monks:

Long ago I gave you a nickname, and now I think I will write it down. It is *apotaktistai* [renouncers], a name applied to certain persons by the impious Galilaeans. They are for the most part men who by making small sacrifices gain much, or rather everything, from all sources, and in addition secure honor, crowds of attendants, and services. Something like that is your method, except perhaps for uttering divine revelations. . . . And perhaps too there is this difference, that you have no excuse for levying tribute on specious pretexts as they do; which they call *eleēmosynē* [alms], whatever that may mean. But in other respects your habits and theirs are very much alike. Like them you have abandoned your homeland and wander all over. . . .³

Julian's sketch is, of course, as much a caricature as Augustine's, meant to chasten ascetics of his own calling. It nevertheless makes plain what Augustine and other Christian writers only imply: certain wandering monks received both popular acclaim and alms by virtue of their material renunciations (i.e., their ascetic poverty) and their charismatic behavior or utterances (here specified as prophesying). From an ecclesiastical perspective, such acclaim could prove challenging indeed. At Constantinople it became pivotal in a series of confrontations between church officials, whose claims to spiritual authority derived mainly from their church office, and monks, who derived both apostolic authority and aristocratic patronage by virtue of their ascetic practices and spiritual services.

As vagrant beggars, spiritual teachers, or charismatic "enthusiasts," wandering monks raised the basic question of what it meant to be a monk wherever they appeared. When the Council of Chalcedon in 451 issued the first church canons that addressed the movements of monks and placed their activities under episcopal control, monasticism was still an evolving phenomenon. One purpose of this study is to demonstrate that the sequestered form of monastic life that the Council favored, as well as the self-

3. Julian, *Oratio* 7.224BC; ed. and trans. adapted from Wilmer C. Wright, p. 122: πάλα μὲν οὖν ἐθέμην ἐγὼ τοῦτο τὸ ὄνομα, νυνὶ δὲ αὐτὸ ἕοικα καὶ γράψαι. ἀποτακτιστὰς τινὰς ὀνομάζουσιν οἱ δυσσεβεῖς Γαλιλαῖοι· τούτων οἱ πλείους μικρὰ πρόεμενοι πολλὰ πάνυ, μᾶλλον δὲ τὰ πάντα πανταχόθεν ξυγκομίζουσι, καὶ προσκτώνται τὸ τιμᾶσθαι καὶ δορυφορεῖσθαι καὶ θεραπεύεσθαι. τοιοῦτόν τι καὶ τὸ ὑμέτερον ἔργον ἐστὶ, πλην ἴσως τοῦ χρηματίζεσθαι. . . ἴσως δὲ καὶ διὰ τὸ μηδὲν ὑμῖν εἶναι πρόσχημα τοῦ φορολογεῖν εὐπροσάπως, ὅποῖον ἐκείνοις, ἦν λέγουσιν οὐκ οἶδ' ὅπως ἐλεημοσύνην, τὰ δ' ἄλλα γε ἐστὶν ὑμῖν τε κἀκείνοις παραπλήσια. καταλελοίπατε τὴν πατρίδα ὡσπερ ἐκείνοι, περιφοιτᾶτε πάντη. . . .

sufficient, work-based ideal that authorities like Augustine promoted, were in fact novel developments in monastic history, supplanting an earlier, widely practiced ideal in which an ascetic elite, observing apostolic principles, provided spiritual edification to Christian communities in return for their material support. But this book is also a study in cultural history that explores why certain Christian holy men became recognized as legitimate, while others, who embraced Jesus' most demanding precepts for Christian perfection, became marginalized and repudiated in this most crucial period for the establishment, spread, and acceptance of monastic institutions.

THE MODEL HOLY MAN

With the victories of Constantine in the first quarter of the fourth century, a cultural revolution gained supremacy in the Roman Empire that would eventually transform or supplant traditions held for centuries. The process of Christianization that followed is most notorious for its violence against pagan temples, sacred groves, and statuary, and for imperial legislation against the practice of ancient rites. Yet this process required more penetrating suasion than could be effected by the swift and irregular destruction of outward symbols of the cultural past or imposed by the threat of capital punishment.⁴ Ancestral customs tended to reassert themselves where neglected by church and imperial forces.⁵ Christianization required that imaginations be reoriented toward new cultural icons, based not only on scriptural examples but also on living exemplars who vividly embodied the ideals that the Scriptures described.⁶ At the same time, church leaders had to acknowledge and accommodate the sensibilities of their large congregations, now being filled with the mainstream of Roman society.⁷ The pressures on these leaders to persuade and accommodate were exerted in turn upon a figure that rose to prominence in the rhetoric, literature, and society of the late fourth century: the Christian monk.

4. These are the aspects of Christianization discussed by Ramsey MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire, A.D. 100–400* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 68–119 and Frank Trombley, *Hellenic Religion and Christianization, c. 370–529*, vols. 1–2 (Leiden: Brill, 1993–1994). For threats of capital punishment see *CTh* 16.10.6 (issued in 356) and 16.10.13.2 (395).

5. For an instructive example, see John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints* 16 (PO 17.233–37). For methodological problems in assessing Christianization see esp. Robert Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 1–17.

6. See Peter Brown, *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 3–26, 57–78 and Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991).

7. See Markus (1990): 63–83.

In previous centuries Christians had already celebrated men and women within their communities who made sexual and material renunciations in order to distance themselves from the ordinary “world” and prepare themselves for the world to come.⁸ But as Christianity gained a more central position in Roman society after Constantine, church rhetoric increasingly favored those solitaries whose *askēsis* (spiritual exercises, practices, renunciation, or mode of life) placed them outside the normal (urban or village) course of human interactions and concerns. Around such *monachoi* crystallized the most otherworldly ideals. “To go to the monastery of a holy man,” John Chrysostom told congregations in Antioch (modern Antakya) in the 380s or 390s, “is to pass as if from earth unto heaven,” for in that solitude visitors would find neither the self-indulgence of luxuries nor the burdens of ordinary living.⁹ And none seemed to offer a better example than the monks of the Egyptian desert:

If you go now to the desert of Egypt, you will see that this desert has become better than any paradise, with countless choruses of angels in human form. . . . They display the same strictness [*akribeia*] in the great diligence of their lifestyle as they do in their doctrine of faith. For though they have stripped themselves of all possessions and crucified themselves to the whole world, they push themselves still further, nourishing those in need through their own physical labors. For though they fast and keep vigils, they don’t think it right to be idle during the day; instead they devote their nights to holy hymns and watches, applying themselves during the day to prayers and the work of their hands together at once, imitating the apostles’ zeal.¹⁰

Anyone would know this who went to Egypt, Chrysostom says; but if they could not, he suggests they consult the biography of “him whom Egypt brought forth after the apostles, namely the great and blessed Antony.” By reading his *Life* they would learn precisely “what sort of lifestyle Christ’s laws demand.”¹¹

8. See J. C. O’Neill, “The Origins of Monasticism,” in *The Making of Orthodoxy: Essays in Honor of Henry Chadwick*, ed. R. Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 270–87.

9. John Chrysostom, *In epistolam I ad Timotheum homilia* 14.3 (PG 62.575).

10. Chrysostom, *In Matthaëum homilia* 8.4–5 (PG 57.87–88): καὶ νῦν ἔλθῶν εἰς τὴν ἔρημον τῆς Αἰγύπτου, παραδείσου παντὸς βελτίω τὴν ἔρημον ταύτην ὄψει γεγεννημένην, καὶ χορούς ἀγγέλων μυρίους ἐν ἀνθρωπίνους σχήμασι. . . . Διὰ δὴ τοῦτο μετὰ τῆς τοσαύτης ἀκριβείας τῶν δογμάτων, καὶ τὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ βίου πολλὴν ἐνδείκνυται σπουδὴν. Τὰ γὰρ ὄντα ἀποδυσάμενοι πάντα, καὶ τῷ κόσμῳ σταυρωθέντες παντὶ, καὶ περαιτέρω πάλιν ἐλαύνουσι, τῇ τοῦ σώματος ἐργασίᾳ πρὸς τὴν τῶν δεομένων ἀποχρώμενοι τροφήν. Οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐπειδὴ νηστεύσουσι καὶ ἀγρυπνοῦσιν, ἀργεῖν μεθ’ ἡμέραν ἀξιούσιν· ἀλλὰ τὰς μὲν νύκτας τοῖς ἱεροῖς ὕμνοις καὶ ταῖς παννυχίαις, τὰς δὲ ἡμέρας εἰς εὐχὰς τε ὁμοῦ καὶ τὴν ἀπὸ τῶν χειρῶν ἐργασίαν καταναλίσκουσι, τὸν ἀποστολικὸν μιμούμενοι ζῆλον.

11. Chrysostom, *In Matthaëum hom.* 8.5 (PG 57.88–89): εἰ δὲ τις οὐδέποτε ἐπέβη τῶν σκηνῶν ἐκείνων, ἐννοεῖτω τὸν μέχρι νῦν ἐν τοῖς ἀπάντων στόμασιν ὄντα, ὃν μετὰ τοὺς Ἀποστόλους ἡ Αἴγυπτος

The homilies Chrysostom and other preachers delivered before urban Christians in this period often praised “those of the hills” who proved that worldly transcendence and apostolic ideals were possible for ordinary human beings. Through their rhetoric such “holy ones” found place beside the martyrs as heroes of the new culture.¹² The homily cited above also attests the extraordinary impact (“now on everyone’s lips”) that Athanasius’ biography (written ca. 357) of the Egyptian hermit Antony had on the conception of monasticism held by easterners and westerners alike in the late fourth century.¹³ Inspiring not only for ordinary Christians, it also exerted profound influence as a normative text describing how monks should practice their vocation. As Gregory of Nazianzus remarked in 380, Athanasius’ biography provided “legislation for the monastic way of life in narrative form.”¹⁴ What that meant is sketched by Sozomen, a church historian writing at Constantinople in the middle of the fifth century:

Whether or not the Egyptians or others were the first to exhibit this philosophy [i.e., monasticism], it is agreed by all that the great monk Antony brought this course of life to the highest pitch of discipline and perfection, with the appropriate ethics and bodily exertions. . . . He bestowed his patrimony on his villagers and distributed the rest of his property to the poor, since he realized that it is the mark of a serious philosopher not just to strip oneself of wealth, but to disperse it properly. . . . He tempered the intensity of those who conversed with him and moderated their habits. . . . He never allowed himself to be idle, but required each who intended to live in goodly fashion to work. . . . He endeavored to be unknown and to remain unseen in desert places, but if ever forced to enter a city for supplies, he immediately went back out to the desert when he had fulfilled his purpose, for he used to say that . . . just as fish lose their lives when cast on dry land, so do monks lose their dignity when they go into towns.¹⁵

ἦνεγκε, τὸν μακάριον καὶ μέγαν Ἀντώνιον. . . . τοιοῦτον ἐπεδείξατο βίον, οἷον οἱ τοῦ Χριστοῦ νόμοι ζητοῦσι. Καὶ τοῦτο εἴσεται τις μετὰ ἀκριβείας, ἐντυχὼν τῷ βιβλίῳ τῷ τῆν ἱστορίαν ἔχοντι τῆς ἐκείνου ζωῆς.

12. The classic study is Peter Brown, “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity,” *JRS* 61 (1971): 80–101; revised in *id.*, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 103–52. See also *id.*, “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity, 1971–1997,” *JCS* 6 (1998): 353–76.

13. Chrysostom, *In Matthaëum hom.* 8.5 (PG 57.89): . . . μέχρι νῦν ἐν τοῖς ἀπάντων στόμασιν ὄντα . . . The traditional attribution of the *Vita Antonii* to Athanasius remains probable though problematic. See Bernadette McNary-Zak, *Letters and Asceticism in Fourth-Century Egypt* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2000), 88–97. For its impact on fourth- and fifth-century monasticism see Samuel Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony: Monasticism and the Making of a Saint* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 163–84 and Timothy Fry, *RB 1980: The Rule of Saint Benedict in Latin and English with Notes* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1981), 311–13.

14. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* 21.5 (PG 35.1088A): συνέγραψε τοῦ μοναδικοῦ βίου νομοθεσίαν ἐν πλάσματι δηγήσεως.

15. Sozomen, *Historia ecclesiastica* 1.13.1–10; ed. Joseph Bidez and revised Günther C. Han-

The characteristics that Sozomen identifies with Antony are worth repeating. By placing as much emphasis on distributing wealth as on renouncing it, by promoting moderation in ascetic behavior, by practicing manual labor instead of “idleness” (*argia*), and by striving to live in isolation so as to preserve the “dignity” (*semmolēta*) befitting a monk, Athanasius’ Antony epitomized strict monastic discipline (*akribeia*) for this fifth-century reader. Thus Athanasius’ narrative established Antony as the model Christian holy man.

Athanasius’ depiction of Antony may have borne little resemblance to the historical Antony,¹⁶ but the practices associated with him and other Egyptian monks soon set the standard for monks living elsewhere in the Roman Empire. We may see how such “Egyptian” practices were idealized, schematized and promoted by western authors reporting to readers back home. As Jerome (ca. 347–420) informed his Roman protégé Eustochium in 384, in Egypt there were three kinds (*genera*) of monks.¹⁷ *Coenobites* lived together and regulated their prayer, fasting, and manual labor in obedience to superiors in their communities. *Anchorites* were those who had withdrawn far from society and lived alone in deserted regions after training in *coenobia*. Antony had made such anchorites famous, but their way of life could be traced back to John the Baptist. There was still another kind of monk, which Jerome labels the *remnuoth*:

These men live together in twos or threes, seldom in larger numbers, and live according to their own will and ruling. A portion of what they make they contribute to a common fund which provides food for all. In most cases they live in cities and fortress villages, and anything they sell is very expensive, as if it were their craftsmanship that was holy rather than their way of life. Quarrels are frequent among them, for while they supply their own food, they refuse to subordinate themselves to anyone. It is true that they compete with one another in fasting, making a fuss about achievements which should be kept secret. Everything among them is done for effect: loose sleeves, big boots, rough cloaks, constant groaning, visiting virgins, slandering clergy. Whenever a feast day comes they stuff themselves till they vomit.

sen, pp. 27–29; εἰς ἄκρον ἀκριβείας καὶ τελειότητος ἦθεσι καὶ γυμνασίοις τοῖς πρέπουσιν ἐξήσκησε ταυτηνὴ τοῦ βίου τὴν διαγωγὴν Ἀντώνιος ὁ μέγας μοναχός . . . σπουδαῖοι γὰρ εἶναι φιλοσόφοι κατείδεν μὴ μόνον ἑαυτὸν γυμνώσεια χρημάτων, ἀλλὰ καὶ εἰς δέον ταῦτα ἀναλώσεια. . . τῶν ὁμιλούντων αὐτῷ τὸν τόνος ἐκίρνα καὶ τοὺς τρόπους ἐρρῦθμιζε. . . ἀργεῖν δὲ οὔτε αὐτὸς ἠνείχετο καὶ τὸν μέλλοντα καλῶς βιοῦν ἐργάζεσθαι παρεκελεύετο . . . ἐσπούδαζεν ἀγνοεῖσθαι καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἐρημίαις λανθάνειν. . . τοὺς μὲν γὰρ ἰχθύας ἔλεγε. . . ξηρᾶς ἀποτόμενους τὸ ζῆν ἀπολιμπάνειν, τοὺς δὲ τὴν μοναστικὴν σεμνότητα ἀπολλύειν τοῖς ἄστεσι προσιόντας.

16. See Rubenson (1995): 185–91; Michael A. Williams, “The *Life of Antony* and the Domestication of Charismatic Wisdom,” in *Charisma and Sacred Biography* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1982), 23–45; and Hermann Dörries, “Die Vita Antonii als Geschichtsquelle,” in *Worte und Stunde*, vol. 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1966a), 145–224.

17. For the *genera monachorum* tradition, see Fry (1981): 313–20.

According to Jerome, such remnuoth were regarded in Egypt as “most inferior and despised,” but “in our own province,” he remarks, “they are the chief if not the only kind” of monk—an observation to which we shall return.¹⁸

The Egyptian *genera monachorum* that Jerome defined became more developed when John Cassian (ca. 360–435) described Egyptian practices for fledgling monastic communities outside Marseilles. As he wrote around 428, “in Egypt there are three kinds of monks, of which two are excellent, while the third . . . must be completely avoided.”¹⁹ Like Jerome, he identifies the first two kinds as coenobites and anchorites, but the third he calls *sarabaites*; he also provides a history for each. According to Cassian, coenobitic monasticism originated with the apostles, whose common use of property is described in Acts 2:45 and 4:32–35. However, as Christian leaders began to relax the original discipline of their communities, those who sought apostolic perfection were forced to move away from cities. These recluses, he asserts, were the earliest monks, and vestiges of their way of life could still be seen in strict *coenobia*.²⁰ Like Jerome, Cassian says that anchorites originated with Antony but found their prototypes in John the Baptist and Old Testament figures. Cassian, however, also insists that the anchoritic lifestyle evolved from the coenobitic.²¹

Against these two *genera* Cassian contrasts the *sarabaites*. These, he says, hasten to be called monks, but fail to observe coenobitic discipline or submit to the will of a superior; they make renunciations only for show, and live at home, without a superior, either alone or in groups of two or three; they wander about at will, and work only to provide themselves with luxu-

18. Jerome, *Ep.* 22.34; text and trans. (adapted) F. A. Wright, pp. 136–37: tertium genus est, quod dicunt remnuoth, deterrimum atque neglectum et quod in nostra provincia aut solum aut primum est. Hi bini vel terni nec multo plures simul habitant suo arbitratu ac dicione viventes et de eo, quod laboraverint, in medium partes conferunt, ut habeant alimenta communia. Habitat autem quam plurimum in urbibus et castellis, et, quasi ars sit sancta, non vita, quidquid vendiderint, maioris est pretii. Inter hos saepe sunt iurgia, quia suo viventes cibo non patiuntur se alicui esse subiectos. Re vera solent certare ieiuniis et rem secreti victoriae faciunt. Apud hos affectata sunt omnia: laxae manicae, caligae follicantes, vestis grossior, crebra suspiria, visitatio virginum, detractatio clericorum, et si quando festior dies venerit, saturantur ad vomitum.

19. John Cassian, *Collatio* 18.4; ed. E. Pichery (SC 64), p. 14: duo sunt optima tertium . . . omnimodis evitandum.

20. Cassian, *Collatio* 18.5; ed. Pichery (SC 64), pp. 14–16: Istud ergo solummodo fuit antiquissimum monachorum genus . . . cuius etiam nunc adhuc in districtis coenobiis cernimus residere vestigia.

21. Cassian, *Collatio* 18.6; ed. Pichery (SC 64), pp. 16–18: ita ergo processit ex illa qua diximus disciplina [i.e., the coenobitic] aliud perfectionis genus, cuius sectatores anchoretae id est secessores merito nuncupantur.

ries.²² Cassian links them historically to Ananias and Sapphira, who had declined to give all their property to the original apostolic community (Acts 5:1–4), but he also suggests that most sarabaites were driven to the monastic profession “by necessity.”²³ Like Jerome, he notes that their kind of monasticism was about the only one found outside of Egypt.²⁴ Cassian, however, adds that a fourth kind of monk had recently emerged. Though he gives them no name, he says they pretend to be anchorites, but refuse to submit to the governance of superiors after a brief period of training in coenobitic monasteries.²⁵

Whether or not Cassian was familiar with Jerome’s letter to Eustochium, it was his version of the Egyptian *genera monachorum* that provided the general profiles by which monks would be classified and evaluated in the Western monastic tradition. Early in the sixth century (ca. 500–530) an anonymous writer used Cassian’s distinctions of good and bad monks in his *Rule of the Master*.²⁶ While this writer felt no need to amplify his brief entries on coenobites, anchorites, and sarabaites, he went much farther than Cassian in describing a fourth kind of monk, applying a Greek and Latin hybrid term to describe them: *gyrovagi* (those who wander in circles).²⁷

They spend their entire life in different provinces visiting different cells or monasteries for three or four days . . . demanding that their hosts perform the precept of the Apostle which says “Give hospitality to strangers” [Rom 12:

22. Cassian, *Collatio* 18.7; ed. Pichery (SC 64), pp. 19–20: ad publicam tantummodo id est ad hominum faciem renuntiantes. . . . districtionem ut diximus coenobii declinantes bini vel terni in cellulis commorantur . . . hoc praecipue procurantes, ut absoluti a seniorum iugo exercendi voluntates suas ac procedenti vel quo placuerit evagandi agendiae quod libitum fuerit habeant libertatem.

23. Cassian, *Collatio* 18.7; ed. Pichery (SC 64), pp. 18–19: hi igitur dum inbecillo animo rem summae virtutis adfectant, vel necessitate ad hanc professionem venire compulsi.

24. Cassian, *Collatio* 18.7; ed. Pichery (SC 64), p. 21: per alias provincias . . . istud tertium Sarabaitorum genus abundare ac prope esse cogouimus.

25. Cassian, *Collatio* 18.8; ed. Pichery (SC 64), pp. 21–22.

26. More precisely, he used Cassian’s distinctions transmitted by the *Rule* of Eugippius (511–ca. 535), abbot of a monastery near Naples. For the relation of the *Regula Eugippii* to the *Regula magistri [RM]*, see Conrad Leyser, *Authority and Asceticism from Augustine to Gregory the Great* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 108–18. I focus on the *RM* because of its influence on Benedict and his *Rule*.

27. The term *gyrovagi* derives from the Greek γύρος (circle) and Latin *vagus* (wanderer, vagrant). It is first attested in *Regula Eugippii* 27.13–18 (a passage used and amplified by the *RM*), but its origin is not known. In the late fourth century, Evagrius Ponticus used the term κικλευτής to describe monks who “circulate” from one superior to another in the Egyptian desert; see below ch. 1. For the social problems associated with *gyrovagi* in the *RM*, see Maribel Dietz, *Travel, Wandering, and Pilgrimage in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1997), 121–31.

13]. Taking advantage of this precept, they ask to rest their restless feet after journeying; using travel as a pretense, what they really desire is to relieve not their feet but their bellies. . . . Never staying put, they are forced by traveling every day to beg, sweat and groan, instead of living and working in one place. . . . they prefer to travel than stay still. Ever wandering through different lands, they have no idea where they might support their weariness, or even where they might find their burial.²⁸

It was this anonymous *Rule of the Master* that provided Benedict of Nursia (writing ca. 530–560) with a typology for rounding off the *genera monachorum* at the beginning of his own more famous sixth-century *Rule*.²⁹ For Benedict it sufficed to note that in addition to coenobites, anchorites, and sarabaites,

there exists a fourth kind of monk called gyrovagi, who spend their entire life in different provinces visiting different cells for three or four days, ever wandering, never settled, enslaved to their own wills and debauched bellies, worse than sarabaites in all ways. Better to keep silent than to speak about these and their wretched way of life.³⁰

As sarabaites served as a negative foil for coenobitic monks, so too did gyrovagi serve as a negative foil for the anchoritic life. The *Benedictine Rule* enshrined this extension of John Cassian's original schema for posterity, providing a stereotype by which ascetic wandering and begging would be understood and disparaged into the medieval period.³¹ But Augustine's treatise shows that this form of monastic life could already be considered a widespread problem by the end of the fourth century.

The near uniformity of this *genera monachorum* tradition might suggest there was agreement in late antiquity over what constituted good and bad ascetic practices and monastic types. It is therefore important to note another anonymous, but less well-known, version of the *genera monachorum*,

28. *RM* 1,32–49,163–173; ed. Adalbert de Vogüé (SC 105), pp. 332–46: numquam persistentes acti sunt cotidie ambulando mendicare, sudare et gemere, quam uno loco stando laborare et vivere. . . . eligunt magis ambulare quam sistere. Qui per diversa semper vagando ignorant apud quem tedia sua suscipiant, et quod est ultimum, nesciunt ubi suam constituent sepulturam.

29. On the relationship between the two *regulae*, see Fry (1981): 79–83 and Leyser (2000): 118–20.

30. Benedict of Nursia, *Regula* 1.10–12; ed. Timothy Fry et al., p. 170: Quartum vero genus est monachorum quod nominatur gyrovagum; qui tota vita sua per diversas provincias ternis aut quaternis diebus per diversorum cellas hospitantur, semper vagi et numquam stabiles, et propriis voluntatibus et gulae illecebris servientes, et per omnia deteriores sarabaitis.

31. See Ernest McDonnell, "Monastic Stability: Some Socioeconomic Considerations," in *Charanis Studies: Essays in Honor of Peter Charanis*, ed. A. E. Laiou-Thomadakis (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1980), 136–38.

written probably in southern Gaul around 410.³² It was written partly in response to a view apparently held by many at that time, namely that monks were “worthy of hatred” even by Christians.³³ The author of the *Discussions of Zacchaeus and Apollonius* attributes this view to the practices of certain deviant monks who feigned fasting and chastity while creeping among women, whom they seduced “with vain notions” in order to obtain gifts and reap “the shameful profits of greed.”³⁴ He then goes on to describe those *genera* of monks he considered true. Like Jerome and John Cassian, he identifies these as monks who either lived alone or together in a communal arrangement, shunning inactivity in the belief that their “food had to be derived through work alone.”³⁵ In contrast to Jerome and Cassian, however, this author assumes that the communal monks he praises might also be found in urban areas and says nothing about obedience to superiors. (He also includes mere celibates among those who “truly pursue their monastic profession,” though he deems these to be inferior to others: “their faith is hot, but not burning; while religious in disposition, they are not wholly consumed with religion.”)³⁶ Here lies the importance of his version of the *genera monachorum*. Not only does the *Discussions of Zacchaeus and Apollonius* attest the variety of monastic life to be found in cities of the early fifth century. It also indicates that Jerome and Cassian were using the Egyptian monastic tradition to reform monastic practices considered acceptable by at least some Western authorities: for the loosely organized monastic communities its author describes seem to be exactly what Jerome and Cassian

32. For date (ca. 408–10) and milieu (Suplicius Severus’ circle) of the *Consultationes Zacchaei et Apollonii*, see Jean Louis Feiertag, *Les Consultationes Zacchaei et Apollonii. Étude d’histoire et de sotériologie* (Fribourg: University Press, 1990), 38–125; summarized in *id.*, *Questiones d’un Païen à un Chretien (Consultationes Zacchaei christiani et Apollonii philosophi)*, vol. 1 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1994), 16–31.

33. *Consultationes Zacchaei et Apollonii* 3.3.1; ed. Jean Louis Feiertag and Werner Steinmann (SC 401), p. 178: *quam ob causam etiam nostrorum odiis digni habeantur*. For pagan antipathies toward monks in this period, see D. H. Raynor, “Non-Christian Attitudes to Monasticism,” *SP* 18 (1989): 267–73.

34. *Consultationes Zacchaei et Apollonii* 3.3.6; ed. Feiertag-Steinmann (SC 401), p. 180: *primum studiis lubricae familiaritatis irrepunt, captasque mulierculas vanis opinionibus inludentes, in usum miserae cupiditatis illicunt; dum aut muneribus inhiant, et foeda avaritiae luca conquirunt*.

35. *Consultationes Zacchaei et Apollonii* 3.3.13–15; ed. Feiertag-Steinmann (SC 401), p. 184: *Locis primum remotioribus habitant, etiamsi in urbibus degant. . . . cunctis execrabilis torpor, et victus nisi labore non congruens*.

36. *Consultationes Zacchaei et Apollonii* 3.3.9–12; ed. Feiertag-Steinmann (SC 401), pp. 180–84: *Hi autem vere modum professionis istius exsequuntur. . . . Quidam etiam velut in postremo sectae istius gradu parva observatione contenti tantum caelibes vivunt. . . . fides calida est, non tamen fervens; et mens religiosa non religioni penitus addicta*.

were complaining about when they noted the prevalence of remnuoth or sarabaite monasticism outside Egypt.³⁷

NORMATIVE TRADITION AND HISTORICAL REALITIES

If monks [are single ones], why so many? If so many, how then can they be solitaries?

Oh multitude of monks that gives the lie to monachism!

PALLADAS, late fourth to early fifth century³⁸

Tracing the early history of Christian monasticism in the Roman Empire remains a vexed problem, not least because Athanasius' portrait of Antony and the writings of authors like Jerome and Cassian continue to influence monastic studies.³⁹ Many scholars continue to assume that "a distinction must be made between an ascetic and a monk, as every monk is an ascetic, but not every ascetic is a monk."⁴⁰ Yet the *genera monachorum* tradition demonstrates that making such distinctions was not so easy in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, and that early monastic history was itself a process of sorting out which practices were to be identified with legitimate monks, and which were not.

In the *genera monachorum* two practices are held to be defining features of monastic legitimacy: social isolation and economic self-sufficiency. Both depended on the practice of manual labor, which enabled a monk to live independently from mainstream society. Indeed, Paul had admonished Christians to "work with your own hands" for this very reason, "that you

37. For this objective of Cassian's *De institutis* and *Collationes*, see Columba Stewart, *Cassian the Monk* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 17. Stewart suggests *De institutis* 10.23 was aimed at practices associated with Martin of Tours (see below, ch. 3) and Sulpicius Severus. That Jerome and Cassian were discussing the same phenomenon under the labels *remnuoth* and *sarabaïtes* is clear. Both labels probably derive from the Coptic word *auâet* (company): see Fry (1981): 318 n. 39.

38. Palladas, *Anthologia Graeca* 11.384; trans. adapted from William R. Paton, *The Greek Anthology*, vol. 4 (LCL 84; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926), 255; εἰ μοναχοί, τί τοσοῖδε; τοσοῖδε δέ, πῶς πάλι μούνοι; / ὃ πλῆθος μοναχῶν ψευσαμένη μονάδα. A distich "mocking the discrepancy between theory and practice": Alan Cameron, "Wandering Poets: A Literary Movement in Byzantine Egypt," *Historia* 14 (1965): 474.

39. For their influence on modern studies see esp. James E. Goehring, "The Origins of Monasticism," in *Eusebius, Christianity, and Judaism*, ed. H. W. Attridge and G. Hata (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 235–55.

40. S. Abou Zayd, *Ihdayutha* (Oxford: ARAM, 1993), 93. The attempt to distinguish between monk and ascetic is modern. When distinctions were drawn in late antiquity, they were drawn between true and false monks. I cannot agree with Karl Heussi in *Der Ursprung des Mönchtums* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1936), 53–54, who argues that a *Sonderwelt* created by isolation (in a hermitage, cloister, etc.) from the world distinguished a monk from an ascetic. Physical withdrawal was a contested criterion for monastic legitimacy in this period; see below, chs. 3–5.

may behave properly towards outsiders and be dependent upon no one" (1 Thess 4:11–12). Yet we must not take this ascetic emphasis on manual labor for granted. Although numerous studies have focused on the way "orthodox" monastic authorities of this period like Jerome, Augustine, and Cassian promoted its practice as an ascetic ideal,⁴¹ few have sufficiently addressed the alternatives to that normative tradition that existed and were also espoused at the time.⁴² Indeed, modern studies have tended to identify objections to manual labor with marginal or heretical ascetic groups such as "Manichaeans," "Messalians" or "circumcellions." Moreover, they have treated such groups as separate historical phenomena, or rather, as distinct and isolated historical "movements." In this way scholarship has perpetuated the labels, distinctions, and typologies that late antique authorities used to discredit and marginalize beliefs and practices contrary to their own. As a result, we have lost a balanced perspective (if not complete sight) of a conflict between different notions of ascetic propriety that arose in the late fourth and early fifth centuries. This conflict had bearing not only on the development of the normative monastic tradition, but also on the place and privileges that monks could assume in the late Roman ecclesiastical and social structure.

This book approaches early monastic history as a series of conflicts and reforms that arose over such practices as wandering, begging, and enthusiastic behavior (e.g., prophesying or ostentatious prayer and fasting) as well as the justifications made in their defense. I attempt to circumvent late antique typologies by taking a comprehensive approach that draws on a

41. See Heinrich Holze, *Erfahrung und Theologie im frühen Mönchtum. Untersuchungen zur einer Theologie des monastischen Lebens bei den ägyptischen Mönchsvätern, Johannes Cassian, und Benedikt von Nursia* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1992), 107–32; the articles in S. Felici, ed., *Spiritualità del lavoro nella catechesi dei Padri del III–VI secolo* (Rome: Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 1986); A. Quacquarelli, *Lavoro e ascesi nel monachesimo prebenedettino del IV e V secolo* (Bari: Istituto di letteratura cristiana antica, Università degli studi, 1982); and Arthur Geoghegan, *The Attitude towards Labor in Early Christianity and Ancient Culture* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1945). Studies on ascetic poverty have focused on the same late antique authorities: e.g., Georg Jenal, *Italia Ascetica atque Monastica. Das Asketen-und Mönchtum in Italien von den Anfängen bis zur Zeit der Langobarden, ca. 150/250–604* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1995), 474–94 and Adalbert de Vogüé, "Le pauvreté dans le monachisme occidental du IV^e au VIII^e siècle," *Collectanea Cisterciensia* 46 (1984): 177–85.

42. True even for more nuanced studies of ascetic attitudes to manual labor in this period, e.g., Antoine Guillaumont, "Le travail manuel dans la monachisme ancien: contestation et valorisation," in *Aux origines du monachisme chrétien* (Bérogrolles-en-Mauges: Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1979a), 117–26 and Birgit van den Hoven, *Work in Ancient and Medieval Thought: Ancient Philosophers, Medieval Monks, and Theologians and the Concept of Work, Occupations, and Technology* (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1996), 117–52. Philippe Escolan, *Monachisme et Église. Le monachisme syrien du IV^e au VII^e siècle: un ministère charismatique* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1999), 183–201, notes that manual labor was the exception to the norm in the Syrian milieu, and identifies this rejection of labor with an "apostolic" ideology rather than with specific heretical groups.

wide range of sources, while focusing primarily on ascetic wandering and material dependency. Thus problems specifically identified with certain monks in the East (e.g., Messalians) will be clarified by comparison to problems associated with monks in the West who in the same years were being criticized for similar practices, but under different labels. I also attempt to expose the rhetorical strategies used by critics of such “pseudomonks” by noting similarities to satirical tropes used by Greco-Roman authors to discredit philosophic rivals in earlier periods. Furthermore, my point of departure is social history, especially (although I begin with desert communities in Egypt) the urban social history of the late Roman Empire. That is because monks who wandered or refrained from manual labor were not considered a problem if they remained in the wilderness. It is also because most of our sources were written by members of urban societies who were keenly aware of the attitudes of their fellow urban citizens. Indeed, too often monasticism in this period has been treated as if it developed wholly detached from the late Roman social mainstream, as if monks themselves neither blended into nor were affected by the late Roman urban environment and social structure.⁴³ But these were the historical realities that most concerned the authorities who wrote our sources.

It will become clear that an apostolic ascetic lifestyle characterized by wandering and material dependency was widely advocated and practiced in the fourth and fifth centuries all around the Roman Empire.⁴⁴ This form of monastic life went back at least to the third century and was justified by a literal understanding of certain New Testament passages (e.g., Mt 6:26–34, Lk 10:38–42, Jn 6:27, Acts 6:1–4, and 1 Thess 5:17).⁴⁵ It was based on the notion that strict imitation of Jesus and his apostles (meaning absolute poverty, prayer, and spiritual teaching) was the highest form of Christian life. Though its most radical proponents in this period became identified

43. A notable exception is McDonnell (1980). Two important discussions of wandering as an early ascetic practice are Antoine Guillaumont, “Le dépaysement comme forme d’ascèse dans le monachisme ancien,” *École Pratique des Hautes Études, Ve section: Sciences religieuses, Annuaire 1968–1969* 76 (1968): 31–58 and Hans von Campenhausen, “The Ascetic Ideal of Exile in Ancient and Early Medieval Monasticism,” in *Tradition and Life in the Church*, trans. A. V. Littledale (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), 231–51. They do not, however, discuss the social and economic implications of the practice.

44. In this respect my study differs from Escolan (1999), which treats “apostolic” monasticism only as a Syrian phenomenon, restricted to the Roman East.

45. To clarify, I will not link this apostolic form of monastic life directly to first-century Christian *Wanderradicalismus*, on which see Gerd Theissen, “The Wandering Radicals,” in *Social Reality and the Early Christians: Theology, Ethics, and the World of the New Testament*, trans. M. Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 33–60. Instead, I argue that this apostolic lifestyle arose from the way Christians (in different places, at different times) read or heard their Scriptures and aspired to imitate them.

as heretics (e.g., “Manichaeans,” “Eustathians,” “Messalians”), it was also represented by those ascetics whom Augustine and others identified as “pseudomonks,” who offered urban patrons spiritual services in exchange for material support. We shall see how this form of monastic life was marginalized by church and monastic authorities either through accusations of heresy or through their insistence (justified by giving different interpretations to the scriptural passages cited above, or by placing greater emphasis on such passages as Acts 4:32–35, 5:1–4, Eph 4:28, and 2 Thess 3:6–10) that withdrawal from urban areas, manual labor, and moderate poverty truly constituted strict monastic discipline and apostolic *mimēsis*. This study therefore establishes that authorities like John Chrysostom who have been most associated with promoting Christian asceticism in this period were not promoting asceticism per se, but rather certain kinds of asceticism. In addition, we shall see that their reasons for doing so derived not merely from spiritual principles but from social preoccupations as well.

The late fourth and early fifth centuries were troubled times for the Roman Empire. Though still prosperous, it was not a world in which many could easily attain *amerimnia* (freedom from care), a word that wealthy citizens of Antioch inscribed in the floors of their suburban villas.⁴⁶ Barbarian invasions and pressures of heavy taxation troubled all levels of society. Nothing reflects these developments more starkly than the imperial legislation preserved for our horror in the Theodosian and Justinian Codes. With authoritarian certitude successive emperors sought to guarantee stability by prescribing a social order in which professions were made hereditary obligations, where “anyone who tried to seek improvement of his status or make for pastures new was promptly dragged back to the place and calling of his *origo*.”⁴⁷ Thus at the lowest levels of society Emperor Theodosius I in 393 decreed that peasant tenants of large estates in Thrace,

even though they appear freeborn by natural condition, shall nevertheless be regarded as slaves to the very land on which they were born, and shall have no right to take off wherever they like or to change their place of inhabitation.⁴⁸

His successors forbade even urban guild members to change their occupations and residences in concern that many such skilled laborers had

46. Jean Lassus, *Sanctuaires chrétiennes de Syrie* (Paris: Geuthner, 1947), 265.

47. Cameron (1965): 484, caricaturing a standard take on late Roman society.

48. *CJ* 11.52.1; ed. Paul Krüger, p. 443. Cf. *CJ* 11.51.1, issued seven years earlier. For such laws, see A. H. M. Jones, “The Caste System in the Later Roman Empire,” *Eirene* 7 (1970): 79–96 and *id.*, *The Later Roman Empire, 284–602: A Social, Economic, and Administrative Survey* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1964), 795–803, 809–12.