

CONDITUR INSIGNIS. LUCRA FERENS ANIMIS.

QUATTUOR AEBAT UNI SCRIPSISSIMIS PIORVAL.



IN NOMINE

INCIPI

Hermits, the First Monasteries, and Late Antique Society

Introduction to course

Key elements:

- Short seminars - background, major themes, key lines of historical debate – please ask questions though!
- Group reading of sources and discussion – provide depth and multiple perspectives; develop skills in historical interpretation and debate



Why monastic history

- For religious studies, studying monastic history gives a unique perspectives on how religion is lived in society
 - Micro-level (within monasteries), macro-level (the understanding of how parts – i.e. monasteries - affect the whole of religious society – i.e Christendom)
 - Variety: monasticism is like a religious laboratory – so many things are tried, and the world is affected in so many ways as a result
- Monastic tradition affects so much of modern life, even though we are often unaware of it

Orate pro nobis beate a
dign efficiamur. Orem



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gerium prestari fac nos
ipsum meritis a gehem
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The First Monks

- “**Monks**” and “**monasticism**”: the root of the words is “*monos*” in Greek – “alone”, “single”, “one”. The word for monk in Latin is “*monachus*”
- The first “monks” had no monasteries and no formal communities – they were independent, unmarried recluses
- The earliest well-known examples occur in Roman Egypt – **Paul of Thebes** (d. *circa* 341 AD, birthplace unknown), and most famously, **Anthony the Great** (d. *circa* 356, from Herakleopolis)
- These, however, were not the very first religious recluses in Egypt: Athanasius’s *Life of Anthony* states that Anthony received training from another recluse before fully committing to this life, and that there were others like this. There were also some similar developments in the Near East and Syria.
- In any case, the third century AD appears to mark the beginning of the trend, at least as far as we can see it in the sources. And Egypt becomes the most famous location for early monasticism.



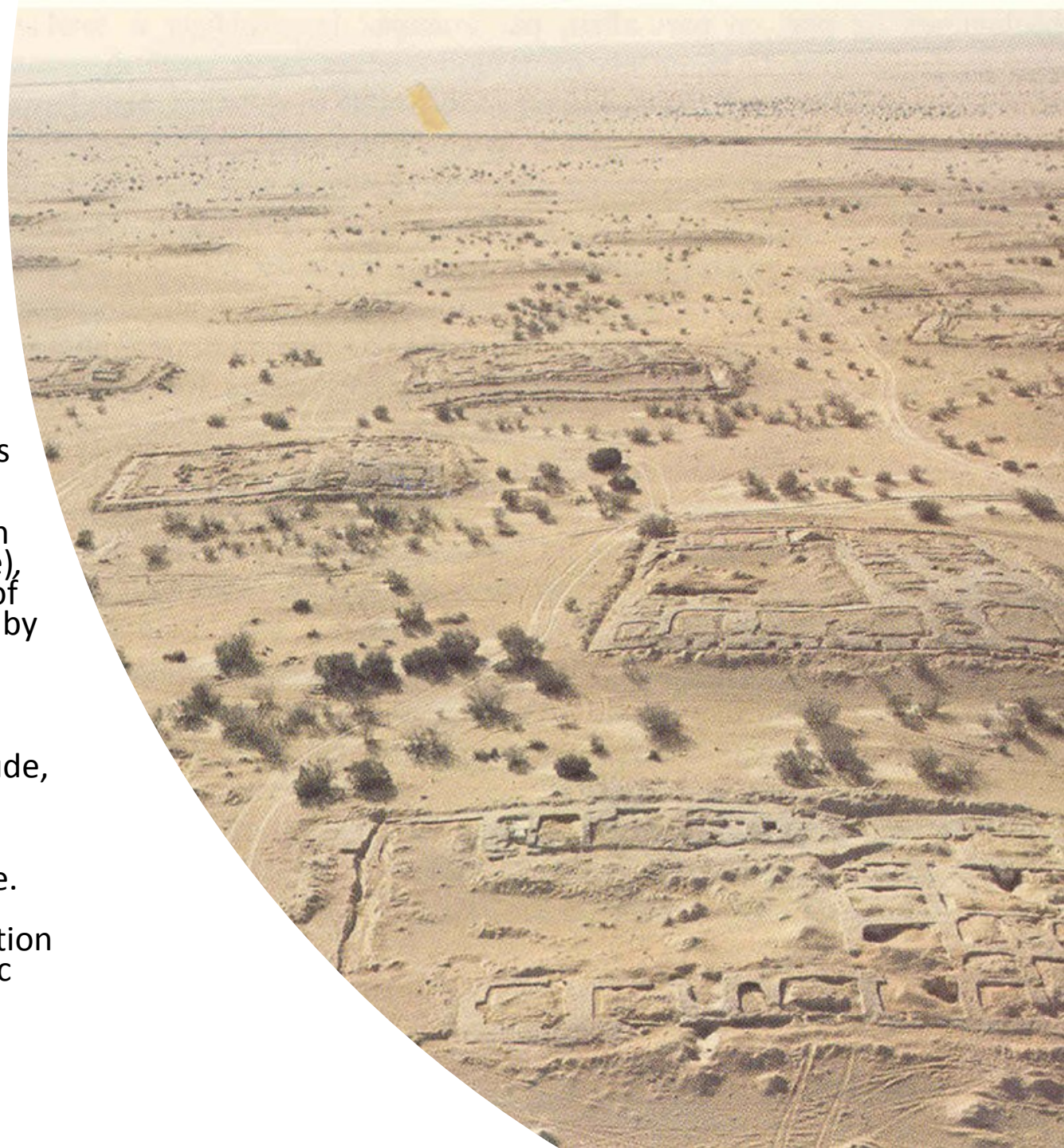
The Egyptian “Desert”

- The earliest well-known recluses (e.g. Anthony, Paul of Thebes) were famed for having lived in the vast Egyptian deserts that lay either side the cultivated Nile Valley, a thin strip of prosperous land where Christianity was fast becoming the dominant force in the 3rd century AD.
- Not all solitary ascetics chose such desert locations. Prior to Anthony (and after!), there were recluses who lived in or near villages (Goehring) in or at the edges of the Nile Valley: the recluse he receives training from lives near a village
- Nevertheless, the aspiration to live in “desert solitude” becomes powerful, and this ideal image is dominant in how early Egyptian monks are described in literary sources. The Latin term for a Christian recluse: *eremita* from the Greek *eremites*, meaning of “of the desert” – in English “**hermit**”; we call their way of life “**eremitic**”.
- Even if early hermits were not always situated in the desert, those who did live outside or even on the margins of the fertile zone faced a challenging living environment. Such hermits are deliberately setting themselves a tough “**ascetic**” regime. “**Ascetic**” and “**ascetism**” derive from Greek: *Askēsis* (“training”, “exercise”).

From Hermits to Monasteries

A more practical monastic form quickly emerges, that does not require ascetics to survive alone.

- Groups of hermits start to congregate very close to each other, even in very large groups (e.g. Kellia – see picture), and pick leaders. Athanasius of Alexandria, biographer of Saint Anthony says that the “desert had become a city” by the end of Anthony’s life.
- Anthony himself gained follower monks at Pispir (a deserted mountain fort near the Nile); he retired to a deeper desert location near the Red Sea to regain solitude, but again attracted others there.
- **Pachomius** (c. 292–348): the most celebrated early promoter of the **coenobitic** (i.e communal) monastic life. Brings together monks in communal dwellings at Tabennsis, Upper Egypt. He goes on to form a congregation of nine monasteries and writes the first known monastic rule of life (his *Precepts*).
- **Coenobitic** comes from the Greek terms “**koinos**” (“**common**”) and “**bios**” (“**life**”)





Female Recluses and Nuns

- The “Sayings of the Desert Fathers” (*Apophthegmata Patrum*), a 5th century compilation of early monastic wisdom, actually contains quite a few sayings of Desert “mothers”! E.g. **Sarah, Syncletica and Matrona**.
- Women’s coenobitic monasticism also begins early. Pachomius establishes a female community alongside his first male community, as part of a larger complex.
- Women are still found less in the literary evidence though. Why?
 - Regarding hermits, society is not quite as comfortable with women taking such an independent path.
 - Female *coenobitic* monasticism is more socially acceptable and even desirable: women are “looked after” in this context. A place to put unmarried daughters or widows, or family members of male monks.
 - Nevertheless, there are already fears over the temptation of male monks by female nuns: women seen as particular carriers and transmitters of the sin of lust.
- N.B. female monk in Latin is a “*monacha*” or a “*monialis*”. In English a female coenobitic monks is much more commonly called a “**nun**”

Early Monastic Values

A physical life that revolved around self-denial. Some common features:

- Celibacy: renunciation of any sexual contact most often seen as critical
 - Pachomius pays particular attention to this issue in his *Precepts* – keen to avoid sexual contact and temptation not only with the outside world, but also between the monks: knees to be kept covered when sitting together, tunics long enough that they do not go too high when the monk bends over
- Diet and fasting: early hermits are especially noted for startling dietary regimes
 - Paul of Thebes is said to have lived largely from the fruit of a single tree, and bread given to him by a raven
 - Anthony consumed just bread, water and salt, according to his biographer, Athanasius of Alexandria
 - Onuphrius (4th or 5th century AD) is said to live entirely on dates
 - In more normal cases, monks tended to live on a simple, vegetarian diet, based on the what was locally available: bread, lentils, rice etc.
- Other physical ascetic practices
 - Basic dwellings: for hermits, caves and or simple constructed cells are frequently reported
 - Simple clothes: the most rigorous hermits wear rags and hair shirts (e.g. Anthony)
 - Sleep deprivation; e.g. rising in the middle of the night to pray.
- Emphasis on constant or very frequent prayer
 - Anthony: “he was constant in prayer, knowing that a man ought to pray unceasingly in private” (Athanasius of Alexandria)
 - Pachomius sets a precise round of daily prayer (e.g. saying the “Jesus prayer” 100 times a day) in his *Precepts*

Early Monastic Values

A spiritual life focussed on repentance for the sins and impurity of man, as well as contemplating the divine.

- An early death and a life of mourning
 - They are “mortifying” (i.e. killing) their “flesh” in repentance for their worldly sins and to escape temptation. Dorotheus in the *Lausiatic History* of Palladius: “It [the body] kills me; I kill it”.
 - With this “death” comes inner grief and mourning. Saint Jerome (d.420): a monk is “*Is qui luget*” – “He who mourns”.
 - Monks grieve over their own sins. They also mourn for mankind more broadly, condemned to both sin and mortality by Adam’s error in the Garden of Eden (“The Fall”). Finally, they mourning for Christ, condemned to death by sinful men.
 - With grief came tears. Evagrius of Pontus (d. 399), an Anatolian scholar who became a monk in Egypt, said that physical tears were the surest sign of true repentance.
- A new birth
 - Their focus is on rebuilding and perfecting man’s inner, God-given virtues. Palladius’s *Lausiatic history* speaks of monks perfecting “charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness and forbearance”.
 - Becoming a monk comes to be seen as like a second baptism.

Early Monastic Values - Coenobitic

Some traits of Pachomian monasticism (N.B. there is a lot of variety in this period beyond Pachomian norms, but they are certainly influential)

- Common enclosure, separate from the rest of society – although how great the distance really was varied. In Pachomian monasticism men and women are kept in separate accommodation.
- Common prayer – Pachomius established two daily **offices** (a fixed observance of prayers and scriptural readings, typically Psalms) – one in the day and one at night.
- Common material goods – No personal possessions. Technically, these do not even belong to the monastery, but to God: thus they are to show charity to the poor from them.
- Common labour – even a monk's body is not his own: they all perform manual labour to support each other even if they might have specialised jobs (i.e. growing vegetables, making clothes).
- Common obedience – to an “**abba**” (male) or “**amma**” (female): Coptic terms for “father” and “mother”. These figures set the common direction both in life and learning (they lead Scriptural education). The word “**abbot**” comes from “**abba**”.

Early Monastic Values - Coenobitic

The positive, regenerative possibilities of monastic life are perhaps especially important for coenobitic monasticism

- Communal monasticism - if more practical - might seem to weaken the monastic purpose: fleeing worldly attachments to focus *solely* on God.
 - Physical asceticism somewhat lowered (from stringent self-denial to lack of individual property)
 - Most importantly, they lived with other men (or women, in female houses)
- Nevertheless, it too had a distinctive spiritual appeal
 - If people were in perfect harmony in their absolute desire for union with God, could they not live together? Might it even be spiritually helpful for them to be together?
 - Monks in communities could see themselves as fleeing the disorderly and sinful society of the world to build a more perfect one
- Hence the emphasis on “common life” in Pachomian coenobitic monasticism.

Separation and Support

Literary sources tend to emphasise the separation of monks from regular society.

But the ability to attract so many new recruits – from all segments of society, from very high status to quite low status – suggests strong connections with the outside world. “Desert” Hermits were often not far from the prosperous fertile zone. Monasteries were often created in villages, at the edge of this zone or even within it.

- Pachomius’s foundations took over deserted villages, but none were really in the desert (Goehring). Tabennisis is on the banks of the Nile!

The economic needs of so many monks inevitably also quickly exceeded what they could provide for themselves from gathering food or cultivating little gardens.

- Even monastic literary sources (e.g. the writings of Shenoute, abbot of the White monastery, d. 465) suggest the importance of crafted goods, not only for the community itself but also for exchange with outsiders for supplies.

Egyptian Coptic papyri also complement this picture of very regular interaction with society (Wipcyzka).

- Gifts from outsiders made for spiritual benefit (e.g. prayers; benefits from the act of giving to holy men and women) are well-attested: both money and land are given. Such gifts were popular enough that we see some social reactions – e.g. lawsuits over family inheritances given away to monks!
- Monks who came from privileged backgrounds brought land to their monasteries. Combined with gifts from outsiders, monasteries often accumulated estates that they financially exploited through tenant farmers or labourers.



Early Egyptian Monastic sites (marked with crosses)



The Roots of Monasticism

Why do men and women go to the “desert” (whether real or imagined) to live such an ascetic lives?

Several ways of looking at this question (not mutually exclusive):

- Scriptural example
- Long-term cultural heritage
- Immediate socio-cultural factors



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Scriptural Example

Monastic literature of this period (and throughout the Middle Ages) emphasises that monastic life was derived from the teachings of Christ himself

Christ in the wilderness, battling with the devil

“Jesus was led by the spirit into the desert, to be tempted by the devil” – there he “fasted for 40 days and nights” (Matthew 4:1-2)

Christ’s answer to a rich young man

“If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me” (Matthew 19:21)



Scriptural Example

Monks – especially coenobitic monks – looked to the community of the apostles:

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. **All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.** Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”
(Acts 2:42-47)



Cultural Heritage

The pursuit of strict, ascetic-style practices is present across multiple religious and cultural backgrounds. In turn, historians have naturally suggested ways in which monasticism might have been linked to other cultural trends and outlooks in the ancient world.

Religious self-denial, e.g. fasting: a common trait in many religions; prominent in Biblical Judaism, continues in the early Church, magnified by Christ's example in the wilderness.

Jewish "monasticism" – e.g. the Essenes (2nd century BC – 1st century AD)

- An interesting antecedent: an ascetic, penitential community living somewhat separately from society. Saint Jerome, who was very knowledgeable of Hebrew traditions noted the similarity.
- Nevertheless, there is no clear, continuous link to the development of Christian monasticism.

Cultural Heritage

Dualism

An ancient belief – dating back at least as far as Zoroastrianism - in inherently “good” and “bad” elements within the universe.

At the time in which Christian monastic life began to develop, a competing, syncretistic faith – Manichaeism – finds some popularity in the Mediterranean: at its core, a battle between a good, spiritual world and a bad, material one.

- The rejection of dualism by the Church Fathers (e.g. Augustine, 354-430 AD – a former Manichaean) and learned monastic writers is strong. If all creation is God’s then the material world and the body cannot be inherently bad.
 - Evagrius of Pontus: prefers to see sin originating in 8 evil “thoughts”. His list would become the basis for the seven deadly sins: gluttony, lust, greed, sadness, despondency, anger, vainglory, pride
- But there is some blurring of these lines: Augustine finds man’s attraction to sin in his “carnal [i.e. ‘fleshy’] will” (*voluntas carnalis*), a defect derived from “the Fall” (i.e. Adam eating the apple) by which mankind, without the help of God’s grace, comes to prefer his own temporal comfort and satisfaction to the spiritual.
- How much most monks truly understood the boundary between what would become theological orthodoxy and dualism is open to question.

Cultural Heritage

Stoicism - A Hellenistic (i.e. Greek) philosophy

Key idea: Emancipation from external concerns and desires towards an inner peace and tranquillity through the development of reason

- Some parallels, but Stoicism has some key differences from learned monastic outlooks
 - There is no physical ascetic requirement; stoic ideals can be practiced by Roman gentlemen like Cicero.
 - Christian virtues are not free from all desire and emotion. God is emotional, and the bond with man is one of love.
- BUT Evagrius of Pontus does come close. Believes that monks must develop an *apatheia* that frees them from worldly passion. This outlook would lead to some later concerns about his orthodoxy.

BUT: despite these cultural inheritances, monasticism also represented a clear rejection of parts of existing culture

E.g. Celibacy: practiced in some pagan contexts, but marriage and reproduction are celebrated as pinnacle social norms

- By choosing and promoting a celibate life as the most perfect, monks and their supporters in the late Roman empire are overturning cultural norms (Brown).

Immediate Socio-cultural Factors

It is worth reflecting further on the specific spatial and temporal circumstances of the moment in which early Christian monks became most famous.

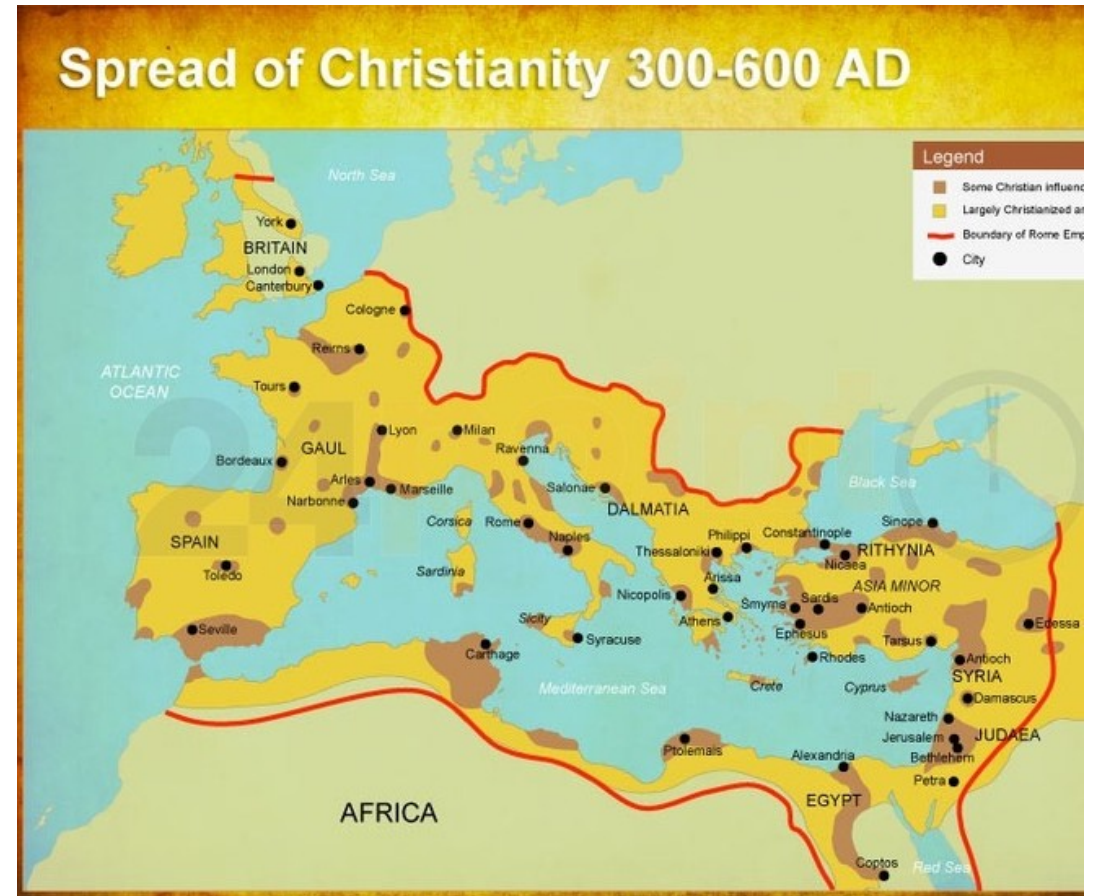
Late Antique Egypt

- The fertile Nile delta is the prosperous “breadbasket” of the Roman Empire. Grain is heavily exported to the Italian peninsula. But just outside this region, there are vast expanses of sandy desert.
- While there were ascetics emerging elsewhere (especially in the Near East and Syria, including in their wildernesses), Egypt’s “true desert” beyond the fertile zone allowed holy individuals like Anthony to set themselves apart as truly otherworldly in a way that was not as easy elsewhere (Brown).
- While many monks would not choose this level of seclusion, this desert heritage gives Egyptian monasticism a symbolic power. But Egypt was also unusual in that desert regions were so close to the highly-populated fertile area: most of those Egyptian monks who lived in desert areas were usually just outside the margins of the fertile zone (Goehring).
- Taking these points of view together: In Egypt “otherworldly” holy men are in close reach for a prosperous, “worldly” society: a powerful and attractive combination!

Immediate Socio-cultural Factors

Christianity between persecution and imperial religion

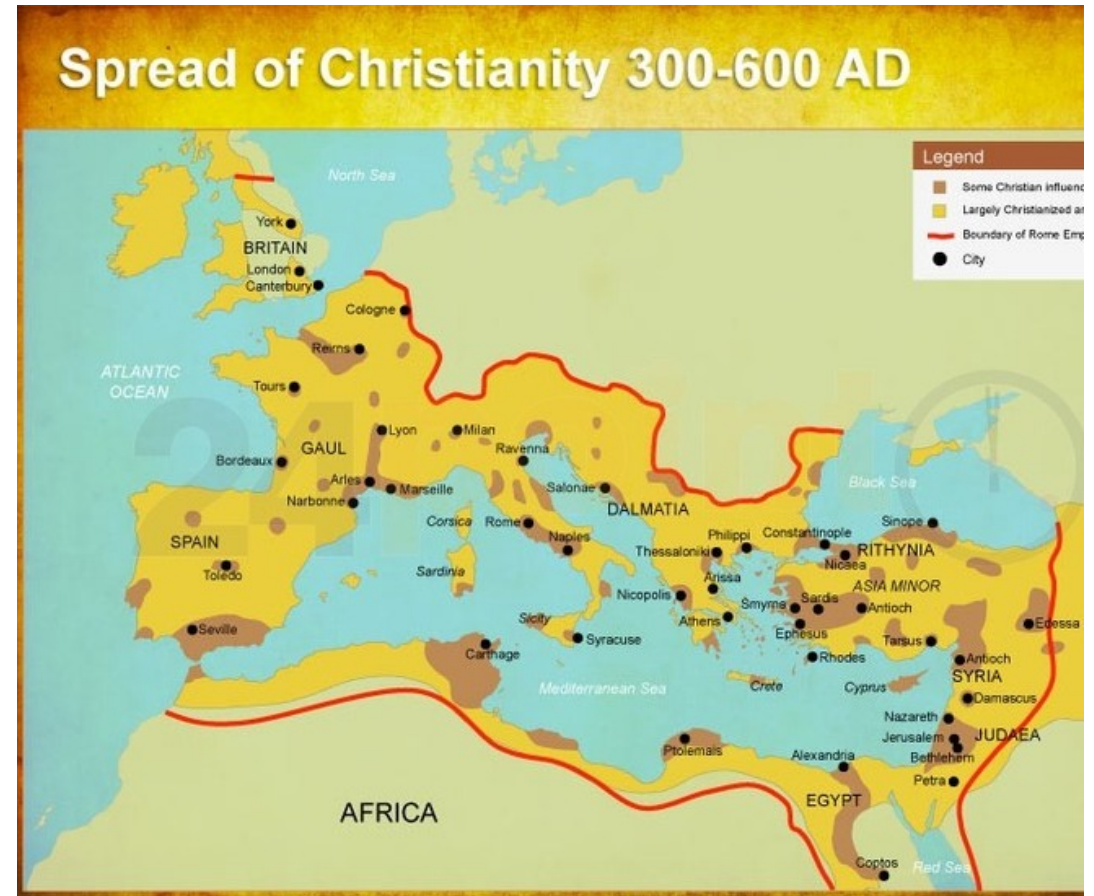
- Christianity is becoming a very public religion, rather a secretive cult in some of the Empire's key Mediterranean centres – including the Egypt, the Near East, North Africa, and Rome itself.
- Leads to the harshest persecutions yet known: that of Diocletian (emperor 284-305) in particular. Saint Anthony goes to the desert around this time.
- But most who become monks are not escaping pagan reaction: rather, from the mid-fourth century Christianity is very well established: Emperor Constantine I legalises the religion in 313, and by 324 it is clearly his favoured religion.



Immediate Socio-cultural Factors

Christianity between persecution and imperial religion

- The popular emergence of monasticism in the Christian heartlands of the Empire might be seen as a reaction or counter-culture to this new Christian scenario (Lester K. Little)
 - Ascetic life is a way of proving one's piety now martyrdom is less of a threat
 - A way to set oneself apart, as part of a godly elite, now that the Christian community as a whole cannot be seen so easily seen as such
- But its spread and acceptance by those who did not take it up suggests that others were in some way reassured or excited by its presence
 - Provide prayer and charity for society: taking pressure off other Christians
 - A "north star" of Christian perfection that others could learn from, even if they did not fully imitate its rigours

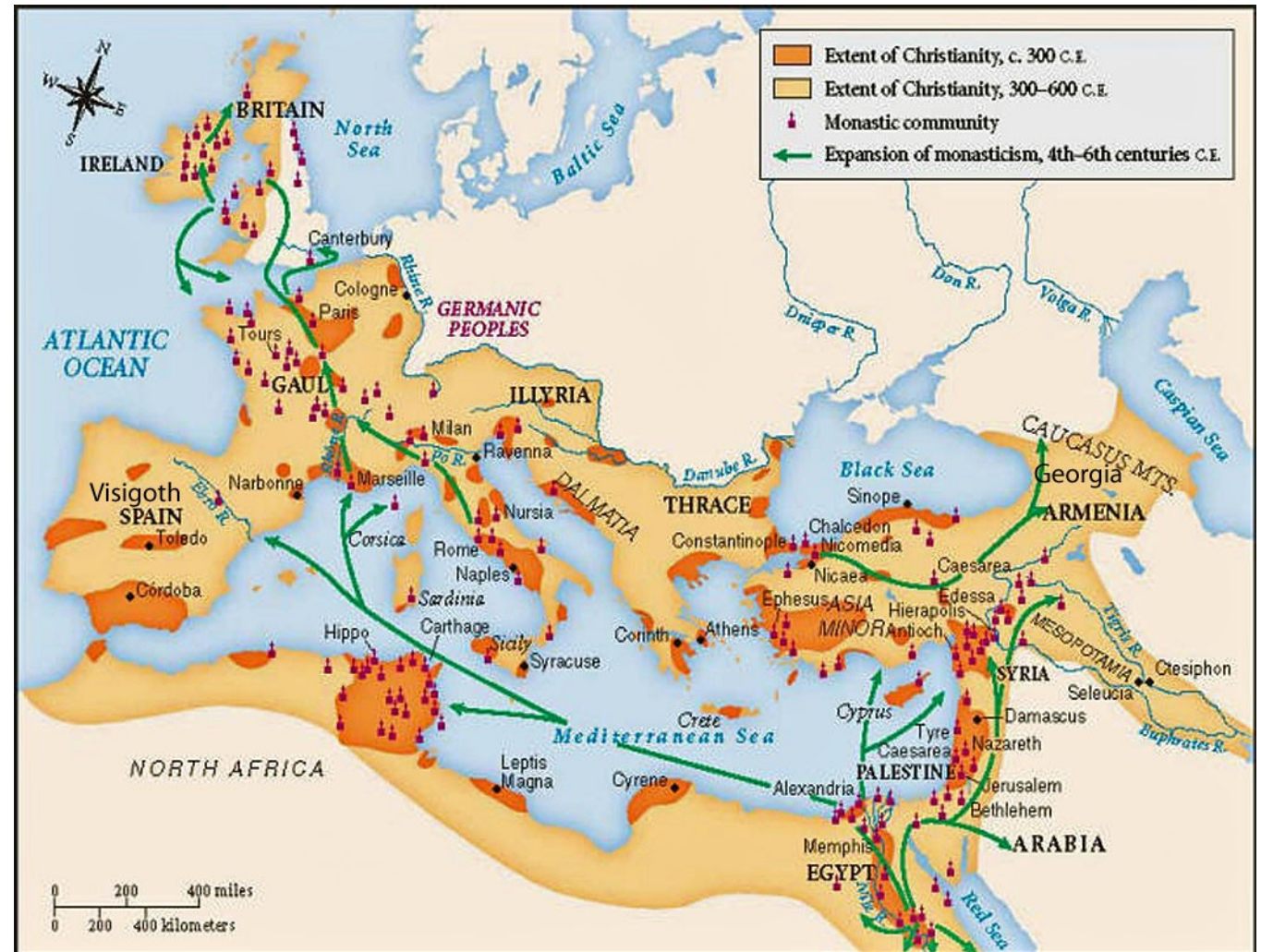


The spread of monasticism in the West

The fame of Egyptian monasticism spread very rapidly

Monastic practices with direct, traceable roots back to Egypt start to make significant headway in Europe around 400 AD

A topic for the next class!



Sources – Life of Saint Anthony (c. 360 AD), by Athanasius of Alexandria

Athanasius – bishop of Alexandria (from 328 AD to his death in 373 AD)

Life of Anthony

- Records the life of **Anthony**: born in Herakliopolos, allegedly in 251, becomes a recluse, eventually moves to Pispir, a deserted mountain fort not far from the Nile. Later moves further into the Eastern Desert, to another mountain near the Red Sea.
- Written not long after the death of Anthony (recorded as 356 AD)
- By this point monasticism widespread within Egypt
- Written for “brethren in foreign parts” – i.e. outside Egypt – who had “entered upon a noble rivalry with the monks of Egypt by your determination either to equal or surpass them in your training in the way of virtue.” [Prologue]
- Knew Anthony personally: “I hastened to write [...] what I myself know, having seen him many times, and what I was able to learn from him, for I was his attendant for a long time” [Prologue]
- Translated from Greek to Latin before 374 by Evagrius of Antioch. Widely read by monks in both the West and East for centuries to come

Reference: Athanasius, *Life of Saint Anthony*, trans. H. Ellershaw (1892).

<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2811.htm> [I have simplified the language somewhat]

Sources – Life of Saint Anthony (c. 360 AD), by Athanasius of Alexandria

“After the death of his father and mother he was left alone with one little sister: his age was about eighteen or twenty, and on him rested the care of both of his home and his sister. Less than six months after the death of his parents, he went, as was his custom, to the Lord’s House. As he walked, he looked within himself and reflected on how the Apostles left everything behind and followed the Saviour [cf. Mt 4.20]. He reflected also on how, in the Acts [cf. 4.35-7], they [the early Christians] sold their possessions and laid them at the Apostles’ feet for distribution to the needy, and what and how great a hope was laid up for them in heaven. Pondering these things he entered the church, where it happened that the Gospel was being read: he heard the Lord saying to the rich man, “If you would be perfect, go and sell what you have and give to the poor; and come follow Me and you shall have treasure in heaven” [Mt 19.21]. Anthony, as though God had reminded him of the Saints, and the passage had been read just for him, went out immediately from the church, and gave the possessions of his forefathers to the villagers – they were three hundred acres, productive and very fair [...]

Having committed his sister to known and faithful virgins [...] he henceforth devoted himself outside his house to discipline, watching himself [cf. Dt 4.9,15.9; Lk 17.3, 21] and training himself patiently. For there were not yet so many monasteries in Egypt, and no monk at all knew of the distant desert; but all who wished to watch themselves practised discipline in solitude near their own village. There was at this time, in the next village, an old man who had lived the life of a hermit from his youth. Anthony, after he had seen this man, imitated him in piety [cf. Gal 4.18]. [...]

He went on, seeking the service of God still more eagerly. Having met again with the old man he had encountered previously, he asked him to dwell with him in the desert. But when the other declined on account of his great age, and because as yet there was no such custom, Anthony set off alone to the mountain.”

Sources – Lausiatic History (c. 419-20 AD), by Palladius of Galatia

Palladius – bishop of Heliopolis in Asia Minor (from c. 400 AD until his death in the 420s AD)

- Became a monk in 386 AD or sometime after, travelling to Egypt to learn from ascetics there

Lausiatic History

- Written for an urban, aristocratic audience in Constantinople
- Requested by Lausus, chamberlain of the imperial court of Theodosius II
- Describes Palladius's own experiences with the ascetics of Egypt, and above all, his conversations with those he learnt from
- Although originally written in Greek, it was probably first translated into Latin in the fifth century and became popular in Western monastic libraries.

Reference: Palladius, *The Lausiatic History*, trans. W.K. Lowther (1918), http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/palladius_lausiatic_02_text.htm

Sources – Lausiac History (c. 419-20), by Palladius of Galatia

“... I left Dorotheus before the three years were up, for living with him one got parched and all dried-up. For all day long in the burning heat he would collect stones in the desert by the sea and build with them continually and make cells, and then he would leave them in favour of those who could not build for themselves. Each year he completed one cell. And once when I said to him: "What do you mean, father, at your great age by trying to kill your poor body in these heats?" he answered thus: "It kills me, I kill it." For he used to eat (daily) six ounces of bread and a bunch of herbs, and drink water in proportion. God is my witness, I never knew him stretch his legs and go to sleep on a rush mat, or on a bed. But he would sit up all night long and weave ropes of palm leaves to provide himself with food. Then, supposing that he did this to impress me, I made careful inquiries also from other disciples of his, who lived by themselves, and ascertained that this had been his manner of life from a youth, and that he had never deliberately gone to sleep. Rather, while working or eating he closed his eyes when finally overcome by sleep, so that often the piece of food fell from his mouth at the moment of eating, so great was his drowsiness. Once when I tried to constrain him to rest a little on the mat, he was annoyed and said: "If you can persuade angels to sleep, you will also persuade the zealous man." [I have simplified the language somewhat]

Sources – Sayings of the Desert Fathers (5th century AD)

The *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* (Latin: *Apophthegmata patrum*)

- A selection of sayings and anecdotes that are attributed to a number of early Egyptian ascetics, primarily men, but also three women
- These sayings and anecdotes were initially transmitted orally
- Compiled in Greek sometime in the fifth century, and in Latin probably not long after
- Another relatively common text in medieval monastic libraries
- The anecdotes here are the two stories that concern **Sarah**. Not much else is known about her.

Reference: 'The Sayings of the Desert Fathers' in *The Desert Fathers*, ed. and trans. B. Ward (London, 2003), 35-6, 106 [5.10-11, 10.76]

Sources – Sayings of the Desert Fathers (5th century AD)

“They said of Sarah that for thirteen years she was fiercely attacked by the demon of lust. She never prayed that the battle should leave her, but she used to say only, ‘Lord, give me strength.’ They also said of her that the same demon of lust was once attacking her threateningly, tempting her with vain thoughts of the world. She continued in the fear of God and maintained the rigour of her fasting. Once when she climbed up on the roof to pray, the spirit of lust appeared to her in bodily form and said to her, ‘You have overcome me, Sarah.’ But she replied, ‘It is not I who have overcome you, but my Lord Christ.’”

...

“Two monks came from Pelusium to see Sarah. On the way they said to each other, ‘Let us humiliate this *amma*.’ So they said to her, ‘Take care that your soul be not puffed up, and that you do not say, “Look, some hermits have come to consult me, a woman!”’ Sarah said to them, ‘I am a woman in sex, but not in spirit.’”

Sources – The Conferences (c. 420 AD), by John Cassian

John Cassian (c. AD 360 – c. 435)

- Probably born in Eastern Europe; well educated background: Greek and Latin bilingual
- As a young adult, he goes to Holy Land, then Egypt with his friend Germanus. They spend 25 years travelling together
- Eventually settles in Marseille, Southern Gaul, where he founds two monasteries

The *Conferences* (c. 420)

- A write-up of his and Germanus's discussions with leading Egyptian hermits and coenobitic monks – their words are recorded in much longer detail than the *Sayings of the Desert* fathers, although they are reconstructed from Cassian's memory, long after they occurred
- A companion volume to his *Institutes*: the *Institutes* were a practical guide to monastic life; the *Conferences* provide material for mental and spiritual reflection. Primary spiritual aim: achieving purity of heart (*puritas cordis*)
- Written in Latin for the benefit of Gallic followers, at the request of Bishop Castor of Apt
- A true classic of Western monastic tradition (especially for the later Benedictine tradition); perhaps the single most important vector for the transmission of Egyptian wisdom to the West

Sources – The Conferences (c. 420 AD), by John Cassian

“Abba Joseph: Hence, as we have said, only the ties of a friendship which is founded upon similarity of virtuousness are trustworthy and indissoluble, for ‘the Lord makes those of one mind to dwell in the house.’ (Ps. 68:6) Therefore love can abide unbroken only in those in whom there is one chosen orientation and one desire [...] If you also wish to preserve this inviolably, you must first strive, after having expelled your vices, to put to death your own will and, with common earnestness and a common chosen orientation, to fulfil diligently what the prophet takes such great delight in: ‘Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell in unity.’ (Ps 133:1) This should be understood not in terms of place but spiritually. For it profits nothing if those who disagree about behaviour and chosen orientation are together in one dwelling, nor is it a drawback to those who are of like virtue to be separated by distance. With God it is common behaviour rather than a common location that joins brothers in a single dwelling, and the fullness of peace can never be maintained where there is a difference of wills.”

Sources – Constitution of Valens, 370 AD

Emperor Valens (d. 378)

- Eastern Roman Emperor between 364 and 378; brother of Valentinian I, Western Roman Emperor

Constitution:

- Concerns high-status citizens (*curiales* – i.e. city councillors) whose wealth in land entailed public services (*munera*) for the Roman state
- These services were primarily financial and formed a key part of the tax system
- The source is concerned with such people taking becoming monks and giving this property to their religious communities
- This source is part of Roman legal compilations, albeit we have no knowledge of how successfully it was enforced from Egyptian papyri (see Wipszycka, 163-5)

Reference: *The Theodosian Code and Novels and the Sirmundian Constitutions*, ed. and trans. C. Pharr (Princeton, 1952), 12.3.63.

Sources – Constitution of Valens, 370 AD

“Certain devotees of idleness have deserted the compulsory services of the municipalities, have undertaken to live in solitude and secret places, and under the pretext of religion have joined with bands of hermit monks. We command, therefore, by Our well considered precept, that such persons and others of this kind who have been apprehended within Egypt shall be routed out from their hiding places by the Count of the Orient and shall be recalled to the performance of the compulsory public services of their municipalities, or in accordance with the tenor of Our sanction, they shall forfeit the allurements of the family property which We decree shall be vindicated by those persons who are going to undertake the performance of their compulsory public services.”

Sources – Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew (68), by Saint John Chrysostom

John Chrysostom (d. 407):

- Born in Antioch in Syria and lived much of his life there. His mother may have been a pagan and he received a pagan classical education, but was baptised in 368 or 373
- Studies theology as part of the Antioch school, and becomes famed for his preaching in the city
- Made archbishop of Constantinople in 397

The *Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew*:

- Sermons written down by others as they were said. Originally in Greek, but translated into Latin in the 5th century by Anianus of Celada; enjoy a wide readership in the West
- Chrysostom's preaching is simple and direct and intended for the widest audience
- Homily 68 concerns Christ's parable of the idle and murderous vineyard workers; he contrasts the monks with men of this attitude

Reference: Johannes Chrysostomus, "In Matthaeum homiliae," *Patrologium Graecae* 58: 643 [68.3]; trans. G. Melville in G. Melville, *The World of Medieval Monasticism* (Collegeville MN, 2016).

Sources – Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew (68), by Saint John Chrysostom

“Their work is the same as that of Adam, when in the beginning, before the Fall, clothed in majesty, he communed intimately with God in that most blessed land that he lived in. How could our monks be worse off than Adam before the Fall, since he was entrusted with the building of Paradise? He knew no worldly troubles. Nor do they know them. He came before God with a pure conscience. They do the same. Indeed, they approach God with even more trust, because they are blessed with greater grace by the Holy Spirit.”

Select Bibliography

Beyond the general reading, the following are very useful and easily available:

Peter Brown, *The Body and Society* (CZ trans: Brno, 2000)

E. Wipszycka, “Resources and Economic Activities of the Egyptian Monastic Communities”, *The Journal of Juristic Papyrology* 41 (2011), 159-263. <https://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/propylaeumdok/2426/>

James Goehring, “Withdrawing from the Desert: Pachomius and the Development of Village Monasticism in Upper Egypt”, *Harvard Theological Review* 89.3 (1996). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1510047>