Greek Hagiography in Late Antiquity
(Fourth–Seventh Centuries)

Stephanos Efthymiadis with Vincent Déroche
(with contributions by André Binggeli and Zissis Aïnalis)

Late antiquity is by now a firmly established term to denote the time-span which runs from roughly the fourth to the mid-seventh century CE and has been understood by scholars as either a period of transition or a period in its own right during which the Greco-Roman world, especially its religion, gradually disappeared while Christianity progressively gained an absolute supremacy in spiritual matters. In particular, the period from the end of the Great Persecution (303–313) to the rise of Islam witnessed an explosive growth in the popular veneration of saints. The proliferation of this new phenomenon was reflected in and to a large extent supported by the literary form known as hagiography, which was practised in different regions, languages and genres. The writing of Passions, biographies, panegyrics and all kinds of stories about holy men and women went hand-in-hand with other social and political developments typical of this period such as the rise and spread of monasticism, the increase in bishops’ spiritual and institutional authority, the emergence and vigour of theological disputes, as well as conflict between religions such as between Christianity and paganism including Persian Zoroastrianism. As outlined in the introduction, the fact that several regions within the orbit of the empire or outside of it cultivated their own distinctive hagiographies, produced in Greek or in local languages, accounts for their being examined in separate chapters in this volume. This chapter will offer a survey of Greek hagiography produced after the pioneering vita Antonii in areas of the empire other than Palestine, South Italy and Egypt (though some Egyptian material will be included). The texts will be discussed in chronological order and by region. At the same time, a broad distinction will be maintained between monastic and urban hagiography. Given that, in the majority of cases, both saint and author were monks in urban settings, this distinction will not be enforced too strictly. It is chiefly concerned with the landscape where the life of a saint and his biography were situated: in the desert or in an urban centre and its hinterland.
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Hagiography by the Church Fathers and about them

Having acknowledged the seminal importance of the *vita Antonii*, which, after the *Passions* of the early martyrs, inaugurated a new era for Christian writing and stimulated a great interest in monasticism, any survey of Greek Christian biographies must then turn to discuss the works of eminent fourth-century Christian writers devoted to saints. These texts, written mostly in a sophisticated prose style, fulfilled the rhetorical and generic requirements of a Roman panegyric and an *enkomion* combined with the features of a biographical narrative.¹ A work of just such hybrid literary character is the *Life of Constantine (vita Constantini)* by Eusebios of Caesarea, composed in stages and apparently left unfinished in 339, the year of its author’s death. Its obvious purpose was to pay homage to the first Christian Roman ruler, Constantine (d. 337), designated a divinely inspired leader (θεῖος ἀνήρ), who like Moses was visited by God and entrusted with the mission to liberate his people from tyranny (ch. I, 12). Now that the question of its authenticity is no longer at the forefront of scholarly debate, the *Life of the Emperor Constantine (BHG 361x)* can make a valid claim to having priority over the *Life of the ascetic Antony* by Athanasios of Alexandria (295–373) as the first Christian biography.² Unlike the latter, however, it had no impact whatsoever on the formation of hagiographical discourse, lacking as it did the edifying strain of hagiographical writing and being intended for Christians and pagans alike. It would be more reasonable to consider it a literary hybrid, formed by amalgamating several sorts of rhetorical discourse emmeshed with the literary currents of the day, all proper to a significant apologist for the early Christian Church.³

Similar problems, though not so challenging, surround the study of rhetorical orations composed by Basil of Caesarea (330–379), the two Gregories, of Nazianzos (329/330–ca. 390) and of Nyssa (335/340–post 394), and John Chrysostom (340/350–407) in the last four decades of the same century. The rich literary legacy of Basil and John comprises encomiastic homilies to Christian martyrs, delivered while their authors occupied public ecclesiastical office.⁴ Basil was mostly concerned with celebrating the martyrs of his motherland, Cappadocia, and his best known homily,

¹ For their relationship to the post-classical rhetorical tradition, see Bartelink, ‘Adoption et rejet des topiques profanes chez les panégyristes et biographes chrétiens de langue grecque’; also Heim, ‘Les panégyriques des martyrs ou l’impossible conversion d’un genre littéraire’.
² For a discussion of the two texts, written 20 years apart, see Cameron, ‘Form and Meaning. The *Vita Constantini and the Vita Antonii*’.
³ Recent debate on the literary character of this text includes the studies by Barnes, ‘Panegyric, History and Hagiography in Eusebius’ *Vita Constantini*; Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 265–71; Cameron, ‘Eusebius’s *Vita Constantini* and the Construction of Constantine’. See also Cameron and Hall, *Eusebius, Life of Constantine*, 27–34; Tartaglia, *Sulla vita di Costantino*, 13–17. Treadgold considers it ‘a Christian version of the sort of classical history that was defined by the reigns of rulers, like Philip of Macedon or Alexander the Great’: *The Early Byzantine Historians*, 41.
⁴ On these panegyrics, see Delehaye, *Les Passions des martyrs et les genres littéraires*, 133–69.
the one dedicated to the Forty Martyrs of Sebasteia (BHG 1205), is a case in point.\(^5\) As for John Chrysostom, there is no doubt that the large number of extant *enkomia* of holy apostles and martyrs that are attributed to him can be divided between his two periods of preaching in Antioch (386–397) and in Constantinople (398–404). Whereas the Syrian metropolis boasted a significant Christian past and present, the empire’s new capital was yet to accrue its importance in Christian geography by an enhanced interest in the cult of the martyrs. Not surprisingly, therefore, several sermons which John, a versatile and charismatic orator, pronounced as bishop of Constantinople were occasioned by translations of holy martyrs’ relics to the capital.\(^6\)

Nonetheless, if we are looking for literary sophistication, innovation and again hybridity of literary forms, we must turn to the eloquent compositions of Gregory of Nazianzos and his namesake from Nyssa. As Delehaye has pointed out, these works reflect increasing attempts to have the honour paid to martyrs extended to holy bishops, ascetics and virgins.\(^7\) While literary echoes of all their works were to resound in later ‘high-brow’ hagiography, especially the *vitae* and *enkomia* composed from the ninth century onwards, it is hard to categorise them in terms of genre. Fourth-century Church Fathers were above all theologians whose skilful use of Greek rhetoric aspired to higher purposes than pure edification and the accumulation of biographical episodes, the purpose and literary diacritics of monastic hagiography. With his *Funeral Orations* (*epitaphioi logoi*), a rhetorical genre which he particularly cultivated, Gregory of Nazianzos paid tribute to family members and illustrious contemporary hierarchs like his friend Basil of Caesarea and Athanasios of Alexandria. These orations, delivered between 370 and 382, stand out as pieces of exquisite literary art, but, to use his own words in his *In Praise of Athanasios* (no 21, BHG 186 – ch. 5), they were intended to be eulogies not ‘a work of history’, meaning a biographical account. Gregory’s most refined *Funeral Oration* to St Basil (no 43, BHG 245) was fashioned to both honour a dear friend and a model bishop and shore up the author’s own reputation, blotted after the charges which led to his resignation as bishop of Constantinople (381). As with his other orations to his father Gregory (no 18, BHG 730v), his brother Caesarios (no 7, BHG 286) and sister Gorgonia (no 8, BHG 704), the integration of biographical and autobiographical elements into an encomiastic narration does not make this sophisticated piece of rhetoric a hagiography, particularly if it is compared with the *vita Antonii* and later saintly biographies.\(^8\)

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\(^5\) On his *enkomia* in general, see Girardi, *Basilio di Cesarea e il culto dei martiri nel IV secolo*; on the most famous among them, see Karlin-Hayter, ‘Passio of the XL Martyrs of Sebasteia. The Greek Tradition: the Earliest Account’.


\(^8\) For a brief survey of St Gregory of Nazianzos’ *Funeral Orations*, see the introduction of Bernardi in his edition of *Oration* 43, 28–32. For more recent discussions, see Norris, ‘Your Honor,
By contrast, Gregory of Nyssa’s *Letter on the life of Makrina* (BHG 1012), written between 380 and 383, is no doubt a philosophical biography with more explicit hagiographic pretensions. Like Gregory of Nazianzos’ *Funeral Oration to his sister Gorgonia* (BHG 704), this biography integrates the values and modus vivendi of the ascetic movement into the domestic sphere of a family wholly committed to practising a life of piety. However, unlike Gorgonia, who was a married woman and a mother, Makrina never married but, taking advantage of the death of her suitor, which occurred when she was 12, espoused the life of a ‘widowed’ virgin. Her brother Gregory portrays her as a martyr, highlighting her commitment to an ascetic way of life in the world and in the household, before giving a panoramic overview of her family and concluding with a detailed and lively description of her funeral.

Makrina and her noble family could trace their lineage of Christian devotion back to their grandmother Makrina the Elder who came from Pontos, a land said to have owed its faith largely to the missionary work of Gregory the Wonderworker (Thaumatourgos), a holy martyr of the Decian persecution (249/250). Gregory of Nyssa undertook to write his namesake’s *Life* (BHG 715) in a very traditional rhetorical fashion and must have given it as an oration in the first instance. Scholars have reasonably questioned the historicity of the episodes inserted in this vita just as they have also noted the author’s predilection for comparing his hero with Moses. In turn, the Jewish patriarch became Gregory of Nyssa’s subject for praise in a *vita* (the *Life of Moses*, BHG 2278) which was composed towards the end of his life and in which the shadowy paths of mystical theology can first be traced.

It has perhaps become a moot point whether we should regard the above as works of rhetoric or hagiography. But we face no such problem if we turn to examine the literature composed in praise of its authors, the Church Fathers themselves. Its...
broad chronological range, which includes the last centuries of Byzantium, allowed for a good deal of variation and shifts in narrative focus. Excluding Gregory of Nazianzos’ own *Funeral Oration* for St Basil, which is both for and by a Church Father, five of those *vita* and *enkomia* which fall within the chronological confines of late antiquity deserve to be discussed here.

The earliest among them is a *Funeral Oration* for St John Chrysostom (*BHG* 871, *CPG* 6517) which has survived under the name of Martyrios Bishop of Antioch (459–post 471). Nonetheless the author’s autobiographical and other allusions suggest a dating much closer to the death of John Chrysostom in exile (408) and certainly before 425, the year when patriarch Attikos of Constantinople died (he is twice presented as still alive in the text: chs. 115 and 134). The main reason why this lengthy and rhetorically elaborate oration has been left unedited and ignored for so long is mostly because Chrysostom Baur, a major specialist in the study of John Chrysostom, considered it of no historical value and much later in date. However, it may even predate Palladios of Helenopolis’ *Dialogue on the life of John* (*BHG* 870), a work until recently thought our best authority on the life of St John, and is no less ‘lively’ in terms of polemic against Chrysostom’s successive opponents.

Before modern scholars restored the early date and the value of this text, pride of place among the biographies of St John was given to the extremely long *Life* by George, Archbishop of Alexandria (*BHG* 873), an early seventh-century composition unfolding in narrative form and copying extensive extracts from Palladios’ *Dialogos*. Not much later, in the second half of the seventh century, Theodore Bishop of Trimithous in Cyprus (*BHG* 872b) also drew extensively on Palladios’ account to fill out a much shorter *vita*. Unlike that one, George’s text enjoyed a remarkable popularity as revealed in the number of extant manuscripts (at least 20) and the fact that it served as the basic source for any later hagiography on Chrysostom. In the ninth century the Patriarch Photios, despite his negative comments on its style and historical accuracy, devoted a long note to this text in his famous *Bibliotheca*.

It is no surprise that a rich hagiographical dossier developed around St Gregory of Nazianzos (‘the Theologian’, as he came to be called from the sixth century onwards), made up of texts from all periods of Byzantine history. Judging by its huge manuscript tradition (179 codices!), his most authoritative biography was the earliest one, composed by Gregory the Presbyter (*BHG* 723) between 543 and 638. As a hagiographer, this Gregory was careful to gloss over anything embarrassing

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in his namesake’s career and, as the biographer of a skilful writer, he delighted in adorning his account with words and phrases taken from the very author who was regarded as a model of rhetoric.\footnote{On the date of this vita, see Lequeux, \textit{Gregorii presbyteri vita sancti Gregorii theologi}, 13–16. Discussion of this \textit{vita} in Efthymiadis, ‘Two Gregories and Three Genres: Autobiography, Autohagiography and Hagiography’.
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In turn, much of St Basil’s hagiographical posterity was at odds with his elaborate portrayal in his friend Gregory’s \textit{Funeral Oration}. Next to a rather mediocre \textit{Enkomion} by his brother Gregory of Nyssa and a \textit{Laudation} under the name of Ephrem the Syrian, who in fact did not survive St Basil, we possess a \textit{Life and Miracles} attributed to Basil’s younger contemporary St Amphilochios of Iconium (\textit{BHG} 246y). This is in fact the work of an author who before the year 800 brought together legendary stories of varied provenance and content dating from late antiquity and attached to the saintly bishop of Caesarea (\textit{BHG} 247–50). This Pseudo-Amphilochian \textit{vita} has come down to us in different versions (Syriac, Arabic, Armenian and Georgian), was translated into Latin by Anastasios Bibliothecarius (d. 878/879) and was diffused to such other languages as Old French and Old Russian.\footnote{On this \textit{Life}, see J. Wortley, ‘An Unpublished Legend of an Unworthy Priest and Saint Basil the Great (\textit{BHG} 1449 p)’; Wortley, ‘The Pseudo-Amphilochian \textit{Vita Basilii}. An Apocryphal Life of Saint Basil the Great’; Barringer, ‘The Pseudo-Amophilochian Life of St Basil: Ecclesiastical Penance and Byzantine Hagiography’; and Muraviev, ‘The Syriac Julian Romance as a Source of the Life of St. Basil the Great’.
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\section*{In the Footsteps of the \textit{vita Antonii}: Monastic Biographies and Collections from the Desert}

Owing to the subjects it elected to praise, hagiography concerning the Church Fathers found wide acclaim in Byzantium among lay and monastic audiences alike. Unlike the \textit{vita Antonii}, however, it was lacking in compositional dynamics, a factor which would generate parallels and a body of other forms of literature (\textit{Apophthegmata Patrum}, Questions and Answers and Letters of edification) as such monastic literature came to show in late antiquity.\footnote{See Rapp, ‘‘For Next to God, You are My Salvation’’: Reflections on the Rise of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity’.
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Still in the last decades of the fourth century the \textit{vita Antonii} had made rapid headway among the urban population of the Roman world. To begin with, it served as a model to Jerome in the west, who composed three \textit{vitae} regarded as the first hagiographies in Latin: the \textit{Life of Malchus the Captive Monk} (\textit{BHL} 5190), a hermit dwelling in a cave, the \textit{Life of Paul the First Hermit} (\textit{BHL} 6596), an ascetic in Egypt preceding Antony in the desert, and the much longer \textit{Life of Hilarion} (\textit{BHL} 3879), who hailed from and founded monasticism in Palestine. In the east, Athanasios’ composition inspired
the biography of St Antony’s contemporary, Pachomios (292–346), the founder of cenobitic monasticism and organiser of the first monastic community (koinonia) in Upper Egypt.

**Pachomian Hagiography**

Pachomios’ *vita* was a landmark in the elaboration of a particular hagiographical form, the biography of a saintly figure who founded a monastery or a monastic congregation. It has been transmitted in many different forms and languages: Coptic, Greek, Latin and Arabic. In addition to the different versions of the *Life*, the hagiographic dossier comprises three secondary texts: the *Paralipomena* or *Ascertica* (*BHG* 1399–1399a), which was also translated into Syriac, the *Epistula Ammonis* (*BHG* 1397–8), and three chapters of Palladios’ *Historia Lausiaca* devoted to the Pachomian community (*BHG* 1399x–z), as well as a large number of ascetic and documentary texts such as monastic rules, letters and instructions attributed to Pachomios and his successors Theodore and Horsiesios. All these texts, especially the *Paralipomena*, have been incorporated to various extents into the different versions of the *Life*.

One of the most controversial questions about the *Life of Pachomios* concerns its original language or, more precisely, the exact relationship between the Greek *Lives* and the Coptic material and the extent to which the secondary versions in Latin and Arabic can be relied upon for reconstructing the original tradition.\(^{20}\)

As a matter of fact, several fragmentary versions are preserved in Sahidic, the Coptic dialect of Upper Egypt where Pachomios’ monasteries were located. Some of these contain fragments of a very early tradition, probably more ancient than the main hagiographic texts that have come down to us. Others present a much more developed version of the biography, which was translated at a later stage into Bohairic, the dialect used in Lower Egypt.

In Greek, six different versions of the *Life* have been preserved. Owing to its plain language, its poor style and the incoherences in its general structure, the Greek *vita prima* (*BHG* 1396–1396a), in many respects similar to the Bohairic *Life* albeit a little shorter, has often been treated severely in the scholarly literature.\(^{21}\)

By and large it has been regarded as the closest text to the original tradition in Greek, all the other *Lives* being mere rewritings of or fresh elaborations on this original text, sometimes compiled with other Pachomian material. The Greek *vita altera* (*BHG* 1400) deserves, however, special mention as it is the most popular and widely circulated text in the Byzantine period; it offers indeed a stylistically revised version of the *vita prima*, including material from the *Paralipomena* but abridged so that it ends with the death of Pachomios. Closely related to the *vita altera* is an early Latin translation of this version by Dionysius Exiguus (sixth century).


As regards Arabic, four main versions are known, but none of the material has received a critical edition. Recent studies have paid much attention to these Arabic versions, as they give greater insight into an earlier form of the *Life* than those preserved in Greek and Bohairic. One of these versions (Ag) indeed appears to have preserved authentic material from the earliest Sahidic *Life*. The second version (Av) is a translation from a Coptic original represented by the Bohairic *Life*, but more reliable. The third version, preserved in a group of Sinai manuscripts (As), is a translation from a Greek original (the *vita tertia*), and the fourth (Am), which is the only edition available to date, is an Arabic compilation of (Ag) and (As).\(^{22}\)

Although there has been scholarly consensus regarding the general framework of the textual transmission of this complex hagiographic dossier, the original form of the *Life of Pachomios* and the interdependence of the earliest versions extant in the different languages is still a matter for investigation; for it would appear that most of these versions contain some original material not shared with others.

Naturally enough, in his prologue to the *vita prima*, while enumerating the illustrious predecessors of Pachomios who had led an ascetic life, the hagiographer mentions Antony and refers incidentally to his *vita* by Athanasios, which no doubt served as a source of inspiration and a model for him (*vita prima*, chs. 2 and 99).\(^{23}\)

The early ascetic life of the two monks, from their original calling to withdraw into the desert and their temptations by demons, followed a similar course. However, the divine call to found a monastery at Tabennesis (‘Stay here, Pachomios, and build a monastery; for many will come to you to become monks’: *vita prima* ch. 12) marks a new beginning in the monastic life of Pachomios, and the two careers diverge at that point. While Antony’s progression in the solitary life on the way to spiritual perfection is uninterrupted until his death, from this point on Pachomios places himself at the service of the disciples who flock round him and creates a new form of spiritual ideal based on obedience and mutual service.

The main part of the *Life of Pachomios* is thus devoted to the story of the foundation and the organisation of the monastic community. A succession of characteristic elements makes up the narrative framework of the story of the first foundation in Tabennesis. These elements, which most foundation narratives in Byzantine hagiography will touch on, are as follows: the choice of an ideal site designated by God, reception of the first disciples, the building of an enclosure wall, the redaction of a monastic rule, the institution of a hierarchy inside the monastery and the organisation of duties, and, finally, the building of a church and the recognition of the monastic institution by the Church hierarchy. The introduction of this narrative into the Athanasian model is thus the first adaptation by Pachomian hagiographers

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\(^{22}\) On the Arabic versions, see Crum, *Theological Texts from Coptic Papyri*, 171–93; Veilleux, *La liturgie dans le cénobitisme pachômien au quatrième siècle*, 53–8; Grossmann, ‘Some Observations’.

\(^{23}\) Note that any explicit mention of the *Life of Antony* is absent from the Coptic sources.
to a new form of sanctity. The fact that Pachomios was henceforth at the head of a monastic congregation led to another major change in the model.

The earliest historical mention of the Life of Pachomios appears in a letter preserved in Coptic and addressed by Theophilos, Patriarch of Alexandria, to Horsiesios, head of the whole Pachomian congregation, probably in 387. He asks him to bring along the Life of our fathers Pachomios and Theodore (Lefort, Vies coptes, 389–90). There is no title in this form preserved in any of the extant versions, but it opens up another debate that revolves specifically around the original form of the Life. Amélineau first argued in favour of the existence of two distinct texts, a short Life of Pachomios ending with his death, which constituted the original form of the biography written in Coptic, and a Life of his disciple Theodore that was incorporated into the former in one solid block rather than intertwined with the early material.

Regardless of the final answer to this question, the fact is that by the end of the fourth century, the time when the vita prima was composed, the biography of Pachomios was closely associated with that of his disciple and successor Theodore. The whole structure of the vita prima in itself suggests this association: Theodore appears very early in the narrative, a large section is devoted to his youth, and his death, probably in 368, concludes the Life. All in all, he is the second main character, almost on an equal footing with Pachomios. Conversely, the Byzantine redactor of the vita altera, probably disturbed by this two-headed biography, reworked the vita prima so that it ended after Pachomios’ death.

In relating the organisation of a whole congregation of monks in some monasteries of Upper Egypt, encompassing the history of the movement under the three successors of Pachomios, the project of the hagiographers goes beyond the plain biography of a saint to resemble the chronicle of a monastic community over half a century. The Life of Pachomios is followed by two other texts which complete the dossier in the two complete extant manuscripts of the vita prima. According to its prologue, the first of these texts, the Paralipomena or Ascetica, also preserved in a seventh-century Syriac translation by the monk ‘Enanisho’, is to be considered an annexe to an existing work, most probably the vita prima itself. These 18 anecdotes on Pachomios and Theodore complete the biographies of the two main characters. The second text is the Epistula Ammonis. As a youth, Ammon became a monk in the Pachomian monastery of Pabau into which he was received by Theodore. Using both eyewitness and hearsay evidence, Ammon composed what was in fact an enkomion in the form of a letter, a literary device known from Athanasios’ vita Antonii. The addressee of Ammon’s letter is not named, but it may well have been

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24 See Van Cranenburgh, ‘Étude comparative des récits anciens de la vocation de saint Pachôme’; and Flusin, Miracle et histoire dans l’œuvre de Cyrille de Scythopolis, 49–53.
25 Amélineau, ‘Monuments pour servir à l’histoire de l’Égypte chrétienne au IVe siècle. Histoire de saint Pakhôme et de ses communautés’, xlvi–liv; the theory was developed by Veilleux, La liturgie dans le cénobitisme pachômien au quatrième siècle, 58–68, and criticised by de Vogüé, ‘La Vie arabe de saint Pakhôme et ses deux sources présumées’.
Theophilos himself, the Patriarch of Alexandria who commissioned the Lives of Pachomios and Theodore from Horsiesios. So it appears that as early as the end of the fourth century a Greek Pachomian corpus was being compiled in Alexandria.

In the different forms in which it has come down to us the Pachomian dossier is a complex and sometimes clumsy compilation recycling earlier material. However, the transfer of this heritage from its original Pachomian milieu in Upper Egypt to Alexandria, the development of a hagiographic tradition in Greek and the translation of the normative documents into Latin allowed for the rapid dissemination of all these texts throughout the late antique world, thus contributing to the celebrity of Pachomios himself and of the communitarian monastic life which he initiated. The literary portrait of the founder of a monastic community found in his Lives would come to maturity a little more than a century later under Cyril of Scythopolis’ pen, in his consecutive biographies of the Palestinian founder abbots, with first among them Euthymios and Sabas.

Other Vitae of the Desert

In modern scholarly literature, the dominant figures of Antony and Pachomios have overshadowed all the other contemporary Desert Fathers about whom similarly edifying works have been produced. Whether placed in a historical setting or not, these works have been preserved in various versions either anonymously or under the ‘pen name’ of a known ascetic, a considerable impediment to establishing even an approximate dating. Their structure and content allow us to infer that they elaborate on shorter accounts, either ‘spiritually edifying tales’ or ‘collections of sayings’ preserved under the name of a particular ascetic. These were somehow put together, stylistically upgraded and amplified to fill up the length of a saint’s vita. This being so, they cannot have made their appearance later than the sixth century. To be sure, despite their popularity, which sometimes triggered new recensions and reworkings, these works fail to rank above the vita Antonii, on the simple grounds that their plots lack sophistication, based as they are on a sequential narration of their hero’s ascetic feats and wise sayings rather than on a climactic chain of experiences. Sometimes, however, they indicate a remarkable literary inventiveness which has fleshed out the sketchy story of a given ascetic with further details, or use an original narrative technique, or both.

To begin with, the Life of Arsenios the Great (BHG 167y) brings together stories about a holy man who came from Rome to Constantinople in order to become the teacher of the Emperor Theodosios I’s two sons, Arkadios and Honorios. When it was revealed to him that Arkadios intended to murder his teacher on account of a

27 For instance, the Latin corpus of rules translated into Latin by Jerome in 404: see Boon, Pachomiana Latina.

28 On the literary dependence of Cyril of Scythopolis on the Lives of Antony and Pachomios, see Flusin, Miracle et histoire dans l’oeuvre de Cyrille de Scythopolis, 44–53; and Chapter 6, this volume.
reprimand, Arsenios fled to Alexandria and then to the Sketis (or Skete, mod. Wādī Natārūn), where he became a disciple of the famous abba John the Dwarf (Ἰωάννης Κολοβός). From the chapter relating the failed attempts first of Theodosios and then of his sons who succeeded him to track down an ascetic who had decided to flee the world for life, to the reference to his death at the age of 95, the *vita* consists of apophthegmatic sentences, narrations and visions, i.e. all the narrative components of monastic literature.

Novelistic motifs like those in the biography of Arsenios are also recognisable in the story of Onouphrios (or Onophrios, *BHG* 1378–9) in which we glimpse a similarity with what is recorded in the *Life of Mary of Egypt* and other saints who ‘lived in hiding’. The action is set in the desert of Upper Egypt, and is embedded in the narration of another ascetic, the fourth-century abba Paphnoutios, who is both the alleged author and the internal narrator. The Coptic name Paphnoutios occurs frequently in monastic literature of this period and may perhaps in this case be identified with the bishop of a town in the Upper Thebaid in Egypt, as reported by the Church historian Socrates (ch. 1.11). A certain Paphnoutios was also the recipient of eight letters from prominent individuals seeking spiritual counsel. According to the story, Onouphrios was a naked, skinny, long-haired hermit who had fled from a cenobitic monastery to achieve the utmost isolation and physical mortification. One day upon leaving his cell, Paphnouhtios encountered him and thus learned something of his biography a little while before he found him dying in a place nearby. Later versions, which postdate late antiquity and were adorned with rhetorical flourishes, recounted the same story divesting Paphnoutios of the role of author and narrator.29

Equally didactic but longer and more elaborate is the *vita* of Paisios (or Paesios), a fourth-century Egyptian anchorite (*BHG* 1402). It is introduced as the work of the aforementioned ascetic John the Dwarf who, like the aforementioned *persona* of Paphnoutios, takes up the role of eyewitness and main interlocutor in a narrative teeming with sayings, visions and mystical experiences, such as the saint’s encounter with the Emperor Constantine ‘who came from heaven to visit him in his cell’ (ch. 35–6). In a similar vein, and in spite of its heading, the *vita* of Mark the Athenian (*BHG* 1039–41) is not a biography but a lengthy narratio put into the mouth of the ascetic Serapion. As this fictional romance has it, after a long journey instigated by angels and visions, the narrator meets the elderly holy man on Mt Thrace in Ethiopia. Serapion then listens to Mark’s story, informs him that the persecution of Christians is over, and witnesses his death and ascension to heaven.30

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29 For instance, the versions by Nicholas Sinaites (*BHG* 1381a) and Theophanes of Sicily (*BHG* 1382) which date from the ninth century and later. On the question of the provenance of the Onouphrios-Paphnoutios story, see Winkelmann, ‘Die Problematik der Entstehung der Paphnutiuslegenden’. For discussion of the narrative motifs in the *vita Onuphrii* also known as *Peregrinatio Paphnutii*, see Goddard-Elliot, *Roads to Paradise. Reading the Lives of the Early Saints*, 51–64. On the relationship between the various extant versions, see Fagnoni, ‘Una *Vita greca di S. Onofrio mimetizzata. Osservazioni sulla composizione di BHG 2330–2330a’.

30 On the similarities between the travels of Serapion as in this story and Jerome’s *Life of Paul of Thebes*, see Goddard-Elliot, *Roads to Paradise. Reading the Lives of the Early Saints*, 68–71.
Unlike the previous ones, the last in this group of texts is couched in a sophisticated prose permeated with biblical and patristic quotations. The *Life of Synkletike (BHG 1694)*, an upper-class woman from Alexandria who left her family for the desert, echoes that of St Antony only inasmuch as it is a long excursus on all kinds of monastic preaching and teaching. Unlike its model-text, however, it is almost totally lacking in biographical data and edifying anecdotes. Although in some manuscripts it has been preserved under the name of Athanasios of Alexandria, it is no doubt later than the fifth century.\(^{31}\) The author is inspired by Evagrios of Pontos and other ascetic writers. Showing off his medical knowledge, he concludes his account with detailed descriptions of the 80-year-old ascetic’s fatal disease which, moreover, he presents as her struggle with the Evil One (v. 1078ff.).

All these texts refer to biographies set exclusively in the monastic desert. This literature, which dressed up monastic ideals in a biographical guise, also branched out into *vitae* where equal attention was paid to the life prior to the monastery or the desert. The protagonists were exclusively holy women, who would practise extreme asceticism either after a life of mortal sin or after fleeing an unwanted marriage. Not surprisingly these sixth- and seventh-century biographies of repentant harlots and cross-dressing holy women were a great literary success. They were usually built on precise narrative patterns which, by virtue of their novelistic traits, highlight relationships and the social roles of both genders.

The latest work in the first category but perhaps the most famous late antique hagiographical text of all is the seventh-century *Life of St Mary of Egypt (BHG 1042)*. As a work of Palestinian origin, it is discussed in detail in the relevant chapter. What can be said here is that this is a *vita* embedded in the *vita of the abba Zosimas*, who transmits to the reader the fascinating story of Maria, former harlot in Alexandria and repentant ascetic hiding in the desert. For once in a Byzantine saintly biography the narrative unfolds not in straightforward linear but in retrospective fashion. Before she repented, Mary retired into the wild desert; as a ‘queen of sin’ she was queen of a prodigal city, Alexandria, and this is recalled with much realism and no attempt at ‘censorship’. By contrast, the *vita of St Pelagia (BHG 1478)*, which is earlier and seems to have a historical core, appears more reserved about such matters. The story has James the Deacon as a narrator introducing the bishop Nonnos who, before an assembly of his peers, confesses his attraction to the beauty of the prostitute Pelagia, whom he had seen parading in a luxurious fashion through the streets of Antioch. The *vita*, which ends with the repentant woman’s reception into a male monastery as a eunuch named Pelagios, is less elaborate in

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\(^{31}\) A number of manuscripts ascribe the *vita* to a certain ascetic called Polykarpos. On the whole question, see Ampelarga, *O Βίος της Αγίας Συγκλητικής*, 14–21. The name and the story of Synkletike (i.e. woman of senatorial rank) shows similarities with the tale of a woman who fled an unwanted marriage in Constantinople to reach the Judean desert in Palestine; see the story edited by Flusin and Paramelle, ‘De syncletica in deserto Jordanis (BHG 1318w)’; also Vivian, ‘Syncletica: A Sixth-Century Female Anchorite’.
diction and style than that of Mary of Egypt, yet still animated thanks to its lively dialogues and complicated plot.\textsuperscript{32}

The \textit{Life of Abraham and his niece Maria} (\textit{BHG} 5), which is anachronistically assigned to St Ephrem, the famous Syrian theologian and poet (d. 373), is thematically relevant here. Originally composed in Syriac, this rather bizarre text divides the stories of its two protagonists into two distinct sections. The first section is a typical account of the hermit Abraham’s ascetic experiences whereas the second one acquires a strong novelistic character. Orphaned at the age of seven, Maria Abraham’s niece was entrust to her uncle with whom she lived in an ascetic fashion until she fell victim to a monk seduced by her beauty. Considering herself guilty of mortal sin, she set out to live as a harlot in an inn. Abraham’s adventurous endeavours to track down his lost niece culminate in a protracted scene where the uncle, disguised as a soldier and a would-be customer, meets Maria in the tavern and they have a dialogue which leads to the recognition scene. The \textit{Life} ends with their return journey together on horseback to the hermit’s cell.\textsuperscript{33}

The \textit{vita} of Theodora of Alexandria (\textit{BHG} 1727), dating from no later than the sixth century, strays into somewhat different territory. The protagonist, who lived in the reign of the Emperor Zeno (474–491), is an adulterous woman who, by fleeing to the desert, tries to overcome her sense of guilt. The story unfolds in successive theatrical dialogues and the author insists on the repercussions of her illegal passion and on her conversion from sin to repentance, self-punishment and ascetic toil.\textsuperscript{34}

The theme of cross-dressing holy women is finally traceable in the \textit{Narrationes} attributed to or associated with Daniel of Sketis (respectively \textit{BHG} 2099z–2102f and \textit{BHG} 79–80e, 120–123j, 618–618b, 2254–5, 2453–2453b), especially those concerning

\textsuperscript{32} What suggests that there may be a kernel of historicity in this \textit{vita} is the fact that Pelagia may have been the famous prostitute in Antioch mentioned by John Chrysostom in his Homily 67 on St Matthew and in a reference to the bishop Nonnos in the \textit{Chronicle} of Theophanes the Confessor (de Boor, 141–2); cf. Brock and Ashbook Harvey, \textit{Holy Women of the Syrian Orient}, 40–41. For debts of the story and the description of the heroine to the ancient romance, see Pavlovskis, ‘The Life of St. Pelagia the Harlot: Hagiographic Adaptation of Pagan Romance’.

\textsuperscript{33} A similar scene is encountered in the \textit{Life of Thaïs} (\textit{BHG} 1695), where St Serapion pretends to be a customer in order to get close to the harlot and drive her back to virtue; cf. Nau, ‘Histoire de Thaïs. Publications de textes grecs inédits et de divers autres textes et versions’, 90–98. For the theme of ‘seeking the woman’ as developed in late antique hagiographic narrative, see Goddard-Elliot, \textit{Roads to Paradise. Reading the Lives of the Early Saints}, 126–30. On the importance of recognition scene in late antique hagiography, see Bouhlo, Ἀναγνωρισθήτω. \textit{La scène de reconnaissance dans l’hagiographie antique et médiévale}, 75–6 (on that of Abraham and Maria).

\textsuperscript{34} The \textit{terminus ante quem} for the pre-metaphrastic text can be established as fragments thereof have been preserved in a sixth-century papyrus. See Wessely, ‘Die Vita s. Theodorae’, 25–44. For detailed discussion of this \textit{vita}, see Papaconstantinou, ‘“Je suis noire, mais belle”: Le double langage de la Vie de Théodora d’Alexandrie, alias abbâ Théodore’.
Anastasia the patrician and Andronikos the money-dealer and his wife Athanasia.\footnote{The new edition by Dahlman, \textit{Saint Daniel of Sketis. A Group of Hagiographic Texts}, contains the stories: \textit{BHG} 2100, 2255, 2102, 2453, 2101, 618, 122 and 79.} In this collection of eight edifying stories, set in Alexandria and the monasteries of Egypt, Daniel of Sketis is only the presumed and not the real author. It seems, however, that some time after the destruction of Sketis in 570, one of his disciples collected some of the stories circulating under his name and assembled them into some kind of dossier. Besides being the literary link between the stories, Daniel usually appears as the narrator or a secondary character.\footnote{See Garitte, ‘Daniel de Scété’.} The other common leitmotiv which runs through the whole collection is that of ‘secret holiness’, a recurrent theme in late antique monastic hagiography. Stories feature men and women who were for the most part not monks and whose sanctity is revealed immediately before or after their death. By and large scholars agree that Daniel’s stories have little bearing on historical truth and that their significance lies in their edifying message and particular literary structure.

**Monastic Collections**

As already suggested, full-length biographies of distinguished holy men and women like those of Arsenios, Mary of Egypt and Synkletike, must have grown out of a tendency to elaborate on short tales found in collections of \textit{apophthegmata}, such as the sayings of the Desert Fathers and anecdotes of edifying character.\footnote{Arsenios and Synkletike are among the holy ascetics whose teachings figure prominently in the \textit{Apophthegmata Patrum}. For the case of Mary of Egypt whose \textit{Life} must have been an expanded version of a story included in the \textit{Spiritual Meadow} of John Moschos, see Flusin, ‘Le serviteur caché ou le saint sans existence’.
} Already by the close of the fourth century, such collections as the \textit{Apophthegmata Patrum}, known also as \textit{Paterika} or \textit{Gerontika} (from the Greek words \textit{pater} [father] and \textit{geron} [elder]), or the \textit{Historia monachorum in Egypto} had experienced considerable literary success not only within monastic audiences but in the ‘outside’ world of the laity too. Spreading monastic wisdom as they did through oral transmission from master to disciple and from one monastic cell to another, they steadily found learned imitators who put pen to paper to record the ideal of the Egyptian, Palestinian and Syrian deserts.

Indeed, when in ca. 419–420, the monk Palladios, later bishop of Helenopolis in Bithynia and thereafter bishop of Aspuna in Galatia in Asia Minor (ca. 364–ca. 431), wrote his famous \textit{Historia Lausiaca} (or \textit{Lausiac History}, \textit{BHG} 1435–8), commissioned by Lausos, eunuch and chamberlain at the imperial court of Theodosios II (408–450), this kind of literature had already broken new and fertile ground. In the modern edition, which represents the short recension, Palladios’ account consists of 71 brief chapters (of which 20 are about women) which combine the literary tradition of biography with that of the Sayings of the Desert Fathers and (to a lesser extent)
the miracle stories. In addition to this short version, the Greek text also survives in a long recension, which comes in a number of different forms and still awaits a critical edition. Palladios’ Historia was based on a reworking of a travelogue which he had composed between 388 and 399 in which he recorded his experiences with the monks in Egypt. Chronological and other inconsistencies led scholars to contest Palladios’ trustworthiness, but, despite his obvious literary borrowings and reminiscences, it is now pretty much beyond doubt that he drew heavily on personal experience to produce a work that was both edifying and authentic. Moreover, as a work reaching out to a Constantinopolitan audience, the Historia Lausiaca promoted monastic ideals beyond the harsh serenity of the desert, artfully implying that ascetic conduct might also be pursued amidst the bustle of a city. By citing names, toponyms and other details, Palladios demonstrated a propensity towards realism and, more importantly, infused his narrative with credibility. Stories, some of which would have been regarded as extraordinary even by contemporary believers, are related in a plain, simple style, without any pretense to rhetorical elaboration, and unfold as reports of personal experience combined with the experience of others. This intersection of experiences culminates in the concluding chapter where the author speaks about the fellow-itinerant brother who had accompanied him on his journeys since youth. In fact, Palladios appends here his own autobiographical report to those about other distinguished monastics, thereby implicitly making himself the last of the long series of heroes whom he enshrined in this multifaceted monastic memoir.

More than one and a half century before another classic of monastic literature, John Moschos’ Spiritual Meadow, began circulating in Palestine, the most noteworthy compendium of ascetics’ lives and anecdotes composed in Greek emerged from the pen of Theodoret Bishop of Cyrrhus in Syria (ca. 393–ca. 460), a theologian engaged in the Christological debates of his century. His Philotheos Historia

38 Butler, the editor of Historia Lausiaca, held that the short recension was the earlier form, and it was this recension that he edited. R. Draguet, editor of the Syriac translation of the Historia, argued that the Syriac versions went back to an original Greek text written by a copticising Egyptian author and that the same work was used by Palladios for the creation of his own text; see Les formes syriaques de la matière de l’histoire lausiaque, I, 22*-59* and 75*-83*. K. Nickau has made a good case for restoring the authorship of the Historia to Palladios; see ‘Eine Historia Lausiaca ohne Lausos. Überlegungen zur Hypothese von René Draguet über den Ursprung der Historia Lausiaca’.

39 On the function of the Historia as travelogue, see Frank, The Memory of the Eyes: Pilgrims to Living Saints in Christian Late Antiquity, 61–9. A structuralist analysis based on the prologue and a small number of chapters was applied to the text by Magheri Cataluccio, Il Lausaïkon di Palladio tra semiotica e storica.

40 For an overview of Palladios’ career, see Hunt, ‘Palladius of Helenopolis: A Party and its Supporters in the Church of the Late Fourth Century’; and Flusin, ‘Pallade d’Hélénopolis’. The tendency to call Palladios’ reliability into question began with Telfer, ‘The Trustworthiness of Palladius’. The significance of Lausos’ identity in shaping the content of several stories has been emphasised by Rapp, ‘Palladius, Lausus and the Historia Lausiaca’.
Asketike Politeia (Ascetic Life – BHG 1435–8), also known as Historia religiosa from the sixteenth-century Latin version of its title, presents in 30 chapters of variable length a remarkable portrait gallery of more than 35 charismatic solitaries who lived in northwest Syria from the early fourth century to the author’s own time, i.e. the 440s, the decade in which this work must have been completed.41 Like Palladios in his Historia, but perhaps a little more so, Theodoret appears both as narrator and actor in a lofty account which, while not written in Syriac, was conceived as a panorama of Syrian monasticism. Before embarking on his praises of a saint’s virtues, feats and miraculous power, Theodoret introduces each account – diegema or diegesis, as he repeatedly styles them42 – with detailed geographical indications and biographical data about the saint’s provenance and his or her social background. References to himself are scattered all over the narrative, with one usually rounding off each portrait.43

Granted, all these narrative traits would not have markedly contrasted Theodoret from all the other hagiographers who practised this kind of literature in late antiquity. As a matter of fact, his survey of Syrian monasticism stands out not so much for its structural components as for its sophisticated means of expression. In keeping with the rules of panegyric and philosophical biography, Theodoret employs an archaising form of Greek and makes pervasive use of a vocabulary derived from athleticism and the games, thereby grafting a veneer of classicism onto his humble and ragged heroes, who, more often than not, he calls philosophers. Blending, as he does, references to the Olympic Games and Homeric key-words like κλέος with biblical allusions and exempla, Theodoret, on the one hand, shows off his Greek paideia, and, on the other, inscribes himself in the tendency among fourth- and fifth-century Christian writers to deflect and combat paganism and heresy by ‘usurping’ or ‘adopting’ their enemies’ weapons.

In his peroration (ch. 30.7) the Syrian bishop makes a last programmatic statement: ‘we have recalled different lives, and added accounts of women to those of men, for this reason: that men old and young, and women too, may have models of philosophy, and that each person, as he receives the impress of his favourite life, may have as a rule and regulator of his own life the one presented in our account’.44

41 For the precise date of composition, which must be the year 444, see Canivet and Leroy-Molinghen, Théodoret, 30–31. Ch. 29 encompasses the biographies of two holy women at one go. The most comprehensive study of the work remains that by Canivet, Le monachisme syrien selon Théodoret de Cyr. Detailed discussion of its content also by Urbainszyk, Theodoret of Cyrrhus. The Bishop and the Holy Man.

42 On the various uses of these terms in late antique hagiography, see Rapp, ‘Storytelling as Spiritual Communication in Early Greek Hagiography: the Use of Diegesis’. Obviously, Theodoret assigns to them a meaning broader than that of a plainly-narrated story.


44 See tr. Price, Theodoret of Cyrrhus, 188. On Theodoret’s sources for earlier saints, see now Debié, ‘Nisibe sauvée des eaux: les sources de Théodoret et la place des versions syriaques’.
Although these words would suggest that he was targeting a wide audience, it is hard to believe that his elaborate language and elite discourse would have appealed to or been understood by the many people who, some decades earlier, had greeted such works as the *vita Antonii* and the *Historia Lausiaca* warmly. The reception, however, that the *Philotheos Historia* enjoyed from later Byzantine writers points to the fact that, at least for its author’s rhetorical skills, this Christian collection of philosophical biographies was well received particularly in learned milieux.45

Chapters 26–30 of the *Philotheos Historia* deal with holy men and women who were still alive. The first among them is Theodoret’s most celebrated hero, ‘the great wonder of the world’, as he calls him, Symeon Stylices the Elder (d. 459). His *Life* (ch. 26) was structured differently from the accounts of other ascetics in the collection and, not by chance, was first published as a separate work, some time between 440 and 444. Moreover, as its own manuscript tradition confirms, it had an independent circulation (*BHG* 1678–80). Like Antony of Egypt whose spiritual progress coincided with his increasingly intense isolation in the desert, Symeon the Stylite of Syria became an emblematic holy figure in late antiquity: his spiritual ascension was reflected in the height of his new pillar. Unlike Antony, however, who was more of a literary paradigm than a real figure, Symeon attracted pilgrims to his site before and after his demise. Built by imperial initiative between 476 and 490, Qal’at Sem’an, an architectural complex which still today impresses its visitors, became a major shrine for the duration of late antiquity.

Before long Theodoret’s praise of such a renowned saint found emulators. *Vaticanus syriacus* 160, a manuscript whose colophon gives a date as early as April 473, i.e. only 14 years after the Stylite’s death, preserves a Syriac *vita* written by his disciples (*BHO* 1124).46 Not far distant in time is the rather problematic and brief Greek *vita* which has come down to us in about 30 manuscripts and in divergent recensions under the name of Antony *prosmonarios*, who is presented as Symeon’s disciple four times in his account (*BHG* 1682–1685k). As a hagiographer, Antony clings to the simple means of expression which typifies edifying monastic literature. Nonetheless, he prudently takes pains to point out the number of years the Stylite spent at a particular place, thereby tightening up an otherwise loose narrative. After relating in detail the holy man’s initiation into the solitary life, Antony brings together his wondrous acts – stiffly introduced with the formulaic expression ‘now listen to another paradoxical (or mysterious) story’ – and, concludes with his eyewitness report about the depositing of the saint’s relics into a casket and their subsequent translation from his pillar to Antioch on a mule-drawn cart. Although


46 This early Syriac manuscript is joined by another one, British Museum Add. 14,484, dating from the sixth century and preserving a second Syriac version. See the presentation in Flusin, ‘Syméon et les philologues, ou la mort du Stylite’, 5–9.
we cannot be sure whether he wrote independently of Theodoret or not.\textsuperscript{47} Antony too dwells here on the international fame of Symeon, also emphasising the overall concern of civil and Church authorities to preserve his relics intact.

Unlike the Bollandist Peeters, who dismissed its importance, most scholars have by and large argued in favour of the reliability of the Greek \textit{Life}. Moreover, it was suggested that the Syriac and the Greek \textit{Lives} originated in the two monastic communities, the Syrian and the Greek respectively, which grew up around St Symeon’s pillar. Nonetheless, nowhere in the Greek \textit{vita} is there mention of a Greek community, whereas it is obvious that, unlike the Syriac version, the Greek \textit{vita} puts the emphasis on the cult of the saint’s relics, not on his disciples and spiritual heirs.\textsuperscript{48} It is indicative that, when Martyrios, Bishop of Antioch, the most imposing figure amidst a throng of people attending the ceremonial translation of the relic, tried to remove a hair from Symeon’s beard, he saw his hand temporarily shrivel up (ch. 29). All in all, St Symeon the Elder’s hagiographical dossier, compiled while he was still a living holy man, is a case in point as to how texts can reflect a particular spirituality through the images and the themes which they choose to elaborate upon.\textsuperscript{49}

A century and a half later both Symeon Stylites the Elder and his hagiography served as a model for the very long \textit{Life of Symeon Stylites the Younger} (BHG 1689). Simply by dint of the fact that it runs parallel to almost the whole sixth century (Symeon was born in 521 and died in 592), this text is of exceptional historical interest. Some details of the stylete’s mortification (like the wounding rope tightened around his body in ch. 26) clearly point to inspiration from Symeon the Elder’s example, but, in view of his tangled hagiographical dossier, it is hard to deduce from which documents Symeon the Younger’s hagiographer collected information. Only the precedent set by Symeon the Elder and the idea of closely following the example of an earlier stylete (ch. 11) can explain why Symeon the Younger embarked on the life of a stylete at the astonishing age of seven and, as a result, spent at least 64 years atop a pillar.\textsuperscript{50} Born in Antioch, Symeon settled as an ascetic further to the west, on a mountain which by virtue of his achievements

\textsuperscript{47} Along with other issues concerning the authority of the Greek \textit{vita}, this was a point of serious debate. A.-J. Festugière held that what Antony shares with Theodoret was due to oral tradition: see \textit{Antioche païenne et chrétienne. Libanios, Chrystostome et les moines de Syrie}, 376.

\textsuperscript{48} For a discussion of the interrelationship between Theodoret’s \textit{Life}, the Syriac \textit{vita}, and the Greek \textit{vita}, see Lietzmann, \textit{Das Leben des heiligen Symeon Stylites}, who argued for each \textit{vita} coming from its respective ethnic community. Also Delehaye, \textit{Les saints styliotes}, I–XVII, who defended the Greek \textit{vita}’s trustworthiness. Peeters’ views were expressed in \textit{Le tréfonds oriental de l’hagiographie byzantine}, 93–136. After recapitulating the debate, Flusin suggested that the name of Antony the hagiographer may be fictional and he pinpointed the different functions of the two \textit{vitae}: \textit{‘Syméon et les philologues’}, 9–19.

\textsuperscript{49} See Harvey, ‘The Sense of a Stylite: Perspectives on Simeon the Elder’.

\textsuperscript{50} Chronological discussion in van den Ven, \textit{La Vie ancienne de S. Symeon stylite le jeune}, 124*–130*. Interesting hypotheses in the light of modern psychoanalytical parallels can be found in Caseau, \textit{‘Syméon Stylite le Jeune (521–592): un cas de sainte anorexie?’}. 52
was named the Wondrous Mountain (Θαυμαστὸν Ὄρος) and on which he built for
himself a new monastery and two pillars, one after the other.

Believing that the *Life* was imprecise yet close to the truth, Delehaye and Van
den Ven posited that the 259 chapters which constitute this very long text were the
work of an anonymous monk at Symeon’s monastery, essentially a naive author
who must have been an eyewitness to most of the saint’s life and who relied on
oral testimonies for the remainder. However, along with E. Müller and D. Chitty, we are inclined to the conclusion that the author had at his disposal some kind of
written monastic documents where Symeon’s miraculous deeds were recorded.
The result was the duplication (probably unintentional) of basically identical
narrative sequences (chs. 241–8 and chs. 80–89, chs. 15–23 and chs. 24–39, besides
other minor duplications/repetitions). Its editor Van den Ven showed that the
chronology of major events outside the monastery and of the stages in the saint’s
life are recorded quite correctly, yet the careful recapitulation at the end of the *vita*
is wrong in assigning 68 years as a stylite to Symeon.

At some points the author is anxious to defame a fellow-monk named
Angoulas, who was supposedly at odds with Symeon (chs. 123, 128 and 168) but
who evidently must have clashed later with the author (or his faction) inside the
monastery. Moreover, a comparison with the references to Symeon which we cull
from the *Ecclesiastical History* of Evagrios Scholastikos, writing at Antioch around
593, shows that Symeon maintained friendly relations with Gregory, patriarch of
Antioch, and with the Emperor Maurice – though the *vita* is silent on this. This
reticence is best explained by a kind of *damnatio memoriae* which would make sense
during the reign of Phokas (602–610), who both dethroned and executed Maurice,
suggesting a date for the work’s composition. All in all, the *vita* is by no means
devoid of conflict and tension, and may be reckoned one of the most ‘polemical’
in late antique hagiography. The author has an axe to grind when referring to
groups he deems to be opponents of the saint. He labels as ‘pagans’ people who
were surely Christians, for instance inhabitants of Antioch who opposed the public
cult of the saint’s image (ch. 157), or others who were scandalised by the death of
John the Baptist (ch. 158). He is also quick to condemn many Christians, especially
clerics, who censured and even banned Symeon (e.g. chs. 116, 214–15, 239).

Judging from the many people of Antioch, even the patriarchs, and the villagers
around the Wondrous Mountain who sought his help, the main area of Symeon’s
authority lay in the space between the country and the city. Interestingly, by
contrast with monastic hagiography and the chiefly ‘rural’ *vitae of Theodore of Sykeon
and of Nicholas of Sion*, Symeon appears to have taken little interest in neighbouring
towns (cf. ch. 125), and, like his namesake Symeon the Elder, seems to have enjoyed
an international reputation. In his long-distance intercessions, the saint makes
exceedingly frequent use of *eulogiai*, tokens made of dust blessed by him and

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52 For instance, in Isauria (chs. 96, 123, 172, 188, 192 and 227), Iberia (chs. 103, 130 and 136) and Constantinople (chs. 106, 151, 205).
bearing his image. The slightly later Life of his mother Martha (BHG 1174) insists even more upon the efficiency of those eulogiai (chs. 54–5). In fact this was done because the hagiographer was deeply aware of the urgent need to underscore the saint’s mediatory role and identify it with the mundane interests of his monastery. His case is a supreme example of the worldly motivations of hagiographical writing.  

Constantinople and its Urban Hagiography

In the three centuries of late antique hagiography, Egypt, Palestine and Syria remained the most fertile sources of its inspiration and the main centres of production. Heroes and stories of monastic hagiography were staged against the exclusive backdrop of a barren landscape, thereby implying a polarisation between life in the desert and life in the city. The purity of the desert was contrasted with urban corruption, suggesting that life in the civilised world was by definition conducive to and synonymous with sin. Bearing this consideration in mind, those who took up the praise of urban saints, whether they were monks, bishops or other clergy men, justified their heroes’ presence in the city by highlighting either their engagement with a crucial ecclesiastical cause (doctrinal or otherwise) or their role as social benefactors. The Christological controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries and the involvement of the emperors in them provided the means by which urban, chiefly Constantinopolitan, hagiography was placed high on the literary agenda.

In late antique hagiography the small town once known as Byzantium, which gradually became the heart of the empire, maintained a significant but not a central presence. Its rise to the status of a holy city as early as the second half of the fifth century and its identification as a ‘Second’ or ‘New Jerusalem’, owed a great deal to the amassing of relics and other religious treasures deposited in lavishly decorated churches and little to the presence of holy men and women. This is to some extent reflected in the relatively small number of saints who were active in Constantinople during this period and in Constantinopolitan hagiography itself, which was a late creation with restricted appeal, especially if compared to the hagiography of the desert. At first it was keen to record the exploits of holy abbots, abesses and ascetics active in and around the city; later it extended its attention to patriarchs and clerics. Alongside this secular or more mundane hagiography, we observe an interest in the writing of collections of miracles with stories of those who had sought a miraculous cure in Constantinopolitan shrines dedicated to the Virgin Mary and the martyrs.

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53 Discussion in Déroche, ‘Quelques interrogations à propos de la Vie de Syméon Stylite le Jeune’.
54 On Constantinople as a holy city, see Flusin, ‘Construire une nouvelle Jérusalem: Constantinople et les reliques’.
Constantinopolitan Monastic Hagiography

It took a long time for monasticism in late antique Constantinople to attract the attention of an urban population embroiled in mundane priorities. A decree of Theodosios I (379–395), issued in 390 but cancelled two years later, forbade the monks, who were seen, even among Christians, as a source of trouble, from settling in cities. Yet before long, around 430, the situation would change and monks would be noted for their engagement with major or minor causes which marked the history of late antique Christianity. Indeed, what could be termed ‘monks and politics in late antiquity’ was a major topic for monastic hagiography produced in the capital from the fifth to the seventh century.55

Although Constantinopolitan monasticism sprang up independently of its Egyptian and Eastern roots, monastic establishments in the capital city housed many migrants from the Christian Middle East, whether Syrians or Egyptians. This reality should barely surprise us as it mirrored the linguistic and ethnic diversity which was characteristic of a metropolis in the making. In addition to this, the Byzantine capital was not late in becoming a centre of conflicts and polemical debates. Not surprisingly, from the Syrian Isaac (d. 406) to the native Constantinopolitan Theodore of Stoudios (d. 826), who in the age of Iconoclasm embodied the political triumph of monasticism, holy abbots and abbesses were portrayed as entangled in doctrinal controversies, Church conflicts and imperial politics. They were joined by some ascetics (stylites or otherwise) who came to lead a life in seclusion, mostly in the capital’s suburbs, but attracted the devotion of members of the upper classes. Biographers of urban abbots and ascetics tended to register this monastic mobility recounting episodes which would constitute their miraculous record in a narrative which was more tightly knit than the rather loose model found in the hagiography of the desert. In that respect, most vitae of urban saints created their own form of literary expression, distinct from the patterns which prevailed in the east. Moreover, their tendency to record scenes from an urban environment rather than life in a monastic enclosure makes them good guides to the topography of the city and its usually turbulent political and social history from the late fourth to the seventh century.

The first known abbot and founder of a cenobitic monastery in Constantinople was the hermit Isaac (d. 406). Like all other Constantinopolitan saints of eastern origin, it was at the insistence of a divine voice that he left Mesopotamia for the capital. His name and activity were associated with his opposition first, in 374–378, to the pro-Arian Church policy of the Emperor Valens (364–378) and, then, in the years 398–404, to John Chrysostom, when the latter clashed with the monks of the

55 For useful surveys of this group of saints, see Dagron, ‘Les moines et la ville. Le monachisme à Constantinople jusqu’au concile de Chalcédoine (451)’; Seiber, The Urban Saint in Early Byzantine Social History; Saradi, ‘Constantinople and its Saints (IVth–VIth c.). The Image of the City and Social Considerations’; Caner, Wandering, Begging Monks. Spiritual Authority and the Promotion of Monasticism in Late Antiquity, 158–241; Hatlie, The Monks and Monasteries of Constantinople, 62–132.
city; it is natural enough that hagiographers should have sought to skirt round the issue of Isaac’s implication in this conflict, reported in the Ecclesiastical Histories of Sozomenos and Theodoret.\footnote{Lenski, ‘Valens and the Monks: Cudgeling and Conscription as a Means of Social Control’; Hatlie, The Monks and Monasteries of Constantinople, 65–71; Barnes, Early Christian Hagiography, 242–6; Liebeschuetz, ‘Friends and Enemies of John Chrysostom’; and Elm, ‘The Dog that did not Bark’.
} What is more, the vita prior (BHG 956), which cannot have been earlier than the sixth century, and the vita posterior (BHG 955) place Isaac’s death in 383, i.e. well before his involvement in the ecclesiastical affair about John Chrysostom. In other respects the vita hints at the ascetic being greeted with mistrust in an urban milieu, though this attitude would be reversed once his predictions about Valens’ ignominious defeat and death in the battle of Adrianople (in 378) proved correct. The reputation he thus won secured his sojourn in the city and ensured his later association with the generals Victor and Saturninus, his erstwhile persecutors turned supporters and patrons.

It was on an estate belonging to Saturninus that Isaac built the first Constantinopolitan monastery, whose leadership his pupil St Dalmatos (or Dalmatios) took on and to which, according to the vita prior (chs. 16–17), Dalmatos gave his name. Isaac’s monastic successor held the military rank of scholarios at the court of Theodosios I but, after being separated from his wife and daughter, abandoned worldly fame and fortune to enter monastic life together with his son Faustos. His vitæ (BHG 481–2) make him out to be a fierce opponent of the bishop Nestorios even before the latter ascended the patriarchal throne of Constantinople and declared his heretical views. Like most urban monastic biographies of the period, these vitæ have more of an informative than an edifying orientation, incorporating ‘material’ that would fit plausibly into an ecclesiastical history. The now lost vita of St Dios, another Syrian monk and founder of the second oldest monastery in Constantinople, must have been similar in content and character and the very model of a ninth-century enkomion.\footnote{See Krausmüller, ‘The Constantinopolitan Abbot Dius: His Life, Cult and Hagiographical Dossier’, 18.}

It would be hard to praise the hagiography of the first holy abbots of Constantinople for their literary qualities. Yet the same cannot be said for the vita of Hypatios of Rouphinianai (BHG 760), a particularly instructive text for historians and philologists alike. The former may derive from it a wealth of information about the early development of monasticism in Constantinople and in its hinterland as well as about the uneasy relations between clergy and monks, while the latter will appreciate it as a literary hybrid, an example of Greek Christian writing shorn of any reminiscence of ancient pagan literature. The Life reports that Hypatios died in 446 at the age of 80, an approximation which implies a date of birth around 366. The son of a wealthy family in Phrygia, he fled his parents’ home at the age of 18 (i.e. ca. 384) and wandered in Thrace, where he joined an older ascetic named Jonas. Hypatios then (ca. 400) came closer to the capital, to the outskirts of Chalcedon, where, with two other monks, he occupied the recently abandoned
buildings of the Roushphianai, the palace, church and monastery built by the praetorian prefect Rufinus between 392 and 395, shortly before his fall from office and death in that year. Hypatios officially became abbot in 406 and remained in charge for 40 years ruling a monastery where moderate askesis was practised. Two stories about the ascetic excesses of two monks remind the readers of the inherent dangers of such practices. The personal excellence of Hypatios in ascetic struggles contrasted sharply with the leniency of his spiritual guidance for monks. With a focus on cenobitic life, obedience to the abbot is extolled as well as his prowess in matters of spiritual discernment. The vita provides a wealth of information on daily activities in a monastery which was populated by incomers from the east, one of whom was Kallinikos, the Syrian author of the vita. Its last chapter offers a vivid contrast between the scarcity of monks in the capital at the beginning of Hypatios’ career and their growing numbers at the end of his life. Dagron believed that the hagiographer’s aim here was to mask two unpleasant facts: first, that early monasticism in Constantinople was much older, but urban, disorganised and mostly pro-Arian, and second, that monks in general and Isaac in particular had been instrumental in John Chrysostom’s fall in 403, at the so-called Oak Council held close to the Roushphianai. This may be true, but does not apply to the same extent in the case of Hypatios, who, because of conflicts with other monks, left the Roushphianai in ca. 403 during the critical years, and came back as abbot only in 406, when the turmoil around John Chrysostom had been settled.

Kallinikos wrote the vita of Hypatios in simple Greek very soon after his master’s death, in ca. 450. He dedicated the work to a priest, as well as to the ‘brethren’, i.e. his fellow-monks at Roushphianai, where in ca. 470 an anonymous corrector edited its language and supplied it with a preface, a unicum in the hagiography of this period. If Kallinikos can be regarded as an important writer, this is thanks to his lack of classical education. In fact, there is no evidence that he had read learned Christian literature or that his reading went beyond the Bible (extolled as the summit of all knowledge), the vita Antonii (cited as a model for Hypatios in ch. 53, and clearly imitated at some points), perhaps the monastic writings of Pseudo-Makarios and probably texts written by Hypatios himself destined for ‘internal use’ by his monks (cf. the lengthy ch. 24). In sum, the vita Hypatii is probably both the first piece of hagiography with merely monastic literary references and a text which runs counter to contemporary literary trends. The model of the vita Antonii is not followed as closely as its editor believes, especially as events in the life of Hypatios are not arranged chronologically except at the beginning (youth) and end (illness, death and subsequent events). Some parts in chs. 20–47 are organised thematically with reference to different aspects of the hero’s virtues (e.g. chs. 25–31), whereas some events are narrated in reverse chronological order. Yet, besides the ubiquity of miracles, there is a close affinity between the two vitae in the

59 This may have been the convert of ch. 35, who is said to have asked for such a text, but this is not as certain as the editor Bartelink believes.
omnipresent demonology, including of course the signs of waning rural paganism (e.g. ch. 45).\textsuperscript{60}

A Syrian holy monk called Auxentios (d. 470) was also associated with the monastery of Rouphinianai. He served in the army of Theodosios II as a \textit{scholarios} and was later noted for his piety and the miracles he performed in the capital until he withdrew to the opposite coast in Bithynia on Mt Oxeia to live as a hermit. After successive attempts to drive him back to Constantinople failed, he was brought to the monastery of Hypatios of Rouphinianai, performed a series of miracles and retired again to Mt Skopa, which, after his death, in the reign of Leo I (457–471), would be renamed Mt Auxentios. His biographer insists on the declarations of faith to the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon to which the saint was invited to make on several occasions as well as the three foundations which claimed his relics. Auxentios was eventually buried in the nunnery of Trichinareai which he had founded and, according to his late fifth-century hagiographer, his relics continued to perform miracles ‘to this day’. This statement found in the peroration of the \textit{vita BHG} 199 allows a dating no sooner than one generation after the saint’s death. This dating is corroborated by the everyday details and Latin colloquialisms with which this \textit{vita} is replete.\textsuperscript{61}

In 427–428 the aforementioned St Hypatios defended the \textit{Akoimetoi}, monks banished from Constantinople, against the bishop of Chalcedon (ch. 41).\textsuperscript{62} The \textit{Akoimetoi} (the ‘Sleepless Ones’) were a monastic community who practised perpetual prayer as taught and instituted by Alexander (d. ca. 430), a saint born on an unnamed island in the Aegean but who spent most of his life as an itinerant monk in the east. His lengthy \textit{vita} (\textit{BHG} 47), preserved only in a tenth-/eleventh-century manuscript (\textit{Parisinus gr. 1452}), records the saint’s successive wanderings and journeys mostly in Syria, his missionary work and consecutive conflicts with pagans and Christian accusers. His anonymous biographer, who may have been acquainted with the \textit{vita Hypatii}, meticulously reports the periods of time when the saint stayed in a particular place, but otherwise avoids providing historical data. He ends his account, which may date from the late fifth/early sixth century, by calling attention to Alexander’s disciples who after their master’s death founded a monastery across from Constantinople, in the area of Gomon on the Asian side of the Bosphoros (ch. 53).\textsuperscript{63}

After Alexander’s death, the \textit{Akoimetoi} took up residence in Irenaion, opposite Sosthenion in the middle of the Bosphoros, i.e. at a spot which was both quiet and not very far from the capital. We learn this from the \textit{vita} of its third abbot,

\textsuperscript{60} On the value of this \textit{vita}, see Mango, ‘Saints’, 275–7; and Barnes, \textit{Early Christian Hagiography}, 246–8.

\textsuperscript{61} The notion that this \textit{Life} predated the other five (\textit{BHG} 200–203b) and was of an early date was proposed by Auzépy, ‘Les Vies d’Auxence et le monachisme “Auxentien”’.

\textsuperscript{62} On this episode, see Wölfle, ‘Der Abt Hypatios von Ruphinianai und der Akoimete Alexander’.

\textsuperscript{63} The latest analysis of this \textit{vita} is by Caner, \textit{Wandering, Begging Monks. Spiritual Authority and the Promotion of Monasticism in Late Antiquity}, 126–57.
St Markellos (BHG 1027z), a native of Apameia in Syria who, until he became a pupil of Alexander in the capital, had studied in Antioch and worked as a scribe in Ephesos. It was thanks to Markellos (d. 485) that the Akoimetoi established close contacts with the imperial court and played an influential role in the events which marked the history of the city from the Christological controversy which led to the Council of Chalcedon (451) to the popular revolt against the patriarch Gennadios (458–471). As it turned out, in Markellos’ lifetime the prestige of the community of the Akoimetoi was considerably enhanced, especially with respect to the copying of manuscripts. His vita (BHG 1027a), preserved in full only in a single manuscript (Parisinus gr. 1491), must have been written by a monk of the Akoimetoi ‘in a time not very distant from his own’ (ch. 36), which, on safe grounds, has been placed not later than the death of the Emperor Anastasios I (518). The use of short phrases and an unadorned discourse gives the whole narrative a lively tone.

St Markellos was perhaps the unnamed abbot who figures in the Life of one of the most popular late antique saints. The story of John named ‘the Poor’ or the Kalyvites (the ‘hut-dweller’) conjures up the image of an erudite younger son of a prominent family who ran away from home after meeting a monk of the Akoimetoi and studying a luxury Gospel book, produced at his parents’ expense. Feeling homesick after six years at the monastery of the Akoimetoi, he was granted permission by his superior to visit his parents. Yet, having exchanged his clothes for a beggar’s rags, he set up a hut outside the parental mansion where he lived in anonymity for the rest of his short life. His identity was revealed just before his death after a dramatic recognition when he showed the Gospel book to his mother.

In view of its novelistic and sentimental overtones (the protagonists tend to become tearful at the drop of a hat), it is no surprise that John’s story crossed linguistic boundaries and enjoyed a remarkable popularity. In the Greek domain (BHG 868–9h), however, this acclaim has not resulted in the formation of a complex tradition. In essence, all extant versions rephrase the same story without situating it in a precise historical context. Only the saint’s home city is identified as Constantinople or, in a single case, as ‘the city of the Romans’.

The story of John Kalyvites is modelled on the tripartite compositional structure ‘separation-travel-return’ (Ringstruktur) and cannot conceal its close thematic similarity to the life of the fourth-century ascetic St Alexios, also known as the ‘Man of God’ (Homo Dei). With an aristocratic family background in Rome and escape from marriage as a backdrop, St Alexios’ biographies likewise underscore the break with family ties and suggest that a saint may also hide in the world, not just in the desert. To a greater extent than that of John Kalyvites, Alexios’ story integrated monastic ideals into the scenery of an urban hagiography. On his wedding night the young Roman aristocrat abandoned his wife, native city and senatorial family for Edessa and the life of a beggar dwelling in the narthex of a local church. When his sanctity was revealed in a vision to the church’s sacristan, he secretly sailed

64 See Déroche and Lesieur, ‘Notes d’hagiographie byzantine’.
65 For John Kalyvites as a precursor of St Alexis, see Stebbeins, ‘Les origines de la légende de saint Alexis’.
back to Rome to take up residence in his family’s household. His identity remained concealed until his death but, together with the details of his extraordinary life, it was posthumously unveiled in the lines written on a scroll found on his body. Once again there is no need to explain why this romance-like story spread across many regions and languages. Unlike St John’s, St Alexios’ hagiographical dossier turned out to be a thick and confusing one, too complex to attempt to rehearse all its complications here. It need only be noted that a Syriac ancestor which ended the story in Edessa and dates from the third quarter of the fifth century is believed to have been the original which, probably as early as late antiquity, produced many Greek descendants (BHG 51–6). These variously explored and amplified the basic plot of Alexios’ story to such an extent that, as has been noted, the fluidity which characterised the Greek tradition alone reveals ‘a spectrum of sensibilities, from a less problematised, credulous version dwelling without qualms on the miraculous element in the narrative, to a more sophisticated approach’.

Second only to the vita Hypatii, the monastic Life considered the most rich and reliable source of information about the empire and fifth-century Constantinople is that of St Daniel the Stylite. Its chronological recapitulation is so accurate that we can follow the hero’s biography step by step: born in 409 in Syria near Samosata and dedicated to a monastery as a novice at the age of five, he was finally admitted to monastic life when he turned 12. Some years later, he followed his abbot on pilgrimage to Antioch and then to Tell Neshin (now Qal’at Sem’ān), where he received the blessing of Symeon Stylites the Elder. After almost 25 years as monk and abbot and while heading for Palestine, he first heard the news of a Samaritan uprising, then met a mysterious Elder who suggested to him that he travel to the ‘second Jerusalem’, i.e. Constantinople. In 451, he settled in a desolate place on the Asian shore of the Bosphoros, where he lived as a recluse for nine years in a former pagan temple, infested by demons. Upon hearing of Symeon’s death, Daniel had a vision and then received a visit from a fellow Syrian monk, Sergios, who was taking Symeon’s leather tunic to the emperor; when he failed to secure an audience with the emperor, Sergios left the tunic to Daniel and convinced him to follow in Symeon’s footsteps. According to the rest of the story, Daniel ascended a stone column in the outskirts of the capital at Anaplous. Stylitism was then unknown around Constantinople, and it was the main cause of Daniel’s swift rise to fame. The stylite was visited by the Empress Eudokia, and then the Emperor Leo I (457–471); he predicted fires, revolts and acts of treason, namely everything that disturbed the public life of Constantinople. Moreover, Daniel approved Zeno’s ascension to the throne, and, quite understandably, was hostile to Basiliskos, the usurper (475–476). When the new emperor was inclined to condemn the Council of Chalcedon (451) and clashed with the Patriarch Akakios, Daniel made an extraordinary move: he

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66 The question has been treated by Drijvers, ‘Die Legenden des heiligen Alexius und der Typus des Gottesmannes im syrischen Christentum’.

67 See Crostini, ‘Mapping Miracles in Byzantine Hagiography: the Development of the Legend of St Alexios’, 84; a fruitful discussion of the question of the different versions of St Alexios’ story runs through the whole study.
climbed down from his column and rushed to Constantinople to organise a mass demonstration with other archimandrites which finally forced Basiliskos to recant. Daniel was thereafter regarded as a living icon and his death in 493 occasioned turmoil because everybody wanted to detach a bit of cloth as a relic; under the patriarch’s supervision, he was buried in his own monastery.

Although he spoke only Syriac, Daniel was able to establish links with powerful people, in the palace and in the Church. Symeon the Stylite’s precedent conferred on him an authority which he shrewdly increased by placing himself close to the centre of political power. This explains why his vita, written in plain language, is so close to political history at various points, and can be studied as such. Commentators agree that its anonymous author was a monk in Daniel’s monastery.68 Before him and during Basiliskos’ reign, another monk tried to place an icon of Daniel above the door of the ‘sheepfold’ (mandra), i.e. the monastery, and to write his biography, but the saint had both the icon and the life destroyed; yet a copy of this text was perhaps preserved and used by our author. The result is impressive: historians have always taken the information of this vita at face value, except, of course, for cases where certain facts are glossed over.69 As regards its time of composition, scholars agree only that this was probably soon after Daniel’s death; there is no direct allusion to later events to provide a terminus post quem after 493. The encomiastic reference to the Emperor Anastasios (491–518) (ch. 91) clearly implies that he was still alive, and on good terms with the monastery (where the vita was written). Moreover, the mention of the Patriarch Euphemios before and during the saint’s funeral (ch. 92 and 96), points to only one possibility: a date between 493, Daniel’s death, and 496, Euphemios’ forced deposition at Anastasios’ behest.70 To hypothesise a text extolling both Anastasios and Euphemios thereafter would be untenable. Another puzzling problem is the existence of two early versions of the same vita. It is most likely that either the author himself proceeded to make a slightly revised edition or a fellow monk corrected some factual mistakes. In either case, the value of the vita is not affected.

A More ‘Secular’ Constantinopolitan Hagiography

Aside from this group of foreign holy monks, urban hagiography celebrated upper-class men and women who set a high premium on a life of chastity whether within a marriage or not but who also engaged in charitable activity. The earliest and best-known example is that of St Olympias (360/370–408/410) who is first attested in Palladios’ Historia Lausiaca as ‘the woman of nobody’, i.e. not belonging


70 On this question, see Déroche and Lesieur, ‘Notes d’hagiographie byzantine’.
to her father, her grandfather or her husband (ch. 56). Olympias was a wealthy widow who was first ordained deaconess of Hagia Sophia and then founded a nunnery nearby. One after the other, her relatives were enclosed there after they liquidated their fortunes to underwrite its existence. Her biography was written in a simple style which does not eschew Latin loanwords by an author who made use of Palladios' Dialogue on St John Chrysostom and claimed to have been the saint's contemporary. In addition to underscoring her close ties with St John Chrysostom, he stresses Olympias' efforts to pursue a life of chastity and ascetic devotion after the premature death of her husband; and he concludes his account with a long encomiastic, if not homiletic, sermon. Furthermore, he makes detailed reference to Marina and to Elisanthia who, one after the other, undertook the guidance of her monastic community and took care of the veneration of Olympias’ relics which were kept in the monastery of St Thomas on the Asian coast of the Bosphoros. Later on in the seventh century the abbess Sergia, a rare case of a female hagiographer, traced a line of continuity by adding to the hagiographical dossier of St Olympias a narration of the translation of her relics from St Thomas’ monastery, burnt down in a Persian raid, to the Constantinopolitan nunnery. In the same account (BHG 1376) we hear that, owing to its vicinity to Hagia Sophia, the convent was damaged by fire during the Nika riots (532) and later restored by Justinian.

Olympias' aristocratic background matched that of St Melania the Younger, whose lengthy vita must be credited to Palestinian hagiography, but which, in its outline, had parallels which must have been of Constantinopolitan composition. The first half of the vita of St Domnica reads like a romance: she was born in the reign of Theodosios I, also hailed from Rome, secretly fled her wealthy family embarking on a ship sailing to Alexandria. She then found herself in a fortress inhabited by four virtuous virgins who were followers of 'Greek religion', but who she managed to convert to Christianity and guide them to live in monastic piety. They then all sailed together from Alexandria to Constantinople, where they were successively entertained by the Patriarch Nektarios and the Emperor Theodosios. At the latter's behest, a sanctuary was erected dedicated to the prophet Zachariah and a monastic community was established under the saint’s guidance. Despite its many references in the second half of the life to historical persons and events, the Life cannot conceal either its largely legendary character or its basic purpose, i.e. to endow the nunnery with a holy legend.

Unlike Domnica, Matrona of Perge in Pamphylia (ca. 430–510/515) was a historical figure attested in the Ecclesiastical History of Theodore Lector (ca. 525) which is preserved in a fragmentary state. Although her adventurous life drove her to the east, Matrona was a Constantinopolitan saint who assumed various stereotypical roles encountered in the Byzantine hagiography of female saints: escape from a marriage and an oppressive husband, monastic cross-dressing, extensive travelling, becoming the abbess of a nunnery and charitable activity. Nonetheless, her lengthy vita (BHG 1221), which survives in an eleventh-century manuscript (Parisinus 71)

71 The most recent discussion of this vita is by de Angelis, ‘Reading the Βίος Ὀλυμπιάδος. Some Reflections upon Widowhood in the Early Byzantine Empire’.

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gr. 1519), comes across as realistic, displaying as it does a large amount of realia as well as information about urban monastic life. The author’s reticence about the saint’s brave opposition to the Monophysite policy of the Emperor Anastasios I (491–518) is striking. Before the conclusion, we are informed that the Life was based on what Matrona’s fellow-ascetic, the nun Eulogia, had witnessed in person and noted down from the reports of others. This specification alone would place its composition towards the middle of the sixth century.72

An equally lively but more realistic picture of Constantinopolitan monasticism is recorded in the biography of a low-ranking clergyman, St Markianos (d. 471), who is also attested in the History of Theodore Lector, as a former follower of the heresy of the Novatians who called themselves καθαροί (the pure).73 Like other saints of this period, he hailed from a well-to-do Roman family which at some point settled in Constantinople. Having dispersed his fortune to the poor, he became presbyter and οἰκονόμος (i.e. a cleric entrusted with managing the property) of the church of Hagia Sophia and dealt with the construction, restoration and decoration of churches and pious foundations such as St Anastasia, St Irene and St Isidore.74 His hagiographical dossier, which is rich in urban topography and realia, comprises four extant and largely concordant vitae. They are all anonymous except for one (BHG 1032) which concludes with the testimony of a certain Sergios that it was he who wrote the saint’s biography but relying upon ‘those who knew precisely about the father’. Some episodes about the saint’s miraculous and other activity which are missing in the other vitae may be seen as lending further credence to Sergios’ statement and as suggesting that his is the oldest extant biography of Markianos.

What is of more interest, however, is that at the close of the fifth century, along with the monks, Constantinopolitan society was beginning to hold ecclesiastics in reverend esteem.

The Hagiography of Holy Patriarchs of Constantinople

As a matter of fact, in the years preceding and the decades following the Council of Chalcedon (451), the formation of a monastic hagiographical tradition in the

72 On Matrona as a holy cross-dresser, see Patlagean, ‘L’histoire de la femme déguisée en moine et l’évolution de la sainteté féminine à Byzance’, 613–14; and Constantinoú, Female Corporeal Performances. Reading the Body in Byzantine Passions and Lives of Holy Women, 95–120. On the date of her vita, see Mango, ‘Life of St Matrona of Perge. Introduction’, 13–16; and Mango, ‘Saints’, 266–9; Catafygiotou-Topping, ‘St. Matrona and Her Friends: Sisterhood in Byzantium’, 211–24 (who argues that the vita was addressed to a female audience, but is wrong in suggesting that the author must have been a woman).

73 The same specification is made in the Life of Auxentios-BHG 199, ch. 2.

74 The interrelationship between extant vitae and the question of priority was examined by Wallraff, ‘Markianos – ein prominenter Konvertit vom Novatianismus zur Orthodoxie’, 3–8. Points of topographical and historical interest are discussed by Saradi, ‘Notes on the vita of Saint Markianos’; Mango, ‘Le terme antiforos et la Vie de saint Marcien économe de la Grande Église’.
Byzantine capital went hand-in-hand with an increased interest in praising those patriarchs of Constantinople who were credited with a critical role in ecclesiastical controversies and the defence first of Nicene, and, then, of Chalcedonian orthodoxy. This endeavour also aspired to enhance the prestige and consolidate the privileges of the see of Constantinople vis-à-vis the other patriarchates. In the first place, the bishops of Byzantium who were deemed worthy of a saintly biography were those who advocated the Nicene doctrine against the pro-Arian emperors of the fourth century. Apart from the *Laudation of the Patriarch Nektarios* (381–397) by Leo of Sicily which is an original rhetorical composition but of a much later date, most probably the twelfth century, these hagiographies are merely pastiches composed of long excerpts from *Ecclesiastical Histories*. Thus, the joint *vita* of Metrophanes and Alexander (*BHG* 1279), on which all later *vitae* depend, draws extensively on the lost History of Gelasios of Caesarea (before 395), whereas the *vita* *S. Pauli confessoris* consists of excerpts taken from the *Histories* of Socrates.\(^75\) It is not by chance that in the ninth century these *vitae* aroused the interest of the Patriarch Photios who has left us a detailed summary of them in his *Bibliotheca* (codd. 256–7).\(^76\) Similar considerations must have prompted – in the sixth century or even later – the composition of the *vita of the Patriarch Anatolios* (449–458) (*BHG* 91) which surveys the events and the figures involved in the Council of Chalcedon and highlights the role of the patriarch as a supporter of Daniel the Stylite (d. 493).

This literary mould, which built patriarchal biographies on verbatim excerpts from an ecclesiastical history or other ‘external’ material, would only be broken towards the end of the sixth century. Between Patriarch Menas (536–552), for whom a short and insignificant *vita* survives, and John the Faster (582–595), whose biography by a certain Proteinios is fragmentarily preserved in the Acts of the Seventh Ecumenical Council in Nicaea (787), Eutychios occupied the see of Constantinople for two terms of office (552–565 and 577–582). The man who took up the challenge of writing an ‘original’ and brief *vita* (*BHG* 657) dedicated to him was Eustratios, presbyter in Hagia Sophia.\(^77\) He seems likely to have been assigned to the service of Eutychios during the latter’s second patriarchate and must have

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\(^77\) For a recapitulation of Eustratios’ œuvre, see Van Deun’s introduction in *Eustratii presbyteri Constantinopolitani, De statu animarum post mortem*, IX–XI. Discussion of the Life’s historical points of interest and literary techniques by Cameron, ‘Eustratius’s Life of the Patriarch Eutychius and the Fifth Ecumenical Council’ and ‘Models of the Past in the Late Sixth Century: The Life of the Patriarch Eutychius’. For Eustratios’ long and elaborate introduction, see Wilson, ‘Biblical Imagery in the Preface to Eustratios’ Life of Eutychios’.
followed him in his exile in Amaseia, a large town in the Pontos where much of the vita’s narrative is located. Eutychios was the son of a Phrygian officer described as the ‘right-hand man of the general Belisarios’. When in a children’s game he was asked to write his name on a wall and guess what he would become in life, he wrote ‘Eutychios patriarch’. His contacts with the Church of Constantinople were established when, as abbot of a monastery in Amaseia, he represented the local metropolitan at the Fifth Ecumenical Council in 553. His learning and devotion attracted the attention of Justinian and the Patriarch Menas whom he succeeded, remaining in office for an initial 12 years. However, his firm opposition to Justinian’s endorsement of the heresy of Aphthartodocetism, which taught that Christ’s body before the Resurrection was divine and incorrupt (ἀφθαρτος), led to his deposition and exile. Back in his monastery in Amaseia, he performed many healing miracles, especially in respect of children, a notable aspect of his biography. After the death of the Patriarch John III Scholastikos who had replaced him, Justinian’s successor, Justin II, restored Eutychios to his former office.

Eustratios wrote the patriarchal biography in the style of a panegyric which is elegant but not sophisticated. From the long introduction to the detailed description of the patriarch’s final hours, his narrative is permeated with rhetorical links between his hero’s acts and biblical reminiscences and exempla. Yet he never lost touch with what was essential in the actual history of his subject, be it his role in contemporary issues or his wonder-working activity. Eustratios enlivens his account not with dialogues but with his abundant references to names and secondary characters as well as his intermittent addresses to his audience in the form of reminders. Expressions such as ‘we all know that...’ or ‘this can be seen until today’ set a tone of fervour and familiarity at the same time and perform the role of establishing the trustworthiness of his testimony.

Besides the vita Eutychii, we owe to Eustratios a treatise known by its Latin name De statu animarum post mortem and, in all likelihood, the vita of the martyr Golindouch (d. 591, BHG 700–701; CPG 7521), a Persian woman converted from Zoroastrianism to Christianity and baptised Maria. This was not an original composition but a reworking of a lost Passio by a certain Stephen of Hierapolis (Mabbug) which has survived in a Georgian translation. Golindouch’s confession of faith under the rule of Hurmazd IV (579–590) led to her suffering cruel persecution and an ongoing ordeal until she arrived in the Roman Empire. There, confronted with some supporters of the heretic Severos, she prophesied the end of the Persian Empire and the coming of the Antichrist (chs. 20–21). The author’s predilection for biblical parallels and a digression about the martyr Basileus, patron saint of Amaseia (ch. 17), make it safe to identify him with Eustratios.

78 On St Golindouch, see Peeters, ‘Sainte Golindouch, martyre perse (+ 13 juillet 591)’; and Garitte, ‘La passion géorgienne de sainte Golindouch’.
Constantinople and its Miracle Collections

By the sixth century the fame of Constantinople as a holy city with numerous shrines, whether monasteries or churches, was already established. Many cults had by then reached the imperial capital and several holy establishments related to them had gained considerable popularity attracting pilgrims from far and wide seeking a cure. Two such shrines provided inspiration to authors who took up the task of collecting tales of miracles, usually performed by a process of incubation, i.e. in which a patient sleeping in the church was visited in a dream by the saint. The first collection must date from the late sixth–early seventh century and refers to the church of the doctor saints Kosmas and Damianos situated in Blachernai outside the city walls on the Golden Horn. As it stands in the modern edition, the collection consists of 38 anonymously preserved miracles which may be divided into five groups. Interestingly enough, 24 of them can be found in another Greek collection of Monophysite tendency, which is couched in a simple prose style, unlike the elegant Greek of the first collection. All the miracles lack chronological points of reference and some of them recur with minor variations in other collections of this period, to be precise in the lives of their Alexandrian counterparts, Sts Kyros and John, and St Menas. Those who benefited from the two Anargyroi (as they were also called on account of their refusal to take money for their cures) were common people of all ages, sometimes involved in grotesque situations.79

Humour and comic effects are also a hallmark of the collection of miracles of St Artemios for which internal evidence allows a precise dating between 658 and 668, the year in which the Emperor Constans II died (see mir. 23 and 41). The 45 miracle stories are centred round the church of St John the Baptist in the Constantinopolitan quarter of Oxeia where the relics of St Artemios were kept in a crypt. Though a military saint, Artemios specialised in the cure of men suffering from hernias in their genitalia. The collection presents him as healing patients who visited his church and others at some distance from it. As has long been noted,80 these Miracula, written on the threshold of the so-called Dark Age, offer enormous scope for research. Their protagonists are people ‘of flesh and blood’ and their stories are filled with details from daily life and reversals which grant a complexity and lively tone to what would otherwise have been conventional narratives. The lively tone is very much enhanced by the use of language which, except for the ‘polished’ introduction, is unpretentious and close to spoken Greek, especially in the dialogues with which most miracle stories are replete. The author must have worked up accounts of miracles which he had either found recorded in a church register or had reached him by hearsay. The fact that he included in the collection two episodes from the life of an unnamed bachelor and cantor in the St John’s

79 On the possible location of their shrine, see Mango, ‘On the Cult of Saints Cosmas and Damian at Constantinople’.
80 See Rudakov, Ocherki vizantiyskoy kul’tury po dannym grecheskoy agiografii.
church stories (mir. 18 and 22) lends colour to the assumption that this man was none other than the author himself.\textsuperscript{81}

\section*{Greek Hagiography in the Provinces}

\subsection*{Asia Minor}

Since antiquity Asia Minor had stood out as the fertile motherland of religious cults. The transition to the Christian era not only failed to dissipate this tradition but rather reinforced its potential. In fact, the Christianisation of late antique Asia Minor was followed by the spread of a wide variety of saints’ cults hosted in regions and cities most of which, as early as the fifth century, could boast a local patron saint, usually an apostle or a holy martyr from the age of the Great Persecution or before. From Nikomedeia in Bithynia to Tarsos in Cilicia and from Ephesos in the Aegean to Trebizond on the Black Sea, the Anatolian peninsula was a land densely populated with holy sites and shrines, a fact which must undoubtedly have encouraged the production of local hagiography.\textsuperscript{82} More often than not, the \textit{literati} who undertook the task of supporting and promoting local cults by writing \textit{Passions}, \textit{Panegyrics} or \textit{Collections of Miracles} were the same people who administered local sees, i.e. Christian bishops. Two such figures deserving of brief notice, given that their work is better categorised as homiletic rather than hagiographic, are Asterios of Amaseia (ca. 350–ca. 410) and Basil of Seleukeia (d. 458/460), who celebrated the Christian martyrs in their surviving panegyrical sermons. Asterios’ homilies demonstrate a sound knowledge of classical literature, the \textit{Description of a painting of the martyrdom of St Euphemia} being the most often quoted example. In turn, Basil was an ecclesiastical writer large parts of whose prolific output were of doubtful authenticity. His name has been wrongly associated with the authorship of the \textit{Acts and Miracles of St Thekla} (BHG 1717 and 1718), a saint who became a model for all other women saints; in fact, she is described as an apostle and the first woman martyr for having been St Paul’s disciple and an exemplary virgin. Her shrine, in fact a cave that was the site of her grave, was located in a hill south of Seleukeia, a town in Cilicia-Isauria previously also known for its pagan sanctuaries. As its title denotes, the \textit{Acts and Miracles} is a work in two parts consisting first of a paraphrase of the second-century apocryphal \textit{Acts of Paul and Thekla} (BHG 1710–16) with the

\textsuperscript{81} For this identification and a discussion of the literary merits of this text, see Efthymiadi, ‘A Day and Ten Months in the Life of a Lonely Bachelor: The \textit{Other Byzantium} in \textit{Miracula S. Artemii} 18 and 22’. On the same collection, see Déroche, ‘Pourquoi écrivait-on des recueils de miracles? L’exemple des miracles de saint Artémios’; Kazhdan and Sherry, ‘Miracles of St Artemios’; and Kazhdan, \textit{A History of Byzantine Literature} (650–850), 27–35.

addition of a text about the end of Thekla’s life in Seleukeia (mod. Meriamlik), and then of a collection of 46 miracle stories covering a period of almost 90 years. Although all extant manuscripts agree in assigning the authorship of this text to Basil of Seleukeia, its editor Dagron convincingly rejected this attribution: this was not the minor work of a major writer, but the major work of a lesser one, an anonymous priest who was excommunicated by the bishop Basil. Written in ca. 444–448, the Acts and Miracles of St Thekla is an erudite work couched in archaising Greek and elaborate phrasing permeated with Homeric formulae and other classical reminiscences. It is another avowed example of classicising hagiography, similar in terms of literary orientation to the contemporary Philotheos Historia of Theodoret of Cyrthus. It is striking that both authors were conversant in the language and means of expression which also characterised the writings of the learned pagan elite whom they aimed to oppose.

This remarkable text, written in an ornate rhetorical style, finds its only literary parallel in the seventh-century miracle collection of Sts Kyros and John. By contrast, a collection with no high literary pretensions, dedicated to St Theodore Teron and preceded by his Enkomion, dates to a few years later, still in fifth-century Asia Minor. Its author was Chrysippos of Cappadocia, presbyter of Jerusalem, known to have been later consecrated Bishop of Scythopolis in Palestine (467–479). The 12 miracle stories are related in a rather dry fashion and set in an unnamed town which can probably be identified as Euchaita (mod. Avkat) in the Pontos, the place which hosted St Theodore’s cult in the Byzantine era and beyond. Although we may suspect that Passions continued to be produced on a local basis, the absence of new saints until the sixth century made Asia Minor a province of little importance to hagiography. A tentative exception may have been the anonymous vitae of a Paphlagonian saint, Hypatios, shadowy bishop of Gangra in the fourth century who allegedly took part in the Council of Nicaea (325) and later on fell victim to the Novatian heretics. The interest of his dossier (BHG 759–759f) lies in the co-existence of legendary and historical elements, an example of which is the mention in the relatively early vita BHG 759a of the exemption of the saint’s flock from the imperial xylelaion tax. The other full-length vita BHG 759, which must be later than

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83 See ‘L’auteur des Actes et des miracles de sainte Thècle’, 5–11. Conversely, Basil of Seleukeia has been taken for granted as the author of the collection by Delehaye, ‘Les plus anciens recueils de miracles des saints’, 49–57; and Festugière, Collections grecques de miracles: sainte Thècle, saints Cosme et Damien, saints Cyr et Jean (extraits), saint Georges, 13ff.

84 On the socio-cultural parameters of St Thekla’s cult in Seleukeia, see Davis, The Cult of St Thekla: A Tradition of Women’s Piety in Late Antiquity, 36–54; on the literary character of fifth-century hagiography on St Thekla, see Johnson, The Life and Miracles of Thekla. A Literary Study.

85 Chrysippos was a disciple of the famous ascetic St Euthymios and, as such, he is mentioned in the latter’s vita by Cyril of Scythopolis (BHG 647–8 – p. 25, 35 etc.)

the sixth century, is noteworthy for its rhetorical style.\textsuperscript{87} Another Paphlagonian was the stylite Alypios, who, thanks to his longevity (he died at the age of 99), was a contemporary of both St Symeon the Younger (d. 592) and the Emperor Herakleios (610–641). When as a deacon and \textit{oikonomos} he tried to flee eastwards, he was prevented by his bishop but found a place of ascetic isolation in a pagan necropolis where he successfully fought with the demons. To escape the flood of disciples, he retired to a pillar where he remained for 67 years.\textsuperscript{88} His \textit{vita} (BHG 65) was written by an anonymous monk from his monastery at a rather later period, but its paucity of prosopography, miracle record and concrete details, makes it pale in comparison with that of Symeon the Younger. The hagiographer includes in the narrative monologues in the form of prayers and visions and highlights the role of Alypios’ mother in supporting her son’s \textit{askesis}.

It was only in the last decades of the late antique period and thanks to two significant \textit{vitae} that the hagiography of Anatolia experienced a vigorous, though brief, revival. Both texts have striking similarities: inconsistency in chronology but accuracy in topography, representation of a waning paganism no longer understood as a religion, the hero’s devotion to a special patron saint, precocious distinction by the bishop and early (i.e. anticanonical) ordination, accession to the episcopate and ensuing failure, and tensions between city and countryside. Firstly, the anonymous \textit{Life of Nicholas of Sion} is the work of one of the saint’s disciples in his monastery of St Sion at Akalissos, somewhere in the Lycian mountains north of Myra.\textsuperscript{89} Written not long after the death of the saint in 564,\textsuperscript{90} the text has been preserved in only two manuscripts because the memory of this Nicholas has been overshadowed by that of his much more illustrious namesake, Nicholas bishop of Myra in the fourth century.

The \textit{vita} is remarkable for its poor intertextuality: the author’s only reading seems to have been the Bible, from which he draws citations and narrative patterns. Its order is roughly sequential, starting with the foundation of the monastery by Nicholas the Elder, Nicholas’ uncle, and followed by the predestined birth of Nicholas in whom the elder Nicholas immediately recognised his successor. Yet the author is clearly unable to provide an exact date of birth for the saint, though a date \textit{ca}. 500 seems probable, and in fact the whole \textit{vita} evidently lacks precise dating indications, except for the date of the saint’s death (always recorded for cult purposes). All in all, the author is more familiar with the microgeography of the area

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{87} See ODB 962; Laniado, ‘La Vie d’Hypatius de Gangres (BHG 759a), Jean Malalas et l’impôt du \textit{xylélation’}.
\item \textsuperscript{88} Kaplan, ‘Le choix du lieu saint d’après certaines sources hagiographiques byzantines’.
\item \textsuperscript{89} As suggested by Harrison, this monastery was probably situated in mod. Karabel; see ‘Churches and Chapels of Central Lycia’. There are no clues to allow us to identify the author with a particular ‘brother’ mentioned in the \textit{vita}.
\item \textsuperscript{90} Ch. 80 places the saint’s death in the thirty-eighth regnal year of Justinian (527–565). The word \textit{μακαρίου} in the dating formula has been interpreted as an allusion to Makarios II, then patriarch of Jerusalem (so Anrich, II, 216; I. and N.P. Ševčenko, 17), but it is safer to interpret it as a simple adjective, ‘of blessed memory’ (Blum, \textit{Die Vita Nicolai Sionitae}, 127).
\end{itemize}
(the *vita* is teeming with toponyms) than with chronology. The only recognisable historical fact is the well-known epidemic of bubonic plague which affected the empire in 541/542 (ch. 51–2), when Nicholas was already powerful enough to be credited with protecting Myra from this evil (ch. 53). The text thus seems to be a conflation of oral testimonies and direct eyewitness reports. Nonetheless, this does not point to a purely objective approach on the part of the author; for at least in two main points he must have left his mark. In the first place, he consistently gives a negative picture of Nicholas’ elder brother, Artemas, though not without contradicting himself: the first mention of Artemas relates his appointment as Nicholas’ second-in-command (δευτεράριος) from the time of the foundation of the monastery (ch. 7), but later references to him show him blundering and inappropriately contesting his brother’s pre-eminence. Nonetheless, he is never said to be deprived of his position of deuterarios (chs. 39, 44–7, 56) and in the end he becomes archimandrite after Nicholas’ death (ch. 78). It is difficult to escape the conclusion that Artemas was not so discredited by his brother and most of the other monks as the author would have us believe, and that this animosity toward Artemas probably has more to do with a power struggle after Nicholas’ death.\(^91\)

The second bias due to the author is the attempt to diminish the all-important role of the uncle Nicholas the Elder, the true founder of the monastery, as much as possible without, however, wiping out the main highlights of his overall role.

This appropriation of the deeds of Nicholas the Elder in the *vita* of his nephew is probably partly subconscious: many features of the narration point to some confusion, especially as regards the beginnings of Nicholas’ career for which eyewitnesses were probably few and aging when the *Life* was written. Some instances point to a duplication of narrative units, possibly by conflation of separate oral and/or written records which the author collected without understanding that they were different records of the same deeds, for instance the two pilgrimages, or the accounts of the construction of the monastery.\(^92\) The obscurity of the circumstances of the *Life*’s composition is in sharp contrast with the clarity of the picture of provincial life furnished in the text. The hagiographer faithfully records the villagers’ woes and Nicholas’ interventions to alleviate them, either by tracking down a water source for a thirsty village (chs. 20–24) or, more often, by felling the old pagan sacred trees, which were by then thought of as demonic lairs to be eradicated (ch. 15 etc.). The tension between the country and the city comes to the fore with the conflict between the bishop of Myra, who was convinced that

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\(^{91}\) The parallel with the figure of Angoulas in the *Life* of Symeon Stylites the Younger is striking. This also has a bearing upon the date of the *vita*: it is hardly possible to regard it as having been written during Artemas’ own abbacy and some distance in time must be assumed, a fact that would explain many inconsistencies in the text.

\(^{92}\) For a good summary of these issues, see Blum, *Die Vita Nicolai Sionitae*, 92, who, in other instances (p. 8 and 115), rightly suggests that the author made use of some kind of monastic archive within the Holy Sion, but probably in the form of separate texts. If so, the pronoun ‘we’ is no proof that the author was an eyewitness, because this ‘we’ alludes to the authors of the testimonies used.
St Nicholas was setting up some kind of economic blockade of his city, and the saint who resists arrest orders through the villagers’ support (ch. 53). The power of the monastery is also evident in the construction of a church of considerable size (ch. 39) and in the large sums that Nicholas handled (chs. 58 and 69).

To judge by its poor manuscript tradition (three codices in all), the vita of Theodore of Sykeon (BHG 1748) was little known during the Byzantine period. Quite deservedly, however, it has enjoyed a wider reception among modern scholars mostly thanks to its lively and forthright style. Its author, Eleusios-Georgios (George), provides his account with autobiographical details either with regard to his own education or his relationship with the saint. It is difficult to deduce when exactly he wrote this Life; he surely took up the task during the last years of the saint’s life (ch. 165), and in ch. 2 begs his audience, namely older monks, to be tolerant of his limited literary skills and mindful of his young age (quite understandable for a twenty-something writer). The fact, however, that he reproduces Theodore’s prophecy that the reign of Heraclius (610–641) would last for 30 years (ch. 166) rounded off with the mention ‘and that happened’ would suggest that the work could not have been written before 640–641, and the episode is so well knit into the text that it is difficult to pass it off as a later copyist’s addition. The most probable solution to the problem is that George himself edited his youthful draft after 640–641, a fact that would also explain the highly rhetorical introductory prologue.

Theodore was born during Justinian’s reign (527–565) as the illegitimate son of a female innkeeper at Sykeon, on the imperial road from Constantinople to Ancyra. The boy’s household was obviously richer and more educated than most of the country folk around, but also socially marginal. The town was in itself unimportant, but located on a road carrying many important personalities: emperors, generals and other magnates made their way through Sykeon, thereby offering Theodore many opportunities. He was acquainted with no fewer than four patriarchs and three emperors, and visited the capital frequently. He was consecrated priest at the uncanonical age of 18 (ch. 21), and thereafter went on to found a monastery, acquire many disciples and make two journeys to Jerusalem before he met Maurice.

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94 So far the most acute investigation of the vita’s date of composition has been that by Rosenqvist, ‘Der Text der Vita Theodori Syceotae in cod. Atheniensis BN 1014’, 173–4 (esp. n. 27 regarding Theodore’s lifespan).

95 This second redaction at a later date does not lend support to D. Baker’s hypothesis (‘Theodore of Sykaion and the Historians’) that the shorter recension as in the Athens manuscript was a first draft, whereas this is merely a later abridgment by a copyist, as put forward by Festugière, Vie de Théodore, XXVII–XXIX. George’s patent lack of skill explains the fact that the information he gives about himself is scattered in three chapters (chs. 22, 165 and 170) and conspicuously absent from the introduction. There is no clear compositional unity in the vaguely chronological succession of the 170 chapters.
(ch. 54) towards the end of Tiberios’ reign (578–582). Accordingly he was probably born before 540.96

In spite of these encounters with important people, Theodore was a ‘low level saint’, i.e. generally associating with humble people and having few connections with influential people.97 His biography is also a low level vita, written in simple language.98 George is not really a learned author, but something in-between, quite able to master correct language and use some rhetorical devices together with many hagiographical references and topoi. Two miracles in his account are known from other authors: that of the impure liturgical vessel (ch. 42) is found in the History of Theophylact Simocatta while the miracle of the rain in Jerusalem (chs. 50–51) clearly derives from Cyril of Scythopolis. Moreover, the narrative of Theodore’s birth and childhood is partly modelled upon one of the legends developed around the life of the Emperor Constantine.99

Historically, this vita is an outstanding document, recording little-known features of rural life. It also attests to the cult of saints through Theodore’s particular devotion to St George.100 The holy man mediates successfully between believers and an abusive administration, emperors and patriarchs and he performs healing miracles on a routine basis. It is no surprise that this last gift was ‘transferred’ to the saint’s monastery, which alone would provide a motivation for the writing of his vita. Although posthumous miracles are absent from the extant Greek text, the Slavonic version edited by D. Afinogenov allows us to fill this lacuna at the end of the text (ch. 170).101

The Case of Leontios of Neapolis

The lively and simple prose style which was characteristic of the last two biographies is also apparent in the œuvre of a seventh-century writer who hailed from the island of Cyprus. Apart from an Apologia contra Iudaeos, preserved only in fragments but fitting well into the context of the forced baptism of the Jews by Herakleios in 632, Leontios of Neapolis (mod. Limassol) wrote at least three hagiographical texts, the

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96 Festugière, Vie de Théodore, II, 176, suggests around 530, if the illness of ch. 8 is the Justinianic plague of 542–543, and that he died in 613, the third year of the reign of Herakleios (ch. 170). See also Déroche, ‘La forme de l’informe: la Vie de Théodore de Sykéon et la Vie de Syméon Stylie le Jeune’, 367–85.


98 Survey of its language in Rosenqvist, Studien zur Syntax und Bemerkungen zum Text der Vita Thedori Syceotae.

99 On the two miracles see Festugière, Vie de Théodore, II, 196–8, 204–5 and Rydén, Bemerkungen über das Leben des heiligen Symeon, 36–8.

100 Cf. Walter, ‘The Origins of the Cult of Saint George’.

101 On the Slavonic version, see Afinogenov, Žitie prepodobnogo otca našego Feodora archimandrita Sikeonskogo.
Greek Hagiography in Late Antiquity (Fourth–Seventh Centuries)

vitae of John the Almsgiver, of Symeon Salos, and of Spyridon of Trimithous. It is from the prologue of the first of these that we draw information about the author and his earlier work, the now lost Life of St Spyridon, which Garitte has shown to have been a simple transcription in prose of the older vita in verse by Triphyllios. More significantly, this prologue tells us that Leontios, in spite of his own insignificance, dared to take up this task at the behest of his superior who can have been none other than the Archbishop of Constantia, i.e. of Cyprus. Fortunately, two glosses of this prologue in one of the oldest manuscripts identify this archbishop with Arkadios, who died in 641–642 as documented in the Coptic chronicle of John of Nikiou. As this fits well with the mention of the young Emperor Constantine being already dead (ch. 5), this vita dates from 641–642.

John the Almsgiver was patriarch of Alexandria (610–620), but he was born in Cyprus and also died there, at Amathous where he was buried, after having fled the Persian invasion of Egypt. Granted, the last chapters of the vita, which comprise the posthumous miracles which occurred by the saint’s grave, fulfil the purpose of propagating a local cult. Yet the text clearly has a larger aim which is to promote a kind of religious spirituality and possibly to enhance the prestige of Cyprus after some compromises reached by Arkadios with the followers of the Monothelite movement, which by 641–642 was clearly losing ground. This vita has another declared oddity: it aims to complete an already existing vita of John, written by John Moschos and Sophronios the Sophist, i.e. the writer of the Spiritual Meadow and the person to whom it was dedicated (hence Leontios’ unusual title, Eis ta leipomena/On the missing parts). The full text of this other vita has not survived, but we possess two independent anonymous summaries (BHG 887v and 887w, Nov. Auct.), which allow us to perceive the different arguments: Sophronios and Moschos portrayed John the Almsgiver more as an ecclesiastical and political leader, whereas Leontios made him a model of charitable activity.

This portrayal made Leontios’ text popular to the extent that it was often quoted and imitated. It was translated into Latin by Anastasios Bibliothecarius in the ninth century, and also into Syriac and other languages. This popularity would go some way to explaining the complicated textual tradition. Its first editor Gelzer identified two recensions, and edited the shorter one using the supplementary material from the other recension in the apparatus. Its second editor Festugière found two manuscripts of an even longer version, which was patently the original one, also confirmed by an uncial palimpsest that he failed to use. Moreover, two manuscripts preserve a fourth version which represents a mixture of that long version with the shorter one. In essence, the text edited by Festugière with a few emendations is the closest to the original we can attain, but a new critical edition of

102 On Leontios’ other work, see Déroche, ‘L’Apologie contre les Juifs de Léontios de Néapolis’.
105 See Déroche, Études, 25–36.
106 See Déroche, Études, 43–61.
all the versions, which are in effect *metaphraseis before Symeon Metaphrastes*, remains a desideratum.

Unlike his predecessors, Leontios consciously used very different registers of Greek, from real rhetoric in the prologue to concessions to true vulgarisms in the dialogues of his heroes: as declared in the prologue, Leontios’ aim was to produce a text that even the uneducated could read. Unlike the hagiographers of Symeon Stylites the Younger, Nicholas of Sion, and to some extent the monk George (author of the *vita of Theodore of Sykeon*), Leontios was a competent writer with a rare concern for accessibility, purposely mixing popular elements with sophisticated forms of composition.

Leontios’ text is indeed almost a loose succession of edifying tales without any clear chronological order, except for the beginning (enthronement of the patriarch) and the end (flight and death in Cyprus). Surprisingly, the *Life* pretends to be a simple report of John’s deeds as related by an eyewitness, the archdeacon Menas of Alexandria, and copied down word for word by Leontios at Alexandria, which is impossible.107 Clearly Menas is an invention of the author because, unlike John Moschos and Sophronios, he did not himself witness John’s deeds during his patriarchate. The content relates to the *realia* of John’s career, e.g. the subsidies sent to relieve Jerusalem when it was sacked by the Sasanians in 614 (ch. 18), but the round numbers of some figures (1,000 gold nomismata, 1,000 sacks of grain, 1,000 flasks of wine, etc.) are no doubt legendary. What is more, some stories are to be found in nearly identical form in collections of edifying tales to the point where, to a large extent, it may be said to be a sort of *paterikon*, a collection of the deeds of one or many holy fathers (*pateres*), and Leontios even introduces some stories not as John’s own deeds, but as part of his reading which he would have transposed into edifying advice for his flock (ch. 50, pp. 400–401). By and large the text is much less naive than other *vitae* of the same period. Instead of simply endorsing local vested interests such as those of a sanctuary or a monastery, Leontios provides a colourful apology for general ideas such as the need for charity and the belief that God rewards in this world those who practise virtue.108

His other extant *vita*, that of Symeon Salos or the Fool (*BHG* 1677), was slightly less widely disseminated in the Byzantine era and had a more simple manuscript tradition, but nonetheless left a deep mark on Byzantine hagiography and spirituality: the holy fool for Christ is a perfect saint who feigns madness in order either to avoid vainglory and enjoy greater spiritual advancement, or to get closer to sinners and guide them onto the way of salvation.109 The circumstances of the composition of this life are more elusive than those of the previous *vita*: the prologue does not hint at any commissioner, and the epilogue has the protagonist dying

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107 Some apostrophes to the reader (e.g. ch. 8: ‘the tale is going to say…’) can stem only from Leontios himself. On his sources, see Déroche, *Études*, 117–53.


109 Both Symeon the Fool and John the Almsgiver acted on the assumption that much of society had been estranged from the established Church, and they tried to approach these social outcasts (e.g. Jews, heretics, or other kinds of sinners) in unconventional ways.
alone and unknown. Like the *vita of John*, this text promotes a general ideology, a form of spirituality, without any suggestion of direct material interest. The question of its date remains open. Given that it is not mentioned in the prologue of the *vita of John*, where Arkadios is said to have also ordered the *vita of Spyridon*, we can infer that Symeon’s *vita* was not written until 642. But the argument could be reversed: the redactional carelessness of Leontios could work in both ways (rather than erroneously recording, in the prologue of Symeon’s *vita*, an episode about some prostitutes which was present in an earlier text – John’s *vita* – he may have alluded to an episode he intended to insert into John’s *vita*, but forgot to, and then used this material in Symeon’s *vita*).\(^{110}\)

The writing process is more puzzling. Leontios explains in the prologue that he had written an earlier (no longer extant) Life, but that he had subsequently found more material. This state of affairs may have been reflected in the *vita*’s division into two parts. The first half of the text which refers to Symeon’s monastic calling and training in the desert, has a clear structure (progression from cenobitism to eremitism, and then to holy folly), is lacking in facts and laden with rather verbose passages; the second half, the saint’s career as a holy fool beginning with the entry to Emesa, is a loose succession of tales without a clear chronology (as in the *vita of John the Almsgiver*) but vivid and rich in concrete details, and is written in a much simpler and sometimes colloquial Greek. In the light of this dichotomy, one may plausibly wonder whether either of these two sections should be identified with the supplementary material.

An obvious source for Leontios must have been Evagrios’ *Ecclesiastical History* (completed soon after 594), which devotes a short section to Symeon.\(^{111}\) Contrary to the reliable Evagrios, who places Symeon’s *floruit* in Emesa around 550, Leontios shifts Symeon’s chronology roughly 30 years later to give credence to his ‘fictional’ eyewitness, the deacon John, who in this instance takes up a role similar to the archdeacon Menas in John’s *vita*. As has been suggested, Leontios, already interested in the character of Symeon, found a detailed text, a *paterikon* that was more or less the second part of the present *vita*, and produced the first part on the model of Evagrios’ framework, filled with impersonal *topoi* so as to give plausibility to a truly puzzling character.\(^{112}\) The alternative solution posits that Leontios’ invention is the second part, an adaptation of tales about the Cynic philosophers, whereas

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\(^{110}\) On its date see also Rydén, ‘The Date of the Life of St. Symeon the Fool’.


\(^{112}\) See Mango, ‘A Byzantine Hagiographer at Work: Leontios of Neapolis’. Nevertheless in the first part there are some short passages, colloquial and concrete, that must also have derived from that older source, and in the second part some rhetorical pieces which are surely Leontios’ own inspiration: see Déroche, *Études*, 96–116.
the first part would be the older source. In his turn, Rydén has provided the most plausible reconstruction, maintaining that Symeon practised an extended imitatio Christi, which would be quite incompatible with paganism. Wherever the solution to the puzzle lies, Leontios’ texts are hagiography par excellence, transforming as they do myth into historical fact. Paradoxically, his vitae are the most faithful testimonies of early Byzantine daily life. In a sense, Leontios could not have expected to be believed had he not recorded everyday life in every detail.

**Cyprus**

Leontios’ close ties with Cyprus justify a reference here to the hagiography of an island which, since the apostolic age, had occupied a significant place in the Christian history of saints. Four texts produced locally about local saints deserve particular attention for their literary and other merits. To begin with, the *Enkomenion of the Apostle St Barnabas* (*BHG* 226), St Paul’s disciple, by Alexander, a monk at the monastery of St Barnabas near the city of Salamis, is arranged in three distinct parts: it starts with an endless succession of rhetorical praises to the saint, then proceeds to his biography and martyrdom drawing on and quoting at length episodes and words from the Acts of the Apostles. In the final section the narrative is transferred to the time of the Emperor Zeno (474–491) to give a detailed account of the miraculous and visionary discovery of the saint’s tomb on Cyprus (488) and his myrrh-scented relic. Internal evidence points to a date towards the second half of the sixth century. A monk named Alexander is the author of a rhetorical text on the *Discovery of the Holy Cross* (*BHG* 410) which chronicles the history of the Christian symbol par excellence from the creation of the world down to the reign of Constantine and its discovery as a holy relic by his mother Helena. Arguments have been made both for and against identifying the one author with the other.

Two other holy bishops and renowned saints of Cyprus were celebrated in vitae with interesting particularities. Hailing from Phoenicia-Palestine Epiphanios was Bishop of Salamis from 367 to his death in 403, becoming known as a theologian

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113 See Krueger, *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius’ Life and the Late Antique City*. The problem with this interpretation would be that this source is reduced to a colourless text which would not have greatly advanced Leontios’ work, and it remains difficult to explain the actions of Symeon at Emesa purely in the light of his pagan predecessors.

114 See Bemerkungen über das Leben des heiligen Symeon, 34–8, 85–7.

115 By way of example, the prologue of John’s vita is the only source to give the price of a visit to the public bath in that period.

116 The most comprehensive study of Cypriot saints remains that of Delehaye, ‘Saints de Chypre’.

117 On this episode, see, among others, Megaw, ‘The Campanopetra Reconsidered: the Pilgrimage Church of the Apostle Barnabas?’.

engaged in anti-heretical polemic. His biography (*BHG* 596–9) is a miscellaneous
text supposedly begun by his disciple John and, after the latter’s death, continued
by his disciple Polybios Bishop of Rhinokoroura. As was previously noted, an
overriding concern for the real author was to absolve the saint from the accusation
of having fiercely opposed John Chrysostom. Two letters referring to the burial
of the saint and exchanged between Polybios and Sabinos, Epiphaniados’ successor
in the see of Constantia (Salamis), conclude this complex work which is couched
in simple style. Jumbling together tales, dialogues, journeys and other novelistic
components, this rather exceptional *vita* is interesting in yet another respect. The
episode of the miraculous cure by Epiphaniados of the Persian king’s daughter
embeds metrical dialogues which may betray the influence of fourth- and fifth-
century Syriac homilies (chs. 23–8).

In turn, a richer hagiographic dossier was reserved for the other renowned
Cypriot bishop and participant in the Council of Nicaea (325), Spyridon of
Trimithous. From the older *vita* or rather collection of miraculous stories in verse by
Triphyllos, bishop of Ledra (Nicosia) and legendary disciple of the saint, stemmed
two *vitae* in prose: the first, a text of modest size, has been anonymously preserved
in a single manuscript (*Laurentianus* XI, 9, dated to 1021) whereas the second was
written by Theodore of Paphos in the seventh century. As the latter declares (ch. 17),
he elaborated on the scant ‘Triphyllos’ material’ by adding episodes drawn from the
*Ecclesiastical History* of Socrates and other unnamed sources (cf. chs. 18–19).
Following on from the *vitae* of John the Almsgiver, this constitutes another ‘early’
case of a *metaphrasis* before Symeon Metaphrastes. Yet, despite his sophisticated
prose style, Theodore retains the dialogue form typical of the genre of edifying
tales and makes generous concessions to words and terms from the vocabulary of
the common people.

A product of local hagiography from the same period is the *Life of Auxibios* (*BHG*
204), a saint ascribed to the apostolic age, who came from Rome to Cyprus, was
acquainted with St Mark and was devoted to missionary work both before and
after his elevation to the bishopric of Soloi. The hagiographer drew on a number of
sources, including the Acts of the Apostles and the *vita Epiphanii*.

**Thessalonike and its Two Miracle Collections**

Co-existence of various saints’ cults in a same milieu, a common phenomenon
in other regions and major cities, was unknown in the second-greatest city of the
eastern empire’s European provinces. Since the fourth or fifth century and down to
the present day, Thessalonike has shown an almost exclusive devotion to its civic
patron, the young martyr and military saint Demetrios. The constantly renewed

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119 Detailed discussion of the *vita* by Rapp, ‘Epiphanius of Salamis: the Church
Father as Saint’; for the verses inset in the *vita*, see Rapp, ‘Frübyzantinische Dichtung und
Hagiographie am Beispiel der Vita des Epiphanius von Zypern’.

interest in his cult, variously manifested throughout the Byzantine period and from a certain moment on associated with the flow of myrrh from his relics, is nowhere better reflected than in his thick hagiographical dossier. Its most renowned ‘folders’ are the two seventh-century collections of *Miracula* which identify the saint’s miraculous activity not with the veneration of his tomb and relics in particular, but rather with the city as a whole.

Scholarly interest in these texts was kindled long ago by their valuable documentation of the Avar-Slavic invasions into the Balkans and the sieges of the city during the late sixth and seventh centuries. The first collection (with a complex manuscript tradition) derived from the rather rhetorical pen of the otherwise unattested John Archbishop of the city and is of a purely hagiographical character. Most of its 15 miracle stories date from the author’s own time which coincided with the reigns of the Emperors Maurice (582–602) and Phokas (602–610) as well as the early years of Herakleios (610–641). Miracles 13–15 refer to the miraculous relief of the siege of Thessalonike thanks to the intercession of the saint. Written 70 years later and preserved in a single manuscript, where its heading and beginning are missing, the second collection of six miracles complements the first; it consists of old stories from the time of John (mir. 1–3), of contemporary ones (mir. 4–5) and of one somewhat later addition (mir. 6).

The Conclusion of an Impressive Cycle

By virtue of their ‘historical’ orientation, the *Miracles of St Demetrios* are exceptional texts, not found elsewhere in the hagiography and more generally in the literature produced in Greek during late antiquity. Last in the line of what has been classed here as ‘urban hagiography’ and despite their happy endings, these two collections betray the reality of the insecurity experienced by a Christian population under continuous threat. The rise and spread of Islam in Palestine, Syria and Egypt as well as the settlement of the Balkans by the Slavs and the Bulgarians were the major causes of an overall recession and a decline in culture. In the ensuing period, up to the early years of the ninth century, people’s interest in literature and the arts was minimal. And hagiography was no exception.

Thus, towards the close of the seventh century, which was in many respects a high point and a remarkably flourishing period due to the presence of skilful
writers spread across the sprawling and diverse empire, Greek hagiography began to languish along with the rest of literature. This low point lasted almost the whole of the eighth century. What is more, in the first decades of the period traditionally known as the ‘Dark Age’ a certain scepticism must have developed towards something that late antique hagiography indulged in and promoted to excess, namely the paradox and the miraculous. By ca. 800, when interest in hagiographical writing was restored, all the key themes of late antique hagiography, be it the monastic desert, doctrinal discord and ecclesiastical tension, the clash of religions, or pilgrimage and travelling, were no longer there. Loss of territory, political instability and many social developments were to trigger major shifts in its means of expression, literary landscapes, types of heroes, basic themes and sources of inspiration. An age of wide geographical distribution, of plurality in saints and edifying themes, and of inventiveness in narrative techniques had come to an irreversible end.

NB: The parts of this chapter that refer to the vita of Symeon Stylites the Younger, Hypatios, Daniel the Stylite, Nicholas of Sion, Theodore of Sykeon, John the Almsgiver and Symeon Salos were written by V. Déroche. The parts on Pachomian hagiography and Daniel of Sketis are due to André Binggeli, while the contribution on Saints Pelagia, Abraham and his niece Maria, and Theodora of Alexandria is the work of Zissis Aïnalis.

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Alexander the Monk

123 On the literature produced in this period of transition, see Cameron, ‘New Themes and Styles in Greek Literature: Seventh–Eight Centuries’.
124 See Dagron, ‘L’ombre d’un doute: L’hagiographie en question, VIe–XIe siècle’. 
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Antony prosmonarios


Asterios of Amaseia


‘Daniel of Sketis’


Eusebios of Caesarea

**Eustratios the presbyter**

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**George the archimandrite**

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**Gregory of Nazianzos**

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**Gregory of Nyssa**

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**Gregory the Presbyter**

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**John and Polybios Bishop of Rhinokoroura**
John archbishop of Thessalonike

Leo of Sicily

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Martyrios Bishop of Antioch

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