LIVING LIKE ANGELS IN THE NEAR EAST: MEN, WOMEN, AND "FAMILY" DOUBLE MONASTERIES IN LATE ANTIQUITY

Andra Jugănaru

"τὴν ἀδελφότητα ἀγαπᾶτε"[1]
(1 Peter 2:17)

When our father Pachomius had found that [his sister's, Maria's] heart inclined to the good and right life, he immediately sent the brothers over to build a monastery for her in that village, a short distance from his own monastery … Later on, many heard about her and came to live with her. They practiced *ascesis* eagerly with her, and she was their mother and their worthy elder until her death. When… Pachomius saw that the number of [these women] was increasing…, he appointed an old man called Apa Peter, whose speech was seasoned with salt to be their father and to preach frequently to them on the Scriptures… [he] also wrote down the rules of the brothers and sent them through [Peter], so that they might learn them.[2]

This is how, according to his *Vita*, Pachomius, the father of cenobitic monasticism, established a new type of ascetic community, the "double monastery."[3] Parallel with the rise of cenobitism, "double monasteries," associations of men and women who exercised their ascetic vocation in the same monastic unit, mushroomed at the beginning of the fourth century in the Near East.[4] Closeness between men

---

[1] Love your brothers.
[2] "The Bohairic Life of Saint Pachomius," 27, in *Pachomian Koinonia*, vol. 1, *The Life of Saint Pachomius and His Disciples*, trans. Armand Veilleux, ed. Adalbert de Vogüé (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1980), 49–50.
[3] This article presents one part of my MA thesis, "Daily Life in Mixed and Double Monasteries in the Late Antique Near East" (Cenral European University, 2013) which was completed under the close guidance of my supervisors, Marianne Sághy and Volker Menze, and thanks to the suggestions offered by József Laszlovszky, to whom I would like to express my deepest gratitude. I am also grateful to Marianne Sághy for helping me turn the thesis into this article.
[4] The topic of double monasticism has attracted little attention in scholarship. See Daniel F. Stramara, "Double Monasticism in the Greek East, Fourth through Eighth Centuries," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6, no. 2 (1998): 271–273, and Ewa Wipszycka, *Moines et communautés monastiques en Égypte (IVe–VIIIe siècles)* (Warsaw: Warsaw University, 2009).

and women dedicated to God has long intrigued observers, particularly because of the danger of fornication among them. Why, then, did men and women choose to live an ascetic life together and yet apart from one another?

This article presents three cases of fourth-century double communities that might make it possible to answer this question. The first such community, founded at the beginning of the fourth century by Pachomius at Tabennesi (Upper Egypt), started as a male monastery and a female convent built for his sister, Maria. Around the 350s, a wealthy and pious Greek family, Macrina and her brothers, Naucratius and Basil the Great, transformed their family estate in Annisa (Cappadocia) into a double community. In 386, Jerome and his brother Paulinianus, together with the former's faithful disciples, the Roman noblewoman Paula and her daughter, Eustochium, founded a double monastery in Bethlehem. Since these communities gave, in fact, an opportunity for members of the same family to live an ascetic life in proximity, one can start from the hypothesis that the family origin of these ascetic households must have been a significant factor in the making of double monasticism in this part of the Christian world.

From Earthly *familia* to a "Family of Angels"

These monasteries originated in the Classical Greek and Roman *familiae*. Family ties, blood relationships, however, were gradually transformed, parallel with their members' spiritual evolution and the growth of the communities. Pachomius, Macrina, and Paula started to live their ascetic lives accompanied by several relatives. However, with time, in each case the biological family was replaced by an ascetic brotherhood (ἀδελφότης), "relatives in spirit," who shared the same vocation of dedicating their lives to God. In spite of the detachment from the earthly family, the monastic community actually imitated its structure. Both the structure and the language used inside the monasteries replicated the Classical family model.[5] The spiritual father of each entire community transferred the role of the old earthly *paterfamilias* to this newly shaped spiritual family, having the greatest authority and, at the same time, responsibility for it:

> Here, as in the original family, the ascetics' sisters, mothers, wives, and daughters were provided and cared for, and supervised by brothers who replaced the original *paterfamilias*, while at the same time all natural

---

[5] Rebecca Krawiec, "'From the Womb of the Church:' Monastic Families," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 11, no. 3 (2003): 283–307.

family ties were effectively severed. The rules and regulations are a precise reflection of this process.[6]

Paradise on Earth: Cells in a Landscape

What role did architecture and the natural setting play in the monastic organization? The landscape must have been carefully chosen before an ascetic community was established. The way in which the buildings were arranged and used determined the proximity or, on the contrary, the segregation between brothers and sisters. The landscape provided ideal conditions for asceticism, since monasteries were sited in quiet and isolated sites. Pachomius chose a "deserted village" for the foundation of his Tabennesi.[7] Its location on the banks of the Nile gave access not only to fertile land, but also to large cities nearby.[8] The idyllic landscape of Annisa was a land belonging to the family of Macrina, a place perceived as a desert, uninhabited, ensuring the withdrawal of the ascetics from society:[9]

> There is a high mountain, covered with a thick forest, watered on its northerly side by cool and transparent streams. At its base is outstretched an evenly sloping plain…. A forest of many-coloured and multifarious trees… acts almost as a hedge to enclose it, so that even Kalypso's isle, which Homer seems to have admired above all others for its beauty, is insignificant as compared with this.[10]

Even though located in a town, the monastery of Paula and Jerome in Bethlehem acted as "an enclave;" Palestine was one of the most glamorous and popular places for ascetic retreat.[11]

---

[6] Susanna Elm, *'Virgins of God': The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 272.

[7] "The Bohairic Life of Saint Pachomius," 17, in *Pachomian Koinonia*, vol. 1, 39. However, "ἐρῆμος" refers to the decline of the village's population rather than to its landscape. See James E. Goehring, "Withdrawing from the Desert: Pachomius and the Development of Village Monasticism in Upper Egypt," *The Harvard Theological Review* 89, no. 3 (1996): 275–277.

[8] Ibid., 273.

[9] Hendrik Dey, "Building Worlds Apart. Walls and the Construction of Communal Monasticism from Augustine through Benedict," *Antiquité tardive* 12 (2004): 357–371.

[10] Basil, "Letter 14," ed. E. H. Warmington, G. P. Goold, trans. Roy J. Deferrari, in Basil, *The Letters*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 106–107.

[11] William Harmless, *Desert Christians. An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 432.

The sites of these monasteries have only been partially determined, based on the descriptions provided by written sources without archeological surveys.[12] Despite this deficiency, the building organization can be reconstructed due to the abundant written details preserved about them. The Pachomian monastery was unified in a sort of "ascetic village," surrounded by an enclosing wall. The community was connected with the outside world through a single gate.[13] The wall had a double function; it not only acted as a barrier against outside dangers, but it also prevented the monks and the nuns from being tempted to go outside easily.[14] The main church, the kitchen, the refectory, and the infirmary were sited in the middle of the monastery. The Nile separated the men's and the women's quarters, but it was not impossible to cross.[15] Each monk or nun lived in his or her own cell, where he or she was supposed to fulfill the canon regarding individual prayer.[16] The houses where the monks and nuns dwelled were built around the church. Both the men's monastery and the women's convent had: "fathers and stewards, weekly servers, ministers and a master of each house. A house has … forty brothers[17] who obey the master, and, according to the number of brothers, there are thirty or forty houses in one monastery, and three or four houses are federated into a tribe."[18]

The monastery in Annisa was a single monastic unit, referred to as ἡ ἀδελφότης, of men and women who consecrated their lives to Christ. As Anna M. Silvas has observed, this detail implied the continuous celibacy of its members.[19] The monastery distinguished a residential section dedicated to the nuns (ἡ γυναικωνῖτις or παρθενών) and a similar one for the brothers (ὁ ἀνδρών).

---

[12] L. Th. Lefort, "Les premiers monastères pachômiens. Exploration topographique," *Le Muséon* 52 (1939): 393–397; Anna M. Silvas, *The Asketikon of Saint Basil the Great* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); eadem, "In Quest of Basil's Retreat: An Expedition to Ancient Pontus," *Antichthon* 41 (2007): 73–95; Denys Pringle, *The Churches of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 137, 156–157, *contra* Jerome Murphy-O'Conner, *The Holy Land. An Oxford Archaeological Guide from Earliest Times to 1700*, 5th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 232–233, 237.

[13] "The Rules of Saint Pachomius," Pr. 52, in *Pachomian koinonia*, vol. 2, trans. Armand Veilleux, ed. Adalbert de Vogüé (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1981), 154.

[14] Alice-Mary Talbot, "Women's Space in Byzantine Monasteries," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 52 (1998): 113.

[15] "The Rules of Saint Pachomius," Pr. 52, in *Pachomian koinonia*, vol. 2, 154.

[16] "The Rules of Saint Pachomius," Pr. 19, in *Pachomian koinonia*, vol. 2, 148.

[17] Or sisters. Pachomius sent the nuns the same rules he had previously established for the monks.

[18] "The Rules of Saint Pachomius," Jer. Pref. 2, in *Pachomian koinonia*, vol. 2, 142.

[19] Silvas, *The Asketikon of Saint Basil the Great*, 24.

These two parts were clearly separated by a strong natural obstacle which could have been either the Iris River or the mountain located nearby.[20] Apart from these buildings, written sources mention a single church (ἡ ἐκκλησία) and a ξενοδοκεῖον for receiving guests. However, guests might also have been invited to the brothers' or sisters' quarters, as appropriate.[21]

The monastery in Bethlehem borrowed some architectural features of the monastic buildings in Kellia. The men's section was placed near the tomb of King Archelaus[22] and, designated by Jerome by the term *cellulae*, an equivalent of the Greek *kellia*, had a church and a tower, as in Kellia. Paula's nuns dwelt near the Church of the Nativity, divided into three groups according to the social backgrounds of their members. Each group had its own distinct building (*monasterium*) where the sisters lived and worked. The nuns' section probably also had either one common church for all three groups or one separate church for each of them, since all the sisters united to sing the Psalms each day, but only on Sundays did they join the monks in the Church of the Nativity. In addition, a guesthouse was built by the wayside for receiving pilgrims and for recruitment.[23]

Whatever the border between monks and nuns was, its existence demonstrates that segregation was felt to be necessary between them. However, it did not obviate contact between the two ascetic groups, since in each community there were means for passing from one part to the other.[24] Moreover, both Pachomius' and Basil's Rules clearly established the conditions under which monks and nuns were supposed to meet and interact. The most frequent occasions were the common prayers in the single church of the monastery, but even in the church separation between monks and nuns was strictly maintained. Meals were taken at the same time, but in separate places.

---

[20] Although the written sources do not specify, the mountain is more likely to have functioned as the border between the two ascetic groups, since the river was impossible to cross, as Anna M. Silvas argues. See Silvas, ibid., 46–48.

[21] Ibid., 21.

[22] Eusebius, *Onomasticon* 42:10–14; Jerome, *Onomasticon* 43:18–45,5, ed. Klostermann, 45, http://www.christusrex.org/www1/ofm/mad/sources/sources072.html (accessed Jan. 16, 2014).

[23] Pierre Nautin, "L'excommunication de Saint Jérôme," *École pratique des hautes études, 5e section, Sciences religieuses. Annuaire* 80–81, no. 2 (1971–1973): 10–11.

[24] Grégoire de Nazianze, "Lettre 5," in Grégoire de Nazianze, *Lettres*, vol. 1, trans. and ed. Paul Gallay (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1964), 6.

Relations between Ascetic Brothers and Sisters

What kind of relations between monks and nuns did physical closeness generate? Since a preoccupation with preserving the ascetic ideal dominated these communities, serious attempts were made to keep a certain distance between men and women. Most rules included limitations which transformed their relation into one of dependence, implying, consequently, obedience. However, sincere admiration and even friendship also developed between monks and nuns.

In double communities, female convents were connected to male monasteries.[25] One may even assume that a particular aspect of their daily existence implied a sort of dependence between them. Work was divided among the members of the community, but the results were always shared. Sources provide rich details concerning the activities of the men, which ensured the economy of the monasteries. In Tabennesi and Annisa, the leaders appointed certain monks to prepare the food, transact sales, make purchases, work in the shops,[26] weave linen or mats, to tailor, make wagons or shoes,[27] work in the fields,[28] build dwellings, and to hunt or to fish.[29] The sources provide numerous details about the different types of monks' work. Nuns, however, were only tasked with two charges: baking bread and weaving woolen cloth. This last detail was probably chosen on purpose, since the hagiographic image of a woman producing cloth signifies her ascetic devotion.[30] Ewa Wipszycka has explained the scarcity of details concerning women's activities through the fact that the male authors of these writings were neither fully aware of nor very interested in women's work.[31]

A constant issue in double monasteries was the concern about temptation that could arise due to the proximity in which monks and nuns lived. Therefore, the monastic rules, letters, and even hagiographies insisted that encounters between the two groups happen only on rare occasions. The various *Lives of*

---

[25] Wipszycka, "Moines et communautés monastiques en Égypte," 578.

[26] "The Bohairic Life of Saint Pachomius" 26, in *Pachomian koinonia*, vol. 1, 48.

[27] "The Rules of Saint Pachomius," Jer. Pref. 6, in *Pachomian koinonia*, vol. 2, 143.

[28] "The Rules of Saint Pachomius," Pr. 24, in *Pachomian koinonia*, vol. 2, 149.

[29] Gregory of Nyssa, "Life of Macrina," 10, ed. and trans. Anna M. Silvas, in Anna M. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger, Philosopher of God* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 118–119; *Anthologie grecque. Première partie. Anthologie palatine*, vol. 6 (Book 8. [*Épigrammes de Saint Grégoire le Théologien (Grégoire de Nazianze)*]), 156, 2nd ed, trans. and ed. Pierre Waltz (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1960), 179.

[30] Lynda L. Coon, *Sacred Fictions: Holy Women and Hagiography in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 41–44.

[31] Ibid., 571.

Pachomius refer to rare meetings between monks and nuns, always in the presence of the abbess. In addition, on every occasion when physical work was necessary in the nuns' dwellings, the monks were supervised by trustworthy old brothers. When a sister died, the funeral was organized by a small group of monks and during the entire ceremony encounters were avoided between the groups of nuns and monks:

> When one of the sisters died, they brought her to the oratory and first their mother covered her with a shroud. Hence the old man Apa Peter sent word to our father Pachomius who chose experienced brothers and sent them to the monastery with Apa Peter. They proceeded to the assembly room and stood in the entryway chanting psalms with gravity until the deceased was prepared for burial. Then she was placed on a bier and carried to the mountain. The virgin sisters followed behind the bier while their father walked after them and their mother before them. While the deceased was buried, they prayed for her and returned with great sorrow to their dwelling.[32]

In spite of the reserved attitude that the fourth-century Church had towards women, some clerics developed strong friendships with their female disciples.[33] Macrina's and Paula's relationships with their spiritual directors, who lived in the same double communities for a short while, furnish examples based on letters and dialogues between them that have been preserved. From the correspondence of Paula and Jerome, 22 letters and prefaces to biblical books have survived. Some are addressed only to Paula, others both to Paula and her daughter, Eustochium (*Fig. 1*). Because of her eagerness, for Jerome "no other matron in Rome could dominate my mind but one who mourned and fasted, who was squalid with dirt, almost blinded by weeping,"[34] as he confessed to Asella, another ascetic woman to whom he was a spiritual father. He constantly addressed his disciples in an admiring tone[35] and often declared his feelings for them. For example, after the death of Blesilla, Eustochium's sister, he sent a letter to Paula meant to soothe her, in which he shared his own sadness with her: "I confess my affections, this

[32] "The Bohairic Life of Saint Pachomius" 27, in *Pachomian koinonia*, vol. 1, 50–51.
[33] Elizabeth Ann Clark, *Jerome, Chrysostom, and Friends. Essays and Traslations* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1979).
[34] Jerome, *Letter XLV. To Asella*, 3, in *Select Letters of St. Jerome*, ed. G. P. Goold, trans. F. A. Wright (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991). 182–183.
[35] Jerome, *Praefatio in Librum Job*, *apud Medieval Women's Latin Letters*: Quapropter, o Paula et Eustochium, unicum nobilitatis et humilitatis exemplar,...spiritualia haec et mansura dona suscipe, http://epistolae.ccnmtl. columbia.edu/letter/262.html (accessed Jan. 16, 2014).

Fig. 1. Jerome writing to Eustochium. Illuminated manuscript originally from Jumièges. Oxford, Bodleian, MS Bodl 717 fol-6r (end of eleventh century)

whole book is written with tears."[36] In 404, when Paula died, he wrote a long and moving letter to Eustochium that ended with: "Farewell Paula and help the final old age of your cultor with your prayers."[37]

---

[36] Jérôme, "Lettre 39. À Paula," 2, in Jérôme, *Lettres,* vol. 2, trans. Jérôme Labourt (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1951), 73. My translation: *Confiteor affectus meos, totus hic liber fletibus scribitur.*

[37] See Jérôme, "Lettre 108. À Eustochium," in Jérôme, *Lettres*, vol. 5, trans. Jérôme Labourt (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1955), 200-201 for the Latin text and http://epistolae.

After the death of Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa visited Annisa, where he found Macrina on her deathbed. Affected by the loss of his brother, Gregory discussed the nature of the soul and the resurrection with his older sister in a deeply spiritual dialogue which he remembered one year after she died.[38] He referred to her as "my teacher," since he sought answers to all the intriguing interior questions about death that had arisen through the mixture of his philosophical education and religious belief:

> [As our sister and teacher still remained in this life], I went to her then with haste to share with her the calamity of our brother. … Alas, when we came before each other's eyes, the sight of the teacher only rekindled the passion, for she too was already in the grip of a mortal illness. She, like an expert equestrian, allowed me briefly to be carried away by the torrent of my grief. Then she endeavoured to bridle me with words and to steer with the bit of her own reasoning the disorder of my soul.[39]

Authority

Double monasteries required detailed regulations meant to keep untouched the ideal of ascetic perfection. How was authority legitimized, shaped, and manifested in these communities? One possible answer to the problem of legitimacy implies the formulation of monastic rules, emphasized and strengthened when their founders decided to put them in a written format and to send them to the ascetics. The economic and social context of the era also influenced the way authority was constructed.[40]

According to Alberto Camplani and Giovanni Filoramo, authority was "the institutionalized and legitimized form" of power[41] in Late Antique society, and it inherited the meaning of the ancient *auctoritas*.[42] In the words of Mohamed Kerrou, "authority is a modality of social influence … fundamentally of moral

---

ccnmtl.columbia.edu/letter/446.html for the English translation (accessed Jan. 16, 2014).

[38] Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, trans. and ed. Anna M. Silvas, in Anna M. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 171–246.

[39] Ibid., 171.

[40] Alberto Camplani and Giovanni Filoramo, ed., *Foundations of Power and Conflicts of Authority in Late-Antique Monasticism: Proceedings of the International Seminar Turin, December 2–4, 2004* (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2007), 12.

[41] Ibid., XI.

[42] Ibid., 5–6.

and psychological order."[43] Calling it "legitimate domination," Max Weber distinguished three types of authority: legal, expressed in laws and competences; tradition, founded on the "sanctity of immemorial traditions and the legitimacy of those exercising authority under them;" and charismatic authority, applicable to Early Christianity and monasticism, derived from the "exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him."[44] Claudia Rapp has criticized the Weberian model of authority, suggesting instead an institutional, pragmatic, and ascetic authority.[45] I would argue that in double monasteries the types of authority belonging to both models accumulated and coexisted. Moreover, since ascetics were members of "brotherhoods" dedicated to God which imitated traditional ancient families, "family authority" was also manifested.

What kind of legitimacy and practice of all types of authority did the nature of double monasteries lead to? The legitimization of authority had a double source. Monks and nuns became charismatic figures in their lifetimes. By instructing Pachomius during his first years of zealous asceticism,[46] "the great monk" Palamon legitimized him to achieve his own charisma due to his virtues. Similarly to Pachomius, Macrina achieved charismatic authority, on the one hand, due to her alleged kinship with Saint Macrina the Elder, persecuted during the reigns of Galerius and Diocletian, and, on the other, through her personal example of devotion and renunciation. Jerome's influence on ascetics may be explained by the fame, which he sometimes stressed himself, that he had acquired during his lifetime.[47] Ewa Wipszycka's remark for the monastery in Tabennesi is valid for the other two communities as well; besides charismatic authority, the founders of the monasteries also had institutional authority, embodied in the terms by which they were referred to. The superiors of the Tabennesi monastery were addressed with the terms "father" and *hegoumen*.[48] In his translation of the Pachomian Rules,

---

[43] Mohamed Kerrou, *L'autorité des saints. Perspectives historiques et socio-anthropologiques en Méditerranée occidentale* (Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1998), 14.

[44] Max Weber, *Economy and Society. An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 215.

[45] Claudia Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity. The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

[46] "The Bohairic Life of Saint Pachomius," 10, in *Pachomian Koinonia*, vol. 1, 29–33.

[47] J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome. His Life, Writings and Controversies* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998).

[48] Wipszycka, *Moines et communautés monastiques en Égypte,* 336.

Jerome kept the meanings of these words.[49] The term "father" had a variety of senses according to the ascetic context in which it was used. "Most frequently, it expresses the profound respect, the humility and the obedience that a son must testify to his father… The filial respect is also expressed through the honorific titles of *apa* and *abba*."[50] Sources also use formulas such as "the prince of the monastery," "the father of the monastery," "the man of the monastery," and, rarely, "head."[51] The *Historia Lausiaca* refers to Pachomius as *archimandrites*[52] to suggest his rank.[53] The Pachomian congregation had a tripartite structure with three echelons of power. The highest one was the *koinonia* (the congregation itself), ruled by "the head" (or archimandrite). It was followed by the monasteries (including Tabennesi) ruled by a superior, seconded by the abbot of the monks and the abbess of the nuns, and the houses, governed by housemasters, followed by their seconds.[54] The term *proestos* probably designated an elder monk whom the superior of the community consulted before making decisions.[55]

Charisma gave women both spiritual and institutional authority. Gregory of Nyssa calls Macrina "the greatest one,"[56] "the holy one,"[57] "the blessed one,"[58] or "my teacher."[59] He expresses the influence that his sister had on his existence in a deeply sensitive letter sent to a member of the Church administration:

> We had a sister who was for us a teacher of how to live, a mother in place of our mother. Such was her freedom towards God that she was for us a strong tower and a shield of favour as the Scripture says, and

---

[49] He called the superior of the monastery *pater* or "prince." See Adalbert de Vogüé, "Les appellations de la cellule dans les écrits Pachômiens traduits par Saint Jérôme," *Studia Monastica* 37, no. 2 (1995): 241.

[50] Wipszycka, *Moines et communautés monastiques en Égypte*, 327.

[51] Ibid., 335–336.

[52] Palladius, *The Lausiac History*, 7, 6, trans. and ed. Edward Cuthbert Butler (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1967).

[53] Wipszycka, *Moines et communautés monastiques en Égypte*, 329.

[54] Ibid., 335–336.

[55] Ibid., 328.

[56] "ἡ μεγάλη". Grégoire de Nysse, *Vie de Sainte Macrine*, 10,1; 15, 28; 18,7; 19,39; 28,6; 31,3, ed. and trans. Pierre Maraval (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1971), 172, 192, 200, 204, 234, 242.

[57] "ἡ ἁγία". Ibid., 28,14; 29,6; 30,8; 31,6; 37,13; p. 234, 236, 240, 242, 258.

[58] "ἡ μακαρία". Ibid., 37,4; 37,19; p. 258, 260.

[59] Idem, "On the Soul and the Resurrection," in Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, passim.

a fortified city and a name of utter assurance, through her freedom towards God that came of her way of life.[60]

The function of charismatic authority was to maintain the continuity and stability of the community, especially in critical moments such as the death of a leader.[61] For this purpose, Pachomius named a successor, Petronius, whom he legitimized to rule the monastery after his death, thus transferring his authority to him.[62]

Legitimization was also founded in the Holy Scriptures. The Rules of both Pachomius and Basil follow Biblical commandments. In addition, they were correlated with other ecclesiastical texts such as the *Apostolic Constitutions* and different conciliar canons.[63] Thus, the Rules had the necessary legitimacy for being enforced, together with punishments, the consequences of disobedience: "Those who spurn the precepts of the superiors and the rules of the monastery, which have been established by God's precept, and who make light of the counsels of the elders, shall be punished according to the established order."[64] In addition, failure to obey the rules, even due to weakness of the body, was sufficient reason for giving penance to a guilty monk:

> If someone has promised to observe the rules of the monastery and has begun to do so, but abandoned them, and later on returned and did penance, while putting forward the weakness of his body as the reason for his incapacity to fulfill what he had promised, he shall be made to stay with the sick and shall be fed among the idle until, having done penance, he fulfill his promise.[65]

The forms and means of authority were articulated in the monasteries over spiritual and practical life alike. Both the person and the actions of the monastery's *abba* (the father of the entire community) had the greatest authority not only over the members, but also over outsiders. His personal example of living an ideal ascetic life and the miracles that he performed guaranteed that God Himself

---

[60] Idem, "Letter 19," 6, in Gregory of Nyssa, *The Letters*, ed. and trans. Anna M. Silvas (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 176–177.

[61] James E. Goehring, "New Frontiers in Pachomian Studies," in *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity*, ed. Birger A. Pearson, James E. Goehring (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 241.

[62] "The Bohairic Life of Saint Pachomius," 121, in *Pachomian Koinonia*, vol. 1, 176.

[63] Wipszycka, *Moines et communautés monastiques en Égypte*, 325.

[64] "Jud. 8," in *Pachomian Koinonia*, vol. 2, 177.

[65] "Jud. 12," in *Pachomian Koinonia*, vol. 2, 178.

legitimized[66] and continuously confirmed his position. The authority of the Scriptures and the Apostles was added to his charismatic and monastic authority, which consequently enforced the reception of the monastic rules.

The strict division among the members of the community reveals the predominance of charismatic authority, legitimized through monastic rules. Because of the complexity of the organization, authority had to be distributed so that it could cover all aspects of material and spiritual life. After building a monastery close and associated to his own for his sister, Pachomius appointed a monk to organize and lead it:

> The Great Man's sister heard [about him] and came to see him… So a monastery of women was built in the village, short distance from the brothers. And as they grew in number little by little, she became their mother.

> He appointed a certain Peter, a man very religious and advanced in age. His speech was seasoned with salt and his eyes as well as his mind were full of dignity. He would often stand to preach to them the words of salvation from the divine Scriptures. Pachomius wrote down for them the rules of the brothers and sent them by the old man Peter, that they might govern themselves by keeping them.[67]

Until his death in September 378,[68] Basil had the most prominent influence on the monastery in Annisa. Macrina was the abbess of the nuns, but a deaconess, Lampadion, was in charge of the women's section under her. The men were led spiritually by Peter, Macrina's youngest brother, whom Basil ordained as a priest some time around 371.[69]

Legal authority covered the interior and exterior of the community. Inside the monastery, a monk punished for disobedience was removed from the "assembly of the brothers" and had the obligation to repent:

> If someone is prone to slander and to saying that which is not [true] and is caught in this sin, he shall be admonished twice. And if he is too

---

[66] Alberto Camplani, Giovanni Filoramo, ed., *Foundations of Power and Conflicts of Authority*, 9–10.

[67] "The First Greek Life of Saint Pachomius," 32, in *Pachomian Koinonia*, vol. 1, 318–319.

[68] The date of Basil's death, assumed until recently to have been January 1, 379, has been re-discussed. Anna M. Silvas has made an overview of all the recent attempts to establish an accurate chronology of "the four Cappadocians" in her introductory study to the edition of the Gregory of Nyssa's *Letters*. See Anna M. Silvas, "Biography," in Gregory of Nyssa, *The Letters*, 32–39.

[69] Silvas, ibid., 25.

contemptuous to listen, he shall be separated from the assembly of the brothers seven days and shall receive only bread and water until he firmly promises to convert from that vice. Then he shall be forgiven.[70]

External authority was exercised over the community by the local bishops. The numerous features that authority had make it necessary to analyze it from various perspectives. In double monasteries, authority had a double aspect. On the one hand, it was exercised from outside the monastery through the conciliar canons and interventions of the bishop. On the other hand, the members of one community were subordinate to a many-branched internal authority. The "chain" of obedience(s) that an ordinary monk or nun owed to various superiors indicates the charisma of several members and also the distribution of authority among them. As for legal and institutionalized authority, the scriptural and apostolic origins which were perceived behind the monastic rules ensured the idea of God's intercession for their elaboration among the members of the monastery.

What sources do not fully reveal is how monks and nuns could influence authority inside the monastery. John W. Coakley's remark for a later period may also be valid for cases of double monasteries in the Late Antique Near East. In these communities, men "functioned as figures of power and control. But on the other hand, the men – often the very same men – also typically cast themselves as the women's admiring followers, pupils or friends."[71] In the examples here, one may assume at least that the monks admired the nuns whom they had to supervise, since many concrete references in this respect appear in the sources.[72] Therefore, one may question whether the exercise of authority was affected by this admiration.

Relations with "Outsiders"

The foundation of double monasteries, especially their enclosure, meant to separate them from the lay world, raise a number of questions concerning relations with persons that did not belong to them. Who was allowed to visit a monastic community, when, and where were visitors allowed to enter? Why did laymen want to visit a monastery? How did monks and nuns relate to their

---

[70] "Jud. 1," in *Pachomian Koinonia*, vol. 2, 175.

[71] John W. Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power. Female Saints and Their Male Collaborators* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 2.

[72] Despite the unavoidable rhetoric of the sources, this admiration is well founded. See Kate Cooper, "Insinuations of Womanly Influence: An Aspect of the Christianization of the Roman Aristocracy," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 82 (1992): 150–164.

neighbors? Did a monastery have a role in the society around it? Were monks and nuns allowed to travel outside the monastery?

The most apparent characteristic of these monasteries concerning relations with their neighbors is philanthropy. *The Life of Macrina* describes many cases of the ascetics giving alms and hospitality. When famine broke out in Cappadocia in 367–369, the monastery in Annisa provided food to the hungry: "Crowds from all sides poured into the retreat where they lived, drawn by the report of their generosity. It was then that [Peter] supplied, through his prudence, such an abundance of food."[73] Naucratius used to hunt for the sake of the poor and the sick,[74] and Macrina took care of orphans whom she found wandering and starving.[75] After the famine, Basil introduced details in his Rules concerning the acceptance of children into the monastery: "Children bereft of parents we take in of our own accord, thus becoming fathers of orphans. But children who are under their parents' authority and are brought by them in person we receive before several witnesses, so as to give no pretext to those on the look-out for one."[76]

Philanthropy was not limited to charity during disasters. In general, the monks gave *eulogia*, blessed gifts, to visitors to the monasteries. Philanthropic actions were delivered equally inside and outside the monastery, a particularity of Late Antique monasteries in the Near East; later, in Byzantine monasteries, these actions could only take place outside the gates.[77]

Despite their hospitality, the communities tried to avoid monks and nuns encountering too many visitors who could distract them from their spiritual exercises, "so that the flock of the brothers may freely tend to its duty and no occasion for detraction be given to anybody."[78] The Pachomian and Basilian Rules clearly specify how foreigners, laymen, and clerics should be received inside the monasteries and the places where they should stay during their visits. Different rules were established for relatives. Guests were received in certain spaces within the monastery, "according to their rank"[79] and gender. Women received special attention:

> If seculars, or infirm people or weaker vessels – that is, women – come
> to the door, they shall be received in different places according to their

---

[73] Gregory of Nyssa, "The Life of Macrina," 14,6, in Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 123–124.
[74] Ibid., 10,4, in Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 119.
[75] Ibid., 28,5, in Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 137.
[76] "LR 15," 4, in Silvas, *The Asketikon of Saint Basil the Great*, 200.
[77] Talbot, "Women's Space in Byzantine Monasteries," 115.
[78] "The Rules of Saint Pachomius," Pr. 52, in *Pachomian koinonia*, vol. 2, 154.
[79] "The Rules of Saint Pachomius," Pr. 1, in *Pachomian koinonia*, vol. 2, 144.

calling and their gender. Above all, women shall be cared for with greater honor and diligence. They shall be given a place separated from all areas frequented by men, so there may be no occasion for slander.[80]

As previously shown, in Annisa, there was a ξενοδοχεῖον (guest house) for receiving guests and housing lodgers. Guests could be invited into the men's or the women's quarters, as appropriate.[81]

The most important guests of a monastery were certainly clerics, for whom the Rules established an entire ceremony on their arrival: "… they shall be received with greater honor if they are clerics or monks. Their feet shall be washed, according to the Gospel precept, and they shall be brought to the guesthouse and offered everything suitable to monks."[82] High clerics' visits to monasteries were not rare. For example, many bishops took part in Macrina's funeral,[83] and Athanasius of Alexandria and Sarapion of Nitentori spent some time in Tabennesi in 328.[84]

As for the members of the earthly families of the monks or nuns, since the purpose of withdrawal was to separate themselves from the world the ascetics received their relatives under the supervision of a trusted member of the community:

> If someone presents himself at the door of the monastery and says he would like to see his brother or his relative, the porter shall inform the father of the monastery, who will call the housemaster and ask him whether the man is in his house. Then, with the housemaster's permission, he shall be given a trustworthy companion and so shall be sent to see his brother or relative.[85]

The reasons for the visits of laymen were related to the fame of the monks and nuns who dwelled there. Pilgrims received spiritual or material gifts from the ascetics. In various places the sources mention Pachomius' healings and eulogia given to visitors both inside and outside the monastery.[86] In light of the permanent care for the stability of the communities, visitors could spend several days to learn

---

[80] "The Rules of Saint Pachomius," Pr. 52, in *Pachomian koinonia*, vol. 2, 154.

[81] Silvas, *The Asketikon of Saint Basil the Great*, 21.

[82] "The Rules of Saint Pachomius," Pr. 51, in *Pachomian koinonia*, vol. 2, 153–154.

[83] Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Saint Macrina*, 36, in Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 143.

[84] "The Bohairic Life of Saint Pachomius," 28, in *Pachomian koinonia*, vol. 1, 51.

[85] "The Rules of Saint Pachomius," Pr. 53, in *Pachomian koinonia*, vol. 2, 154.

[86] "The Bohairic Life of Saint Pachomius," 41, 43, 44, 45, 48, 109, 110, in *Pachomian koinonia*, vol. 1, 64, 67–71, 161–162.

the ascetic life.[87] Those willing to become part of the community had to be tested for a long period of time.[88]

The risk of breaking the ascetic ideals could also arise during travels. Therefore, in general, the monastic rules and the clerics were not favorable to voyages, especially for nuns. In Pachomian monasteries, monks could leave a monastery under certain conditions, but the rules do not specify anything for nuns. For Annisa, the rules clearly state that no one could travel without a mandate from the superior.[89] Gregory of Nyssa expressed his opinion about the dangers that travel could have for a woman in a letter sent to three nuns from a Palestinian monastery.[90]

Without being as elaborated as the late medieval monastic networks, connections between double communities directed by the same spiritual father were gradually established. Pachomius created a *koinonia* of nine monasteries, which he supervised from Phbow.[91] Gregory of Nyssa and Basil the Great instructed several monasteries in Pontus.[92] Jerome and Paula maintained their relations with Melania, established in Rome at the beginning of their ascetic life, even after they retreated to the Holy Land where they founded different monasteries:

> Will the time never come when a breathless messenger shall bring the news that our dear Marcella has reached the shores of Palestine, and when every band of monks and every troop of virgins shall unite in a song of welcome? In our excitement we are already hurrying to meet you: without waiting for a vehicle, we hasten off at once on foot. We shall clasp you by the hand, we shall look upon your face; and when, after long waiting, we at last embrace you, we shall find it hard to tear ourselves away.[93]

Apart from spiritual concerns, practical aspects of social life were also part of the relations between monasteries and the local community. Economic activities were favored, as noted above, by the position of the monasteries. Tabennesi

---

[87] "The Shorter Responses," 97, in Silvas, *The Asketikon of Saint Basil the Great*, 326.
[88] "The Longer Responses," 14–15, in Silvas, *The Asketikon of Saint Basil the Great*, 198–204.
[89] "The Shorter Responses," 120, in Silvas, *The Asketikon of Saint Basil the Great*, 339.
[90] Gregory of Nyssa, "Letter 3," in Gregory of Nyssa, *The Letters*, 123–132.
[91] "The Bohairic Life of Saint Pachomius" 49, in *Pachomian koinonia*, vol. 1, 71.
[92] Gregory of Nyssa, *The Letters*, 32.
[93] *Lettre 46. De Paule et Eustochie à Marcella*, 13, in Jérôme, *Lettres*, vol. 2, trans. Jérôme Labourt (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1951), 113.

was situated close to several markets where monks could sell their handiwork.[94] The Nile River offered a means of transportation to the monasteries included in the *koinonia*. Since the affiliated monasteries spread over 175 kilometers, communication would not have been possible, as James E. Goehring has pointed out, without easy transportation.[95] Relations outside the monastery were extended so that the community acquired land outside the walls, new markets for selling products, and the amount of travel increased, as did the distances covered during journeys.[96] Sources from 367–368 even report a brother paying taxes for agricultural land in the Hermopolite *nome* to the monastery in Tabennesi, which belonged to the Tentyrite *nome*.[97] James E. Goehring assumes that the older community in Tabennesi had legal responsibilities for the land worked by the younger community to which that monk belonged.[98]

In spite of their isolated appearance and seclusion from society, these monasteries were not separated from settlements. They were either situated inside localities or easily accessible from nearby villages. The monastery in Tabennesi was founded in a deserted village which later increased in population.[99] After 328, houses were built in close proximity to the monastery. Theodore's mother, when she came to Tabennesi with a letter from the bishop allowing her to visit her son, could only see him from the roof of a neighboring house.[100] The inhabitants of Annisa joined Macrina's funeral soon after her death,[101] a detail which shows that the village and the monastery were not too distant.

Conclusions

Even though monks and nuns broke the earthly relations with their relatives, they maintained the pattern of the ancient *familia*, building a new, spiritual family together. Once an ascetic left his earthly relatives, he entered the "heavenly Jerusalem" symbolized by the monastery and thus became part of the sacred family of brothers and sisters devoted to Christ.

---

[94] "The Bohairic Life of Saint Pachomius" 26, in *Pachomian koinonia*, vol. 1, 48–51.

[95] Goehring, "Withdrawing from the Desert," 273.

[96] Ibid., 273–274.

[97] Ibid., 273; 283; Goehring, "New Frontiers in Pachomian Studies," 250.

[98] Goehring, "Withdrawing from the Desert," 283.

[99] Ibid., 281–282.

[100] "The Bohairic Life of Saint Pachomius" 37, in *Pachomian koinonia*, vol. 1, 60–61.

[101] Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Saint Macrina*, 35, in Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 142.

Tabennesi, Annisa, and Bethlehem all embodied the idea of the essential unity of human beings, as Jerome, inspired by Origen, expressed it[102] plainly. The option of founding double communities devoted to asceticism was chosen by people willing to reproduce the angelic life of Paradise on earth and the best means of achieving this aim was to transform the earthly family into a spiritual one. The angelic family, however, did not survive the fourth century. Two causes compromised the future of this form of cenobitism. Their family nature opposed the idea of one's total break with earthly matters, a requirement that an ascetic had to meet before entering a monastery, since family still maintained an emotional connection with "the world."[103] But more importantly, the late fourth-century controversy that broke out around Origen's and Pelagius' theology ultimately ended by erasing the possibility of sinless proximity between the genders.

---

[102] Marianne Sághy, "The Master and Marcella: Saint Jerome Retells the Bible to Women," in *Retelling the Bible. Literary, Historical and Social Contexts*, ed. Lucie Dolezalová and Tamás Visi (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2010), 135–136.

[103] Wipszycka, *Moines et communautés monastiques en Égypte*, 569.