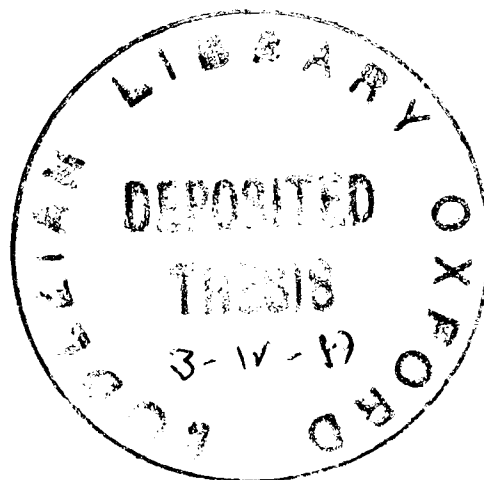


THE ORGANIZATION AND INSTITUTIONS OF FEMALE
ASCETICISM IN FOURTH CENTURY CAPPADOCIA AND
EGYPT

Dissertation in partial fulfilment of the
D.Phil. requirements of the Faculty of Literae Humaniores
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Trinity Term 1986

by Susanna K. Elm, St. Hilda's College

I. TEXT



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ABSTRACT

In discussing the organization and institutions of fourth century female asceticism I attempt to apply methods used in the study of history to a topic generally regarded as theological, and therefore almost neglected by scholars of Ancient History. I concentrate on monasticism neither as generic phenomenon, nor on its spiritual aspects. Rather, I try to identify the social, economic and legal basis of a specific form (female asceticism) in a specific environment (fourth century Cappadocia and Egypt). By reconstructing the process of organization and the developing institutions of female asceticism one discerns a great variety of models, starting with those most akin to the model of the family, and ending with models which call for a complete rupture with society, while based on scrupulous observance of the Scripture. Out of a constant interaction of these two extreme forms models of integration eventually developed, which were specifically created to suit ascetic needs. The survival of these synthesized organizational models depended on their practicality, and on the personality and doctrinal affiliation of charismatic leaders associated with them. The process of the organization of female asceticism is not isolated; it is important to the general development of early Christianity. It illustrates a problem central to Church History: the conflict between institutions and sectarian enthusiasm. The study of this process highlights the methods employed by the hierarchy in solving the paradoxical task of restraining extremes which grow from the teachings of the very Gospel the hierarchy propagates.

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A. INTRODUCTION

1. The origin and early development of monasticism, considered by classic historians as belonging to a different discipline, has always been one of the most central issues of Church history, and is accordingly the focal point of continuing controversy. When scholars evaluated "monasticism", their own theological and ecclesiological views were often decisive in their perception of the phenomenon. These views became relevant as a result of the Reformation. Monasticism became a tool used for furthering their competing arguments on the legitimacy of fundamental theological concepts. In attacking the monastic orders of his day, Luther, in 1521, returned to Antony as example, characterizing him as being in accord with the Gospel, in contrast to the catholic orders.¹⁾ Melanchthon in his Apologia justified the withdrawal of Antony, Bernhard, Dominicus, and Francis by their true adherence to the teachings of the Bible.²⁾ Neither Luther nor Melanchthon were concerned with historical investigation; both used the traditional concept of monasticism as an homogeneous phenomenon to argue their specific points. Yet Luther's criticism opened a new approach: did monks follow the patriarchs immediately or were there interim developments? In 1588 the Protestant R. Hospianius had already published the first study on the origins of monasticism. At the same time C. Baronius' catholic Annales ecclesiastici appeared. Both asked amongst other questions whether John the Baptist was the first anchorite and both answered according to their doctrine: the catholic stressing continuity and the protestant arguing a slightly more heterogeneous development.³⁾ Although the sixteenth and seventeenth century scholars argued their interpretation of monasticism with the apologetic and edifying methods standard at the time, they began to produce numerous editions of the relevant ascetic texts to support their argumentation. These texts laid the foundation for the more scientific approach which began two centuries later.⁴⁾ The doctrinal disputes over monasticism continued, and only in the nineteenth century did methods of scientific analysis begin to develop. H. Weingarten's essay "Ursprung des Mönchtums im nachkonstantinischen Zeitalter", provided the basis for an intensive discussion.⁵⁾ Subsequent research, especially if based on the synchronic approach as favored by Protestant scholars, not only established that early monasticism was influenced by a variety of

circumstances, but also that it was a complex phenomenon in itself. Fundamental works appeared which scientifically reconstructed and re-edited relevant texts;⁶⁾ provided closer insight into specific aspects of monasticism;⁷⁾ and investigated monasticism with archeological methods.⁸⁾ However, many works of the early twentieth century, either continued to investigate generic aspects of monasticism, which allows marginal phenomena to be ignored, or if they were based on a more synchronistic approach, confined marginal aspects to asides and footnotes. Thus many authors omitted an aspect of fundamental importance for an integrated and overall picture: the role of women in the development of early monasticism. In connection with the rise of feminism, the last decades have witnessed an increasing interest in matters related to female asceticism. Studies have concentrated on several key points: theological texts relating to virginity;⁹⁾ theological and social reasons for the role of virginity;¹⁰⁾ the development of specific aspects of female asceticism;¹¹⁾ and the development of female monasticism in light of the authors' general assumption that women are subordinate.¹²⁾ Again, authors used monasticism selectively to further their arguments in contemporary debates. Concentrating on aspects previously omitted, they nevertheless provide an incomplete picture of the historical facts. It is the object of this thesis to reconstruct as full and integrated an historical picture as possible, of a specific time, the fourth century, and of two specific regions, Egypt and Cappadocia. It will not focus primarily on the origins of the Christian perception of virginity and female asceticism, which would necessitate a partly anthropological study not only of Roman Antiquity and oriental religions of a different period, but also of the Old and New Testament and Judaism, nor the genesis of the doctrinal movements in vogue at the time, nor the theological facets of female spirituality (e. g. it will not dwell more than necessary on the literary genre of treatises De Virginitate). This thesis attempts simply to give the basis for a detailed understanding of the historical and social milieu of female asceticism. It intends thus to provide the historical and social description, which I consider to be essential for any proper study of female asceticism or its theological significance. The primary goal is to establish how the status of individual female ascetics developed, and how in time there arose ascetic communities

of women, or of men and women together. The problem as formulated is thus primarily an historical one, whose resolution will clarify aspects of social history, which have been almost completely neglected in traditional historical studies of Christianity in Late Antiquity. This said, however, it would be impossible to deal adequately with these historical problems without considering in some measure aspects of the theological implications, in so far as is necessary for proper historical understanding.

2. There are certain consequences which follow from the historical approach adopted in this thesis. The reconstruction and description of a historical period requires, as far as is feasible, that all relevant factors be taken into account. If this is not to become unwieldy, a specific area and limited time must be chosen. This study is restricted to the fourth century, because this was the time at which Christianity was legalized and, for that reason, new organizational models developed. At the same time, Christianity began to define itself through its own internal struggles, possible in the benign environment, which arose when official opposition ceased. This takes place against the background of other fundamental changes in the administration, economy and population of the Roman empire, which led eventually to its division into the Western and Eastern halves.¹³⁾ In these ways, the fourth century is crucial as a period of transition in which people had to devise new social models adequate to the changes they encountered.

In order to do justice to this particular subject, one cannot be restricted to literary sources. Other types of sources have to be consulted in order to augment, and, if need be, to correct literary sources, which are often written with aims other than that of representing actual occurrences. The main non-literary sources are the ecclesiastical and imperial canons, inscriptions and papyri.

The choice of sources is naturally dependent on the regions which are to be discussed. Syria, Palestine, North Africa, Italy, Southern France and Spain would also have been appropriate for study, since by the fourth century these regions have a tradition of ascetic movements. Consequently, they (some more than others) have attracted the attention of scholars.¹⁴⁾ The choice of Cappadocia and Egypt is based on several key factors. Both regions were of

central significance in the fourth century for secular as well as religious reasons. Cappadocia was a frontier province with extensive military installations, protecting the capital against eastern invasions. Egypt always held a separate position as the leading supplier of grain for Rome and then Constantinople.¹⁵⁾ Both became centres of religious debate early on, much like the other regions mentioned. More relevant is the fact that in both regions the theoretical discussion of the phenomenon "asceticism" reached a peak during the fourth century. In Cappadocia the three Fathers, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory Nazianzenus and Gregory of Nyssa laid the foundation of Eastern monasticism. In Egypt the same is true for Pachomius, Palladius, and above all, Athanasius. One figure in particular - who was of central importance to the development of "ascetic spirituality" - bridges both regions: Evagrius Ponticus.¹⁶⁾ Though Cappadocia does not provide us with many inscriptions, it was the scene of the most important ecclesiastical synods. Egypt offers a unique category of sources with its papyri.¹⁷⁾ The relative availability of the source-material stimulated an earlier and more advanced discussion of monasticism in both regions.¹⁸⁾ The choice of two regions rather than one is based on methodological considerations. Regionalism was a factor of far greater importance in the Late Antiquity than was previously assumed, and it increased with the decline of the capability of the central government (which no longer resided in Rome but had been transferred to Constantinople) to enforce its dictates throughout the Empire.¹⁹⁾ The fourth and subsequent centuries did not, therefore, witness the formation of "Roman Christianity", but the rise of many varied strands which only gradually came to adhere to a Roman or Greek Orthodox canon. The same is true for asceticism, which also arose in several different centres. A comparison of Cappadocia and Egypt allows one to gain greater insight into the relation between regional factors and unifying and centralizing tendencies. Both were united by their common history as part of the Roman Empire and by their early exposure to Christianity.²⁰⁾ At the same time, both had fundamentally different geographies, climates, and social, political, and economic structures.

Cappadocia forms a central plateau, bordering on highlands in the north which separate it from the Black Sea coast land, and limited by the Taurus range in the south and east. The plateau itself consists of undulating hills

interspersed with marshy basins and volcanic cones. The climate is continental, characterized by harsh winters (down to -30°C) and hot summers.²¹⁾ Urbanization was rare, concentrating in favorable areas like the Halys basin; the vast areas of open countryside formed the economic foundation of the region.²²⁾ Cappadocia's main products were rural: horses, sheep, and grain (slaves were also an export commodity).²³⁾ Both the geography and the nature of the economy favoured large scale exploitation. Indeed, the land was owned by three different groups, the 'possessores' (private land holders), the state, and the Church.²⁴⁾ The three Cappadocian fathers formed part of the first group - Basil's family, for instance, owned estates in three provinces. The exact extent of private latifundia remains unclear, but was considerable. These land holdings were maintained by coloni and a few free peasants.²⁵⁾ The private owners also exercised the principal political influence in accordance with their wealth.²⁶⁾ By the fourth century more land belonged to the imperial household than to the cities. This was partially brought about by the annexation of temple property after Constantine's conversion. These domains, used primarily to raise horses for the army, were concentrated in what in 372 became Cappadocia Prima, and were administered by the 'comes domorum divinarum', directly responsible to the emperor.²⁷⁾ The Church holdings had increased progressively since 312, either through private donations or annexation of former temple estates.²⁸⁾

Egypt comprised essentially the Nile valley, although it included the eastern highlands, and the western desert with deep saline basins and some inhabited oases.²⁹⁾ The valley itself is approximately 800 km long and on average 10 km wide, the river's width being on average 1 km. Egypt enjoys a uniform climate with average summer temperatures of 38°C and mild winters.³⁰⁾ The inhabited areas were densely populated, and the nature of the agriculture - based on intense irrigation after the annual flooding - made a centralized government a necessity for high productivity.³¹⁾ The principal landholders were the crown and the priests, who subleased to small tenants. From the beginning of the fourth century onwards the number of private possessors increased, partially brought about by the dissolution of temple estates. This trend did not, however, result in the vast latifundia of the western mediterranean.³²⁾ Church property likewise

increased only slowly, either through trade or donation; the donated land was often of lesser value.³³⁾ Since there was a considerable number of small land holders, the role of the coloni was different. Although a community was responsible for a certain amount of tax, thus regulating the migration from village to town, the individual was not bound to the soil. However, a decreasing irrigation efficiency combined with increasing inflation and tax requirements at times led to intolerable hardships. In consequence, some peasants fled into the desert (ἀναχωρησις).³⁴⁾ Alexandria, often called 'Alexandria ad Aegyptum', the Greek-speaking commercial, intellectual and ecclesiastical centre, played a role apart from the mainly Egyptian speaking κοινὴ. It was oriented towards the west and its urban influence, whilst still felt in Lower Egypt, gradually decreased the further south one went. This distinction between Alexandria and the koine is also reflected in the antipathy between the Egyptian peasants on the one hand and the 'hellenistic' upper class on the other. Though supported by Rome, this upper class never gained the same political influence as its counterpart in Cappadocia, and Christianity further deepened the hostility between this class and the Egyptian peasants.³⁵⁾

3. Since literary sources are the most important, I have employed throughout the classical methods of critical textual analysis as well as I am able. Despite the availability of sources, information on the organization of female asceticism is so scarce that this approach must be complemented by other methods. The nature of comparison offers an additional form of evidence. It helps to sharpen the perception of each of the various approaches. Comparison can also enable us to trace fragments of developments which come to light through argumentation *ex negativo*. It has also proved helpful to bear in mind the research methods used to study medieval monasticism, since many patterns of medieval monasticism developed along similar lines.³⁶⁾ A detailed comparison between fourth century and medieval monasticism is impossible. However, certain lines of analysis can be useful, especially since the classical historical analysis has not developed its own methodology for monastic studies.

As is the case when analysing younger religious movements, a confinement to orthodox authors is not defensible. Omitting non-orthodox and heretical

phenomena means leaving out an indispensable field for the reconstruction of the ascetic movement. It would also fail to reconstruct adequately the conditions at the time. By considering the entire spectrum of religious movements, it may be possible to follow the process of progressive institutionalization, and perhaps to trace recurring patterns, whereby extreme positions are repressed for the sake of moderate models of integration.

B. MAIN PART

I. CATEGORIES OF INSTITUTIONALIZATION AS DEVELOPMENT OF AN INDIVIDUAL STATUS AND THE FORMATION OF ORGANIZATIONS.

Institutionalization within the Christian Church is an issue as central as the origins of monasticism. How is a millenarian, sectarian movement transformed into a stable hierarchy? How does an idea find an organized form? What remains of the original idea in the process of institutionalization? How does the institution resolve the tension between charismatic leaders and a strict hierarchy? Between religious inspiration and well-defined laws? These questions, discussed in fundamental form by Max Weber, have been central for 19th and 20th century historiography.¹) It is not the aim here to discuss these major issues. Rather, more concrete questions will be discussed. Admittedly these will be formulated from a retrospective standpoint, by asking how later institutions originated. In this way, institutionalization is defined as a process involving three elements: normative factors, which regulate the life of the individual through customs, precepts, specific formalities, economic preconditions and the like; organized communities, which have a specific function for the individual and society; and the homogenous set of ideas, which constitute a religion. It will also be considered whether or not the process of institutionalization itself differs for men and women.

The first question is: how did the status of the individual female ascetic develop? Her status had to be distinct from the clergy and the lay-body. This status could therefore not remain strictly private, and had to be manifested in some way, for example by a distinct dress symbolizing a specific way of life. Adherence to this way of life had to be a prerequisite, guaranteed by certain legal obligations, for instance a vow. This life style had also to be regulated by certain norms. Although adherence to these norms was originally a voluntary decision, this decision was irreversible.

¹. Weber, M., *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie I*, Tübingen^o 1972, *Die protestantische Ethik* 17-206, esp. 84-206; *Die protestantischen Sekten* 207-36; id., *Economy and Sociology I and III* (transl. Roth, G. / Wittich, C., New York 1968) 1231, 1006-09

The pattern of institutionalization embodies a process of separation. In acquiring a new status, the individual progressively distances himself from his community, be it the family, the village, the church or the lay-body. An increase in institutionalization implies at the same time a progressive separation from familiar social models. The second question is: how did this transition from traditional to new models occur in the case of women? How does a woman distance herself from family, marriage, and congregation? What alternative models arise?

One alternative model is a new community. This naturally raises the question of how this new community would be constituted. Would it be based on a common way of life, on a common legal status, on common property, or on some combination of these? What is its internal organization? Are characteristic elements of institutionalization present, such as specific sets of norms and formalities, an internal hierarchy, a voluntarily accepted but obligatory affiliation, and an element of continuity? What is the relation to existing institutions? In the context of the last question society's reaction has to be considered. Does the process of transition from familiar social models create resistance? Is institutionalization seen as an affront? If so, what are the reasons? Could groups in the process of institutionalization be mistaken for others already subject to negative criticism?

These and related questions form the basic issues in the following study. However, the fundamental objective of this thesis is historical. Its aim is to describe progressive developments and to take a great variety of contemporaneous models into account. Therefore, often neither exact answers nor definitions are possible, as certain customs had not yet been sufficiently defined. It is my aim to provide the general outline of the types of female asceticism, thus giving a basis for further detailed investigations.

II. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE STATUS 'FEMALE ASCETIC' AND FIRST ORGANIZATIONAL MODELS IN FOURTH CENTURY CAPPADOCIA

1. BEFORE BASIL OF CAESAREA (300-350)

a) The Virgo Deo Dicata

The fathers who assembled in Ancyra on occasion of the synod, which took place in 314, dealt in canon 19 with problems of the virginal life.¹⁾ Since the synod was made up of bishops and priests not only from the province Galatia, but also from the neighbouring provinces Cappadocia and Pontus,²⁾ it is reasonable to assume that there were not only Galatian but also Cappadocian questions subject to discussion. If so canon 19 may be considered the first mention of female ascetic life in ecclesiastical legislation, not only in Asia Minor but also in Cappadocia. The canon 19 reads:

ὁ σοι παρθενίαν ἐπαγγελόμενοι, ἀθετοῦσι τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν, τὸν τῶν διγάμων ὅρον ἐκπληρέτωσαν· τὰς μὲν τοὶ συνερχομένας παρθένους τισὶν, ὡς ἀδελφὰς, ἐκωλύσαμεν·

Text and content of the canon, which deals with people 'virginitatem profitentes', leaves no doubt that it is concerned, either wholly or in part, with women who distinguished themselves by proclaiming virginity. As the expression ἐπαγγέλλω indicates, and the character of the canon corroborates, this profession was of a legal and public nature.³⁾ The persons involved must have openly declared their intention to remain virgins. The canon, however, does not emphasise the actual mode of the profession. Neither is it concerned with any precondition or context of the proclaimed status of virgin; it deals, on the contrary, with consequences of its violation: those who broke their profession are defined as διγάμοι.

Already before 314, at the council of Elvira in 306 in Southern Spain, Fathers issued a canon dealing with exactly the same question. Here we learn in canon 13:

"Virgines, quae se Deo dicaverint, si pactum perdiderint, virginitatis, atque eidem libidini servierint, non intelligentes quod amiserint, placuit, nec in fine eis dandam esse communionem. Quod si semel persuasae, aut infirmi corporis lapsu vitiatae, omni tempore vitae suae huiusmodi feminae egerint penitentiam, ut abstineant se a coitu, eo quod lapsae potius videantur, placuit, eas in fine communionem accipere debere."⁴)

Both canons presuppose, the one explicitly, the other implicitly by addressing both sexes, the existence of women who undertook a quasi-legal obligation, which was seen as binding by the community. In other words, they vowed to maintain their virginity.⁵) It remains open whether or not 'pactum' and ἐπαγγελία have an equivalent legal value, in the sense just indicated. The gravity with which the assembled Fathers at either council viewed violation of the vow differs profoundly. Whilst the Ancyran Fathers speak only briefly of the trespass and consequent punishment, the Elvirans proceeded to make more discriminations. They distinguish between the degree of repentance on the part of the lapsed virgin and decree either de facto excommunication or re-admission to community only on the death-bed.⁶) The Ancyran Fathers considered the same lapsed as 'bigamoi'. 'Bigamoi' (this is the technical term for widowers who remarry) were traditionally held in low regard in Christian circles.⁷) The introduction of legal measures to punish bigamoi was, however, a slow process. Bishops from Pontus, Cappadocia, and neighbouring provinces declared in canon at the local synod of Neocaesarea between 314 and 325:

"De his qui in plurimas nuptias inciderunt, tempus quidem praefinitum manifestum est: sed conversatio eorum et fides tempus abbreviat."

In canon 7 they prevent presbyters from attending banquets held at weddings of bigamoi, since 'cum penitentia bigamus egeat.'⁸) The exact nature of the penitence remains completely open; bigamoi were frowned upon but apparently not punished with extreme severity.⁹)

In Spain virgins who violated their vow were punished far more severely than their contemporaries in Asia Minor. Excommunicated de facto as they were, these Spanish virgins were excluded from their congregation. The Church itself no longer regarded them as members. In legal terms this reaction suggests that the Church understood either itself or Christ as the official partner of the contract concluded with the 'pactum'. The lapse was a breach of contract initiated by the virgin, in consequence of which the Church now rejected her. Thus the punishment indicates a greater degree of institutionalization in Spain, virgins almost being considered

to have a status perhaps comparable with that of the clergy. In Ancyra the punishment can be interpreted as mirroring a lesser degree of institutionalization. The virgin does not violate a contract with the Church, but a contract on the personal and individual level of marriage. In being defined as 'bigamos' the virgin must have been married. This marriage, the authenticity of which is ascertained by its public profession, is conceivable as spiritual marriage between virgin and Christ. The second half of canon 19 of Ancyra suggests an alternative solution in prohibiting the cohabitation of virgins and certain brothers.

Textual variations confirm that both sexes were probably implied; the combination intended is 'a man and a woman living together as brother and sister', rather than several men forming a community. Obviously men and women were living in a virginal marriage, proclaimed publicly and considered binding for life. The character of this marriage must have been such that actual consummation was considered adultery. This apparent paradox leads again to the conclusion that both parts were de facto married to someone else, to the Church or to Christ in spiritual union.

If someone decided to live ascetically, society offered only a limited variety of possible forms within which to implement that decision: either as daughter or son within their own family or as husband and wife in a new ascetic family-pattern. The latter was previously accepted as valid, but the Fathers now considered it as illegal, obviously because of inherent dangers. To summarize the information gathered from these sources, it seems that Elvira attests a higher degree of institutionalization than Ancyra; for at Ancyra the ascetic woman held a more personally and spiritually perceived status. The commonly expressed opinion that Elvira and Ancyra attest only different subjective opinions of the Fathers present is possible; probability, however, points to the difference in custom outlined. Fathers acted on their own perception of the subject, but the difference between both can very well be an expression of customs diverging in the two provinces. Neither canon contains any further information regarding the life of virgins. Nothing definite can be said about their economic background, whether or not they lived as individuals in their families or in other communities, what numbers were involved or what their precise function within the congregation might have been.

This information has to be gathered from other sources.

b) A Religious Woman and a Prophetess

Cases illustrating the actual living conditions of women such as the ones mentioned in the canons are hard to find. At a time when Christian communities were developing under adverse circumstances, women practicing special forms of religious life cannot be expected to figure prominently in the sources. If they are mentioned at all the information given is scarcely detailed. As far as Cappadocia is concerned one particular woman attracts attention with regard to the canons of Ancyra, though she lived almost a century before the Fathers met.¹⁾

In his Historia Ecclesiastica Eusebius of Caesarea mentions that Symmachus, a famous translator of the Old and New Testaments, dedicated one of his books to one Juliana. Juliana did not keep the book for very long, but presented it to Origen.²⁾ At the beginning of the fifth century, Palladius wrote in his Historia Lausiaca about the following glossary he found upon reading a very old book:

"I found this book with the virgin Juliana when I was hidden in her house."³⁾

Palladius affirms that the note was written in Origen's own hand. There can be little doubt that the two ladies called Juliana are one and the same person, and that the Caesarea in question is the one in Cappadocia.

When in 230 Firmilianus was elected bishop of Caesarea, a period began which was to turn the town into one of the theological centers of the time. Firmilianus was not only a learned man himself, but also stood in close contact to leading figures especially of the Alexandrine school, for instance Dionysius, Cyprianus and Origen.⁴⁾ This contact was of practical value as well, as became evident in a time of crisis, precipitated by the persecution in Egypt in about 235. In view of the apparent danger Firmilianus invited his friends to await more peaceful times at Caesarea. Origen accepted the invitation; however, he spent his time in Caesarea-altogether two years - not with Firmilianus but in the house of Juliana.⁵⁾

Juliana was a lady of some means since she could afford to host Origen for two years without strain. She was also a Christian with marked theological interests. Symmachus dedicated a translation of the Bible to her, and she certainly stood in close contact with Firmilianus and

Origen, and through them in all probability with other known theologians of her time. Eusebius calls her "a certain Juliana", while in Origen's note she is described as 'παρθένοσ'. If Juliana's husband existed he is never mentioned; if he was alive such an omission would be unlikely (unless he were ignored as a pagan). If she were a widow, it is equally strange that she should not be described as such. At the time Origen arrived to live in her house she seems to have been on her own. This requires a moral standard clearly beyond any suspicion, for otherwise the fact that Origen and Juliana shared a house as an unmarried couple would not be mentioned so openly. Depending on the authenticity of Origen's note it is uncertain whether or not Juliana has to be described as 'parthenos'. This uncertainty notwithstanding, it is clear that Juliana fulfilled all requirements that would later classify her as 'parthenos.' She lived by herself, of independent material means and within her own house. At the same time her moral reputation was beyond suspicion, her theological interests well-known and profound. Even if she did not qualify to be styled as parthenos at Eusebius' time, despite the expression used by Origen, it is not surprising that Palladius deems her without hesitation worthy of the title; she would have been a 'parthenos' had she lived in his time.

At the same time another woman appeared on the religious scene of Caesarea and its environs. In his letter to Cyprian, bishop Firmilianus mentions a wave of spontaneous local persecutions, in reaction to an earthquake and executed with great cruelty.⁶⁾ All Christians were greatly perturbed, many left their homes to escape to neighbouring provinces. At this point:

"emersit istic subito quaedam mulier quae in extasin constituta propheten se praeferret et quasi Sancto Spiritu plena sic ageret".⁷⁾

This woman pretended to act under the influence of the Holy Ghost; she predicted the future, performed miracles, for instance walking barefoot in the snow without harm, and soon she caught

"mentes singulorum ut sibi oboedirent et quocumque praeciperet et duceret sequerentur".⁸⁾

Among her closest followers were a 'presbyterus rusticus' and a 'diaconus'.

Firmilianus eagerly points out that she knew them too well, and with them she celebrated the Eucharist and baptized several people. Only an exorcist could finally subdue this evil spirit and terminate her career.

Firmilianus' account is clearly marked by his outrage at being faced with what he perceives as "*principalium daemoniorum impetu*".⁹) The plain facts as he describes them simply present a woman, who clearly felt driven by a strong religious urge, probably caused by the natural disaster she had witnessed. She felt called by the Holy Spirit to challenge her fellow Christians. Apparently she encouraged them to leave house and home and "*quocumque praeciperet et duceret sequentur*". The prophetess claimed she came from Jerusalem and it was her intention to return, taking her followers with her. Whether Jérusalem, her goal, stands as a metaphor for a new Christian life modelled after the original congregation in Jerusalem, or whether she really wanted to go there, is entirely uncertain. It is, however, certain that her influence sufficed to attract members of the clergy, who along with the general public never doubted her legitimate right to perform liturgical acts - though according to Paul's prescriptions (I Tim 2: 11-13) - women were not allowed to do so. Thus she was exorcised and branded as demonic and possessed, before the example of a woman wandering about and challenging custom could form a precedent.

In about 235, in other words, a woman chose a very different way from that of Juliana to express strong religious sentiments. Unlike Juliana she left home and hence society, taking up a nomadic life of preaching, despite the most adverse conditions. Her conduct, though criticized by Firmilianus, and her message must have been fascinating enough to attract a following that responded to whatever she had to say. However, her way of expressing religious ideas was not appreciated by the clergy, who condemned her as a heretic and possessed.

c) The Parthenos as Member of a Family

Early examples of women realizing their special ascetic intentions thus represent different solutions. The prophetess, in her enthusiasm, wandered the country preaching. Juliana remained in her town and continued to live within her house as a single woman. For the latter solution two factors were essential, independent financial means and mature age. If they were lacking, the possible choices of ascetic ways of life were narrowed down considerably. In such cases the most obvious solution was to remain a member of the family, to attempt an ascetic life while material and social shelter was provided for by relatives. Juliana may well have started her ascetic life (if she led one) in this way. This practice was relatively inconspicuous compared to cases like the prophetess; individuals following it are scarcely attested in the sources, especially in Asia minor.

In 1953 D. Amand de Mendieta and M.-Ch. Moons published what they called Une curieuse homélie grecque inédite sur la virginité adressée aux Pères de famille.¹⁾ The homily is anonymous and it is difficult to ascertain in which region it originated. According to the editors the author was inclined towards encratite ideals, a movement popular in Asia Minor. However, a subsequent comparison with two Homilies by Eusebius of Emesa led the editors to assume that Antioch and the neighbouring provinces are a more likely region of origin.²⁾ The dating of the homily is of greater certainty. As the editors point out:

"...on placera volontiers la date de l'homélie... un peu avant celle où ont été prononcées les deux homélies d'Eusèbe d'Émèse," that is "avant le concile de Nicée."³⁾

Despite the fact that the Homily does not appear to belong to Cappadocia proper, it will be considered as illustrating a specific custom current at the time of the canons, and supported by later evidence from our area.

The actual topic of the homily and its title is virginity:

Περὶ παρθενίας . Apart from its general subject-matter, a second fact is immediately obvious: the homily is intended for parents, 'fathers of sons and mothers of daughters' (II: 10 / 37). Parents ought to persuade their children to remain virgins, or at least they must not prevent them or any other member of the household from doing so.⁴⁾ As in canon 19

children of both sexes are addressed but the context emphasizes fathers and daughters.⁵⁾ At first the author attempts to convince fathers of the advantages of keeping their daughters as unmarried girls. He then provides them with a series of practical suggestions as to how to organize a form of life for a virgin within the framework of ordinary family life.⁶⁾

In the first instance the girl's capabilities and her own wish to spend her life as parthenos have to be ensured, and she is therefore subjected to a period of close observation terminating in betrothal to the Lord (II 16-18 / 39). We do not know the precise mode of this betrothal, whether it had the form of a pactum or not; certainly no public or official ceremony is hinted at. The immediate consequences for father and daughter are, however, marked. The father becomes a priest, the keeper of a sanctuary, his virgin daughter. For her the regime of Christian practice has begun already in the trial period: her behaviour, her gestures, her eyes, the subject of her thoughts, the quality of her love, her endurance of fasting and her perseverance in Christian deeds, all have to be controlled and considered (II 18-19 / 39). Once betrothed the regime is intensified to a degree that almost entirely disregards the girl's physical and psychological needs. If necessary the father has to ignore actual physical harm done to the girl (II 24-25 / 41), since the end justifies any hardship. She is rigorously secluded, like a prisoner, within the house (II 34 / 41-43). Apparently not even visits to the Church are permitted, certainly not to nocturnal masses. Equally, funerals, even of relatives, give no valid reason to leave the house. Any contact with men is strictly forbidden; no one must enter the house, not even for religious purposes; and the girl has to observe her customary vigils (pannychismos) in darkness (II 34-37 / 41-43). The father has furthermore to control her bed at night in order to be the complete master of her behaviour.⁷⁾ The girl does not remain idle either. Under her father's surveillance she has to refrain from laughter, useless words, changing moods and all passions, while constantly reciting Scriptural passages on chastity. Sparse nutrition and simple dress are obvious accessories (II 38-39 / 43).

A father had to be persuaded by strong arguments to subject himself and his child to such a regime with the evident material disadvantages which unmarried daughters tend to cause. Hence the author is eager to

expand on the purpose of such a life: in deciding to become parthenos the girl is engaged to Christ in person.⁹) Her entire life serves to prepare her by maintaining spiritual and physical purity for an event to take place in heaven: the marriage with Christ (II 44 / 45). Christ, her betrothed, will receive her, granting her immortality in splendour as one of the wise virgins. Thus, on the basis of Mt 25 the purpose, motivation and aim of this virginal life are explained, it being important to notice that it is girls who are primarily intended as virginal brides, though boys are also addressed in the homily.¹⁰) Under such conditions fathers gained immensely in social prestige; they could, at the very least, look upon themselves as guardians of a heavenly bride. After all, even earthly considerations proved thus to be advantageous. No dowry had to be paid, there was no fear of stigma if a girl was ugly, of low class, or indeed made an orphan. The homilist assures that every one is welcomed, if virginal life is maintained as described.¹⁰) Some practical aspects of this engagement are, however, difficult to grasp. As has been said, the decision to become a parthenos is not marked openly by a public declaration. As the editors emphasized, the engagement takes place under the legal observation of the pater familias within the family.¹¹) Amand and Moons do not, however, emphasize another observation. Both the nature of the engagement and the purpose of virginal life lead to the conclusion that it was intended as a definite step with a binding character. In III 45, p. 45 we read that the girl could recant her decision. No punishment, no official reproach is mentioned, nor are parents supposed even to remonstrate with a girl who changed her mind. Reproach and remonstration are left entirely to the conscience of the girl, now faced with the disadvantage of marriage, like childbirth and its dangers or the troubles caused by a husband, and depressed by the thought of lost opportunities. In other words, in the same way that the original decision was a purely private affair, relegation is also left to the individual.

This leads to several conclusions. The homily does not belong within the radius of Elviran influence. If it was written within the sphere of influence of the Fathers present at Ancyra and after 314, it attests the ineffectiveness of synodical decisions, in as far as no official vow is mentioned (above p. 12). It attests on the other hand a strong affinity

to customs as described in canon 19. Virginity is treated as a personal commitment, made in private, but on a par with marriage. This marriage is conceived as spiritual, but has authentic character. The homily confirms further that ascetic aspirants remained part of their family, subjected to their father's authority and maintained by the family as far as material needs are concerned. What their influence within the congregation was and if their decision became public is impossible to prove, but has to be estimated.

d) From the Individual Parthenos to the Ascetic Family: Macrina

Between the years 380 and 383 Gregory of Nyssa wrote the biography of his elder sister Macrina, the Vita Sanctae Macrinae (VSM).¹⁾ Although he intended his work as a practical example of ideal ascetic perfection, his account is based on unquestionable historical details. Thus the VSM presents itself as a document describing the development from individual to communal, family-based ascetic life.²⁾

Macrina was born as the eldest of nine children in about 327, whether in Cappadocia or Pontus is not certain. Her father Basil the Elder commanded a considerable income which did not prevent him from presiding over a school of rhetoric at Neocaesarea. To what extent his profession also involved political engagements is still to be ascertained.³⁾ It is certain, though, that he and his family belonged to those levels of provincial landowners "from whom not only the curials in the cities but even new members of the senatorial order were chosen."⁴⁾ Basil and his wife Emmelia distinguished themselves, however, from many of their class by the long Christian history of their families.⁵⁾ Macrina's early life was spent much as to be expected of a young lady of her rank. Since she was, as Gregory emphasizes, a gifted girl, she learned easily and her talents soon became obvious (VSM 3: 4-6, 148). In accordance with the traditional custom that educated children - girls included - were regarded as a gift, she received a sound education.⁶⁾ The syllabus generally taught is well known: Homer, Plato, Demosthenes were most popular; the tragedies were slightly less common. As far as girls are concerned we are not as well informed.⁷⁾ Judging by Gregory's information, however, they were taught almost the same syllabus, because he insists that Macrina never studied tragedies nor, of course, comedies or the poets, clearly referring to Homer and his myths. Possible harm caused by indecencies in those myths is mentioned as reason for their omission: a topos frequently used by Christian writers.⁸⁾ Gregory and his brother Basil themselves did not comply with the former's own argument. Both had a very sound classical education and, considering that her father was a famous rhetorician, it seems quite impossible that Macrina

truly grew up without any notion of classical education or profane culture; a suggestion supported by Gregory's own account in De anima et Resurrectione.⁹⁾

It is, however, a characteristic of Macrina's education that she was educated at home by her mother and kept secluded from outside influence, especially male influence. Private education was no novelty, in fact it was quite common throughout antiquity, but the restrictive attitude of society towards Christianity had tended to make it a necessity for Christian children.¹⁰⁾ That her mother devoted herself to the daughter's education might be of interest. Whereas Gregory's emphasis on this fact may point to a certain novelty, this practice had become firmly established or at least strongly advised some years later. In 393-94 John Chrysostom addresses fathers as teachers of sons, and mothers as teachers of daughters.¹¹⁾

The model character of Macrina's early life and first education is quite obvious. Educated on the basis of Proverbs and Psalms, in complete seclusion, guided by an exemplary Christian personality, she fulfilled the educational ideal of authors like Gregory, Basil, and John Chrysostom who saw this path as essential to 'monastic' education and recommended exactly the same syllabus to younger members of monastic communities.¹²⁾ However, as Gregory himself suggests in De Anima et Resurrectione, Macrina's education was in reality not as secluded and exemplary as he styled it; his ideal description should not, on the other hand, cast doubt on Macrina's truly uncommon Christian intentions either.

As will be shown, Macrina's education and early years did in fact not distinguish themselves from the life style and patterns of her social class, especially its Christian members. As was customary, Macrina was already engaged at the age of twelve to a young man twice her age chosen by her father on grounds of his excellent birth and character. In 340 this young man died suddenly just having finished his studies.¹³⁾ Macrina's reaction to this personal tragedy was anything but customary. Instead of agreeing to a second engagement as suggested by her parents she decided in apparent confrontation to her father's will to remain unmarried (VSM 5: 1-17, 154-56). Gregory stresses that this decision to remain: 'ἐφ' ἑαυτῇ' was indeed a manifestation of Macrina's own free will, which was predisposed to choose a religious life, defined as 'φιλόσοφος βίος'. Whether this was

the case, considering Macrina's age, twelve at the time, is ultimately without consequence.¹⁴⁾ It is, however, clear that Macrina's decision to remain unmarried had tangible results. She now looked upon herself as a widow, referring to her engagement as marriage and thereby claiming the social and legal position of a widow. This leads to the conclusion that the institution of widowhood, already traditional and familiar to her and her surroundings, is now used as a model to realize Macrina's intention to live as 'parthenos'. This step is highly significant with regard to the development of the institution.¹⁵⁾ Macrina pursued her new life within her own family - there was little alternative. For an outside observer nothing changed; rejected suitors might have wondered, but otherwise everything remained much the same. Closer acquaintances alone may have noticed the new routine of her life. Macrina had begun to recite Psalms in regular intervals: in the morning, before and after work, before and after meals, before going to sleep and during the night (VSM 3: 20-26, 150).

While neither systematized prayer nor textile work - her work is described as such in VSM 4: 2, 152 - are strictly extraordinary, one other albeit small feature is worth note: Macrina baked bread for her mother with her own hands. By the mere quality of this work, even if its quantity may have been negligible, she humbled herself considerably, because by undertaking it she consciously denied her social position.¹⁶⁾ By taking to slave labour - cooking and baking were slave-work par excellence - she introduced a new dimension into her regime.¹⁷⁾ Whereas both her education and her Christian life were congruent with the behaviour of her family and its social status this act signifies a rupture, a personal act of humiliation.

When Basil the Elder died in 341-45 his death had several consequences for the family life.¹⁸⁾

Emmelia had now the task of arranging marriages for her daughters and careers for her sons. Once these tasks were performed there was no longer any reason to remain in the city, and so Emmelia followed the custom of her wealthy contemporaries: she retired with her remaining family from Neocaesarea, her husband's professional seat, to Annesi (modern Sonusa), to a 'προδοστειον' on her family estate near Ibora. This move, however, must not be seen as a retreat into solitude for life on country estates was a common custom for the Cappadocian gentry.¹⁹⁾ The area possessed by the family was vast, parts

of it being scattered over three provinces.²⁰) Even allowing for Gregory's rhetoric the widow managed her possessions with astonishing success. Her estate increased in such a way that Emmelia was able to bequeath about nine times as much to her children as she and her husband once owned (VSM 20: 16-20, 206). This augmentation may be extraordinary and exaggerated, but the fact that women managed their own estates cannot be considered as such. At the same time a Simplicia, a Thecla, and a Seleukia are mentioned not only as landowners but also as managers of their estates.²¹) Without necessarily implying a privileged position of women in Asia Minor, it was only natural, and certainly common, that a widow should manage her own estate.²²)

Emmelia's wealth was considerable, and her refuge in Annesi could not have differed greatly from those of the rich 'possessores' criticized by Gregory and Basil: mansions, decorated with different marbles, exotic woods, precious inlays, mosaic paintings and sculptures.²³) The ladies had their slaves, and the mother at least lived like any 'grande dame' of her time, constantly looked after by her servants (VSM 7 : 2-4, 164).

It is difficult to ascertain what exact consequences the move to Annesi had for Macrina's life as a parthenos. Her move from town to country must not be seen as an ascetic withdrawal. She remained involved in the affairs of her family. Gregory is eager to point out that Macrina's assistance in the management of the estate was of vital importance (VSM 5: 41-43, 160). Nevertheless she must have not only continued but intensified the ascetic routine and spiritual life she adopted according to Gregory at Neocaesarea (VSM 3: 20-26, 150). It is certain that the years between 340 and 357 witnessed the development of Macrina's individual asceticism, an asceticism which in all its phases remained intrinsically interwoven with the family and the social environment in which it originated. Apart from Macrina's claiming to be a widow there is no indication of any special status such as 'parthenos': the VSM does not mention a legally binding proclamation, 'epangelia' or 'pactum', nor even a personal vow of virginity.

e) The Pseudo-marriage of Male and Female Ascetics: Syneisactes

In surveying the examples of female ascetic life discussed so far, one underlying principle can be observed. All women except the prophetess realize their ascetic inclinations within familiar social patterns - within their own family or their own homes. Ascetic zeal had no other prerequisites than virginity and a certain routine; to become 'virgo Deo dicata' did not necessitate any further departure from normal social conditions. The advantages of this restriction to familiar forms are obvious; a girl or woman who wanted to live ascetically as 'parthenos' did not have to alter or endanger her social, economic or legal position, with the exception of remaining unmarried. The situation differed profoundly for those who did not have a family, or not a family which could afford to keep an unmarried daughter. If such women wanted to become 'parthenoi', they either had to break completely with society and to bear all consequences of such a step, or they had to incorporate their ascetic zeal in models acceptable to society but distinct from the family-pattern.

The second half of canon 19 at Ancyra contains a possible allusion to one of these models, in referring to a form of cohabitation described as:

ἡτὰρ μὲν τοι συνερχομένας παρθένους τισὶν, ὡς ἀδελφὰς, ἐκωλύσαμην"

1) The term used, 'to come together, to be united or bonded together' (συνέρχεσθαι) suggests that virgins lived in firmly established communion with men, a communion resembling in its external aspects a marriage without being one: 'ὡς ἀδελφὰς' .2)

2) The conciseness of the canon offers no further information, except the conclusion that only the women involved are further characterized, as virgins.

Similar customs seem to have existed in Spain, judging from canon 27 issued at Elvira:

"Episcopus, vel quilibet alius clericus, aut sororem, aut filiam virginem dicatam Deo, tantum secum habeat; extraneam nequaquam habere placuit."³⁾

The point at stake is clearly cohabitation of unmarried men and women not related to each other, though in the canons of Elvira only members of the clergy are prevented from joining in such practices; the exact status of

the women is not made quite as clear as in Ancyra. Nevertheless, the context of 'virgo Deo dicata' suggests that again a brother-sister relationship of unmarried partners is referred to. Both canons ban the custom whilst displaying a surprising lack of detail in specifying its nature. In Ancyra men without qualifications are exhorted not to live with virgins as though they were brother and sister, in Elvira members of the clergy are forbidden to cohabit with women other than their own sisters or virgin-daughters.

In 325, canon 3 of the Nicaean council referred to the same custom, again addressing only members of the clergy and condemning their habit of living with women.⁴⁾ Quite clearly only the closest family members (interestingly enough daughters are no longer mentioned) are at all acceptable as living-companions for a cleric, with the sole exception of a 'person entirely beyond suspicion' - the canon does not delineate such a person any further. No other 'συνεισακτή' can be tolerated. In Ancyra women living in such circumstances were described as 'συνερχωμέναι', in Nicaea as 'συνεισάκτες', that is 'brought in, introduced together'.⁵⁾ Both terms imply some sort of definite status; clearly occasional visits were not prohibited. They also bear the connotation of a certain passivity on the part of the women concerned; they were clearly chosen and invited by the men. The history of the term 'syneisacte' in particular may offer clues as to the nature of this invitation. According to Eusebius, the term 'syneisacte' was created in Antioch at the beginning of the third century.⁶⁾ Here several bishops gathered in 268 to judge the doctrinal reliability of the local bishop, Paul of Samosata. The synodical letter issued by them contains, apart from the verdict, a passage indicating that Paul and members of his clergy lived with girls described as 'syneisactes'. Paul himself lived not only with one but two girls: he provided generously for their material needs and they accompanied him wherever he went.

Yet, at the same time, this union was not in itself considered an incriminating factor; the relationship was undeniably a platonic one, even in the eyes of his adversaries. In other words the situation at Antioch reflects the same circumstances as those banned by the two canons, only involving more than two parties at a given time. The union of Paul and his two girls must therefore be understood as a charitable institution whereby

Paul ensured the girls' upkeep.⁷⁾ A similar aspect could be assumed as fundamental to the union banned at Ancyra and Elvira; there, however, a more traditional pattern was adhered to: the union was shaped after a marriage without being one. Men, especially members of the clergy, lived with women who presumably looked after their household, and provided for the women's financial and social needs. Only in Ancyra are such women characterized explicitly as 'parthenoi'. However, in all other cases the union is described as a chaste one.

Sources illustrating the customs referred to are rare, especially in Cappadocia. Achelis quotes the example of Juliana and Origen, but the previous discussion proved that Origen's stay was temporary whereas the unions in question seem permanent; furthermore, Origen came into Juliana's house whereas 'syneisacte' and the relevant terminology imply a reverse procedure. Considering Juliana's life as a whole she must be seen as single, an unmarried woman or 'parthenos' rather than as 'syneisacte'.⁸⁾

A later reference to women living in unmarried union with men is contained in Basil of Ancyra's treatise De Virginitate, written between 336 and 358. Basil devoted chapter 43 to a custom he describes as: "παρθενικῶν βίον διώκονταίς τοῖς τῶν γάμων μυσήμασιν."⁹⁾ Although banned twice already from doing so, once by a local council, women, in this case explicitly called virgins, continued to live with men in a union resembling marriage. Basil obviously condemns the institution, insinuating a lapse of ascetic discipline and incapability of freeing oneself from worldly desires as reasons for the custom. At the same time he alludes quite inadvertently to a different motivation: "τῷ ὀνόματι τῆς ἀγάπης."

Charity is in fact mentioned on several other occasions in the same chapter, in Basil's opinion it is always used as a pretext by the virgins in question. If charity came into play as a motive - and Basil's allusion leaves no doubt that it did - this can only indicate that women who wanted to remain parthenoi and could not afford to do so, lived with 'Brothers in Christ' or other men in a relationship resembling marriage on a platonic, or spiritual basis. Within that relationship the virgins probably repaid received benefits with housework.

While it is impossible to trace the origins of the custom in Cappadocia

and neighbouring regions, ecclesiastical canons banned the chaste union of men, especially clerics, and women not related to them, at the beginning of the fourth century. The union as far as we can see was considered a marriage, at least in Ancyra and Nicaea. As such it was of a permanent nature, financial and social support were provided for by the man and possibly legal authority as well. Attempts to ban the custom failed, which indicates its popularity. The sources are not definite as to whether or not lay Christians also brought girls into their houses, though the Ancyran canon suggests that they did and continued to do so.

It is most significant that the first occurrence of the custom in canons should coincide with the first occurrence of 'virgines Deo dicatae'. In the canons of Elvira a daughter as 'virgo Deo dicata' is explicitly exempted from the ban and the Ancyran canon dealing with such 'virgines' deals at the same time with syneisactes. Twenty years later Basil mentions virgins explicitly, stating at the same time that charity was one reason for their union. It must consequently be assumed that the institution, if not created explicitly for the purpose, developed parallel to the increase of the institution of virgins into a means of economic and social support for women who wanted to become 'parthenoi'. While a convenient way to find a housekeeper for celibate clerics, this method enabled single women to remain unmarried. Its inherent dangers soon became obvious, possibly even more so in the light of criticism from pagan or other doctrinal fields, and it was consequently banned.

This pseudo-marriage could, however, be judged as progress on the way to new patterns of ascetic life. In entering a cleric's household as spiritual wife a celibate woman renounces the social pattern she is most familiar with, the family, and joins a new community. This community is shaped again after a familiar model, marriage. However, while de facto married the virgin de jure lives outside socially accepted norms. She has thus made an important step away from familiar social forms which is prompted by her ascetic intentions combined with the need to maintain herself physically.

f) Prototypes of Ascetic Communities: The Life of Theodotus

Women wanting to realize ascetic ideals chose different methods to put their intentions into practice. One can classify these methods in two ways: chronologically, and also in terms of forms of ascetic practice as constituting a progression from familiar social patterns to unfamiliar, specifically ascetic ones. Under this aspect progress and chronology do not necessarily coincide. So far, ascetic women living within their family, in a pseudo-marriage, or alone have been mentioned.

In a paper published in 1982 S. Mitchell once more drew attention to an account of martyrdom previously discussed by four other scholars, Franchi de' Cavalleri, Delehaye, Grégoire, and Orgels: the Life of Saint Theodotus of Ancyra.¹⁾ Like Grégoire and Orgels, Mitchell emphasizes the historical value of the piece by pointing to exact internal details and their agreement with relevant external factors.²⁾ Paramount for Mitchell's contribution is the date suggested for the writing of the Life. In contrast to his predecessors he proposes a relatively early date, probably during Julian's reign between 360 and 363.³⁾ The events described in the Life stem, however, from a much earlier period. Theodotus was martyred under the government of a certain Theotecnus, who has been identified as the 'λογιστῆς' of Syrian Antioch and governor of Galatia Prima between 312 and 313 A.D.⁴⁾ In other words, the events related in the Life, if authentic, took place during the persecution of Maximianus and the venue was Ancyra, or rather two lakes outside the city, now Mohan and Emir Göl near Dilimnia (modern Gölbaşı).⁵⁾

'The martyrdom of Saint Theodotus of Ancyra' is in fact only the first half of the title, it reads in full: 'and the Seven Virgins with him.' Obviously the second half is of particular interest in our context. The account of the martyrdom of these ladies forms the central part of the entire Life, contrary to what the title might suggest, though it contains a detailed description of the role played by Theodotus (c. 13 seq.). At the outset of his persecution the governor Theotecnus ordered

these seven virgins to be raped, an attempt not crowned with success. After his initial failure Theotecnus forced the virgins instead to participate naked in a procession to honour the virgin goddesses Artemis and Athena at the anniversary of a purification rite performed in the lakes. There the ladies were asked to become priestesses of the godheads and, upon their refusal, drowned. Later on, Theodotus and a few companions reclaimed their bodies and buried them next to a nearby church.*)

The focal point of the narrative is obviously the ladies' martyrdom so that references indicating the way they actually lived are merely incidental. However, chapter 13 begins:

"They were seven virgins, from their earliest age trained in virtue, educated to esteem continence above all and to have the fear of God in front of their eyes."

The ladies are throughout the Life addressed as virgins. While this address could reflect later usage, they are also characterized as "ἄσκούμεναι". The author is familiar with the ladies' proper names, but, with the exception of one, never mentions them. 'Parthenos' is therefore a title and not only a physical condition. These virgins were further not an isolated case, the source speaks of seven 'parthenoi'. Must they therefore be considered as individuals or as a group?

The only proper name which reappears frequently, is the one of the 'πρεσβύτερα Τέκουσα'. The adjective 'presbytera' clearly reflects a certain age (the lady in question is over seventy) but age alone may not provide full understanding of the phrase. Tekousa, aorist part. of: τίκτω means in fact nothing else but 'mother', and is rare as a proper name.?) Could it have been chosen on purpose?

When faced with the rapists it is Tekousa who approaches one of them persuading him to abstain from his intention. She also appears to Theodotus in his dream exhorting him to save the drowned bodies. In short she is characterized as the most active one of the seven. This assumption is not only corroborated by the grammatical construction of 'presbytera' and her name, 'Mother'. 'Mother', a 'presbytera parthenos', must be a title pointing to a position of authority. In all likelihood this position was patterned on that of a mother, albeit in a spiritual sense.®) Tekousa must in other words be seen as the leader of the seven virgins, both in years and experience. Her authority was, however, not limited to

the virgins. In her appeal that he should reclaim the drowned bodies she addresses Theodotus as child (τέκνον) reminding him that it was her who, since his childhood instructed him with exhortations guided him to virtue (c. 16). Indeed Theodotus used to honour her like a mother. Not only was Tekousa leader of the virgins, she was also mother in a spiritual sense to Theodotus. The question is exactly what the content of those exhortations was. Ἀσκησις and ἐγκράτεια were beyond doubt of paramount importance. When faced with the young men recruited to rape her Tekousa draws attention to her own body destroyed by age, fasting, illness and tortures. Tekousa's askēsis consisted in other words in unspecified mistreatment and fasting (c. 13). At the same time it is emphasized that the virgins were:

Ἐκνεαρᾶς ἡλικίας ἀσκούμεναι, αἵτινες τὴν σωφροσύνην πρὸ πάντων τιμῆσαι καὶ τὸν φόβον τοῦ Θεοῦ..." Could this stand for a certain basic

organization, certain agreed conventions observed by all virgins? In any case, we are confronted with seven virgins guided by a leader, a spiritual mother for them and other members of the congregation, whom she instructs in asceticism. The question is whether those virgins actually formed a community, that is whether they lived together or whether they maintained family ties and only came together on special occasions to perform certain ceremonial functions.

In c. 19 one phrase attracted the attention of scholars at a very early stage, a list of the virgins' names.⁹⁾ The first three of the 'virgins', Tekousa, Alexandria and Phaeinē are distinguished from the remaining four by the attribute ἀποτακτῆται. This attribute together with the virgins' ascetic tendencies led to the conclusion that the seven virgins and Theodotus belonged to a community described as Montanists. In his Panarion 49, dating from 374, Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis, characterizes the Montanists as follows:

Ἐπίσκοποι τε παρ' αὐτοῖς γυναῖκες καὶ πρεσβύτεροι γυναῖκες καὶ τὰ ἄλλα.¹⁰⁾

Most important is a passage dealing in fact with seven virgins:

"Often, in their own church, a group of seven virgins enters, carrying torches and clad in white robes, and they go out from there to prophecy the people."

The similarities are obvious. In both cases the number seven is paramount,

both sources stress the virginal character of the women, both know women as presbytera, and both attribute a public role to women. In Theodotus' Life no white robe is mentioned, but the virgins wear a veil; τὸ περίδεμα βραχύ¹¹.

Montanism originated in 170 in Ardabau in Phrygo-Mysia, initiated by the prophecies of Montanus. By the time the virgins were martyred several other groups with similar tendencies flourished in central Anatolia, propagating tendencies best described as rigoristic asceticism.¹²) The Apotaktikai referred to in the life were most probably among those sects. Strict identification with Montanism is therefore not necessary; it suffices to conclude with Mitchell:

"...the Life of Saint Theodotus was produced in a rigorist, heretical and probably Montanist milieu."¹²)

The question remains, however, what conclusions can be drawn from this denomination with regard to the community formed by the seven virgins. Evidently the virgins had an important position within their congregation, a position surpassing a mere ceremonial function. Tekousa is a teacher of doctrine for the virgins as well as others, her title 'presbytera' even suggests functions verging on the clerical ones in orthodox communities. At the same time nothing can be said concerning her social status, except that the ladies are entitled 'parthenoi'.

According to an early opponent of Montanism, Apollonius, the Montanist prophetesses had: "τοὺς ἀνδρας καταλιποῦσας."¹³)

They were in other words married by the time they felt the call and may have remained so even afterwards. Tekousa emphasized her appeal to the youth recruited to rape her by tearing her veil off, thus showing her white hair. The problem of the veil is difficult to solve. Normally Roman women were not veiled, but it appears that the veil was more common for married women in the Greek-speaking part of the empire.¹⁴) It should be noted that the virgins were veiled and Montanist prophetesses married. It is feasible that the seven virgins were originally, and possibly still, married but now lived as celibate members in their own families, which also provided for their physical needs. Calder found indeed an inscription, dating from the second half of the fourth century mentioning a 'virgin mother'.¹⁵) The inscription stems from Ladik and attests at the very least the

probability of the solution just described. It is equally possible that the seven virgins had left their families once they felt their call and formed their own community, joined if the occasion arose by new members. Here, possibly in their own house, they practiced mortifications under the guidance of a leader, the mother. In this case the veil could symbolize a marriage to Christ.¹⁴)

Evidence for either possibility is, needless to say, lacking, but a definite decision is of secondary importance. What is important is the fact that in practice from the third century onwards the concept of women involved in an intense religious life as a group existed in central Anatolia. Women could be perceived as totally immersed in rigorous ascetic practices, which allowed all family considerations, including marriage, to fade into the background. At the same time those women found a spiritual community (if not indeed a physical one) with other similarly minded women. Their obvious break with social ties was furthermore no disadvantage, they had a stable, permanent position of influence within their respective congregation, institutionalized by their title, virgin, possibly also their costume and their function. It is worth note that the Life of saint Theodotus, with the importance attributed to the seven virgins, has heretical affiliations. While redundant from a purely organizational viewpoint, the distinction between heretical and orthodox may be important when considering the degree of publicity attributed to women.

g) Communities of Ascetic Men and Women

Within one or two decades after the writing of the anonymous Homily Περὶ παρθενίας addressed to fathers of virgins, another treatise was composed bearing the title: On the True Integrity of Virginité to Letoios, Bishop of Melitene.¹⁾ In 1905 F. Cavallera identified its author as Basil, bishop of Ancyra between 336 and 358, thereby establishing the period and region of its origin.²⁾ Mentioned only briefly by Camelot and Vizmanos, the treatise received further consideration by Ianini Cuesta and Aubineau, in both cases regarding Gregory of Nyssa's later work De Virginitate.³⁾ Detailed discussion of the treatise in its own right is, as far as I know, outstanding, an omission possibly caused by the lack of a critical edition.⁴⁾ The following is of course impaired by these conditions; its aim can only be to draw attention to certain peculiarities of Basil's 'Peri Parthenias'.

Compared to the anonymous Homily Basil's treatise is, at first glance, not strikingly different. Addressed to the bishop of Melitene, the treatise deals in effect with women - as does the anonymous Homily although with a certain asexual slant - who vowed virginity and therefore bear the honorary title of a virgin: parthenos (c. 2, c. 4, c. 43 et al.).⁵⁾ Consequently, the treatise is mainly concerned with praising the beauty of virginity (c. 1), and suggesting how to preserve mental and physical purity. However, unlike the anonymous author of the mentioned Homily Basil was trained as a medical doctor, hence his interest in the topic of virginity is strongly biased in favour of physiological and anatomical questions.⁶⁾ Basil thus begins his treatise with a discussion of the strong mutual attraction of opposite sexes, an urge inherent in man's nature. In women this urge is even stronger; since they are the weaker sex, they react to every excitement of their senses. In trying to overcome this urge women and indeed men need to counteract nature itself; preservation of virginity is therefore an act against nature (c. 3, c. 4). In order to complete this task a specialist's equipment, so to speak, becomes necessary and in virtue of his physiological knowledge

Basil is better able than others to furnish such 'equipment'. Firstly, he draws attention to all senses, vision, hearing, taste and touch, offering prescriptions on how to control them. Special attention must be accorded to food, and over indulgence or gastrimargia is 'specially damaging. Since humidity excites the senses dry food should be preferred, especially bread, along with certain vegetables and fruits.⁷⁾ Water is, however, allowed. To avoid negative results, the quality not the quantity of the food is important; too much of any one thing is counter-productive (c. 7-9). The sense of touch is subsequently dealt with, described as even more dangerous than 'γαστριμαργία'. Touch easily excites natural urges, especially when members of the opposite sex are literally within reach. Extreme caution must be exercised to avoid contact with men, one's senses and motions must be controlled. In short bodily purity must be maintained (cf. Homily II: 18-19).

Purity of the body is not the sole issue at stake. Of equal, if not higher importance is purity of the soul, for without it bodily purity remains futile (c. 47-49). The main afflictions of the soul are passions, especially anger, rage, lugubriousness, avarice and envy (c. 47). Only in exterminating them - amongst other things with the help of Scripture - can a state of apatheia, the aim of true purity, be attained (c. 49; Hom. II 36-41).⁸⁾ Purity of body and soul, achieved with so much effort, is only a precondition for virginity's true aim: to become queen in the kingdom of Heaven (c. 26, c. 36, c. 50; Hom. VII: 78-80 eg.) The virgin is regarded as Christ's heavenly bride, her vow is that of an authentic marriage (c.39), her life a preparation for the 'μυστικῇ συμφαγωγῇ' (c. 50). As such the virgin surpasses married women and widows, in fact there is a sharp distinction between them: earthly marriage prolongs death while virginity grants immortality. Although not condemned outright, marriage is certainly painted in very pessimistic colours (c. 21 - 24; Hom. I: 4-7).⁹⁾ In contrast to such a bleak picture a virgin, provided she manages to stay a 'wise virgin', gains a revered position, negating all possible earthly disadvantages, especially social stigma suffered by the poor, the ugly, or indeed slaves (c. 21 -27; Hom. II: 21, VII: 80, VIII: 105-9).

These essential factors, treated by Basil in a very elaborate, often repetitive style, agree with their corresponding topics in the anonymous

Homily. Emphasis is laid on control of passions, bodily and psychological, to maintain the purity of Christ's future bride. The agreement is so marked that one could assume the development of a pattern were it not for some curious discrepancies.

In contrast to the Homily the declaration of virginity has now become a public ceremony. Like an earthly bride who - clad in a special dress, her right hand extended - leaves her father's house for the one of her husband, the virgin leaves her family in a public procession to join the heavenly bridegroom (c. 39).

The juxtaposition of this proclamation and the one of an earthly marriage enhances the character of the virgin's vow. The virgin is bound for the rest of her life, her status emphasized by her dress (which includes a veil, like that of a married woman) and her title. A breach of promise is regarded as even worse than adultery (c. 27, c. 39). Anyone who touches a virgin, God's sanctuary, commits a severe crime. In other words the process of institutionalization has advanced considerably in relation to the Homily. The vow is no longer considered a private matter with only the virgin's conscience as a regulating factor. Now it has become a public affair, considered binding in a legal way comparable to a marriage, and breach of contract is punished accordingly (cf. Hom. III: 45-47). These formalistic aspects are not the only difference between the Homily and Basil's treatise. Besides other divergences between the two, certain contradictions can be noted within the treatise itself, causing *prima facie* inexplicable ambiguities. Strict fasting is undoubtedly of major importance, for instance c. 7 deals entirely with the control of gastrimargia. At the same time Basil is emphasizing moderation. With frequent repetition he stresses his point that it is extremely counterproductive to abuse the body, after all the body is 'the servant of philosophy' (c. 11) and it would be extremely unwise to destroy it. No master would voluntarily kill his servant nor a horseman his horse, likewise an ascetic should maintain his or her body in working order. Ascetics who completely repudiate the use of salt, for instance, are an example not to be followed (c.9). Asceticism must be practiced with moderation, and must not concern itself too much with bodily aspects. Such a preoccupation distracts from the essential purity of the soul (c. 13).¹⁰⁾

Further, sexual abstinence is almost the central topic of the treatise. Many precautions have to be observed and a number of methods to conquer one's natural urges are put forward, as has been mentioned before (c. 5, 6, 14-21, 27-28, 39-42). However, Basil again warns strongly against excess. He is eager to point out that his treatise does not fall into the category of the

"many who advocate different ways to perform virginity".

He does not advertise "how to melt the body away with fasting" and rejects those who

"mortify their bodies by fasting and sleeping on the ground and those who are admired because they part with all their worldly possessions" (c.1).

In particular he opposes a practice apparently very common in the Church - confirmed by inscriptions - the literal interpretation of Mt 19: 12:

"Some are eunuchs because they were born so, or were made so by men, there are others who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of Heaven."¹¹⁾

Not only is this practice absurd, according to Basil it is furthermore entirely futile. Merely by removing the offending organs sexual urges are not destroyed, on the contrary they are enhanced, so that the true aim, purity of the soul, is not achieved (c. 60 - 63). To illustrate his condemnation Basil mentions two cases, one of them involving a "παρθένος τις τῆς ἐκκλησίας κανονικῆς" assaulted by a eunuch, who in frustration can only grind his teeth (c. 61)! This passage is of interest, not only because of its content but also because of a linguistic feature, namely the title of the virgin. If authentic c. 61 would attest a very early use of the title 'kanonikē', if not indeed the earliest, in the sense of 'religious women'. As an attempt to establish the title's validity an inscription bearing two Maltese crosses can be quoted, addressed to a 'Maria kanonikē'.¹²⁾

To return to the argument, exaggerations must be avoided and this principle applies to virgins as well. Thus in stark contrast to the anonymous homilist Basil writes that a virgin must not become a misanthrope:

"οὐ γὰρ εἰς μισανθρωπίαν φέροντες αὐτὴν ἀπεκλεισάμεν..." (c. 36).

This is a most interesting statement. Throughout his treatise Basil warns a virgin against contact with men. For example, chapter 29 deals entirely with the necessity to avoid men, indeed the entire purpose of most precepts is to steel a virgin against male temptations.¹³⁾ Then, all of a

sudden, Basil encourages "a chaste discourse with the friends of the bride-groom". These friends are also called "servants of the Lord" or "brothers in Christ" as opposed to just men or "dishonest men".¹⁴⁾

They seem to play a very important role. A true virgin, while in their company, will be an example of virtue, to be emulated by the brothers (c. 35 - 36). Consequently, frequent discussions are desirable.¹⁵⁾ During these meetings the virgin has, however, to observe certain precautions. Even when alone a virgin must be extremely wary whilst uncovering any part of her body (c. 35).

Clearly, she must redouble these efforts when "brothers of Christ" are present. Only if a virgin controls her every move, thought, and action will a 'chaste discourse' be fruitful (c. 36). One reason why a virgin's body has to be covered from top to toe is the close proximity of virtue and vice: it is easy to move from one to the other. A virgin's greatest mistake would be to confuse a 'servant' or indeed several servants of the Lord with himself, or to consider them higher than their master. Such a truly fatal mistake could happen if the virgin is incapable of distinguishing between agape and eros. Basil, therefore, gives a detailed definition of both, pointing out all the difficulties in separating charity from sexual urges.¹⁶⁾ In separating both issues the virgin ought to consider what the function of an ordinary marriage is, which will force her to realize that her engagement to Christ does not allow for any other bonds.¹⁷⁾ Basil then criticizes the pseudo-marriage already mentioned, describing a virgin who lives with one brother as dead while still alive. In their struggle against temptations virgins will find support in their conscience and the knowledge that God and his guardian angels are omnipresent, even in their thoughts (c. 31, 34, 36-37). As additional precaution Basil considers it most appropriate for a virgin to adopt male appearance. While the soul is equal for both sexes, it is their different physical appearance which can cause the fatal mutual attraction (c. 4). Therefore a virgin ought to become like a man

"ἀρρενωπὸν τὸ ὄμμα...σωφροσὶ κινήμασιν ἐνδρεῖωσ <lg. ἀνδρεῖωσ>" (c. 18, 708 B).¹⁸⁾

As a complement to the transformation of the female appearance into a male one, Basil refers to involuntary eunuchs who lived with holy women

in chaste union.

These observations create a truly puzzling picture. A virgin must guard herself constantly against possible contamination by sexual urges. To do so she must shun all contact with men, and should alter her appearance into a male one. At the same time she must not become a misanthrope, but ought to keep the company of "brothers in Christ" (cf. also c. 64, 800 D-801 A).

The question raised immediately is how the life of these virgins was actually organized. Unfortunately, Basil's remarks concerning this particular problem are far less detailed than could be desired. The public proclamation of virginity signifies, according to Basil, to leave the house of one's father (c. 36).

What follows is described in c. 25:

"Who loves God truly must not only condemn money and wealth... but also the necessary food, sleep and dress as well as all considerations of the world, <he or she should leave> the houses of relatives and their father's house; should seek martyrdom whenever the occasion arises, wear a pauper's dress and choose a life frowned upon by many."

In short, they must follow Gen 12: 1 literally:

"Leave your country, your family and your father's house for the land I will show you."

Yet, the precise organization of this life is still unclear. In c. 21 Basil mentions other women attracted by a virgin to emulate her, in c. 45 he refers to other women, in c. 66 he points out that virgins should not sleep with virgins (!), in the same chapter he mentions a chorus of virgins and in c. 29 (and perhaps in c. 36) he refers to a virgin's behaviour in the presence of female servants and men. The curious contact with 'Brothers in Christ' has been mentioned.

This leads to the following conclusion. Upon proclaiming virginity a woman left her family to join a new, ascetic community. This community consisted of other like minded women and was organized along the strict ascetic precepts elaborated in the treatise. This new community may, further, have resembled a new family, a spiritual family. As such it included male members, namely the 'Brothers in Christ', possibly even servants of both sexes. Such a cohabitation (exact details cannot be reconstructed) is a logical consequence of virginity's nature. Virginity denies sexual distinction, it recreates the angelic state of men before sin, since

"there is no such thing as ... male and female.. in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3: 28; c. 51).

Virgins and brothers in Christ live together as members of a new ascetic family. To facilitate the practical implications of such living-arrangements women have to adopt male appearance - all wear a pauper's dress - and have to be constantly on their guard not to let sexuality enter the relationship. All ascetics must further reject property, bodily amenities and must lead a life disregarded by society.

Eustathius of Sebaste

In 340/341 the bishops of Pontus, unfortunately referred to without mention of their dioceses, gathered at Gangra to issue a letter to their colleagues in Armenia warning them of certain ascetic practices:

"The council has united to rule on certain ecclesiastical questions and to examine the affair of Eustathius; it found many illegalities among the Eustathians and tries, therefore, to redeem the evil caused by him".¹⁷⁾

Presided over by Eusebius of Nicomedia, the fathers composed twenty canons and a separate epilogue containing all features condemned.

Who was Eustathius? Born before 300 as son of Eulalius, bishop of Sebaste in Armenia, Eustathius is considered by Sozomen as the originator of monasticism in Armenia, Paphlagonia, and Pontus.²⁰⁾ While it is unreasonable to consider him creator ex nihilo, the few facts known of his youth show him to be in frequent conflict with church authorities because of his ascetic zeal. After a dispute with his father between 325 and 328 he sought to become a member of the clergy at Antioch, but was not accepted by the local bishop Eustathius. Whether he spent the following time (between 325 and 330) in Alexandria as pupil of Arius, whereby he could have become familiar with Egyptian asceticism, is not certain.²¹⁾ After 330, however, he became member of the Caesarean clergy, left before 338 to serve under Eusebius of Constantinople, only to return to Armenia and Pontus. There he was condemned by a synod at Neocaesarea, possibly in about 339, and later at Gangra, as just mentioned.²²⁾ It must be assumed that those frequent changes were caused by disagreements over Eustathius' convictions. Unfortunately we do not possess any first-hand sources written by Eustathius himself, which contain his convictions. They have, therefore, to be extracted from their condemnation and a few

allusions in Basil of Caesarea's later writings with all the drawbacks inherent in such a method.²³⁾ Among those twenty canons the following are of special interest.²⁴⁾

"If under the pretence of asceticism a woman changes her clothes and, instead of wearing female ones as she should, wears male clothes, she will be anathematized" (can. 13).

Canon 14 continues:

"If a woman leaves her husband, despising marriage to practice 'anachōrēsis', she will be anathematized".

Finally canon 17, the most intriguing:

"If under the pretence of asceticism, women cut their hair short, which God has given them to remind them of their subordination, in order to defy that subordination, they will be anathematized".

Furthermore, judging by the canons' condemnation the ascetics criticized married clergy (can. 4), fasting the way it was commonly practiced (can. 2; can. 19), the ownership of property, in particular church property (can. 8) and they propagated the liberation of slaves (can. 3).²⁵⁾

Eustathius' teachings - whilst quite obviously addressed to all Christians - had special attraction for two groups of the traditionally underprivileged: slaves and women.²⁶⁾ If we concentrate on the case of women it is clear that the attraction had startling results. Women shaved their heads, dressed in male clothes and left home and family for the sake or under the pretence of asceticism. In I Cor 11: 5-14 Paul teaches that a woman has to wear a veil, otherwise,

"she might as well have her hair cut off; but... it is a disgrace for her to be cropped and shaved.. and therefore it is a woman's duty to have a sign of authority on her head out of regard for the angels".

Long hair symbolizes the woman's God given dependence on the man, consequently cutting ones hair short results in a negation of such a dependence.²⁷⁾ Gangra thus accused the heretics of denying the subordinate role of women. This denial led as a logical consequence to a negation of sexual differences, that is to an equal estimation of men and women. This assimilation of sexes is indeed corroborated by the condemned practice of wearing male clothes. The significance of this step gains further weight when considering that canon 12 condemns men who wear a so called 'περιβόλαιον', a wide, simple overcoat usually worn by philosophers to demonstrate their rejection of worldly values.²⁸⁾ Eustathius' father

Eulalius subjected him to public penitence for "not having worn an outfit becoming to a priest", and the former's excommunication at Neocaesarea was also linked with his dress.²⁹) This dress must have been the 'peribolaion' and the same habit was chosen by the women. Eustathius' choice of this particular dress has further to be connected with his teachings. The 'peribolaion' stood for poverty and the rejection of the world, in Eustathius' case also for a rejection of the clergy's social distinction. If women wore a peribolaion they signaled their denial of social distinction by displaying poverty, and their denial of sexual distinction by adopting the appearance of male ascetics.³⁰)

A passage in Mc:

"For when they rise from the dead, men and women do not marry, no, they are like angels in heaven," (12: 25)

could provide the theoretical concept according to which sexual distinction could be denied.

Angels, according to traditional teachings, are only conceivable as neuter, asexual entities; they are of course unmarried.³¹) Humans attempting to ensure resurrection, especially by anticipating heavenly perfection on earth, had to emulate angels; they had to become asexual as well.³²) The precondition in achieving this aim is celibacy, neutralization the final goal. For women this was particularly difficult to realize. As they were inferior to men their capacity for redemption was doubtful, so that there was only one way for women to achieve this aim. They had to become first of all male.³³) Adopting male external appearance is therefore a logical step to symbolize this spiritual concept. However, male appearance is by itself not sufficient. Both men and women had to strive for a higher ideal, the neutralization of their sexual distinction. Thus the anticipated 'ἄγγελικὸς βίος' requires asceticism, which is often described in contemporary sources as 'φιλόσοφος βίος', here expressed by wearing the 'peribolaion'.³⁴) In adopting a philosopher's outfit these women symbolized their spiritual aim: ascetic perfection.

Eustathius' teachings included the equality of sexes expressed by adopting male appearance in the case of women. At the same time this appearance was considered an attack against the institutionalized clergy, as Eustathius' own case demonstrates. Marriage was another institution

questioned by Eustathius and his followers. Women left their husbands and children and vice versa. The expression 'ἀναχωρεῖν' gives a clue to how this separation could have been put into practice: simply by wandering about. It is certain that Eustathius and his followers, in observing Genesis 12: 1 scrupulously, renounced all possessions and comforts of village life. Further, the teachings as condemned by Gangra, appear to have been intended for all Christians, not just for a minority.³⁵⁾ In fact, Eustathius and his followers taught nothing that was not soundly based in the Scriptures. No condemnation uttered at Gangra does more than confirm a literal observance of scriptural passages. Yet the socially explosive potentiality of these teachings hardly needs to be pointed out.

Macedonius and Marathionius

In 342 "a worldly man and cunning politician" was elected bishop of Constantinople, the Arianizing bishop Macedonius.³⁶⁾ While the details of Macedonius' election and even more so the simultaneous doctrinal disputes are beyond the scope of the present discussion, one particular aspect of Macedonius' final success should be pointed out.³⁷⁾ In his struggle for succession he found support amongst "the numerous monasteries which he had founded in Constantinople" - a factor which both of our sources, Sozomen and Socrates, agree upon. The actual guidance of these monasteries was the task of Macedonius' deacon, Marathionius, "the zealous leader of communities 'συνεκρία' of men and women."³⁸⁾ Socrates and Sozomen leave no doubt that Macedonius and Marathionius had introduced these establishments to Constantinople during Constantius' II reign and, unlike some other attempts at predating Constantinopolitan events, this early date can be accepted.³⁹⁾ It would of course be most interesting to know more about these communities, but source material concerning Macedonius and Marathionius suffers from similar shortcomings as that concerning Eustathius.

Sozomen's Book IV contains, however, in chapter 27, an important notice. Marathionius, the deacon, was a former tax officer and had amassed a fortune during office. Suddenly, he converted to asceticism and social commitment, persuaded by none other than Eustathius of Sebaste, presumably

during the latter's stay in Constantinople before 356.⁴⁰) As a reconsideration of the scarcely known details shows, Macedonius' and Marathonius' foundations were characterized by strong social commitment; they include a hospice, a 'feeding place for the poor' (πτωχοτροφεῖον), and a hospital and they are inhabited by male and female ascetics with no apparent segregation.⁴¹) Sozomen's notice alludes to Macedonius' and Marathonius' inclinations towards Arianism and ensures further their close connection with Eustathius of Sebaste, at least as far as their ascetic institutions and teachings are concerned.

In this context a remark by Jerome in his De vir. ill. 80 is highly intriguing:

"Basilus, Ancyranus episcopus, .. sub rege Constantio Macedonianae partis cum Eustathio Sebastano princeps fuit." ⁴²)

The term 'Macedonian party' is in fact a later denomination of a doctrinal position intended as response to Arianism, Aetius' anomios-position, and to the intransigent Nicæan formula 'homoousios'. This doctrinal approach, the 'Homoiousian party', was initiated by none other than Basil of Ancyra. The strongest supporter and co-operator of Basil in his attempt to propagate his doctrine was, according to all ancient historians, including Philostorgius, Eustathius of Sebaste.⁴³) Both acted in the synod at Seleukia in 359 and in Constantinople; and at the last session of Seleukia they found support in another bishop, namely Macedonius of Constantinople.⁴⁴)

Eustathius and Macedonius were in other words linked not only by ascetic teachings but also by their doctrinal attitude; and doctrinal convictions were an even stronger link between Basil and Eustathius.

What results from these observations for the interpretation of Basil's treatise on 'True virginity'? We noticed, to repeat earlier conclusions, a certain dichotomy within the treatise itself. Basil explicitly attacks rigorists, twice called heretics, who appear to advocate excessive ascetic practices. Thus he insists on moderation in fasting and other ascetic practices, the selective character of virginity, that is the impossibility to postulate virginity as precondition for all Christians, the legality of marriage, the need for a virgin to remain secluded and to be veiled -

because of the angels (I Cor 11: 5-14; c. 34) - and he criticizes those who reject all property.

At the same time Basil paints marriage in the blackest colours, accusing married people of prolonging death, he exhorts a virgin to adopt male appearance by wearing a 'pauper's dress'; and to leave her family and worldly possessions in order to lead a life disregarded by others. This life should be led together with other women and in close proximity to 'Brothers in Christ', on the basis of Gal. 3: 28:

"There is no such thing as.. male and female .. in Christ Jesus."

Further, to my knowledge no ecclesiastical institution is referred to.

The synod at Gangra did not condemn Eustathius himself, but some of his radical followers. Loofs and Gribomont reached this conclusion because only three years later, at Antioch, Eustathius was charged with perjury.⁴⁵) Eustathius was furthermore a recognised member of the clergy, in fact one of the first ascetic bishops.⁴⁶)

Both Eustathius of Sebaste and Basil of Ancyra were prominent propagators of the homoiousian faith, both acted at Ancyra in 358, both went to Sirmium to persuade the emperor Constantius to adopt their version. Basil and Eustathius evidently knew each other and what is more shared the same doctrinal convictions.⁴⁷) Is it not possible, therefore, that Basil's treatise, oscillating between moderation and rigorism, was written almost in defence of Eustathius? Or at least reflects great affinity with teachings propagated by Eustathius himself as opposed to his radical followers?

This is further corroborated by another feature, Basil's attack on heretics. He mentions them twice, once naming them Marcionists (c. 33; c. 62). It is sufficient to point out that Marcionists were popular in the area, originating in fact in Sinope, and propagated rigorist asceticism, criticizing institutions such as the clergy or marriage.⁴⁸) While it is possible that Basil attacked Marcionists properly speaking, it is equally possible that he defined extreme followers of Eustathius as such. He would in fact be highly unlikely to identify a heresy originating from his friend's teachings as caused by the very same, especially since the distinction between rigorist Eustathians and Marcionists is only marginal. It is therefore most likely that Basil perceived radical followers of

Eustathius rather as Marcionists, a well defined heresy, than as what they may have been, namely Eustathians.

In reconsidering the teachings of the treatise - buried as they are under much stylistic clumsiness - we may conclude that they attempt to reconcile rigorous ascetic tendencies with mainstream practices, to encourage asceticism while at the same time trying to curb excesses. Eustathius' biography, consisting of balancing his ascetic ideals with clerical obligations signifies a similar attempt. Both, Basil and Eustathius, seem to have propagated a middle way, a compromise between scrupulous Scriptural interpretation and social necessity. About 358 Eustathius founded a hospice, called 'feeding-place for the poor' or 'ptōchotropheion', at Sebaste. Epiphanius reports later that the leader of this hospice guided male and female ascetics into the wilderness, because he disagreed with Eustathius' moderating tendencies, which included for instance the acceptance of property, namely the hospice itself.⁴⁷) Marathonius presided over communities of male and female ascetics, as well as over 'ptōchotropheia' and Basil exhorts virgins to communicate 'chastely' but frequently with 'Brothers in Christ'.

Could these observations confirm the existence of settled, organized communities of male and female ascetics with a certain social commitment, living according to precepts as contained in Basil's De Virginitate, within cities which were also the episcopal sees of Basil, Macedonius and Eustathius?

If so, why do we not know more about these communities?

About 358 the 'Homoiousian party' had gained the support of emperor Constantius II and had thus reached the peak of its power. Less than two years later, in 359/60 Basil returned to Constantinople, now on Constantius' request, to clarify certain doctrinal points previously left open. Basil was accompanied not only by Eustathius, but also by a namesake, Basil of Caesarea, whom he had enlisted as supporter because the young man, just returned from Athens, was already known for his rhetorical skills. However, in the meantime the balance of power had changed. In the past two years Homoiousianism had lost its most powerful supporter, the emperor. Its leaders came under severe attack, the young Basil fled, and all relevant

homoiousian bishops were deposed, Basil, Eustathius, and Macedonius among them.⁵⁰)

2. BASIL OF CAESAREA AS ASCETIC ORGANIZER (356-79)

a) A Brief Definition of Basil's Ascetic Concepts and his Historical Impact

Basil of Caesarea, the very same young man who fled the council at Constantinople in 359/60, is generally regarded as the true founder of monasticism in Cappadocia and Pontus and is seen as originator of changes which had immediate effects on the development of asceticism both in his own time and for the future.¹⁾ As it is the aim of the present discussion to identify organizational details of early monasticism it would be desirable to describe the extent of Basil's impact with regard to the numbers involved as well as the geographical distribution of communities founded by him. Unfortunately Basil refers only sporadically to such details in his letters and ascetic writings so that it is extremely hard to be exact. ²⁾ Out of Basil's over 350 letters about 44 deal with asceticism, often in little more than brief passages no more than tangential to organizational matters.³⁾ The Ascetica, the major relevant opus, also contains but a few clear statements regarding numbers or localities. The greater part of the information we possess derives from the beginning of Basil's ascetic career and this period has consequently attracted the closest investigation.⁴⁾

In 356, aged 25 or 26, Basil returned to Caesarea from his studies in Athens and renewed his acquaintance with an old friend of the family, Eustathius of Sebaste. Basil accompanied Eustathius in the following year on a tour through famous ascetic countries, from Syria to Mesopotamia, then through Palestine to Egypt.⁵⁾ This journey may have induced Basil to forgo the career as rhetorician already carved out for the young aristocrat. Upon returning he joined his mother and sister at Annesi with the firm intention of embracing ascetic life, and attempted to persuade his friend and fellow student Gregory Nazianzenus to begin this new life with him. Gregory agreed in principle but would have preferred a place closer to his home since he had to care for his elderly parents. He therefore suggested a part-time establishment, half at Annesi, half at

Tiberine, a suggestion which Basil did not accept.⁶) Basil remained only temporarily at his mother's home at Annesi, he immediately went in search for a 'μονή', a secluded spot at some distance from human habitation. He found it on the opposite side of the river Iris, not too far away, and described it enthusiastically to Gregory, inviting him to visit.⁷) Indeed, Gregory spent the winter of 357 / 358 in this 'φροντιστήριον', 'μοναστήριον' and 'school' (Gr.Naz. Ep.4 / I 3f.). In Gregory's words as contained in letters 4 and 5 written after his return to Tiberine in 358, the spot sounds less inviting.⁸) It was dark, cold and hard to reach, the only shelter against the harsh climate was what Gregory describes as a 'rat-hole' (μωξία), probably a hut. If it was not for Basil's mother's regular food supply the two friends would certainly have died of starvation.⁹)

One observation is of fundamental importance: Basil was not alone, others had already gathered at the very same spot. Gregory's letter 4 mentions several ascetics chanting psalms in this 'place for meditation' (φροντιστήριον; I 4) and letter 6 also alludes to a group joined in ascetic pursuits. Gregory speaks of 'brothers' united in their souls by prayers and meditation (συμφύα, συμψυχία) and in their zealous pursuit of virtue 'guided by written rules and canons' (ὁποῖο γραπτοῖς καὶ κανόσιν)(I 7). As early as 358 Gregory clearly refers to rules regulating ascetic life.¹⁰) The content of those written rules and canons can be extrapolated from Gregory's same letter 6. The brothers chanted psalms; observed vigils; worked in the woods, apparently to build more permanent dwellings; planted gardens, and maintained at the same time a strict fast (I 7). The assumption of an organisation present from the very beginning, based on the Scripture and regulated in writing, is confirmed by Basil's letter 2.¹¹) This letter contains the essence of Basil's ascetic convictions, attesting to an approach which was both rigorously individual and yet also contained the nucleus of institutional development. That Basil should fix his ideas concerning ascetic discipline in writing is, considering his intellect, not surprising; more surprising is the fact that he was joined very early on by several others with similar ideas.

Two years later, about 360, Basil left his ascetic followers to

return to Caesarea, where he was ordained 'Reader'. His ordination as presbyter in 362 suggests that he could subsequently return to Annesi only sporadically, since he soon became involved in ecclesiastical affairs.¹²⁾ However, in the same year, 362, a misunderstanding arose between him and the local bishop, Eusebius. This was in part caused by the fact that Basil had gained considerable standing, because of his family background as well as his personality, within a group described by Gregory Nazianzenus as

"wiser men, since they retreated from the world (... σοφώτεροι τῶν πολλῶν, οἱ κόσμου χωρίσαντες)".¹³⁾

To avoid schism Basil, suggested as a worthier leader, returned to Annesi, to his 'phrontistērion' in the solitude (ἐρημός; c. 29 PG 36, 535 B). In other words, not only did Basil find followers immediately after he began his ascetic career in the wilderness, he also found a considerable number of men - there is no mentioning of women - at Caesarea who likewise practiced a retreat from the world, described by Gregory as 'νασιπαῖοι'.¹⁴⁾ The possibility that ascetics of both types, in the forests as well as in the town, existed before Basil suggests itself. It is therefore obvious that upon embracing asceticism Basil followed earlier models. Basil himself states in letter 223, written in 375, that his search for an ascetic model led him directly to his travel companion, Eustathius. Both men maintained close bonds via frequent visits and Eustathius' best disciples were connected with Basil's own.¹⁵⁾ Basil was embedded in existing traditions. Men lived in the woods before him, in all probability in his immediate neighbourhood, others practiced asceticism while remaining in the town. They lived alone or in groups and their asceticism as corroborated by Basil was quite severe. Eustathius' influence upon this tradition and Basil himself cannot be outlined in detail but must be assumed.

However, Eustathius and Basil were linked by more than ascetic ideas. Like Eustathius, Basil did not succeed in retiring from the world to the degree he may have desired. Basil's origin, his family's position and his intellectual and rhetorical skills prevented a complete retreat. Soon he became another ascetic to be elected bishop.¹⁶⁾ It is the obligations connected with this office that explain the decrease of ascetic references

in his later letters; dogmatic as well as day to day affairs predominate.¹⁷⁾ However, his frequent absence from Annesi forced Basil to converse with his brothers via the written word, thus resulting in the vast body of regulations, the Ascetica.¹⁸⁾ Therefore major strata of monastic development can be reconstructed from Basil's writings, despite the decrease of direct evidence contained in the letters.

One of the most interesting aspects of Basil's precepts is a tendency towards moderation which was already becoming noticeable in the first five years.¹⁹⁾ Like Eustathius before him Basil soon realized that extremes would be counterproductive.²⁰⁾ Already in letter 22 Basil permits more food, prohibits strict fasting and housing probably improved. As significant as moderation is a second concept repeatedly emphasized: the need to live communally.²¹⁾ Basil leaves no doubt that ascetic behaviour can only improve within a community and condemns individual asceticism shortly thereafter.²²⁾ The rules themselves are clearly a result of this emphasis on communal asceticism and are of course written to cater for just such a community. The question to be born in mind is, whether Basil's communal approach was entirely his own innovation or whether he found a tradition even for that particular concept.

Gregory's later description of his and Basil's achievements, perhaps not surprisingly, strongly emphasizes their own originality by pointing out that Basil created a third, new model of ascetic life out of two existing ones, called ' βίος ἑρημικός ' and ' μίγας '.²³⁾ Whether Basil's third model was original or only an improvement of earlier ones, he and Gregory did not fail to pass it on to potentially interested parties. While still presbyter Basil founded a hospice at Caesarea, clearly modeled after Eustathius' since it bears the same name ' πτωχοτροφεῖον '.²⁴⁾ In 372 this hospice had developed into a 'new city', containing quarters for bishop and clergy, housing for poor and sick and according to Clarke the ascetic community to which the great Ascetica were dedicated.²⁵⁾ Unfortunately there is no direct evidence to corroborate his assumption.

Two undated letters indicate that the hospices did not remain limited to Caesarea. Letter 142 mentions a chorepiscopus in charge of a hospice and letter 143 refers to a hospice in Amasia (one of the few geographical terms) also in relation to a chorepiskopos. It seems as

though the number of hospices increased rapidly, spreading at the same time into minor towns of Cappadocia and Pontus.²⁶⁾

In 372 Basil addressed letter 259 (III 104) to two monks he would have liked to invite to his home; but he realises the difficulty of this as they are indispensable to their own community, because:

"Men who have chosen the life of the poor and who always provide for the most necessary items with their own hands, cannot leave their residence for a long time." (III 150)

Could this suggest that they were in charge of a hospice?

Letter 150, quoted in this connection by Clarke, is equally difficult to interpret. It may have been written by a certain Heraclides, who became interested in asceticism while staying with Basil at the hospice in Caesarea.²⁷⁾ These circumstances lead Clarke to assume the mentioned identity of hospices and ascetic communities. Although there must have been close links between both institutions, this identification is not compelling.²⁸⁾ However, a number of ascetic communities proper are referred to. One of them is of course Basil's own foundation at Annesi. At the end of 375 he writes to: " τοῖς ὑφ' ἐαυτὸν ἀσκηταῖς " that he would like to visit them but has to send his confidant Meletius (Ep. 226; III 23). Interestingly, the letter contains a doctrinal discussion and warnings against heretics, possibly suggesting that even his own monks could be lead astray. A similar assumption is possible for letter 259 (III 104). Other communities are alluded to in Basil's Ascetica. RF 35 (PG 31, 1004) is probably the most obvious. Here the brothers ask whether it would be convenient to have several adelphotes in one village. Basil deems this unwise since rivalries are likely to ensue thus impairing the aims of harmony and unity. It seems a little far fetched to assume, based on this passage, that each town had its own community.²⁹⁾ However, other communities did exist. In RF 30, 43 and 54 Basil addresses superiors in the plural, clearly indicating heads of several communities.³⁰⁾ He exhorts in RF 54 superiors to congregate on a regular basis to discuss matters of mutual interest and prescribes in RF 43 (PG 31, 1029) that new superiors have to be elected by those of other communities. The existence of several ascetic communities is thus firmly established. In contrast to the hospices those communities are, however, always referred to as 'ἀδελφότης' or brotherhoods, and, especially in the early letters, as

'monastērion' or 'phrontistērion'.³¹⁾ A clear identification of a hospice and an ascetic community is therefore not feasible; it is, however, probable that both institutions were closely connected and spread rapidly. Basil indicates in letter 284 that communities had become so important that tax exemption could be requested on their behalf. That and other legal privileges seemed already to exist.³²⁾ Institutionalisation had proceeded, a vow is required, and monks form a 'τάγμα τῶν μοναζόντων'.³³⁾

Later authors corroborate the impression of a multitude of flourishing communities. Rufinus writes in his HE II, 9:

"Basilus Pontus urbes et rura circumiens,...in unum coire, monastica construere.. ita brevi permutata est totius provinciae facies, ut in arido et squalenti campo videretur seges fecunda.."³⁴⁾

Sozomen relates that Basil and Gregory divided the country. Whilst Gregory remained responsible for Cappadocia Basil founded numerous monasteries in Pontus.³⁵⁾ Cassianus testifies that Piamun found 'coenobia' in many Pontic villages.³⁶⁾ This picture of unhindered growth and progress needs, however, some readjustment. We possess neither geographic^{al} nor numeric evidence for the spread of Basil's communities, and the identity of hospices and ascetic brotherhoods is not conclusive. The only place where a community is attested beyond doubt is Annesi. In point of fact, although rhetorical exaggeration certainly has to be taken into account, Basil twice refers to the scarce number of communities in his diocese, despite a recent progress in ascetic life. Further, Basil and Gregory may have attempted to transform previously existing communities into new ones, following Basil's precepts on the strength of his episcopal authority. This has to be borne in mind in the subsequent argument.

b) The Organization of Basil's Female Community

As has been pointed out Eustathius of Sebaste and the ascetic tradition linked with his name had a decisive influence on Basil of Caesarea's concepts. In connection with this premise it is important to keep in mind that Eustathius had a particular impact on a certain part of society, namely women. Did Basil also follow his initial teacher in the attention attributed to women? Did he have his own concepts regarding them? If so, what were these concepts; were they original or adaptations of Eustathian models, of traditions already in existence? If Basil's concepts were innovations, did he attempt to convince women that they were of greater value than their own as he did in the case of men? To investigate these problems it would be best to reconstruct the organization of female coinonia on the basis of the RF and RB.

Only a fraction of the Basilian Corpus Asceticum deals explicitly with women. Out of a total of over 400 only 13 questions address adelphai and many organizational features have to be reconstructed by analogy with those found in the male community. This method is feasible because Basil addressed men and women alike, for instance in RF 15 (PG 31, 952). A sharp distinction between the sexes would furthermore clash with Basil's concept that men and women are equal with regard to their Christian soul. Thus, it can be assumed that similar organizational principles applied to both communities.¹⁾

The few regulations, or rather questions, relating explicitly to the female community attest that it was guided by a leader. However, even this simple observation is not without its difficulties. In RB 108 (PG 31, 1156) this leader is entitled 'proestōsa', whereas RB 110 and 111, obviously in the same context of leadership, speak of 'πρεσβύτερα' (PG 31, 1157). We must therefore clarify whether Basil applies both terms indiscriminately or whether they designate different bodies of authority with their respective functions.

The title 'ἡ προεστῶσα', 'the one who leads, protects and cares for the ones in her keeping', was certainly created by analogy with its male equivalent.²⁾ 'προεστῶς', originally the title of

"the highest ranked member in the Church. . . or a college of presbyters acting on his behalf",

appears frequently throughout RF and RB; mainly in the sense of 'leader of the community.'³) In the few cases Basil uses 'πρεβύτερος' it is synonymous for 'τελειωτής' and refers to age. Besides RB 110 and 111, there is only one other exception where Basil uses 'presbyteros' to indicate authority, namely RB 103 (PG 31, 1153), so that 'proestōsa' must indicate the leader of a female community, bearing the same honorary title as her male counterpart. Further attempts to clarify the exact hierarchical structure which was involved are complicated by Basil's inconsistent terminology. In contrasting lower and higher members of the community, he speaks for instance of 'προέχοντες' (RF 31, PG 31, 993). 'Proechontes', here in the plural, could simply be a general term for leadership without specific reference. However, in most cases Basil addresses several leaders in a general fashion, he addresses them as 'proestotoi' rather than 'proechontes'.⁴) The term 'proechontes' therefore cannot be explained as a mere generalization; it is more convincing to interpret it as indicating a separate body of authority, a committee of elders acting alongside the leader of the community.

According to RF 27 (PG 31, 988) potential criticism of the proestos is the sole prerequisite of "those who are in charge (προέχουσι) because of their age and wisdom"; the same is repeated in RF 48 (PG 31, 1037): only a committee of 'experienced and counselling brothers' is permitted to criticize the superior.

Finally, RF 48 (PG 31, 1037) repeats that no one is allowed to criticize the proestos except 'a committee of experienced and counselling brothers' (Eccl. 32: 24). The most significant information is, however, contained in RF 45 (PG 31, 1032). In case the proestos has to leave the community an able brother has to be chosen as representative or proxy.

In other words, the community was guided by a 'proestōs', in his absence represented by his proxy, who is chosen by the 'proestōs' and a committee of able brothers. The committee had furthermore the duty of criticizing the 'proestōs', of acting as a control, and of assisting him with advice, for instance upon distributing charges to individual brothers (RB 104, PG

31, 1153).⁵⁾ Another piece of information contained in RB 104 is of even greater importance. The assistance of the committee is not a specific characteristic of the male community but applies likewise to the female one: "ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἀδελφαῖς".

The proestosa as well was assisted in her tasks by a committee of able sisters, a suggestion corroborated by RF 33 (PG 31, 997) referring to specially elected elder brothers and sisters. RF 33 determines, in fact, that private matters concerning members of both communities could be dealt with only by way of intermediaries. These intermediaries were chosen on the grounds of their personal and moral integrity and in all probability because of their advanced age (PG 31, 997 D). Clearly, these intermediaries belonged to the committee of able brothers and sisters mentioned above, but to fulfill this specific function a factor not normally obligatory came into play: age. As the title 'presbyteros' and 'presbytera' indicates, age became a crucial qualification in this particular context. As soon as transactions with the opposite sex are involved, ability and moral integrity were no longer by themselves sufficient. The danger of possible slander or other problems arising from contact between the sexes had to be counteracted by advanced age. The offices mentioned so far were not the only ones, for other brothers as well were in charge of specific tasks. A group of elders were dispatched to help the sisters on a regular basis with duties they were unable to perform themselves;⁶⁾ within the male community an oikonomos, a cellarer, a distributor of alms, several overseers of work and a tutor are referred to;⁷⁾ and a sister managed the production of textiles (RB 153, PG 31, 1181).

Other than that, on the part of the sisters no corresponding office is mentioned. That need not, however, exclude the existence of other offices, the presence of a female teacher, for instance, can reasonably be assumed. RF 15 (PG 31, 952) affirms beyond doubt that boys and girls were accepted into the community, as orphans or brought by the parents themselves. In the latter case their acceptance was witnessed by an official to avoid subsequent complications (956 B). Upon acceptance into the community the children were housed separately from their elders but within the precinct of their community, be it male or female. The

greatest care was taken to educate these children in an exemplary Christian manner; in fact the curriculum taught resembles almost exactly the one described in Macrina's case (above p. 22). Their academic education was supervised by a specially appointed teacher, whilst the superior himself dealt directly with disciplinary matters. Although these details refer explicitly to boys, it would be unreasonable to assume coeducation. The girls were, in other words, taught by a specially appointed sister, a suggestion supported by the fact that Macrina is perceived throughout the VSM as ideal "διδάσκαλος" and "παιδαγωγός" for all who lived with her.■)

3. FEMALE ASCETICISM IN BASIL OF CAESAREA'S TIME

(356-79)

a) The Transition from the Ascetic Family to the Ascetic Community: Macrina

The gradual development of Basil's alternative method of asceticism and its impact on existing forms should become most noticeable in his immediate surroundings, in Macrina's community and its further approach to ascetic life.

Macrina as sister and ascetic pioneer has, in fact, always been prime evidence in demonstrating Basil's influence as an ascetic teacher; while some modern authors ascribe to her influence Basil's conversion to ascetic life, most of them assume a reversal of influence from then onwards. It is a foregone conclusion that Macrina's community adopts Basil's rule, and that, indeed, his teachings for women are addressed to Macrina's community. Macrina is seen as completely immersed in Basil's monastic system, a double monastery under the guidance of brother and sister being the logical outcome.¹⁾ Whilst the assumption of a double monastery may well reflect historical circumstances, it is still surprising that Macrina's position has always been considered as a matter of course, without critical examination. To establish the validity of such a view it seems necessary to subject Macrina's subsequent ascetic development to a closer investigation.

Basil spent the first years after his return to Annesi experimenting with a new way of life. Macrina, meanwhile, continued to live according to her ascetic routine, remaining firmly embedded in her mother's affairs and the responsibilities of her household. Despite this apparent continuity there can be no doubt that Basil's arrival and subsequent settlement changed the original community at Annesi, and the question arises to what extent and precisely where these changes took place. The estate at Annesi now housed three different communities, signifying different models of ascetic life. Firstly, there was Macrina's community, an ascetic household including her mother and brother Peter; secondly, Basil's 'monē'; and

thirdly, the 'ἑσχατία' or refuge of their younger brother Naucratius (VSM 8: 14, 166).

At this point, Naucratius and his life require closer attention. Born directly after Basil, in about 330, Naucratius apparently surpassed or at least equalled his elder brother in talent. At the age of 22, at the moment of newly attained success as a scholar he suddenly decided to "turn to a life of solitude and poverty" (VSM 8: 8, 166). Accompanied solely by a slave, who was more of a friend than a servant, he retreated to an enclosed spot in the forests near the river Iris to lead a life "far away from the world". Sustaining himself by hunting he served and nurtured several old men who lived in the neighbourhood, while he tried to comply faithfully with all his mother's wishes (VSM 8: 22-34, 168).²⁾

Already some characteristics familiar from earlier discussions can be seen. The terms of Naucratius life 'καθ' ἑαυτὸν', also described as 'philosophos bios', point to Eustathius of Sebaste and his teachings (VSM 8: 13, 166 and 9: 1, 168). Naucratius was one of his followers, possibly the first in the area, if the old men cared for by him do not indeed represent earlier enthusiasts.³⁾ The exact locality of Naucratius' retreat is of course unknown. It must, however, have been quite close to Annesi since Naucratius' contact with his mother never ceased.⁴⁾

These observations have several implications for Macrina and Basil's influence on her ascetic development. During the years 352-57 Macrina had been exposed to a radical realization of asceticism as understood by Eustathius and his followers. Upon his arrival in 355 / 56 therefore, Basil was confronted with two ascetic models. Macrina practiced asceticism within the framework of a household and his brother Naucratius attempted to achieve ascetic perfection by living in a 'monē', shared by a few old men. Upon Basil's second return, after his voyage to Egypt, the picture had completely changed.

At some time in 357 Naucratius had suddenly died, while hunting with his slave Chrysaphios for food three days away from home.⁵⁾ Emmelia's shock and distress were great, while Macrina is depicted as maintaining stoic calm, but the effect of the catastrophe must have left its marks on every member of the family. Recollecting Basil's first steps as an ascetic, in a 'phrontistērion' of the roughest kind, which was situated on

the opposite side of the river within walking distance of his mother's home, one cannot dismiss the possibility that Basil's decision to stay and live as anchorite was strongly influenced by the example of his recently deceased brother.⁴) It may even be possible that Basil's very early followers were in fact those of the late Naucratus', who now found a new leader in Basil. It is equally possible that Basil set up his *monē* while Naucratus was still alive, so that for a brief period of time all three establishments coexisted side by side. Our knowledge of the chronology allows no definite solution. Continuity, possibly even of location, was in any case maintained. The estate still housed an ascetic household and a *'monē'* consisting of several anchorites closely connected with the household. Basil, one cannot help thinking, continued from where his brother had left off. The question remains, however, what impact Naucratus' death and Basil's arrival and subsequent stay made on Macrina's community.

In a chapter placed by Gregory between his account of Basil's return and Naucratus' death (these events can be dated between 356 and 357) the following transformation of Emmelia's household is described. Macrina persuaded her mother to renounce her customary life of the great lady (VSM 7: 2-4, 164) and

"to adopt the feeling of community and to partake in the life of the virgins around her, after having made them from the slaves and servants they were into sisters and equals" (VSM 7: 7-8, 164).

This transformation resulted eventually in Emmelia (and Macrina)

"sharing one table, one bed and even all necessities of life, like an equal,"

with the former slaves, "all differences of rank being removed from their life" (VSM 11: 9-13, 176). What does this change signify? The phrasing of VSM 7: 7-8 suggests that a manumission of all domestic servants or at least the ones closest to Emmelia and Macrina had taken place. To clarify in the first place the technicalities of the step - which to my knowledge has not been done before - it is necessary to define the exact kind of manumission applied.⁷) Two possible procedures come to mind immediately, the so-called '*manumissio in ecclesia*' and the '*manumissio inter amicos*'. '*Manumissio in ecclesia*', promulgated in two Constantinian edicts dating from 316 and 323, authorized Christian congregations to free slaves.⁸) The procedure involved a declaration in front of the bishop (or his representative in the countryside) and the assembled congregation. This

procedure was highly formalized and a slave thus freed became a full citizen and 'persona sui iuris'.⁹⁾ 'Manumissio inter amicos' on the other hand was far less complicated. A master declared a slave as friend, expressing this either by letter (per epistulam) or by inviting him to dine at the same table (per mensam). In contrast to the other types of manumissio this form did not grant full citizenship. A slave thus freed was merely Latinised.¹⁰⁾

In Emmelia's household the second type of manumissio, inter amicos and more precisely per mensam must have taken place. Gregory informs us that the former slaves now share the same table with his mother and sister, furthermore he alludes neither to the presence of a cleric nor indeed to a congregation.

The slow spread of the first type of manumission, in ecclesia, also speaks in favour of the suggested procedure.¹¹⁾ If manumissio inter amicos has taken place, this means that the newly freed slaves had not reached full citizen status. They continued to be of a lesser rank than their former masters, not only in social but also in legal terms. Yet Macrina and her mother treated them regardless of rank as equals (VSM 11: 12, 176). The exact significance of such a step is comparatively hard to assess, given the scarcity of sources. Despite differing opinions voiced in the secondary literature concerning the degree of Christian influence upon the treatment of slaves, some factors regarding the fourth century are unanimously agreed.¹²⁾ Whether caused by the cessation of offensive Roman warfare, the increasing transformation of free citizens into coloni or indeed the influence of Christian doctrine, the number of slaves declined during the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries AD. The relative impact of these three factors remains thereby a highly controversial matter.¹³⁾ While never exactly cheap, slave labor increased in cost, which led to a gradual amelioration of the lot of individual slaves. In Asia Minor, for instance, slaves were primarily used for less physically demanding housework and are accordingly described as 'οἰκεῖοι'. Their duties included a variety of specialized crafts, such as baking.¹⁴⁾ This amelioration, supported on an intellectual level by Stoicism and Christianity, resulted in the better treatment of the individual, but only a

fractional increase of acts of liberation.¹⁵) As far as Christian influence is concerned most modern authors seem thus to agree with Imbert's conclusion:

"... L'Église, si elle considère comme égaux à ses yeux l'esclave et le libre, si elle protège le servus contre son maître, ne touche pas au lien de subordination qui unit l'un à l'autre: chacun reste socialement dans sa situation, bien que, spirituellement, tous deux aient la même destinée."¹⁶)

The foundations of slavery itself were never seriously attacked. Westermann suggests that the considering of slaves as spiritual equals declined from the fourth century onwards, because of the increased economic reliance of the Church on its own slaves. In other words, Westermann assumes a regressive tendency towards maintenance of barriers in the period discussed.¹⁷)

Seen against this background Macrina's and Emmelia's step gains further significance. In my earlier passage on Macrina I attempted to show that her ascetic development proceeded in gradual steps, marking a deviation from established social conditions for a lady of her rank and standing. At first Macrina considered herself a widow without having been married, she then adopted simple dress and performed a limited amount of manual work, especially baking, customarily performed by slaves. All of these steps, except perhaps the first, remained, however, within the framework of convention, at least from the viewpoint of an outside observer.

Only persons very familiar with the household could detect the changes within, to others the picture was that of normality. In treating slaves as equals, slaves who had been freed but were still of lesser rank, Macrina and especially Emmelia undertook the first step which openly showed their ascetic disposition. Emmelia had to reject her life of luxury; moreover she and her daughter broke a social barrier of considerable strength. Their self-abasement to the standard of lesser mortals openly signifies a break with convention that must be paralleled by Basil's rejection of a worldly career (VSM 11: 8, 176). Seen in terms of Macrina's previous activities, this step had the same qualitative value as a physical retreat into the wilderness. Both her brothers could declare their new psychological disposition immediately; they could express and symbolize their psychological retreat by a physical one. For Macrina, a woman, such a step appears to have been impossible. She remained firmly within the confines of her family. Throughout the first twelve years of her ascetic career

she expressed her disposition by only unobtrusive changes. Now, however, in treating subordinates as equals, both Macrina and her mother parallel the brothers' physical break. In the women's case the medium of manifestation is a social one, a break of conventions not a physical retreat.¹⁸) This interpretation is supported by a series of organizational changes to be observed during the same period, whereby chronology plays an important role. To recapitulate the relevant passage, VSM 7:7-8, 164:

Ἡ δὲ ὁσας εἶχε μεθ' ἑαυτῆς ἐκ δουλίδων καὶ ὑποχειρίων ἀδελφὰς καὶ ὁμοτίμους ποιησαμένη·"

Did Emmelia and the newly freed slaves join in the kind of life already adopted by Macrina and several other virgins of unknown origin; did Emmelia decide to free all her slaves and join Macrina at the same time - the 'parthenoi' referred to being identical with the former slaves; or had Emmelia freed a few eager slave-girls earlier on and now joined this group together with the most recently freed slaves? Maraval's introductory comment:

"...Macrine persuade sa mère, libérée du souci. . . , de renoncer à son train de vie habituel pour adopter celui des vierges qu'elle avait auprès d'elle,"

unfortunately leaves the sequence of events ambiguous.¹⁹) However, looked at more closely, the relevant passages indicate that the bulk of servants had been freed shortly before Emmelia's decision to participate in Macrina's regime (VSM 7: 7-8, 164 and 11: 8-12, 176).

Gregory's arrangement of the events could support such an interpretation. In chapter VI Gregory states that Basil returned from Athens just after Emmelia had arranged suitable settlements for her other daughters. The same chapter contains Basil's subsequent conversion to ascetic life. Chapter VII contains the alterations within the household, chapters IX and X deal with Naucratus' death in 357, and chapter XI resumes the description of the newly formed community. This sequence would place Emmelia's conversion at a time before Basil's settlement and just after Naucratus' death, between 356 and 357. Emmelia's decision to join her daughter and Basil's decision to settle in a home must, therefore, be connected with Naucratus's death. His death may in fact have been the driving force behind the changes. In both cases Macrina's influence, for she alone maintained stoic calm during the catastrophe, is emphasized as

exemplary. Gregory depicts her as advising her mother how to alleviate her burden: by adopting the ascetic life on an equal standing with the slaves freed only shortly before. This parallelism of time and cause in Emmelia's and Basil's conversion would also confirm the qualitative identity of their steps.

Upon his decision to renounce his worldly status as rhetorician and member of the curial class, Basil also renounced a substantial part of his possessions. He thus prepared the transition to the ascetic life by degrading himself to a lower census category. Even though the step may have been of a symbolic rather than financial value (Basil had to make five attempts to free himself of his worldly burden) it was of considerable significance: it included an obvious change of rank.²⁰)

It has already been pointed out that Macrina practiced a rather jejune lifestyle from a very early time onwards. Upon freeing her slaves, Emmelia likewise renounced personal luxury. Further, both women, Macrina and Emmelia, had undertaken steps to re-arrange their financial matters, some time before Emmelia decided to practice personal poverty.

VSM 20 contains an account by Macrina in which she refers to the financial situation of her parents. She emphasizes, possibly with some exaggeration, that during the lifetime of her parents - in no small part because of the efficient management of her mother and herself, despite all ascetic tendencies - the property's value had increased nine-fold. This figure was arrived at from the division of the parents' property among the nine children, each child receiving a larger portion than the original fortune of the parents. Though the multiplication by nine is probably a rhetorical figure, Gregory is justified in counting his family among the richest of his time (VSM 20: 15-20, 206-08).²¹)

The division of property referred to by Macrina must be identical with the division mentioned in chapter XI (VSM 11: 1-5, 174). Here we are informed that Emmelia arranged for the settlement of her daughters and at the same time divided her fortune equally among her nine children. In other words, Naucratus was still alive. Emmelia kept only enough to cater for her own and her households bare necessities. Macrina, on the other hand did not retain her share but placed it into the trust of "the priest"

(VSM 20: 20-23, 208).

Already in 356/57 Emmelia disposed of her property, shortly before she adopted personal poverty. The terms of this disposal are as interesting as its early date. It demonstrates in both cases Macrina's and her mother's careful and considerate dealing with the financial affairs of the family. Obviously neither Emmelia nor indeed Macrina was inclined to give their religious feelings priority over the family's financial matters. Thus Emmelia did dispose of her money, but without throwing it carelessly away. Instead she divided it in equal parts amongst her children, freeing herself of an unwanted burden without infringing the just expectations of her children. Macrina accordingly entrusted her portion, undoubtedly a considerable sum, to the priest of the local church, who administrated it as *οἰκόνομος*. It is uncertain whether this act was actually equivalent to a dedication. Clearly the trust was connected with certain obligations. The money had to be used for charitable means, especially during the recurrent periods of famine. However, it remains an open question whether the trust was permanent or whether the property would revert to the family after Macrina's death.²²) It should be noted that Macrina undertook no step regarding renunciation of her property, while this could have affected the fortune of her brothers and sisters. Only after she could dispose of her own part did she do so in a considerate and beneficial manner.

It follows, assuming that my dating of the division is correct, that before Basil renounced his share of the possessions, Macrina and her mother had already done so. The act of renunciation was furthermore effected with great thoughtfulness; both women provided firstly for the worldly welfare of their entire family and only then realized their personal aspirations. The years between 356 and 357 thus witnessed important changes at Annesi. Naucratus died, Basil succeeded him, all three disposed of the majority of their possessions and broke barriers of rank and status.

The problem of the relative influence the individual participants, in particular Macrina and Basil, exercised on each other still remains to be solved. A re-interpretation of the events from this point of view, should begin with a brief comparison of Basil's and Macrina's attitudes towards the

problem of slaves.

Basil's attitude as documented in his later writings differs profoundly from that of his sister, his younger brother Gregory and his friend Gregory Nazianzus. While the latter two deplored (at least in theory) the institute of slavery, describing it as unnatural and a tyranny, Basil does not allow such a conclusion. He argues that slavery reflects the God-given order of mankind, stating that an obedient slave had a higher chance of reaching perfection, and condemns any revolt to change this status.²³⁾ Some of Basil's fleeting remarks on the subject of slaves reveal a surprising amount of the customary contempt felt by rich owners towards their servants; Basil is in this respect tightly interwoven with his surrounding culture. As a matter of fact in practice neither Gregory Nazianzenus nor Gregory of Nyssa maintained their own laudable theoretical standpoint. Both of them owned slaves.²⁴⁾ Although Basil's later attitudes do not necessarily reflect his earlier ones the documents confirm that it was Macrina and her mother who took the most radical attitude towards slaves. They alone not only freed their slaves but regarded them as equals. If Macrina was influenced in her attitude towards slaves then this stemmed probably from the teachings of Eustathius rather than from Basil's (above p. 41).

Basil's early stay seems on the whole to be marked by influence exercised upon rather than by him. As I attempted to demonstrate, his decision to become an ascetic and the way he put this decision into practice, indicate Eustathius' and Naucrati's influence.²⁵⁾ In his introduction Maraval makes a misleading statement based on Gribomont:

"... la rude vie de "gentil-homme campagnard " du frère puîné de Basile. ... s'apparentait bien plutôt à l'ascétisme eustathien qu'au monachisme basilien, déjà beaucoup plus organisé."²⁶⁾

While there can hardly be any doubt concerning the first assertion the second statement seems somehow mistaken. Maraval himself writes at a later stage:

"Sa <Naucrati's> retraite aurait duré jusqu'en 357 environ, un peu avant que Basile vienne prendre sa succession au bord de l'Iris (en 358)".²⁷⁾

Since Basil returned probably between 357 and 358 any comparison between Naucrati's and Basil's system seems rather futile.

However, there was an organized ascetic community at Annesi: the community around Macrina. With the conversion of Emmelia and the freeing of the

slaves, Macrina had succeeded in transforming the former ascetic household into an ascetic community. One must assume that initially in this community no strict separation of sexes was practiced (Macrina's brother Peter continued to live in it for some time and so may have had male dependents), and manual work was one of its most important features.²⁸) Whilst the treatment of slaves and the life of poverty and fasting reflect Eustathius' influence upon this newly established community, the concept of manual work as a method of spiritual improvement cannot be traced back to Eustathius. However, the canons of Gangra clearly would not emphasize such a positive attitude, so that it is difficult to specify the origin of this concept.²⁹)

It has become apparent that Eustathius, Macrina and Naucratus influenced Basil's early ascetic years. However, in discussing the subsequent development of Basil's and Macrina's communities, it is best to investigate initially the organisation of Macrina's community while keeping the results previously gained from the study of Basil's community in mind. Difficulties encountered in dealing with this task result mainly from the fact that Gregory mentions the few organizational details in retrospect from the date of Macrina's death, July 19th 380, mainly because he was not present in the interim period between 357 and 380.³⁰) Macrina and her mother belonged to a prominent Pontic family (above p. 21). Consequently their newly adopted life-style did not remain unnoticed, the ascetic household at Annesi soon attracted new members. Whenever Gregory refers to Macrina's community after 357 he uses terms implying a considerable number of members, such as the plural of parthenos (VSM 11: 9, 176; 26: 2, 228; 32: 4, 246; 34: 24, 252) or a 'ἰχθυόσ τῶν παρθένων' (VSM 16: 5, 194; 29: 1, 236; 33: 15, 248). Macrina's community increased steadily.³¹) In a limited number of cases it is possible to reconstruct the approximate date of new additions, while at the same time furnishing information concerning the social background of new members. In VSM 26: 30-34, 232 Gregory mentions certain members who deplore Macrina's death with particular vehemence. They lost with her their "mother and supporter". In fact, about 368/69 Macrina had collected small girls from the streets, mainly orphans, who were victims of the severe famine afflicting Cappadocia and Pontus (VSM 12: 30-35, 184). She had raised these girls as members of the community and later on offered them the chance to stay, an opportunity clearly taken by some. In 368/69 the community was thus enlarged by a number of girls, stemming from a very low strata of society, and therefore augmenting the proportion of the community's more humble members.³²) A very different social background is represented by another member, a certain Vetiana (VSM 28: 1-10, 234). Vetiana was of noble birth and very wealthy, her father Araxios being in fact a senator.³³) Married as a young girl, as was customary, to a man of equally high rank, identified as the Alaman magister pedum Agilo, she became a widow some time after 366, having been married for a brief span of time only (VSM 28: 4, 234).³⁴) Left to herself Vetiana adopted Macrina as "guardian and teacher" (VSM

28: 6, 234). Vetiana's relationship with Macrina's community was, however, not as straightforward as it may seem. It is said that she spent "τὰ πολλὰ." within the community. While this could mean "most of her life", the term could also imply "most of her time", quasi a part time membership. Vetiana, despite her desire to lead a life of virtue, may not have been capable of doing so in the same radical way as Macrina.³⁵⁾

A fourth wealthy member, apart from Emmelia, Macrina, and Vetiana, was in all likelihood Lampadion, a deaconess (VSM 29: 2, 236). The origin and development of the title deaconess suggest that Lampadion was not only quite well off, but also a widow, although again we possess no precise information (below p. 90). It is interesting that at least two of the individually known members are widows, Emmelia and Vetiana; one of the others was possibly a widow and Macrina claimed to be one. All four are thus free from the paramount female duty, a family and its obligations. It is certain that the term 'parthenos', shared by all, designates a status rather than a physical condition, parthenos is, in other words, a title. No conditions or modes of transition from a given former to this new status are mentioned; there is neither a public nor a private vow.

The mere factor of numerical increase in the decades following the transformation of the household necessitated internal changes within the community. An internal organisation must have developed. At the head of the community stood Macrina, the initiator and consequently the leader. In VSM 16: 10, 194 Gregory gives her the title "ἡ καθ' ἑαυτὴν". This term is rarely used as early as the end of the fourth century to denote leadership of a religious community. Its clear connotations of leadership favoured its later development into a technical term, but the use in VSM is quite exceptional for this time.³⁶⁾ Gregory's employment of the term leaves no doubt regarding Macrina's leadership. Another aspect of this leadership is contained in her characterization as 'paidagōgos' and 'didaskalos'.³⁷⁾ Macrina was the sole and final authority in all matters, spiritual as well as temporal. The impact of her authority becomes obvious in VSM 26, 228, where the virgins attempt to maintain their countenance in face of Macrina's death for fear of displeasing her by displaying unwanted emotions. Once Macrina is dead they lose all control, knowing that now all their strength, guidance, security, and comfort has been taken from

them.

However, Macrina did not preside in splendid isolation. An inner core of special friends (VSM 27: 13 -15, 234), gathered around her, Vetiana and Lampadion being among these close companions. As VSM 28 and 29 (234-36) imply, these companions were in charge of particular tasks. Lampadion is said to "preside over the choros of virgins" (VSM 29: 1-2, 236).³⁸) This 'choros' was probably more than a ceremonial body. Although such a function needs not be excluded, the term indicates the community as such. Lampadion's later role during and after Macrina's funeral suggests that she was Macrina's proxy, her importance being emphasized by her title "deaconess". It should be noted that Macrina as a leader was surrounded by an inner circle of close friends who assisted her in daily charges, especially during her later illnesses, a clear parallel to Basil's organisation.

A distinct group was formed by the young girls adopted in 368/69. The very fact that they were younger and in need of education implies a treatment different from that of the elder members, although there is no possibility of reconstructing the precise terms of this treatment (VSM 26: 30-34, 232). All members together constituted the "χορὸς τῶν παρθένων".³⁹) This choros inhabited what is described as 'παρθενῶν' and 'γυναικωνῖτις' or in a very general fashion as 'eschatia'.⁴⁰) 'Phrontistērion', was used for the first time in an ascetic context by Gregory Nazianzenus.⁴¹) 'Gynaikōnitis' stood originally for the women's, 'parthenōn' for the girls' quarters of a house. 'Gynaikōnitis' designates also the female section of a church, becoming later the technical term for a convent.⁴²) Parthenon on the other hand was used very early to denote an ascetic community, Athanasius' use of the term in the Vita Antonii is perhaps the best known example.⁴³) This terminological aspect has two important practical consequences for Macrina's community. By 380 Peter was the superior of his own significant community, and when the hegemon of Sebastopolis came to visit the establishment, a distinct female community had been formed (VSM 36: 8-12, 256). Separation of the sexes had taken place. A second question is whether Basil's female community and Macrina's are identical. This problem remains inconclusive but clues may be found in investigating the setting of Macrina's community. Practicality would

favour the assumption that Macrina remained in the family 'προόστειον'. Descriptions by the two Gregorii and Basil confirm that 'villae' of rich possessors were vast and had room to accommodate a large community.⁴⁴) Upon visiting Macrina, Gregory is guided "into the house", where he finds his sister resting on the floor (VSM 16: 11, 194). After her death Macrina is laid out in the 'προαύλιον', in all probability the vestibule of her house.⁴⁵) Most likely, Macrina's augmented community went on living in the family home. This house was situated in the village Annesi, which was entirely owned by Macrina's family until long after her death.⁴⁶) Peter's newly formed male community lived likewise on family-owned real estate, in the village or at its edge.⁴⁷)

Having established the physical location of Macrina's community, we must discuss some internal developments. Although not bound by a public vow - as far as is discernible - Macrina and Emmelia and consequently all virgins distinguished themselves by their dress. It consisted of "a coat, a veil and shoes (ἱμάτιον. . . τῆς κεφαλῆς ἡ καλύπτρα, τὰ τετριμμένα τῶν ποδῶν ὑποδήματα) (VSM 29: 15-16, 236). Macrina owned only one set of the described clothes in close adherence to Mt 10: 10: "Provide no gold, silver, . . . no pack for the road, no second coat, no shoes, no stick. . .". The implication of poverty thus given, combined with the description of Emmelia's coat as "of somber colour" (VSM 32: 5, 246), suggests a close resemblance to Eustathius' gown. It seems that members of Macrina's community wore what was to become the typical monastic habit.⁴⁸) In contrast to the female followers of Eustathius, Macrina never denied her sex; she emphasized it by wearing a veil.⁴⁹) It is important to note that after her death, and only then, Macrina was laid out in a bridal garment, a white dress. (VSM 32: 3, 246). The simple dress described by Lampadion symbolizes several features of Macrina's spiritual concept, the basis of her daily regime in both practical and spiritual aspects. Personal poverty was of paramount importance and signified in its manifestation through manual labour the spiritual concept of humility. Humility includes obedience as expressed by mutual service. Throughout her life Macrina is described as a servant, of her mother, but also of her brothers and other members of the community, whilst others serve her in return (VSM 5: 25-35, 27: 13-15; 156-58, 234). The same emphasis on service is, incidentally, to be found in Naucrati's

description (VSM 8, 164-68). Poverty, manual labour - textile work and the preparation of food - and mutual service are only accessories (πρόσπεργον) and a preparation for the virgin's true occupation: constant prayer, and uninterrupted meditation on the Divine, day and night (VSM 11: 30, 178; I Thess 5: 17).⁸⁰) Continued celibacy is a condition sine qua non, fasting and control of all passions and bodily needs and disengagement from earthly concerns are cornerstones of ascetic practice. In contrast to earlier years, however, the practical side of ascetic life was now observed on a much larger scale. Instead of just Macrina several virgins now worked, served each other, and prayed together; differences in age as well as social background had to be accommodated. The result must have been an increased institutionalization simply to maintain functioning order within the community. VSM 16: 5, 294 implies set masses in the church; VSM 22: 3-4, 212 mentions special songs for evening prayer (performed by a musical choir); specific hymns existed (VSM 11: 30, 178); and a rudimentary eucharist was performed at Macrina's sickbed (VSM 24: 6-9, 226).

The transformation of Macrina's immediate family into an ascetic community, signified by the renunciation of property and by the granting of equal status to freed slaves, represents the peak and at the same time the termination of Macrina's gradual withdrawal from her customary social background. These two incidents, which occurred in about 357, have to be seen as a final rupture with attempts to combine a "normal life" within the limits set by Macrina's social surroundings and her personal ascetic intentions, manifested at first by regarding herself as a twelve-year-old widow. The transformation of her household - and not the early refusal to marry - constitute the decisive step into a new world, a world without immediately available pattern or models to follow. Macrina has to be her own guide in shaping the social conditions most appropriate to this new life. The early years after 357 must therefore be seen as experimental. Ascetic concepts doubtless developed in earlier years had now to be practiced in a different, specifically ascetic context. New practical approaches must have developed gradually whenever the occasion arose. While providing better facilities to achieve spiritual perfection the community could not afford to lose touch with the temporal world. Thus

personal poverty did not necessarily include the poverty of the community. Indeed, not only did the community own the estate on which they lived, they also found sufficient funds for increasing numbers of members and for extensive charitable acts.⁵¹) Three possible sources of income come to mind: firstly the revenues from Emmelia's property - she did not renounce everything; secondly inheritances when a family member died, and thirdly donations made by wealthy members such as Vetiana.

Macrina, furthermore, never ceased to be aware of her own social position. Shortly before her death she reminded Gregory that both had strong reasons to be proud of their family's name and position (VSM 21: 7-9, 210). Yet the social composition of her community reflects, in its discernible traits, that of society at large. The majority of members are from a low strata of society, others (including Macrina herself) come from the highest. The interest in Macrina's community displayed by members of the upper class, for instance the hegemon mentioned earlier, confirms that Macrina's experiment was approved of.

Relations with the local clergy existed and seem to have been good. The priest functioned as oikonomos of Macrina's property; whether this status included legal trusteeship as well is uncertain. The local bishop Araxios, a chorepiscopus presumably, attended Macrina's funeral with his entire clergy. He himself, together with Gregory and two clerics, carried her bier (VSM 33: 22-34, 250).

The developments here described can be seen as an original and so far unique attempt to create a new social model for ascetic women. Obviously this process did not take place in vacuo, for Basil's ideas on ascetic common life developed at the same time. A comparison reveals a number of agreements between the two communities with regard to internal organization, daily routine and dress. In contrast to VSM Basil's rules do contain a detailed mode of admission including a vow (above p. 56) and a warning against too early an age of admittance (RF 956).

The major difficulty in drawing any positive conclusion as to mutual influence lies in the fact that we do not possess any source reflecting Macrina's own views.⁵²) Certain factors seem, however, worthy of note in attempting a final assessment. Macrina was 27 or 28 years old by the time

Basil returned to Annesi. She could look back on about fifteen years of ascetic experimentation and had already transformed her household into an ascetic community.

Basil commences ascetic life as anchorite; but in community with others similarly minded. Although he never mentions Macrina and spent scarcely any time at Annesi, his rules concerning women attest the equal standing accorded to male and female superior, despite the economic dependence of the female on the male community.⁸³⁾ Accepting the historical validity of VSM with regard to organizational questions, we must, at the very least, assume a co-operative development of the concept 'ascetic community'. Basil's rules regarding women may well have been intended for Macrina's community as the confirmation of existing realities. It is equally possible that Basil laid down rules for his own female community with Macrina's as a model; provided they were two different establishments.⁸⁴⁾ Simply because of her continuous presence, Macrina must have been the predominant figure at Annesi. Basil was therefore not the overpowering influence which he is generally perceived to be. Macrina did have her own share in developing what is known as Basilian monasticism, a share that should not be underrated.⁸⁵⁾

b) Continuing Forms of Individual Ascetic Practice:

I. Parthenoi

Basil's dominant position in the perception of his contemporaries, followers, and indeed later historians, has led to the tendency to take his immediate effect for granted. All contemporary and prior ascetic phenomena are easily ignored or seen in retrospect through Basil's eyes (the same would be true for female asceticism had it been dealt with). This predominant preoccupation with one figure, Basil, is understandable given the source material, principally Basil's writings. Precisely those writings, however, especially his letters, contain valuable, albeit rather scarce, information concerning female ascetic life.

In 374 and 375 Basil corresponded with Amphilochius, bishop of Iconium (II 141), about the correct interpretation of the ecclesiastical canons; in this correspondence Basil adopted the role of a commentator. In discussing decisions taken at Ancyra in canons 18-20 of letter 199 he expounds the subject of virgins (II 155-57). Following the Ancyran Fathers, the punishment for fallen virgins is Basil's initial concern.¹⁾ The Ancyrans decided to treat them as bigamoi; since legislation concerning bigamoi had become more specific by the time Basil wrote letter 199, these virgins are now condemned to one year's repentance.²⁾ However, Basil is no longer content with this state of affairs. Furnished with the knowledge of the past sixty years he criticizes the Fathers' decision as too lax. In view of the status the "τάγμα τῶν παρθένων" has acquired in recent years the entire subject, virgins and their fall, has to be re-examined.

To begin with Basil clarifies the relative position of virgins and widows to the effect that a virgin holds the higher rank (II 156). Consequently a virgin's fall is the more severe crime and since I Tim. 5: 11-12 considers a remarriage of a widow as breach of an engagement, fallen virgins warrant treatment as adulteresses; after all their husband is still alive. Adulteresses were excluded from the congregation, that is excommunicated.³⁾ However, before discussing the trespass of a virgin

Basil deems it necessary to define whom he regards as such: "a woman who has devoted herself to the Lord out of her own free will, who has renounced marriage and prefers the saintly life" (II 156). A woman's own free will, neither external force nor persuasion, is the foremost prerequisite for the decision to become 'parthenos'. Therefore Basil proposes that a girl's vow to become a 'parthenos' must only be accepted when she has reached the age of reason, that is sixteen or seventeen years. The voice of children cannot carry the same weight. However, the genuineness of a girl's decision cannot be determined by age alone. Basil suggests therefore a novitiate: a period of trial allowing both the girl and those concerned with her enrolment to assess the sincerity and indeed suitability of the 'parthenos-to-be'. This novitiate consists of several steps, each testing specific requirements; perseverance and frequent repetition of her wish to be admitted are paramount. Once the vow has been taken in these conditions Basil assumes that the woman was conscious of her action; she must therefore be aware of its consequences. A possible fall can then justly be punished without mercy.

In 375 virgins formed in other words a "tagma tōn parthenōn". Admittance ensued upon taking a vow undertaking to live as a chaste woman devoted to God. Enrolment into the order included material benefits, so that corruption set in. Basil complains that many minor-aged girls are forced by parents, brothers or close relatives to become parthenoi, not because of their own desire, but because 'virginal life' afforded a mean of existence (II 156f.). The 'tagma' had apparently declined into a charitable institution for unmarriageable girls, a cheap, convenient, and socially acceptable way to rid oneself of 'superfluous' girls, probably without having to pay an equivalent to a dowry. As in Macrina's case, the age of these girls corresponds to the customary age of marriage, under sixteen.⁴)

Basil's description suggests that girls enrolled did not remain within the family; they appear to have lived elsewhere, probably with other members of the 'tagma'. In both cases, whether they continued to live in the family or within a community, they were financially provided for. The 'tagma' may have acquired its financial means through donations, as demonstrated by Macrina, and administered them as a legal unit or through a member of the clergy as trustee (VSM 20: 22-23, 208). Some of the

donations may have been a type of dowry, but girls without financial means were equally accepted. Sixty years after Ancyra the 'virgines Deo dicatae' had thus constituted themselves into an order. Enrolment ensued upon a vow which in Basil's perception is equivalent to the vow of the Nazirite; it is intended as a lifelong commitment, the virgins are materially provided for and socially respected. Misuse was inevitable. Basil proposes therefore a minimum age, a novitiate and draconian punishments to restore the original, purely religious character of the institution. Although Basil's description suggests advanced institutionalization, we learn nothing concerning the possible presence of clergy-members at the enrolment ceremony, nor about the 'tagma's' position within the congregation or its internal structure and the daily life of the individual member. Further, it remains open whether 'tagma' is a generic term, indicating a uniform organization committed to a single doctrine prevalent in Cappadocia, or whether it was a local phenomenon, and what role Basil as organizer played in the tagma's development.

Canon 20 of the same letter indicates that other women, who were also members of the 'tagma' or at least professed 'parthenoi', had proclaimed virginity while being, according to Basil "ἐν αἱρέσει" (II 157). It remains open whether this 'heresy' is merely doctrinal or whether it involves a different approach to ascetic practice as well. In cases where these women break their vow Basil recommends leniency. Since their vow had originally been sworn under irregular circumstances, it is null and void. The customary punishment of fallen virgins does not apply. Basil thus launches an interesting campaign: a lapsed heretical virgin is accepted in grace once she decides to become orthodox; new baptism and a new life eradicate all past sins. With this attitude Basil gained new, grateful, and faithful sheep for his flock.

Thus we learn not only that Iconium possessed a 'tagma tōn parthenōn' but also that the 'tagma' suffered from doctrinal schisms, if indeed a separate organization did not exist: some virgins had proclaimed their status as heretics. We remain ignorant as to the actual living conditions of either type of 'parthenos'. It is uncertain whether members of the 'tagma' lived in their homes or in special buildings, that is as a community.

One remark made with reference to men could shed further light. In c. 19

Basil distinguishes between two groups of male ascetics, firstly members of the 'tagma tōn parthenōn', who have to proclaim a vow, and others who do not swear a vow before they have accepted celibacy in private.

Gregory Nazianzenus also makes a distinction in a passage in Or. 43 in Laud. Bas., referring to those who live a eremitic life and the 'μυγᾶδοι'.

Would one have to assume a similar distinctions between members of the tagma and others in the case of celibate women? ⁵⁾ A curious correspondence between Gregory Nazianzenus and Basil may support such an assumption. ⁶⁾ Three letters written in 374 indicate that the residents of a small town called Venasa included several virgins, women and girls belonging to "their mother the Church" (II 105). ⁷⁾

Before the events causing the correspondence, the number of these virgins was not as high as it later became and they apparently lived dispersed over the town, within their families. In 374, however, a deacon who had usurped the: "name and insignia of a patriarch," assembled some unhappy virgins, a few even against their will, and now guided them after his own fancy (παρθένους δὲ ἀθλίαις συναγαγὼν κατ' ἰδίαν ἐξουσίαν καὶ αὐθεντίαν.)

One must assume that the virgins belonged to the "tagma tōn parthenōn," which apparently formed a part of "κοινὸν τάγμα τῶν μοναστῶν ." It seems even as though the increasing number of 'parthenoi' - they merit to be called a choros - brought material benefits for the deacon personally (II 106). ⁸⁾ Where exactly and how he achieved this assembly remains vague. Not satisfied with his achievements, the deacon planned a major coup: one night he "gathered all the virgins he could get hold of" - to what purpose will be explained later. For the moment it has to be stated that the virgins in Venasa did not live in one house; not all members of the tagma lived in communities, some remained in their families.

A letter written about fifteen years earlier could augment our dossier of information. In letter 46 one of the fallen virgins is addressed personally, thus allowing a reconstruction of at least one case in greater detail. ⁹⁾ Neither the exact identity of the virgin, nor the date of her fall nor the town where she lived is known to us. Basil's aim in writing this letter is to convince the virgin that her fall does not necessarily lead to eternal damnation; provided she is prepared for true repentance,

divine grace may again be bestowed upon her. To achieve his intentions Basil employs all his rhetorical skills thus presenting a completely different approach from that of the canonical letter 199. Now references to organizational questions are merely by-products of his primarily psychological arguments. The fallen virgin used to live with her grandmother, mother and sister in a community with several other virgins (II 118). The women occupied a town-house and were not strictly secluded. The mother's ascetic inclinations can be deduced only from the fact that she performed some kind of manual labour not customary for her status, in this she was imitated by her daughter and the other virgins. It must therefore be assumed that all three women came from an elevated social background, an assumption confirmed by Basil's familiarity with the household and indeed an allusion to Plato's Criton in his letter.¹⁰) The virgin herself occupied a revered position within her congregation, no further clues as to her precise position within the congregational hierarchy are given - which was evidently well-deserved. Basil describes the virgin's daily routine, glorifying it in retrospect, as consisting of prayer, vigils, fasts, simple dress, work, and a controlled behaviour, manifested outwardly in paleness due to fasting and blushing caused by modesty. Clearly Basil describes here what he perceives to be a model routine (II 118-19).¹¹) The practical aspect of the parthenos' life are again a mere preparation for the spiritual perfection culminating in marriage to Christ. In an argument based on II Cor 11: 2 he sees it as his duty to supervise the virgin's spiritual progress and to prepare her for her forthcoming marriage to Christ. Basil sees himself in other words as the virgin's guardian; he, the cleric (Basil was at this time still 'reader' or presbyter), occupies the same position as the father in the anonymous homily. This development is interesting: while maintaining basically the household pattern, the role of the father is now taken by a member of the clergy, as spiritual advisor. The summary of the fallen virgin's circumstances reveals a startling similarity to those of a virgin previously mentioned, especially with regard to the mother-daughter relationship and the allusion to the Christian grandmother: Basil's sister Macrina. Three interpretations suggest themselves: either the letter was forged after 383 the basis of VSM, or women in similar circumstances underwent similar

developments or Basil had another sister who started off as a virgin and subsequently married.¹²⁾ Basil does not explicitly classify the virgin as a member of the *tagma* but she fulfills all its conditions. So far the circumstances that virgins lived in could only be described in more or less vague terms. The question is whether more can be said of a group of 'parthenoi' addressed by Basil as 'kanonikai'.¹³⁾ At the beginning of his episcopate Basil wrote to a group of women closely connected with bishop Bosporius of Colonia on a subject of paramount doctrinal concern, the homoousian question (I 134).¹⁴⁾ Apparently these women had just overcome a crisis over this issue, during which Bosporius corrected and supported them constantly. News of this crisis had reached Basil, who now addressed the critical issues again, entitling the women 'κανονικάι.' This title means literally, pertaining to a rule.¹⁵⁾

What kind of rule this was and who exactly the 'law-giving' body was still remain open, but the function of the Ancyran Fathers and Basil suggest that they possessed the necessary jurisdictional competence. Further, Basil clarified in letter 173 (II 108) that the principle law-giving body is nothing other than the Scripture. In the same letter, addressed to "Θεοδώρα κανονικῇ", Basil gives his definition of a kanonikē's life as 'not a small battle'.¹⁶⁾ The terms of the 'battle' are again semi-seclusion, fasting, vigils, work, and modesty combined with prayer and meditation. The question remains whether the 'kanonikē' herself can interpret the precepts for her life laid down in the Scripture, or whether she needs an institution or a spiritual advisor to do so. It seems as if Bosporius and Basil, both high ranking members of the clergy, fulfill the position of the latter, thereby functioning as representatives of Jesus Christ. Information concerning the organization of Theodora's life as kanonike remains scarce. While it is possible that she lived as a single woman, the fact that her namesakes at Colonia formed a community, suggests similar circumstances in Theodora's case. Close connection with local bishop and acute doctrinal awareness are features common to all 'kanonikai' mentioned. An explicitly Basilian foundation need not be assumed.¹⁷⁾ Basil never used the word 'kanonikē' in his rules. Letter 52 written in about 370 was addressed to women living in the diocese of Bosporius. The 'kanonikai' appear to have formed a recognised group who attracted his attention.

Furthermore, it must be pointed out that Basil and Bosporius assume a function similar to the father of the anonymous homily. It seems feasible that the transfer of an originally family-based pattern to an official institute resulted in the shift of the 'pater familias' position to a member of the clergy, especially the bishop.¹⁰⁾

A third reference to 'kanonikai' augments our dossier concerning this particular term with a new variant. In letter 188, again addressing Amphilochius on the subject of canons, Basil remarks in c. 6:

"The prostitution of 'kanonikai' must not be considered a marriage and must be broken at all costs" (II 126, AD. 374).

'Kanonikai' could either live with men in a pseudo-marriage, a practice that would exclude life in a community or lead a regulated life in a mixed community, now in the process of being reformed according to Basil's concepts.

This assumption would receive additional support if Gribomont's proposed merging of letters 173 (II 108) and 22 (I 52) could be confirmed. He suggests:

". . . que Théodora ait été, soit la secrétaire porte-parole, soit même la principale autorité d'une groupe mixte. . ." ¹¹⁾

Whilst the definite adoption of Gribomont's proposition needs further support, canon six indicates that 'kanonikai' need not have lived in solely female communities.

The organizational information gained so far describes a picture far less uniform than expected. The few tangible facts indicate the existence of a tagma of virgins, already well organized. Public proclamations with fixed penalties for perjury as well as financial remuneration are now established. At the same time, the numbers of 'parthenoi' increased probably prompting institutionalization. This development led in due course to a decline in morals. Existing selection procedures did not suffice to maintain religious standards. Basil therefore attempts to introduce a more rigorous method of selection, resembling the novitiate practiced in his communities. The actual circumstances of members of the 'tagma' remain difficult to assess. Quite obviously the majority of virgins lived in groups, but family involvement continued. However, the result of these investigations is difficult to reconcile with some of Basil's remarks, for instance in letter 207 (II 185,

AD. 375):

"We are like children compared to the perfect (in Mesopotamia or Palestine). Even the women who have chosen the evangelic life. . . are blessed. . . We have done preciously little in that domain, because we are still but feeble elements. . . If some of these practices cause irregularities in the lives of these women, I do not accept responsibility. . . But I wish you to know: we are proud to have convents (syntagma) of men and women living like citizens of Heaven..."

To clarify the situation further, recourse to other contemporary source-material is necessary.

The first choice to come to mind in search for additional source materials are the letters, autobiographical and historical poems, and epigrams of Basil's friend and companion, Gregory Nazianzenus. Hauser-Meury's observation:

"Zunächst verbietet ein klassisches Stilgesetz ihm. . . gegenständliches historisches oder kultur-historisches Detail zu geben. . .",

bears prima facie greater relevance in Gregory's than in Basil's case. Gregory was after all: "Literat von hohem Anspruch. . ." ²⁰) Yet these stylistic considerations do not impair the value of Gregory's writings as an historical source.

In 372 Gregory approached the then 'peraequator' Hellenius in a lengthy 'protreptikos' to request tax-exemption for ten needy monks living in his diocese. At the same time he argues in favour of exemption for all monks and clerics. The monks were, however, not the only ascetics in Nazianzus. The same carmen refers to "παρθενικὰς δὲ γυναῖκας. . . συμφίον. . . χριστὸν. . . ἀκοιμήτοισι φάεσσιν" (v. 225-30, 1467-68). The circumstances of these virgins are then described as:

"some are congregated, profiting from their common desire for heavenly life, and practicing the same kind of life. Others stay with their weak parents or with brothers as witnesses of their propriety" (v. 255-60, 1469-70). ²¹)

They lived in groups, alone, within their family, or with brothers. A similar division is repeated in the Praecepta ad Virgines (v.245), where Gregory exhorts virgins not to have misgivings about living with their parents or brothers. ²²) In other words, Gregory refers to female ascetics living in communities, in families, and with elder brothers. Other examples from Gregory's letters confirm that this division is not merely stylistic.

Some time before 370 Gregory wrote a letter of condolence occasioned by the death of a certain Leucadius. Leucadius had been the superior of: "a blessed

brotherhood of monks and virgins," situated in the Cappadocian town Sannabadae.²³⁾ Gregory exhorts both men and women within the community to continue to strive for Leucadius' goal; in following the path led by him they will preserve his memory. Leucadius clearly presided over a mixed community. In 375, five years later, Gregory retired from the turmoils of the world "to Seleucia to the parthenōn of the blessed virgin Thecla," where he remained until 379.²⁴⁾ The assumption that the community at Seleucia comprised male and female ascetics is explicitly corroborated by a source written a decade later, the travelogue of the virgin Egeria.²⁵⁾

Upon her visit to Seleucia she found a spacious precinct enclosed by an "enormous" wall, doubtless a fortification against the surrounding Isaurians, which contained nothing:

"nisi monasteria sine numero virorum ac mulierum. . . etiam sanctis monachis vel apudactitis, tam viris quam feminis, qui ibi erant..."²⁶⁾

Thecla was also the name of another lady, sister of the priest Sacerdos who practiced an ascetic life in the immediate vicinity of a sanctuary of martyrs. With her were her, "beloved children," clearly sharing her lifestyle (II 115). Were these her natural or spiritual children, male or female? In any case, Thecla had been the focal point of a community (II 114, I 71) and the fact that Gregory always refers to her entourage in neutral terms suggests that it consisted of men and women rather than solely of 'parthenoi'. However, Thecla could also be seen as an example for ascetic family life, focused around the mother. This particular community still existed as late as 383.²⁷⁾ Gregory further mentions several virgins who lived alone but who may have been members of their families in previous years. The most interesting of these virgins is a certain Russiana, a relative of Gregory whom he considers in his testament, thus giving tangible insight into economic matters previously only inferred.²⁸⁾ Gregory had already arranged Russiana's financial situation, but now ensures her an annual rent providing comfortable income. He builds her a house on a location chosen by her and gives her two slave girls whom she may free if she wishes. After Russiana's death the house and the slaves will become the property of the Church in Nazianzus.²⁹⁾ Two other virgins are mentioned in similarly interesting circumstances. In 383 Gregory in person supervised the examination of a certain Alypiana with a view to enrolment in the 'tagma tōn parthenōn'. Details of the examination

procedure reveal that Basil's suggestions formulated in 372 are now widely accepted. Upon enrolment the virgin is entrusted to the care of the local bishop, Eulalios, as spiritual father and guide.³⁰⁾ The bishop, in this case Theodorus, is also responsible for the well-being of another virgin, Amazonia. Amazonia was apparently unwell and Gregory asks Theodorus to look after her, an indication that Amazonia lived alone. The letter furthermore suggests to what an extent the guidance of a bishop was necessary: it included physical welfare.³¹⁾ Aypiana, incidentally, lived in Nazianzus and Amazonia in Tyana.

A fourth lady, Basilissa, is the addressee of a letter once again containing exhortations and prescriptions pertinent to perfection. The authenticity of this letter, however, is not firmly established; it appears only in one family of manuscripts.³²⁾ In contrast to earlier homilies containing similar exhortations the letter to Basilissa is also less Christian, it does not contain as many specifically Christian allusions nor indeed references to the Scriptures as other letters written with similar purposes in mind. This stylistic feature could well be attributed to Gregory's attempts at merging Christian content and pagan form and need not bring the letter's actual authenticity into doubt.³³⁾ In practice the prescriptions do not differ from others discussed. Basilissa ought to meditate on the sayings of Saints, thus eliminating all notions of passion, she should be just towards all members of her household (οἰκεῖοι) - an indication that she lived in a community or together with family members and slaves (133)? Moderation is greatly emphasized; and Gregory does not advise poverty beyond simplicity of life. A veil, lowered eyes, silence, the avoidance of laughter are mentioned, but neither vigils, nor fixed prayer routines. On the whole these precepts do reflect classical moralistic advice very strongly, again a factor possibly implicit in Gregory's literary style.³⁴⁾

Basilissa is also the name of a virgin who lived with a brother. Nothing indicates, however, that both are one and the same person.³⁵⁾ Epigram 154 was written in honour of Georgus who "procured many souls for Christ." Buried beside him is the "noble Basilissa, his sister in flesh and spirit" who now shares his grave as she shared his life.³⁶⁾ Georgus was a priest and his sister presumably a virgin, though Gregory is not explicit.

Gregory knows of another lady also living with an elder brother. The circumstances of this lady, called Theosebia, are slightly more complicated. Possibly in about 375, Gregory wrote a letter of condolence to Gregory of Nyssa occasioned by the death of:

"our holy and blessed sister. . .Theosebia. . .so glorious and illustrious amongst her excellent brothers; Theosebia ten onton hieran kai iereos syzygos.." (II 88-89).³⁷⁾

Further, he addressed epigram 164 to: "Theossebion, daughter of the illustrious Emmelia, who was the Γρηγορίου μεγάλου σύζυγε.. .."³⁸⁾ In epigram 161 written on the occasion of Emmelia's death, Gregory refers to her children, married and unmarried, three of them priests and one daughter: "ἡ δ' ἱερῆος σύζυγος."³⁹⁾ Finally, Basil's letter 46 was addressed to a fallen virgin living in circumstances remarkably similar to those of Basil's own family. The dossier indicates that the definition of 'σύζυγος' is crucial in attempting to clarify the relationship implied.

Emmelia had a daughter called Theosebia married to a priest called Gregory and a son called Gregory who became a priest and was married to someone else called Theosebia. As Aubineau points out: "des coïncidences bien singulières".⁴⁰⁾ It is clear that Emmelia had a daughter Theosebia, who was the 'syzyge' of a priest Gregory, and a son Gregory who was a priest. Could it be that both couples are in fact one and the same, the union therefore being between brother and sister? It has been shown that brothers and sisters could live in chaste union, both maintaining virginity, thus Theosebia could have been Gregory's sister. As 'syzyge' of her brother Theosebia lived chastely, but not within a female community, so that an identification of Theosebia with the fallen virgin addressed in Basil's letter 46 would be unlikely. The problem inherent in this solution is that 'syzyge' stands in the majority of cases for wife. Theosebia could in other words have been Gregory's wife; we know that he did not maintain his virginity. In that case Emmelia's daughter Theosebia was married to another priest called Gregory and letter 46 could have been addressed to her, a somewhat surprising coincidence.⁴¹⁾ In the final analysis our ignorance has to be admitted, while the interpretation of 'syzyge' as sister seems more probable.⁴²⁾

One point remains to be noted. Macrina, Theosebia, Basilissa, Thecla and to a certain degree Russiana and Amazonia were all closely related to

priests or high ranking members of the clergy. In all but the last two cases the priests were brothers. All examples discussed testify further that the diversity of organizational models continued to exist. As late as the 380's we find women practicing the ascetic life as members of families, living with elder brothers, alone or as members of communities, in some cases clearly in mixed communities.

II. Deaconesses

All social models discussed so far were designed primarily for one type of women wanting to practice an intensified religious life: unmarried women or young widows. If women with families wanted to change their way of life, the consequences were drastic and frankly intolerable; hence the Fathers at Gangra had already branded such practices as heretical for both men and women (above p. 41). Nevertheless, the demand for a form of organization which allowed women bound by children (even if now grown up) to practice some kind of intense religious life increased; and a social model developed during the fourth century to accommodate these needs: the deaconess.¹⁾

Only two sources attest the existence of deaconesses for Cappadocia proper, one inscription and Basil's letters. Given the wide spread of the phenomenon by Basil's time, this is quite surprising, and to clarify the development of the status 'deaconess' sources from neighbouring regions, as comprised by the later diocese Pontica, have to be used.²⁾ The first possible indication of a deaconess could be dated as far back as the second century. In his letter 96 to Trajan, Pliny the Younger mentions the following strategy to obtain precise information concerning a new religious sect:

"...quo magis necessarium credidi ex duabus ancillis, quae ministrae dicebantur, quid esset veri et per tormenta quaerere".³⁾

Pliny, a relative outsider, recognised the habit of Bithynian Christians of calling some of their women 'ministrae'. As Bithynia was Greek speaking, it is tempting to translate 'ministra' into 'ἡ δῆκονος'. However, no other Bithynian source sheds light on the position or function of these 'ministrae' and such a translation must be treated with caution.⁴⁾

Two hundred years later, a second document referred to the custom: canon 19 of the Nicaean council held in 325. It states that the so-called Paulianists should be re-baptized and that

"the same should be done on the subject of deaconissai, and the same rule should be followed with regard to all inscribed in 'to kanoni'".⁵⁾

Canon 19 refers to a sectarian problem concerning Paulianists, people who adhered to the teachings of Paul of Samosate, bishop of Antioch between

260 and 271-72.⁶⁾ Paul himself was born in a town on the border between Mesopotamia and Syria, and in both countries as well as in Antioch customs as represented in the Didaskalia were in force. Deaconesses were therefore a custom of long standing.⁷⁾ Paul was certainly aware of this custom and in all probability introduced it to his diocese, once elected bishop of Antioch. There is no evidence suggesting that Antioch was familiar with deaconesses before Paul. By the time canon 19 was promulgated, about fifty years after Paul's bishopric, deaconesses were well established, represented in heretical as well as orthodox circles. A further proof is the phrase used in canon 19: 'διακόνισσα' is a neologism soon to become the technical term.⁸⁾

It is problematic whether a similar custom existed in Cappadocia and its neighbouring regions. Canon six of the Nicaean council attributes a certain jurisdictional supremacy to Antioch, indicating that all bishops between the Taurus and Egypt should regard Antioch as the superior authority.⁹⁾ However, unlike that of Rome or Alexandria, Antioch's supremacy is clearly confined to its immediate surroundings and neither Cappadocia nor the later diocese Pontica came under its influence.¹⁰⁾ Although Nicaea was an ecumenical council where Cappadocian bishops were present, canon 19 need not support the existence of deaconesses in Cappadocia.¹¹⁾ Therefore, the first occurrence of the term in Cappadocian literature is canon 44 of Basil's letter 199.¹²⁾ Here Basil deals with a juridical problem, the punishment of a deaconess who had "fornicated with a Greek" (II 162). He states that deaconesses were 'καθιερωμέναι', that is 'were consecrated', and maintained continence, bound by strict obligations considered binding for life.¹³⁾ A fall resulted in seven years of excommunication. Basil recommends punishing the fall of a virgin with excommunication for an unspecified period of time; and according to Nah. 1: 9 fallen members of the clergy were punished indefinitely. A punishment limited to seven years therefore classifies deaconesses as members of the laity.¹⁴⁾ Yet their decision resulted in a new social status, characterized by their title, distinct from the lay-body as well as from the virgins. It is interesting that Basil mentions a deaconess, "who fornicated with a Greek," a pagan in other words.¹⁵⁾ There is no reason, why Basil should have made such a distinction between pagan and Christian, unless he is

referring to an actual case. However, his entire treatment of the subject suggests that he is laying down generally binding procedures. Deaconesses must have existed in Iconium as well as in Caesarea, despite the lack of information concerning the latter locality.

Basil's letter 105 (II 6) is addressed to: "The Deaconesses, daughters of the Count Terentius." The letter, though written in Caesarea, relates to Samosata, a town already mentioned in connection with Paul as being long accustomed to deaconesses. The letter is further addressed to a distinct group, and therefore only limited conclusions can be drawn. Terentius, the deaconesses' father, was a 'comes', formerly 'dux et comes Armeniae', and thus of considerable social standing.¹⁶⁾ He and his daughters may well have shared a communal house and fortune, and the daughters played a significant role in ecclesiastical affairs. Basil's letter is in fact an encomium, praising their firm orthodox beliefs, which they propagated even in critical situations (II 6). All these factors are obviously of a specific nature, thus of comparatively little relevance to the question of 'deaconesses' as a whole. Basil's praise, however, contains an interesting remark. He describes the daughters as "performing ἀγαθὰ ἔργα" (II 6). An inscription found at Colonia, modern Aksaray (i.e. in Cappadocia itself) dating from the fifth century, reads:

"According to the texts of the Apostle Maria the deaconess has reared children, practiced hospitality, washed the feet of the Saints, and distributed bread to the needy."¹⁷⁾

Undoubtedly these lines on the deaconess Maria are modelled after a famous passage, I Tim. 5: 9-10:

"A widow should not be put on the roll under sixty years of age. She must have been faithful. . . to one man, and must produce evidence of good deeds performed, showing whether she has reared children or given hospitality or washed the feet of God's people, or supported those in distress."

Basil, like the author of the epitaph, referred with his phrase "performing good deeds" to the same passage. In these two instances women are identified with widows, yet entitled 'deaconess'. In contrast to the widows of I Tim. 5: 9-10 the deaconesses mentioned were quite wealthy. Both, Terentius' daughters and Maria must have been wealthy enough to finance their charitable acts; Maria's relatives were, for instance, able to afford an elaborate tombstone. It is impossible to say whether either of the deaconesses had been married and reared children.

However, a number of inscriptions from neighbouring regions, especially

the later diocese of Asia, confirm that most of the deaconesses were widows. Most of them lived in their own families and more often than not their family had clerical connections.¹⁶⁾ For instance, the deaconess Donna was the daughter of a priest, and Aurelia Faustina and Nonna were the mother of a lector and a priest.¹⁷⁾

In 390 an edict was issued to Tatianus, *praefectus praetorio per Orientem*, containing: "legem quae de diaconissis vel viduis nuper est promulgata. . ."²⁰⁾ This indicates beyond doubt that the terms widow and deaconess had become synonymous though former distinctions are still noticeable. Although originally a deaconess must have had functions distinct from those of a widow, both groups amalgamated gradually. Nonetheless, a passage of Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis', *Expositio Fidei* might illustrate the specific role of a deaconess.²¹⁾ Epiphanius states that, rather than offering services to all Christians, deaconesses were specifically assigned to assist women, especially in situations involving bodily contact or indeed exposure: baptism or illness. Further, he characterizes deaconesses as celibate, that is being either a widow, a virgin or living in *marriage blanche*.²²⁾ Thus the decisive precondition was not a woman's social status, to be married, widowed or a virgin, but the actual physical state of continence combined with appropriate Christian virtues, both ensured by a proclamation. If Epiphanius' observations can be trusted, deaconesses provided a social model offering religious involvement for all those women who did not qualify as members of the *tagma ton parthenon*. Epiphanius also specifies the exact hierarchical position occupied by a woman entitled *διακόνισσα*: she is listed below members of the clergy, above exorcists and translators and on a par with readers.²³⁾ Unfortunately in this particular passage Epiphanius' historical accuracy is questionable. In a survey of contemporary Antiochene evidence Martimort noted that no source dealing with baptismal rites mentions any deaconess and emphasizes this finding by referring to later Constantinopolitan practices which likewise fail to mention deaconesses.²⁴⁾ Therefore, baptismal assistance, be it for men or for women, was probably not part of a deaconess's function. Epiphanius' ranking of a deaconess is corroborated by evidence discussed, and two inscriptions may refer to married deaconesses.²⁵⁾ Masa was the daughter and wife of a priest and

Mammeis was married. Still, supporting evidence for the eligibility of women actually married remains vague. Thus the primary function of a deaconess was charity in various forms, made possible in the majority of cases by a certain wealth. Deaconesses apparently not only financed themselves but also helped others, which is their main difference from the widows on whom the deaconesses were modelled. Most deaconesses continued to live within the family or at least remained in close contact with it. (The family may have furnished financial assistance). In many cases members of the family were also members of the clergy. Deaconesses were distinct from the laity by their title and a revered social position, the "διακονίης τιμή",²⁶) Terentius' daughters exemplify their participation in doctrinal disputes. However, from the middle of the fourth century onwards, a second type of deaconess seems to have developed simultaneously to the 'widow-deaconess'.²⁷)

Gregory of Nyssa remarks in VSM 29: 1-2 (236):

"there was also one of those who preside over the chorus, a deaconess called Lampadion."

Lampadion distinguished herself by two characteristics: as a deaconess she was a member of Macrina's community. More than just an ordinary member, Lampadion further "said she knew exactly what Macrina had decided for her burial." Lampadion supervised Macrina's funeral (she selected her burial garments) and she is authorized to do so by the late Macrina herself (VSM 29, 236-38). These factors indicate that Lampadion occupied a position of more than average relevance. Lampadion's function within the community while Macrina was still alive depends clearly on the nature of the chorus she presided over. The chorus is mentioned twice, in VSM 16: 5 (194) and VSM 33: 15 (248), in connection with ceremonial functions.

Quasten therefore suggested that the chorus was a musical body, a suggestion that despite its partial probability seems too narrow an interpretation.²⁸) Gregory customarily uses the term 'chorus' in speaking of considerable numbers or else in a general sense, for instance referring to: "all monks and virgins" in De Virg. IV: 2, 7. In VSM 16: 2 (194) and 33: 15 (248) he furthermore juxtaposes chorus with: "ἡ ἀδελφότης", "σύνταγμα τῶν ἀνδρῶν" and "μοναζόντων τάγμα," the entire male community. Thus 'chorus' stands mostly for the entire female community. If 'chorus' comprises a large portion of the community, if not the entire

community as such, what relevance does that have for Lampadion's position? She bore the honorific title of a deaconess, occupied a favourite position with respect to Macrina and is said to have presided over the chorus. It is unreasonable to assume that Lampadion guided the entire community while Macrina was still alive. The most probable explanation of Lampadion's position seems, therefore, that, as an elder member and possibly in charge of a separate body (e.g. the committee of senior members) she was elected proxy while Macrina still lived. Chosen either because she was already deaconess or ordained as result of her new position, Lampadion may well have succeeded Macrina, thus ensuring continuity in the tradition of the founder. In that case Lampadion would have been hegemon as well as deaconess. Further investigation confirms that Lampadion was not the only deaconess who also presided over a religious community. A fourth century Cilician inscription reads simply: "Timothea diakon of the monastery."²⁷) According to Egeria's travelogue the,

"sancta diaconissa nomine Marthana, quam ego apud Ierosolimam noveram. . . monasteria apudactitum seu virginum regebat."³⁰)

The monastery is Thecla's in Seleucia, a region bordering on Cilicia.

The best known deaconess who was also hegemon was a lady who corresponded with such leading lights as John Chrysostom and Gregory Nazianzenus, the Constantinopolitan deaconess Olympias.³¹) Born according to Libanius' letter in 361 as daughter of Seleucus, a high ranking courtier under Julian, educated by the sister of Amphilochius of Iconium, Olympias married in 384 the then 'praetor urbis Constantinopoli', Nebridius.³²)

Unfortunately Nebridius died two years later upon which the emperor Theodosius himself suggested another husband, his own relative Helpidius. Olympias rejected the offer on religious grounds, which resulted in the confiscation of her extremely substantial property by Theodosius (it was transferred to the new PVC Clementinus), restrictions on her contact with the bishop and her church visits.³³) Only five years later, after his victory over Maximus, Theodosius restored her property. Olympias immediately used her regained wealth to found a large monastery and to grant large donations to the church.³⁴) Olympias, like Macrina, Vetiana, or Terentius' daughters, is clearly an example of the exalted social position occupied by women involved in intense religious life. Olympias illustrates also the extent of the fortunes at stake upon the decision of some

individuals to change their way of life and highlights the difficulties encountered upon transferring vast amounts to the church.³⁵⁾ C.Th. 16, 2, 27, already mentioned, may in fact have been an attempt to curb Olympias' charitable zeal.³⁶⁾ The edict, of course addressing itself to other cases as well, makes it explicit that:

"...diaconiss<ae>. . .nullam ecclesiam, nullum clericum, nullum pauperem scriba<n>t heredes."

Donations to individual members of the clergy or to monks as well as to the church were common, and the role of a deaconess appears to imply such practices. When Olympias was ordained deaconess by bishop Nectarius, she was at the most thirty years old.³⁷⁾ In contrast to I Tim. 5:9-10 and unlike most deaconesses mentioned she had not raised children either; in other words she failed to fulfill two main prerequisites of the 'widow-deaconess'. In fact, the same edict states:

"Nulla nisi emensis sexaginta annis, cui votiva domi proles sit, secundum praeceptum apostoli ad diaconissarum consortium transferatur."

The case was clearly a political one. Olympias was a personality not without influence. By defying Theodosius' suggestion to remarry on religious grounds she uttered a political affront, demonstrating closer loyalty to bishop Nectarius than to the emperor. Using the request for charity implied by her widow' status, Olympias further strengthened Nectarius' position in quite worldly ways, by donating large amounts of property. Reactions of relatives who feared for the family fortune as well as perhaps the PPO Tatianus' animosity (he was pagan) resulted in the edict (C.Th. 16, 2, 27). Olympias and her supporters meanwhile did not remain idle. Either earlier or when C.Th. 16, 2, 27 came already into effect, Nectarius ordained Olympias as deaconess; clearly on grounds of her religious merits, since her widowhood was the only prerequisite of I Tim 5: 9-10 she fulfilled. Perhaps Theodosius' interfered via Rufinus when he realized that Tatianus' action failed to procure the desired results; or Olympias position was too decisive: a few months after its promulgation the edict was abolished.³⁸⁾ Shortly afterwards Olympias founded the monastery mentioned above and thus became another deaconess who acted as 'hēgemon' of a community. Several members of Olympias' community were likewise deaconesses, one of them eventually succeeded her as the new leader.³⁹⁾

The second development of the function of 'deaconess' is firmly established. While amalgamating with the order of a widow, the position of a deaconess develops into that of a superior of a community, clearly demonstrating the underlying honorific nature of the title. By the fifth century the connection 'hēgemon' - deaconess is common.

c) The Ascetic Pseudo-marriage and Other Forms of Common Ascetic Practices of Men and Women

Half a century after the Fathers at Ancyra condemned the pseudo-marriage between celibate men and women, the practice was still in force.¹⁾ At the beginning of his episcopate Basil received a letter (which has not been preserved) from an otherwise unknown presbyter called Gregorius. Gregorius, a man of seventy, who lived somewhere in the Cappadocian countryside, complains that his chorepiscopus, out of sheer spite, prohibited him to live with his companion, a young girl (I 142). He based his complaint on the fact that his conduct was sanctioned by old custom. Basil is shocked and surprised to find that Gregorius dares to plead innocence and to feel indignation. Referring to a Nicaean canon, Basil remarks that he is neither the first nor the only one to condemn such a custom: Gregorius had a 'little woman' (γούναϊος), as syneisacte.²⁾ Apparently the woman helped him with his household; and both had grown rather fond of each other, at least Gregorius of the woman. At the same time their union was clearly platonic, an affirmation Basil has no reason to doubt. He reproaches Gregorius' conduct in fact on the grounds that it is contrary to the decisions reached at Nicaea; that it is the nature and virtue of celibacy to renounce the company of the other sex; and that such a union can be a stumbling block (Rom 14: 13) for many less virtuous. In choosing the celibate life Gregorius was aware of the consequences and he should now stand by his choice. In having a syneisacte, Gregorius: "despite his verbal proclamation of abstinence acts in fact like married men." (I 141) Therefore Gregorius has to send the woman away and to find a male servant to avoid scandal (Rom 2: 24). However, Gregorius should not just send the woman away, Basil suggests he "place her into a monastērion," - an early usage of the word.³⁾

The woman was a celibate, and was provided for by Gregorius. In other words, pure necessity combined with ascetic zeal kept the institution alive. Many women wanting to lead a celibate life had no economic alternative, especially in the countryside where the likelihood of finding similarly-minded companions may have been quite low. However, Basil now

offers just such an alternative: a monastērion where the woman can continue her celibate life, materially provided for, and in community with others. There is no clue whether or not the monastērion was a Basilian foundation or another type of community.⁴⁾

In 374 Basil refers again to the custom in speaking of the "prostitution of kanonikai", a passage mentioned in the context of parthenoi (above p. 81). Approximately at the same time Basil's younger brother, Gregory of Nyssa, wrote in his De Virg. XXIII 4: 5-13 (538-40):

"others deviate in the diametrically opposite direction, while professing nominally celibacy, they do not distinguish themselves from life in community. . . they cohabit openly with women and declare this community as 'adelphotēs'."

A few years later in about 390 Gregory Nazianzenus formulated his thoughts concerning syneisactes in ten Epigrammata.⁵⁾ He addresses them indiscriminately to syneisactes and 'agapetes'; emphasizing that the custom is unacceptable because: "a better hope divided male and female" (12), nature itself; and as black and white, life and death have nothing in common, so should men and women be separated (15). The community of monks and virgins is worse than that of bigamoi (14), since it oscillates between marriage and non-marriage (15). 'ἀγαπῆτοί' of both sexes, while proclaiming chasteness, thus bear all outer signs of prostitution. In fact, rather than to continue life in this a-natural state, they should marry. (15)

Despite these condemnations Gregory does not fail to admit that these relationships can be pure. The parties involved need not ipso facto be corrupt. However, the danger of arousing suspicion by others, quite apart from the danger for the parties involved is too great a risk (13, 15, 16). At first glance, the arguments offered by Basil's canon, and the passage by the two Gregory's, do not differ profoundly from those brought forward earlier on. Closer observation reveals, however, one profound difference. Basil's canon six addresses 'kanonikai', while Gregory Nyssenus relates to an adelphotēs and Gregory Nazianzenus addresses explicitly 'monachoi' in three Epigrammata, others mention 'agapētes', clearly using the plural. A first impression suggests that these three sources deal with a different problem: they do not address individuals but communities of ascetic men and women.

Palladius mentions in chapter 49 of his Historia Lausiaca a former slave called Sisinnius, who, after ten years spent with a hermit in caves near Jericho, returned to his native Cappadocia.⁶⁾ Here, as a presbyter, he founded an: "ἀδελφότητα ἀνδρῶν τε καὶ γυναικῶν ." Sisinnius guided this community in such a fashion that all male and female instincts were eradicated, based on the message of Gal 3: 28:

"There is neither. . . male nor female in Christ Jesus."

Nothing else is known concerning Sisinnius except that his teacher and fellow hermit, Elpidius, was also Cappadocian. He is said to have come from: "the monastery of Timotheus." Timotheus on his part can be identified with a chorepiscopus relegated by Basil between 368 and 379, because of his lack of ascetic zeal.⁷⁾ Sisinnius' return must therefore be dated to the late eighties and early nineties, approximately at the time Gregory Nazianzenus composed his Epigrammata. In view of Basil's references to kanonikai as forming a group it may be assumed that canon six likewise addresses women living in a mixed ascetic community. Consequently, pseudo-marriages are no longer the point at issue, but those communities of male and female ascetics, praised by Palladius and condemned by Gregory. This faces us with a puzzling problem. Gregory, who mentioned communities of men and women frankly and with praise, who himself spent time in Thecla's sanctuary, now condemns a seemingly identical phenomenon, and Gregory of Nyssa, although he may himself have lived with a woman, Theosebia, is full of contempt for the practice. The last three sources, mentioned, Gregory of Nyssa's paragraph in the De Virginitate, Gregory Nazianzenus' Epigrammata and Palladius' chapter on Sisinnius, do not refer to the syneisactes. While syneisactes continued to exist despite repeated condemnations (and must be distinguished from a brother - sister union) the unions described in the last four sources do not appear to be pseudo-marriages, despite the implications of Achelis' monograph.⁸⁾

d) Forms of Common Ascetic Practices of Men and Women

In ca. 374 Gregory Nazianzenus wrote a letter to Basil dealing with an event meriting - at first glance - incorporation in an anthology of humour.¹⁾ It occurred in Venasa, a small town in the vicinity of Nazianzus.²⁾ A certain Glycerius had been ordained deacon by Gregory, because of his skills as a craftsman rather than his intellectual abilities. As deacon his main duty was to serve his elder presbyter. Instead Glycerius neglected his tasks, usurped the title and the habit of a patriarch, and disobeyed his bishop and Gregory himself. Further,

"having assembled on grounds of his own authority and after his fancy, unhappy virgins, some running to join him...others had to be forced... he undertook to guide this group <of virgins>..." (II 135)

After some time during which he stirred up more trouble in his congregation, he

"planned an undertaking extremely shocking and inhuman. Having gathered all the virgins he could, he awaited the night and, stealing them, fled with them" (II 136).

At the same time a great regional fete, the synaxe of the Venasan martyr(s) was being held, as usual attracting large crowds.³⁾ Glycerius made use of this opportunity to "present his group of dancing girls, surrounded by young men." To top this outrage he then resisted the pleas of the virgins' parents and abducted the former into what Gregory describes as 'βάρβαρος' (II 138). Apparently they all lived dispersed in 'τὴν διασπορὰν', in the countryside around Venasa, guided by Glycerius and together with young men, Glycerius' band of brigands (ληστρικοῦ συντάγματος II 137). As a second letter informs us, a few months later the group had still not returned.⁴⁾

At some stage between 374 and 377 Epiphanius wrote the following account of a certain Aerius in his Panarion 75.⁵⁾ Aerius, Eustathius' confidant and leader of his hospice in Sebaste, opposed the latter's advance in the hierarchy to a see by means of an enterprise similar to Glycerius'. Under the alleged influence of Arianism, Aerius usurped the role of a presbyter, ignored the authority of his bishop, collected a group of men and women, and guided them into the wilderness. There they practiced a radical asceticism, including poverty (ἀποταξίς), and led a

migratory life in the open.⁶⁾ Roughly a decade later, between 383 and 394 a synod gathered at Side, initiated and presided over by Amphilochius of Iconium, the same who had previously corresponded with Basil on behalf of the canons. This synod had to decide about the faith of a sect called 'Messalianoi' or 'Euchitai'.⁷⁾ Side was not the first place where this sect had appeared on the agenda. Already in paragraph 13 of his Anchoratus, written before 374, Epiphanius alludes to certain Messalians and in chapter 80 of the Panarion he provides further details in speaking of "another form of heresy, totally ridiculous, of inconsistent opinion and leading men and women into error. They are called Messalianoi, which means 'praying voice'. . ."⁸⁾

Messalians originated, according to Epiphanius, in Mesopotamia and had in his time reached Syrian Antioch. Their Eastern, probably Syriac, origin, is corroborated by Ephrem's Homily 22, written between 363 and 373.⁹⁾ Apart from these factors little is known of the exact history of the sect. Their condemnation at Side must, however, be regarded as taking place at a time when both their westward distribution and their influence had increased to an alarming degree.¹⁰⁾ Theodotus of Cyrus' and Timotheus of Constantinople's later writings record the content of the canons brought into effect against Messalians at Side. Thus their principal ideas can be reconstructed, albeit as they appeared to a hostile audience.¹¹⁾ According to Epiphanius', Theodotus' and Timotheus' testimony, phrased in terms of an accusation, the Messalians practiced cohabitation of men and women: "ἀναμῖξ ἄνδρες ἅμα γυναῖξι καὶ γυναῖκες ἅμα ἀνδράσιν. . . ἐν βύμασι μὲν πλατεῖαισιν . . ." (Epiph. Haer. 80, 3 (487)); their ascetic practice, which was based on complete apatheia, led to annihilation of sexual distinction. Great offence was also taken at their wandering way of life caused by absolute poverty (οὐκ ἔχειν . . . κτήμα ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς . . . , Epiph. Haer. 80 (487)); apparently Messalians roamed about, lived outside settlements and survived by begging, rejecting work of any kind because it precluded their complete immersion in prayer. The coincidence between the traits described in Glycerius' and Aetius' cases and similar tendencies in Messalian sources is undeniable, Theodoret in his HE characterizes the Messalians also as enthusiasts.¹²⁾ In all three cases women had left society, obviously prompted by ascetic reasons. In all three cases they lived with men, in all three cases

extreme poverty was fundamental, leading to a wandering or at best a semi-settled life.

Gregory's letters concerning Glycerius provide an excellent illustration of how this abandonment of society was put into practice. Gregory describes the events at Venasa in a negative and quite ironical way. Glycerius would certainly have seen them in a different light, but his party does not have a voice, at least not one we are aware of. However, it is possible to make certain amendments to Gregory's picture. Glycerius disregarded the authority of the clergy, of presbyter and bishop alike, and set forth to disturb the annual synaxis. Aerius likewise disregarded episcopal superiority. Both express their convictions by usurping the function and habit of a presbyter. Aerius was a favourite disciple of Eustathius.¹³⁾ Eustathians, we should recall, had been accused of disregarding the clergy and condemning synaxes.¹⁴⁾ All, Glycerius, Aerius, Eustathius, and later on the Messalians, are accused of abducting women from their homes and families. Glycerius, unless he was the fraud as which Gregory describes him, followed the same principles for which Eustathians had been condemned thirty years earlier.¹⁵⁾ It is interesting to observe that many of Glycerius' female followers were already virgins or had at least strong ascetic inclinations but were living within their families (II 136). Similarly, women following Aerius lived as ascetics in the hospice, settled and somewhat 'domesticated'.¹⁶⁾ Messalians apparently also found a large following in monasteries: Letoios, bishop of Melitene, had to purge his monasteries, which had turned into brigands' caves (σπήλαια ληστρικὰ), from this pest.¹⁷⁾ It seems that these ascetic women were dissatisfied with the conditions in which they lived and were therefore eager to follow a new path, which promised greater ascetic perfection. In both cases, Glycerius' as well as Aerius', considerable numbers were involved (χορδὸς and πολὺς χορδὸς), though not all virgins were willing converts.¹⁸⁾

Men, and even more so women, following these enthusiastic regimes, had to break radically with their environment. As a consequence institutions such as parental authorities, marriage, and the entire ecclesiastical hierarchy became irrelevant. Naturally people representing those institutions felt under attack. It is understandable that the first to

oppose these teachings are the two groups primarily concerned: the families and the clergy. Again Gregory's letter concerning Glycerius is most instructive. Upon Glycerius' display of the virgins, which Gregory describes accusingly - they need not have to have been dancing - parts of the public were filled with horror, but the parents were, of course, the most shocked:

"they could not resign themselves to the loss of their children. . .and threw themselves at the feet of their daughters....,"

only to be rejected (II 136). Nothing more needs to be said. A sentence in Basil's letter 119 to Eustathius, written a year before the events at Venasa, describes the feelings of the general public very aptly:

"no profession is at this moment more suspect to the people here than that of the ascetic life" (II 25).

For the clergy an additional problem was created by an interesting aspect of the internal structure of those movements. According to their adversaries' description these sects were marked by organizational chaos.¹⁹⁾ However, the same hostile sources confirm that disregard for institutionalization did not result in anarchy. The sects were in fact not an unorganized 'Haufen' but structured according to the same hierarchical principles they attacked.²⁰⁾

One distinction of particular significance must be pointed out. Within the heretic hierarchy, women played an important role. The Montanists, a rigorous group mentioned in connection with the Life of Theodotus, had: "female bishops, female presbyters and others," as well as prophetesses.²¹⁾ The Messalians had:

"female teachers of their heretical doctrine, thus allowing women not only to be like men, but to preside over male priests; in making women their 'head', they defy the authority of the 'head' Jesus Christ." ²²⁾

The Eustathian women likewise denied male 'power over their heads' and became like men.²³⁾ In accordance with Gal 3: 28, the participation of women in active religious life was not limited. Further, women were considered capable of performing the duties of a cleric, thus fulfilling an important public role. Institutions and organizational frameworks were not per se questioned by the heretics, but the legitimation fundamental to hierarchy. The sectarians accepted authority on their own principles: the paramount criterion was ascetic perfection, attainable regardless of sexual distinction.

Of course such an attitude was highly controversial. The conspicuous silence on the part of the established hierarchy with respect to the existence of a sectarian one is easily explained. Such attacks on fundamental principles were extremely dangerous, some actions were expected. What precise direction these actions should take was a difficult question. The clergy was confronted with a complex and intricate problem. Whilst it could not tolerate the nomadic life of groups of ascetic men and women, it had to acknowledge that they followed certain Scriptural precepts to the letter. At the same time, other men and women practiced a settled ascetic life, which was, however, for reasons to be discussed, also unacceptable. As a result the clergy's reactions when faced with this dilemma were necessarily complex and diverse. To fully understand the difficulties facing the clergy responsible, that is primarily Basil and his followers, the history of the Homoiousians must be recapitulated.

Constantius II's decision to depose the leading Homoiousian bishops in 360 represented the first major defeat of the party.²⁴) However, Homoiousianism was far from being beaten. Soon after his deposition Macedonius began to rally other Homoiousian bishops, among them Marathionius, then bishop of Nicomedia, Eleusios, bishop of Cyzicos and Sophronius, bishop of Pompeioupolis.²⁵) Macedonius' efforts to keep the deposed bishops on the party line were successful; in fact those Homoiousians who remained faithful to his line, later represented by Marathionius and Eleusius, adopted the name 'Macedonians', in the region of Constantinople and its neighbouring provinces.²⁶) They were then to represent the middle position of the party. In the following decades the Homoiousian party gradually lost its unity as different factions adhered to different doctrinal positions. Whilst some approached the Nicæan party, others, the majority, focused on a newly expanding doctrine, centered around Eustathius of Sebaste, the so-called 'Πνευματομάχοι'.²⁷) As distinctions between all three fractions, the remaining Homoiousians, the Macedonians in the West and the Pneumatomachoi in the East, were not marked they were eventually identified as Macedonians and / or 'Pneumatomachoi'.²⁸) The entire movement continued to expand. Valen's edict of 367, which exiled again all bishops deposed under Constantius II, demonstrates the strength of the

party: Eustathius ignored it and remained in Sebaste.²⁹) In the early 370's the Pneumatomachoi and Macedonians were the major force in northern Asia Minor, from Hellespontus to Armenia, and south to Cilicia. Its centers were Sebaste, Cyzicos, Nicopolis, and Lamsacus, slightly less so Ancyra, Amaseia, Nicomedia and Nicaea. This astonishingly wide distribution gains further significance when regarding Cappadocia Prima: in Basil of Caesarea's own jurisdictional sphere several Pneumatomachian bishops can be found, and a strong Macedonian / Pneumatomachian party was active in Constantinople in the 380's.³⁰) The early 370's also witnessed a growing dissent, caused by a power-struggle between Sebaste and Nicopolis as well as by doctrinal differences, between two former allies: Eustathius of Sebaste and Basil of Caesarea.³¹)

What consequences do these doctrinal disputes have for models of ascetic organisation? A number of Macedonian protagonists had distinguished themselves as ascetic leaders, the same is true for Basil of Caesarea. The Macedonian foundations (as they will be called in the following), including Eustathius' hospice, always comprised men and women in communities without apparent sexual distinction.³²) Gregory Nazianzenus addressed a community of men and women in Sannabadae in Cappadocia. Sisinnius guided a community of men and women on the grounds of Gal 3: 28, also in Cappadocia. Gregory of Nyssa mentions 'adelphotēs' of men and women, the 'kanonikai' referred to in Basil's canon may have lived in a community with men, Gregory Nazianzenus speaks of 'agapetes' of both sexes as living together and Marthana guided a monastery of women living in close proximity to men. All these sources date from the 370's to the 390's.

Whilst the amount of diversity cannot be overestimated, it appears as though in the second half of the fourth century two major trends of ascetic practice can be distinguished: the peripatetic life of men and women who rigorously rejected society, and settled ascetic communities. The latter trend may further be divided into two groups: one represented by Macedonians and 'Pneumatomachoi', the others represented by Basil of Caesarea, Gregory Nazianzenus, Gregory of Nyssa, and their followers, including Amphilochius of Iconium and Meletius.³³)

It is clear that in the struggle for doctrinal supremacy the ascetic movement played an important role, many doctrinal leaders were also great

ascetics. The question is, whether the two major doctrinal groups actually represented different models of ascetic organisation, not necessarily caused by their different doctrinal viewpoint, but definitively connected with its particular leaders; and whether they tried further to gain decisive influence over the ascetic movement by propagating their own model.³⁴⁾

In case of the rigorists these question are easily solved. They represented a different practical approach to asceticism and their success suggests that their approach met existing needs. However, their approach was unacceptable to all established parties. Therefore, the most obvious solution to channel the rigorous movements was oppression, exercised by the clergy and by the civil authorities. The clergy's major executive organ was the synod. The synod at Gangra condemning radical Eustathians was followed by a string of others, at Antioch, Constantinople, Sirmium or Side to name but a few, directed against radical practices.³⁵⁾ However, enthusiastic, that is radical movements continued, attesting that these forms of punishment remained ineffective because of two main reasons. The radicals could not be defeated by merely challenging their theoretical position. All their practices were based on scrupulous observation of the Scriptures. Therefore, radicals denied the legitimacy of those who, in their view, interpreted the same Scripture in a much laxer way, the clergy. Decisions of established synods could simply be ignored. Further, many of the relevant authorities had themselves lived through a radical period: Basil and Gregory Nazianzus both began as rigorous anchorites in the Pontic forests; Gregory of Nyssa had similar ascetic intentions; Amphilochius of Iconium and his friend Heraclides, had been strongly attracted to anchorite asceticism, and were later dissuaded by Basil; to mention but a few.³⁶⁾ In other words, all the usually quoted protagonists of orthodoxy had at some point strongly adhered to practices they later condemned as heretical.

It is therefore not surprising that the ecclesiastical authorities had to resort to a higher and at least potentially more efficient authority: imperial legislation.³⁷⁾ In 369 Valentinian issued an edict prohibiting the wearing of the 'peribolaion', the philosopher's coat, except for philosophers.³⁸⁾ The second part of the edict on deaconesses,

issued in Milan in 390, has so far not been dealt with.³⁹⁾ It reads:

"Feminae, quae crinem suum contra divinas humanasque leges instinctu persuasae professionis abscinderint, ab ecclesiae foribus arceantur".

Likewise bishops tolerating their behaviour were to be expelled:

"hoc absque dubio emendandis pro lege erit, emendatis pro consuetudine, ut illi habeant testimonium, isti incipiant timere iudicium".⁴⁰⁾

Given the office of its recipient Tatianus (PPD), this edict probably concerns the eastern provinces in general, and not any specific city or region. A definite identification of the group intended is therefore impossible, unless other evidence can be brought forward. The close coincidence in words between C.Th. 16, 2, 27 and the relevant canon 17 of Gangra can however not be denied.⁴¹⁾ Without linking the two sources directly C.Th. 16, 2, 27 can be interpreted as testifying to the continuity of women cutting their hair for ascetic reasons and adopting male appearance. Combined with the campaign against spreading Messalianism and similar sects, C.Th. 16, 2, 27 also confirms that women continued to live as wandering ascetics. Suppression by ecclesiastical or imperial legislation failed in other words to eradicate those movements.⁴²⁾

At the same time, however, the fathers attempted to channel rigorous asceticism by offering a stimulating and acceptable ascetic alternative for enthusiasts, which was firmly incorporated in an established framework. The question remains whether there were two major models propagating a middle way between establishment and rigorism, and if so, which one was the better, that is ultimately superior one. Unfortunately, for reasons to be discussed, actual organizational differences between the Macedonian and the Basilian model have to be reconstructed primarily from Basilian sources, with all the methodological shortcomings inherent in such a method.

In chapter 62 of his Or. 43 Gregory Nazianzenus gives the following appraisal of his friend Basil's monastic achievements:

"He reconciled most excellently and united the 'ἑρηνικὸς βίος' and the 'μυγᾶδός βίος'. These had been in many respects at variance and dissension, while neither of them was in absolute and unallowed possession of good and evil: the one being more calm and settled, tending to union with God.. the other, which is of more practical service, being not free from the tendency to turbulence. <Basil> founded 'ἀσκητήρια καὶ μοναστήρια', not far removed <in spirit?> from the 'κοινωνικῶν καὶ μυγᾶδων'. Nor did he separate the two modes of life as if by a wall, but combined in his institutions the advantages of both" (PG 36, 577 A-B).

Basil created a third form of ascetic life out of merging two existing ones. Which existing forms? Without doubt, the first form is the anachoretic life. The second form is described as 'migados', and 'koinonios kai migados', and as having great practical values. 'Migas', the crucial expression, means 'mixed in confusion' or 'pell-mell'.⁴³⁾ Gregory refers to communities with practical commitments: could not migas stand for mixed sexes, men and women?

Other examples of Gregory's use of 'migas' do not contradict this interpretation.⁴⁴⁾ Whilst the interpretation of 'migas' as indicating 'the ascetic life lived in the world', the interpretation suggested by Clarke and others, is feasible, 'migas' may well have a more precise meaning: ascetics living communally and mixed with members of the opposite sex.⁴⁵⁾ If so, the description fits exactly what we know of Macedonian communities. Basil would then have created a concept that differed from both the 'eremikos bios' and the 'migas bios' as practiced by Macedonian ascetics. The question arises in what way, if it did, Basil's concept was different and how he tried to propagate his version.

Basil's new community at Annesi was definitively not mixed but segregated. Macrina's and his community formed a double-monastery, 'combining the advantages of both'.⁴⁶⁾ Secondly, Basil never required absolute poverty, no relative was to be deprived by someone's decision to become an ascetic; he accepted slavery; his communities developed under the protection of the local clergy; and he placed great importance on work and obedience (above II 2. a). While the latter aspects distinguish Basil's model from radical groups they appear not to have differed significantly from what we could reconstruct of Macedonian organizations.⁴⁷⁾ However, the segregation of sexes seems to have been a major difference. If Basil's concept was distinct from the Macedonian form of the 'middle way' between radical asceticism and conventional organizational models, did he try to propagate it? Basil ensured that as many of his confidants as possible became high-ranking members of the clergy.⁴⁸⁾ While these promotions were primarily caused by the sudden reduction of his diocese in 372, he did not fail to exploit those connections to promote his concept of a coinobium.⁴⁹⁾

In about 372-73 Basil asked his younger brother Gregory of Nyssa to write

a treatises De Virginitate. In his work Gregory has

"taken it to heart to treat briefly <aspects of virginity> in every respect obeying the authority of the one who authorized us" (II 15, 271).⁵⁰⁾

He states that whoever wants to achieve perfection has to follow an exact discipline (XXIII 1: 12-15, 522), outlined in c. VII, and clearly based on Basil's precepts. At the same time, Gregory condemns ascetics who live in mixed communities (XXII 4: 9, 540f.), rigorists who despise marriage (VII 1: 10, 350), ascetics who practice nomadic life (IX 1: 23, 364-66; XXIII 7: 1, 552), and others who refuse to work and live by begging (XXIII 3: 16, 534-36). Gregory presents, to quote Gribomont:

"jeunes gens attirés par la virginité... <avec> l'alternative de se soumettre à un père spirituel ou de risquer une telle déviation".⁵¹⁾

The spiritual father is, of course, Basil. Gregory does not attack the ascetic practice, of those enthusiasts in principle. His main point of criticism is their refusal to subordinate themselves under one leader, that is their failure to adopt Basil's model.⁵²⁾ Gregory's letter concerning Glycerius contains similar lines of argument.⁵³⁾ Gregory never threatens Glycerius seriously. Instead he offers pardon, provided the latter returns with his virgins (II 137). Basil also acts with great leniency. Glycerius had obviously fled to Basil's sphere of jurisdiction and Basil, the addressee of the letter, was very slow to react. In showing understanding Basil may have wanted to attract new members to his kind of community. The most explicit example of Basil's attempts to persuade others to follow his concept is probably letter 295 (III 169). Here monks are very forcefully 'invited' to adopt a common life. It is defined as superior, in fact as the only path to perfection.⁵⁴⁾ At the same time not just any common life is conducive to salvation, Basil emphatically stresses that the only acceptable concept of common life is his own. To ensure that the monks in fact accept this definition, Basil sends a confidant, who will report on the community's progress and list their complaints. The combined letters 173 and 22, if accepted as a single communication, could attest a similar strategy: an attempt to reorganize Theodora's community.⁵⁵⁾ Apart from his writings, Basil did not fail to promote his proposals by personal appearances. His letters give abundant evidence of his travels, simultaneously affirming the sending of envoys such as Meletius, Gregory of Nyssa and Amphilochius.⁵⁶⁾

However, one must not overrate the significance of these attempts. Basil's foremost concern was the propagation of his doctrinal convictions against a rigorists and a Macedonian / Pneumatomachian opposition. Basil died in 379 at the height of intense competition. His mission was carried on by Gregory of Nazianzus, Meletius and Amphilochius. Basil died just as the balance of power changed again decisively. With Theodosius I's accession in 379 the Nicaean orthodoxy found its strongest supporter. Theodosius wanted to unite the Church on the basis of the doctrine propagated by Basil of Caesarea and Athanasius of Alexandria.³⁷) Already in 380 a series of edicts was issued, largely on Amphilochius' incentive, which continued until 394.³⁸) At the very beginning, at the council of Constantinople in 381 and then in an edict from July 25th 383: "all Macedonians and Pneumatomachoi" were banned as heretics.³⁹)

This determined also the fate of Macedonian and Pneumatomachian asceticism. Although the institutions had been well-organized and popular, they could no longer be mentioned, let alone praised.⁴⁰) Macedonian history had to be re-written; in 380 Jerome comments on the 'heresiarch Macedonius', a fifth century Constantinopolitan bishops-list contains 'Macedonius the Pneumatomachian heresiarch'; Eustathius' fate was similar.⁴¹) Whatever was known of the positive aspects of Macedonian asceticism had to be ignored. Consequently, Basil became the sole founder of *koinonia* in Asia Minor.

However, Basil's concept of ascetic life was not immediately accepted and practiced to the exclusion of other forms. Sozomen knows of a flourishing Macedonian monastery in his days; Flacilla, Theodosius' wife, visited hospices and 'ptōchotropheia' based on the Macedonians before 380; and Pulcheria discovered the remains of the forty martyrs of Sebaste (!) in a Macedonian monastery.⁴²) The picture conveying the impression of an automatic, swift conversion of the entire Cappadocian and Pontinian ascetic movement into a homogenous Basilian community is false. As organizational divergences, especially of female religious practices, show, it was a long process until Basil's model was widely accepted.

III. THE GENERA OF FEMALE ASCETIC PRACTICE IN EGYPTIAN SOURCES

1. THE CANONS

The concept of 'parthenoi' in early fourth century Egypt immediately recalls the famous passage in chapter 3 of Athanasius' Vita Antonii where the saint entrusts his sister to

"γυναιμαῖς καὶ πισταῖς παρθένοισι δοῦσ τε... εἰς παρθενῶνα..."

(PG 26, 844 A). A 'parthenōn' was until then the female part of a house. Here, in juxtaposition with pious virgins, it must indicate something else.¹ What exactly Athanasius could have had in mind - especially considering the early date of the episode (ca. 270) - created a host of historical speculations,² at least until Garitte identified the problem as textual rather than historical: "eis parthenōn" has to be substituted by " εἰς παρθενίαν ". In other words, Antonius' sister was to be raised in virginity, as a 'parthenos'.³

Athanasius' passage, while not indicating the existence of a female religious community called 'parthenon', does confirm as early as the third century the existence of women entitled 'parthenoi' because of their particular lifestyle. Furthermore, his passage suggests that these women lived within their community (possibly as some sort of group) since Athanasius refers to several virgins. However, if virgins formed a significant part of the early fourth century Egyptian congregation, their existence must be acknowledged in other sources, in particular those regulating congregational life, the collections of Canons.⁴

In trying to assess the ascetic models specific to Egypt only three collections of canons are relevant: the Canons of Hippolytus, the Pseudo-

Athanasian and the Pseudo-Basilian Canons. These collections were written in Egypt and intended exclusively for the immediate vicinity.⁵ The canones Hippolyti, revised between 336 and 340 on the basis of the Roman Apostolic Tradition, are the oldest relevant collection. A first glance at them does indeed confirm the existence of virgins.⁶

Canon 7 (Coquin 359), based on canon 12 of the Apostolic Tradition, decrees that virgins need not be consecrated by the "laying on of hands"; a simple proclamation sufficed. However, as both Coquin and Botte agreed, this canon was intended for celibate subdeacons and lecturers, not 'parthenoi'.⁷ Canon 18 (Coquin 373-75) is equally disappointing. Here, virgins are exhorted to wear a veil to Church made out of cloth thicker than usual (a pallium), but the phrase 'once they reached maturity' indicates that the virgins in question are young, unmarried women. Canon 18 also does not address religious women.

Thus only canon 32 is of interest (Coquin 403):

"The virgins and widows fast frequently and pray for the Church." Virgins and widows are two clearly identified groups separated from the lay community. The specific characteristics of a virgin can possibly be explained by analogy with a widow. As canon 9 (Coquin 361) explains, there is a distinction between a widow by nature and a widow as part of a specific group. The latter are chosen by criteria stated in I Tim 5: 3-11:

"A widow should not be put on the roll under sixty years of age.. She must have been faithful .. to one man, and must produce evidence of good deeds."

Widows are not ordained, since this is a male privilege, but highly respected because of their accomplishments in fasting and praying. While obviously not part of the clergy widows formed a recognisable group within the congregation. Canon 32 suggests that the same was true for

women entitled 'virgins'. Both contributed to congregational life by fasting and praying, and chastity was required for both types of women. The references to virgins and widows in the canons suggests that a wide range of ages was represented.

The information contained in the canones Hippolyti, though scarce, accords exactly with the information given in Athanasius' Vita Antonii (c.3 PG 26, 884 A). Virgins lived as part of their village community, distinguished solely by a somewhat stricter religious life, but without any immediately recognisable institutional form.

As the name suggests, the Pseudo-Athanasian Canons were not written by Athanasius himself but compiled between 350 and 450 by an unknown Egyptian author.²¹ Internal dating of individual canons is therefore difficult, and the information offered by the canons may reflect developments originating in the late fourth and early fifth century. Although the collection reaches into the fifth century, it merits consideration. Altogether ten of the 107 Athanasian canons deal with virgins. Details contained in these canons reflect the existence of two distinct groups: those living within a family and those who have formed their own community. Ideally, every household ought to have its own virgin (c. 98 / 62). A virgin comes into being when either the mother vows to educate a daughter as 'parthenos' (c. 97 / 62), or the girl decides herself. In either case, the girl's suitability had ultimately to be established by the parents. They were required to observe her every movement, her preferences and her general behaviour. If she was obedient, and perseverant even when faced with 'smite and blame', she was officially appointed to the 'σχήμα'. A girl had to fulfill these qualifications, or else her appointment had to wait until she reached the age of thirty. Nothing is said concerning the mode of this

appointment. An Egyptian virgin's life is distinct from that of her family members by characteristics similar to those in the Cappadocian sources (above p. 18): the virgin fasted until evening, her food consisted of 'breadcakes', fried cakes, and flour mixed with honey and fat; and meat and wine were prohibited. The virgin had a duty to prepare her own food (did some rely on the help of servants?) and is not supposed to visit the church by herself or for nightly vigils. On special holidays she must attend services in a 'monē', or community of virgins. (c. 98 / 62-64). She must further remain silent and occupy herself with prayer. In order to maintain herself materially, even after the death of family members, she can inherit and indeed bequeath the property. If there are no heirs the property will be distributed to the poor, but even friends can count as heirs, c. 102 / 66). Virgins are not allowed to work as servants, especially not with goldsmiths or dyers (c. 103 / 66). If a rich lady recognises that a maid is suitable, she must allow her to become a virgin. The maid will then be treated as a daughter, kept secluded and in charge of the 'canons' of the household (c. 104 / 66-67). Other virgins lived in an organisation described as a convent of virgins, community of virgins, or even monastery, although the absence of the original Greek text defies further specification (c. 48, c. 92, c. 99).⁹ Canon 48 (35-36) prohibits a priest from visiting a female community unless he is old and married or renowned for extreme abstinence. To receive spiritual advice, the inhabitants of the convent or community are allowed to visit the church "before the reading of the Psalms" (c. 92 / 58). They walk there in pairs, guided by their 'mother'. Like their counterparts in households, the virgins in convents cannot attend church on special holidays (μικροῦς), in particular not at night. Prescriptions for the day to day routine in convents agree more or less

with those for virgins in households: they are required to fast until sunset, including on the Sabbath and Sunday, wine is allowed only for the sick; virgins must remain silent and secluded, they must not talk to married women, and they can visit relatives only in the company of another virgin (c. 92 / 58-60). The fact that relatives can be visited, with permission from the mother, contradicts the strict seclusion recommended in c. 99 (64) and c. 101 (65). One canon also describes a curious source of income for convents: rich women are exhorted to spend the night before martyria in convents, paying for all expenses (c. 99 / 64).

The information of the Pseudo-Athanasian Canons is complemented by the Pseudo-Basilian collection, which was also composed during the fourth and fifth century.¹⁰ Here, canon 5 (239) mentions for the first time a certain disdain - punishment would be too strong an expression - for a virgin who breaks her promise: the marriage of a former virgin is shameful. Canon 32 (249) deals with another interesting phenomenon, already known from Cappadocia. It bans cohabitation by celibate men and women. Here the man is mentioned as living with the woman, not vice-versa as in Cappadocian sources. Finally, canon 36 (254) confirms earlier findings by declaring that widows and virgins are under the same rule (νόμος) and in the same position (τόπος), but not in the same order (τάγμα: virgins occupy a higher position. They are in the first 'tagma', while widows are in the second. Widows are again described according to I Tim 5: 3-11. Together with the virgins, they must try "to be a light for the congregation" by fasting, praying and practising abstinence. In contrast to the Pseudo-Athanasian Canons, the Pseudo-Basilian do not seem to allude to a community of virgins: all virgins seem to live in households or alone.

Judging from the information contained in the three collections 'parthenoi' most commonly lived within their families or in specific communities within their villages. The Hippolytian Canons imply a low degree of institutionalisation: no public vow or penalties for failures are mentioned. Both later collections affirm the existence of a vow, without indicating the manner in which it was sworn, as well as a specific dress. Virgins were required to fast, pray, and adhere to certain precepts, such as leading a celibate and secluded life. Property-rights were in no way altered by their status. A particular role for the virgin within her congregation is not mentioned except to say that she obtained a revered position based on her prayers. Of the three collections, the Pseudo-Athanasian Canons alone refer to communities with some organisation. The canons therefore distinguish three models of ascetic life: within the family (with a special role for the mother), in communities, and as partners in a pseudo-marriage.

2. ATHANASIUS: LETTERS TO THE VIRGINS

Though the information obtained from the canons is reasonably complete it has to be supported by additional source-material. We can turn to two letters written by one of the most influential Fathers of the Church. They are both addressed to virgins living within a village or city community.

These letters are entitled the Lettre aux Vierges (=LV) and the Lettre à des vierges, qui étaient allées prier à Jérusalem et étaient revenues (= LVJer), written by Athanasius of Alexandria.¹ Given their author, it could be argued that they reflect only the circumstances in Alexandria. However, both documents are intended for addressees who lived outside Athanasius' immediate reach. Contemporary and slightly later sources, in particular Jerome and Shenoute of Atripe, demonstrate that Athanasius maintained regular contact with ascetics in Egypt.² The original language of one of the letters supports the conclusion that both were addressed to women who lived outside Alexandria. LV was written in Coptic and therefore intended for virgins who spoke the Egyptian vernacular. Evidence also indicates that the second letter, although originally in Greek, was also intended for virgins in the 'κοινῇ'.³ It will, therefore, be assumed that both letters describe circumstances characteristic of Egypt, whereby this does not preclude the existence of similar features in Alexandria itself. Neither of the letters can be dated definitely - a date would help to identify the location - but, in all likelihood, Athanasius wrote LV in his later years.⁴

As LVJer's title indicates, Athanasius addresses a group of virgins who have recently returned from Jerusalem.⁵ Evidently their journey was

a success: parting from the Holy Land had been difficult, and the ladies already long to go back. Athanasius respects and indulges these sentiments. The first part of LVJer (189-92) re-enacts the recently completed journey; it recalls the holy places visited; mentions the group of virgins with whom the Egyptians stayed, and their sorrow upon parting. The letter also affords consolation: wherever holiness is present, Christ is alive; if the virgins persevere in maintaining their lifestyle they will carry Christ within themselves, they will forever be in the Holy Land (LVJer 190). In the second part of his letter Athanasius' suggests ways of ensuring Christ's perpetual presence. Thus, the initial letter of consolation turns into a treatise on true 'parthenia'; forming part of the literary genre of treatises 'περὶ παρθενίας' already discussed.♦

The plural 'virgins' used throughout the letter, the allusion to 'symparthenoi', and the reference to several elders together suggest that the group addressed constituted a community with a certain internal organization (LVJer 189, 192-3). A similar conclusion can be drawn regarding Athanasius' second letter (LV). Its content likewise implies a community of virgins with one or more elder members, who, because of their experience, enjoy a position of authority (LV 72).

A first glance may convey the impression that Athanasius addresses his letters to virgins who are still part of their actual family. A passage on Maria, whom Athanasius presents as the perfect virgin and as a model for all 'parthenoi', mentions parents, their educational function, and the virgin's duty to obey them. He prescribes proper forms of behaviour in the presence of male servants and female companions. In short, he describes a virgin as part of an extensive household (LV 60f., 76). These references imply that the earthly family was indeed the

underlying organizational model. However, it appears that Athanasius speaks in fact of a spiritual family; he sees the ascetic community as the virgin's new home. Christ as 'brother and fiance' is the substitute for the 'earthly family'; instead of bearing their parents' name, virgins are now called 'Daughters of Jerusalem'; and just as a man abandons his parents for his wife's sake, virgins abandon their families for Christ's (Mt 19:15; LV 56, 59, 74, 76; LVJer 196). The extent to which the model of the virgin as part of a spiritual family has superseded that of a virgin as part of her own at the time of the letters is impossible to define; Athanasius' emphasis on the superiority of the former may suggest a recent development.

Exhortations concerning the need for seclusion in LV and LVJer demonstrate that both communities of virgins lived in towns or villages. The virgins are not allowed to leave their houses except for regular visits to the Church (or for a pilgrimage; LVJer 192, 196; LV 61). While in Church a virgin must concentrate absolutely on prayer, thereby controlling her behaviour, especially her movements and her eyes.

Athanasius stresses the importance of a close rapport between virgins and the local clergy. Virgins ought to treat the priests with deference and listen to their edifying words. The priest - as representative of the Lord, not as a man - is the only male contact permitted. Both Athanasius himself, as "a servant of your fiance", and his precursor Alexander are living models for this relationship: they both furnish virgins with spiritual and practical advice. These points combined with the information of the Pseudo-Athanasian canon 48 (35f.) may suggest that spiritual care for virgins was part of a priest's duty. Indeed, priests may have been specifically assigned for this purpose (LVJer 189, 192, 197; LV 71, 72, 76).

Practice and theory did not always coincide. Repeated emphasis on the necessity for absolute seclusion indicates that it could not be enforced. Athanasius warns the virgins against listening to talk about business or commerce; visiting public baths or associating with 'undignified' women (LV 60f., 69, 71, 74; LVJer 191, 193, 194, 196, 198-200). Outside contact may have been necessitated by a virgin having to earn a living - for instance by trading - since no source of income is mentioned. It is very interesting in this context that Athanasius asks male ascetics to support virgins in need with clothes and food, without expecting any kind of compensation (LVJer 200, 201f.).

Before considering a virgin's daily routine in greater detail, Athanasius' definition of a 'parthenos' will be presented. If religious feelings compel a woman to change her life-style, she must first search her conscience fully to appreciate the free and voluntary nature of her decision. Athanasius is eager to emphasise that only as a result of free choice and pure intentions will the decision to become a 'parthenos' be of any value (LV 62, 63, 65f., 67; LVJer 198-200). Once the woman makes her decision, the transition from the old to the new status in life is initiated by a solemn vow, perhaps accompanied by a change of apparel. The letters say nothing to indicate the actual manner in which this vow was proclaimed. It does not appear as though the woman swore this vow in public or with involvement by the congregation; it seems to have been sworn within the confines of the virgins' community. Despite its apparently private nature, the vow is binding and definite; it resembles a marriage on a spiritual level. Any shortcoming, or indeed a fall, is condemned without redemption or excuse (LV 55; LVJer 199).⁷) The vow's somewhat surprising lack of formality could be explained by Athanasius' understanding that the essence of virginity is 'above human nature' and

thus 'without legal text' (LV 55, 62f). Consequently, any attempt to conceive virginity in secular legal terms would not be feasible. Further institutionalization would contradict the true essence of virginity.

In order to keep the 'terms of her contract' a parthenos must live

according to certain prescriptions. She must be celibate; is indeed not allowed even to speak to men; she must turn moderation into the maxim of her daily life, be it with regard to food - strictly vegetarian - movements, speech, or laughter; her dress should cover her entire body, including the hands, and she should wash herself as little as possible, preferably not at all (LVJer 189, 191, 193- 98; LV 60-61, 70, 76). The aim of these practises is to achieve internal beauty, further accomplished by constant meditation of Scriptural passages (mainly the Song of Songs) both during the day and during her nightly vigils. Two models guide the virgin in the quest for perfection; Mary and the dove. By imitating both the virgin will become perfect. As such, she will be able to instruct other, weaker 'συνπαρθένοι' (LVJer 192-97, 206; LV 59-62, 70-72). Of course, the ultimate aim of bodily and spiritual perfection, the aim of true virginity and its highest reward, is the final union with Jesus Christ, the bridegroom in the spiritual marriage (LVJer 201; LV 56, 66, 71-75, 80). The potential union with Christ is what defines virginity. Virginity's capacity to raise a mere mortal above humanity and to enable her to become a divine bride gives it a superhuman quality. This very same capacity to transcend mortality implies that true virginity is a result of divine grace. A mortal cannot 'produce' superhuman qualities through his or her own achievements. Divine grace, personified by analogy with the angel Gabriel, must intervene (LV and LVJer *passim*, especially the beginning).

Both Athanasian letters confirm and elaborate on the information gained from the canons. The letters refer to the same organizational model as the canons: virgins as members of a new ascetic community, more or less secluded, under the guidance of one or more elders, and in close contact with the clergy. However, LVJer in particular refers to another

form of individual ascetic practice also based on an existing non-ascetic model: the pseudo-marriage of male and female ascetics.

In LVJer 198f., Athanasius deplores a habit apparently acquired by some virgins, namely talking to men. Unfortunately, in Athanasius' view, sometimes the matter did not rest there: some virgins actually lived with men on a permanent basis. The men in question were 'ascetics'. Both parties regarded their relationship as fraternal and based on spiritual love. Athanasius is strongly opposed to the practice and thus reiterates the verdict of the Pseudo-Basilian canon 32. Although he does not question the platonic nature of the relationship he cannot tolerate its practical implications.

The virgin herself may remain unscathed, but she could inflict irrevocable damage on her companion (LVJer 200). More to the point, she is already married to Christ. No mortal husband would ever tolerate adultery; thus the mere suggestion that such fraternal unions might be condoned by the divine bridegroom is preposterous (LVJer 198, 201). As far as the men are concerned, there ought to be no question that such practices are inconsistent with their way of life. A man who claims to be a solitary ascetic cannot live together with a woman, albeit a virgin. One plus one makes two, not one (LVJer 201f.).

However, the reasons for condemning such a union are as obvious as the ones for entering it, in Egypt as much as in Cappadocia. Athanasius, like Basil in Cappadocia, is aware of the cause forcing women into such relationships (above p. 95). Women need financial support in order to realise their ascetic goals and the men are grateful for a housekeeper and companion (LVJer 200, 201). Athanasius' sole practical suggestion for ending the virgins' economic dilemma is to exhort male ascetics to

give food and clothing to virgins in need without expecting services of any kind in return (LVJer 200, 201). Practical considerations may have contributed to another arrangement: Athanasius himself stayed for some time with a 'holy virgin' during his persecution. ⁹

In condemning these living arrangements, Athanasius alludes to a special kind of private ascetic practice:

"Les femmes mariées qui se sont éloignées de leurs maris pour la vie pure condamneront les vierges qui habitent avec des hommes." (LVJer 202)

In other words Athanasius knew of married couples who did not consummate their marriage for religious reasons. They attempted to participate in virginal life despite their worldly commitments. This is generally described as mariage blanche.¹⁰

To regard Athanasius' letters as mere prescriptions for obtaining perfect purity would disregard an entire facet of considerable importance: the letters are also Athanasius' attack against contemporary forms of asceticism which he condemns as heretical deviations. Athanasius' main concern was not to describe organizations, but to define his concept of true virginity as opposed to that of the "hérétiques et apostats" (LV 68). This important intention explains the comparative scarcity of organizational information.

Who were these 'hérétiques et apostats'? A reconsideration of LV and LVJer as testimonies of Athanasius' contest against contemporary heretics may produce further clues. Athanasius concludes LV with a long eulogy on true virginity, in which he defines virginity by analogy with other qualities and objects.¹⁰ The eulogy defines virginity as divine grace bestowed upon a chosen few (LV 63).¹¹ This selective nature of virginity

excludes the existence of a divine commandment prescribing it for all; whilst passages like Mt 19: 17 recommend virginity as the better option, it can never be enforced as a general rule (LV 67). To become a parthenos is an act of grace and thus based on the free choice of the individual; the benefits are gained by a constant quest for perfection. These are the fundamentals of Christian virginity. Certain practices performed "chez les gentils <et> chez les barbares" may appear similar but differ in essence (LV 56). The selective character of divine grace implies furthermore that all other ways of life are also legitimate, in particular marriage. Therefore, whoever claims that virginity can be achieved through personal merit alone; that Christ's teachings prescribe virginity as a universal condition; that as a consequence marriage is illegitimate and damnable; and that the consumption of meat and certain other foods must be condemned in principle, is an heretic (LV 68).¹² According to Athanasius, this definition of heretics is supported by I Tim 4: 1-3:

"The Spirit says expressly that in after time some will desert from the faith and give their minds to subversive doctrines...They forbid marriage and inculcate abstinence from certain foods..."

Ascetic teachings putting forth these heretical views posed a serious threat to the way Athanasius wanted virginal practice to be understood. Indeed, Athanasius as "serviteur de votre fiancé" and "vieillard" (LV 76), exhorts the virgins:

"ne changez pas vos ascèses en d'autres; ni non plus... si vous apprenez que d'autres sont devenues négligentes et déchues, que votre virginité ne ressemble pas à la leur.." (LV 71).

One question arises: are we able to identify the heretical group or groups Athanasius has in mind? Fortunately, he provides more clues to answer this question.

I. Alexander of Alexandria and Arian Virgins

In LV 72, Athanasius suddenly feigns incompetence to speak adequately on virginity. He therefore summons the authority of his precursor Alexander by recalling one of the latter's addresses to: "des vierges de votre espèce" (LV 72-76).

In this speech, Alexander identifies the virgins' fiancé, Jesus Christ, as consubstantial with the Father and thus an equal member of the Trinity (LV 72f.). He then warns the virgins not to attribute any credence to opinions which presuppose that Christ is man (LV 73). However, through virginity it is possible to achieve a relationship with Christ which resembles a human one, Christ becomes a 'brother and fiancé' (LV 74). Some attack the true fiancé by arguing:

"Le Verbe de Dieu est une créature... Il fut.. par la volonté de Dieu, étant un être comme les autres... Il est étranger à la substance du Père..." (LV 75).

They do so in order to separate the pure virgins from Christ's love, insinuating that their lifestyle is incorrect. These words are deceitful, uttered to corrupt innocent hearts and to denigrate the vow of virginity. All virgins must be on their guard against them.

Alexander then addresses the true practice of virginity, stating that it must resemble Mary's life (LV 76).

In this section, Athanasius uses a ploy common to ancient authors: he attributes certain convictions to a figure, mostly an authoritative one, other than the writer himself. Although Athanasius uses the same method in his Vita Antonii, this need not preclude the possibility that the speech he attributes to Alexander contains elements of historical truth.¹³ Almost a generation before Athanasius, Alexander also had to cope with the problem of virginity and its degeneration.¹⁴

In a circular letter addressed to bishop Alexander of Thessaloniki (or Constantinople), but intended for several bishops, Alexander says the following:

"...they brought accusations against us before the courts, suborning as witnesses certain unprincipled women, whom they seduced into error. On the other hand, they dishonoured Christianity by permitting their young women <ΝΕΩΤΕΡΑΙ> to ramble about the streets." ¹⁶

This information must be placed in context in order to make it less enigmatic. Alexander's letter is truly significant because it confirms the origin and early development of the doctrinal movement initiated by Arius. This movement was to have many consequences. However, Arianism and its history are beyond the scope of the present discussion except for a very limited aspect: the role Arians attributed to women.¹⁶ Closer observation of Alexander's passage reveals that Arians not only integrated women into their movement, but they also offered them a public role in doctrinal disputes.

According to Alexander, Arians went to great lengths to propagate their own faith and to ridicule orthodoxy whenever they could; they incited daily rebellions, and most importantly used 'unprincipled women' to initiate legal proceedings against members of the orthodox church.¹⁷ Alexander's remarks concerning unprincipled women are made in the context of Arius' propaganda-methods.

Who were these women? The Greek term 'γυναικάριον' is the diminutive of 'γυνή', meaning simply 'little woman', but the characterization of these women as 'loose' allows for one interpretation only.¹⁸ Alexander uses the phrase again in paragraph 58 of the same letter, here as a direct quotation from II Tim 3: 6: "...miserable women...burdened with a sinful past".¹⁹ Quite obviously Alexander describes the women as prostitutes, allegedly used by the Arians to discredit the moral integrity of the orthodox clergy.

This use of prostitutes was not uncommon. A prostitute accused Eustathius of Antioch of illegitimate fatherhood, and Athanasius himself later suffered the same fate. As the case of Paul of Samosate demonstrates, the orthodox were not beyond using exactly the same methods either: he was accused of excessive involvement with 'γυναικαί'.²⁰) The recurrence and apparent usefulness of this stratagem to discredit the opposition on account of moral failures, gives rise to the suspicion that Alexander may have used the same techniques in his letter.²¹) While the Arians may have used prostitutes to discredit the orthodox, it is possible that Alexander attempted to discredit faithful propagators of an opposing doctrine in like manner. Certain passages in Alexander's letter could support such an assumption. Discussing Arian propaganda methods he states that Arians went around town distributing writings (letters) to, and receiving from, women; that Arians allowed "their young women" to roam about on the streets; and he deplores them for "διασπροντες" Christianity (literally "tearing to pieces").²²) That ordinary young women should have such an effect by simply walking about does not stand to reason. The only explanation is that Alexander is in fact referring to 'parthenoi'. Therefore, Arians appear to have gained the support and engaged in public doctrinal disputes not only ordinary women but virgins as well.²³)

These conclusions, drawn from two rather ambiguous passages in Alexander's letter, find further confirmation in Epiphanius' later account:

"...through this <Arius> distracted at once seven hundred in numbers of the virgins of the Church and snatched away seven presbyters and twelve deacons."²⁴)

Epiphanius' writings indicate that Arius had a special following not only amongst women but also amongst the "virgins of the Church", who also

partook actively in doctrinal disputes. That virgins participated in these disputes - which were by no means merely academic - is demonstrated indirectly by three later sources. According to Athanasius, the Arian 'dux' Valacius had orthodox virgins beaten in public (presumably for playing an important role in disputes); and Theodoret records that for the same reason naked orthodox virgins were publicly displayed in a procession after Athanasius' death.²⁵ A remark in Sozomen attests that orthodox virgins, at least eventually, did not withdraw from the dispute. He reports that after Arius' death, Antony and members of the clergy started a campaign for Athanasius' return from exile. Constantine answered their petitions by ordering:

"...the clergy and the holy virgins to remain quiet, and declared that he would not change his mind nor recall Athanasius..."²⁶

What Arian virgins had to suffer from the hands of the orthodox is left to the imagination, but one can assume that their fate was similar. It is therefore obvious that women, especially virgins, played an active role in the propagation of the Arian movement and in the ensuing doctrinal disputes - a fact already observed by Jerome in his letter to Ctesiphon. Alexander himself indicates how it was possible for Arius to have such success amongst women. In paragraph 5 of his letter he characterises the 'gynaikaria' as deceived ($\pi\alpha\rho\epsilon\lambda\theta\epsilon\iota\varsigma$) by Arius and he elaborates on this theme in paragraph 58, noting that Arius and his followers roamed about, talked to women and tried to deceive them with their writings.²⁷ Epiphanius in part attributes Arius' spectacular success among Christian parthenoi - though the number seven hundred is not to be taken literally it nevertheless suggests large numbers - to Arius' appealing external appearance. He was exceptionally tall and well-featured. However, Epiphanius leaves no doubt that the primary cause of Arius' success lay in his teachings and the way he addressed people:

"through this" he attracted the virgins.²⁸ Arius addressed women directly and treated them as serious participants in doctrinal disputes. This approach won their approval. Apart from offering an attractive public position Arianism had a second advantage: the teachings themselves.²⁹

Arius' soteriology and Christology contained aspects which appealed immediately to the ascetically inclined:

"The Arian scheme of *ᾀσκησις* proceeds from the axiomatic identification of Christ with creatures...Christ's election as a reward for his discipline.. is within the reach of fellow creatures."³⁰

"The character of the salvation available to the believer" was to become the crucial issue of the time.³¹ Arius' concept, the spiritual identification with Christ the Son made possible through perfect ascetic practice, was highly attractive, particularly for those whose ordinary lives afforded little other reward. Arius himself was quite aware of this fact. According to Athanasius, Epiphanius and Sozomen, Arius composed popular songs containing the essentials of his doctrine. Not surprisingly Arius' message: "we <men> are able to become like him, the Son of God," spread rapidly not only in those strata of Alexandrian society otherwise difficult to reach, but throughout Egypt, Libya and Upper Thebes.³²

This new doctrine did not remain without its practical consequences. In Alexandria itself:

"They (sc. Arius and a supporter named Achillas)... refused to remain any longer in subjection to the Church; but built for themselves caves, like robbers, and constantly assembled in them <συνόδους>, and day and night plied slanders there against us."³³

What Alexander describes as robber's caves (the same expression as used for Messalians in Melitene and for Glycerius' followers, above p. 101) are - as later sources attest - nothing other than separate congregations with their own clergy and their own virgins.³⁴ The question therefore arises, whether Arian and orthodox virgins differed

merely on doctrinal grounds or whether there were actual differences in ascetic practice. Alexander's circular letter, whilst representing the first official action known to us against Arius and his followers, does not provide the answer to this question.³⁵ However, the attraction of Arian teachings for women had not subsided by the time Athanasius wrote his LV and it is worth reconsidering LV in this light.

By Athanasius' time the number of Arian virgins was actually on the increase as the LV demonstrates. Though Athanasius' return to Alexandria in 346 caused a sudden increase of orthodox parthenoi; though Antony's visit to the city resulted in "the engagement of many virgins to Christ"; though Athanasius mentions in the LV an increasing number of Christian 'parthenoi', the number of Arian virgins was also on the rise (LV 58, 64, 71).³⁶ In fact Athanasius says:

" ne changez pas vos ascèses en d'autres...si vous apprenez que d'autres sont devenues négligentes et déchues, que votre virginité ne ressemble pas à la leur;... ne considérez pas celles qui sont tombées..." (LV 71)

It is not accidental that Athanasius refers to the first Anti-Arian bishop, Alexander, for advice on virginal practice (LV 76), and allows him to repeat the Nicene creed before warning against people who come to virgins to deceive them (LV 74-75). In fact, Alexander's speech agrees almost literally with passages from Athanasius' Oratio III Contra Arianos.³⁷

Athanasius' strong emphasis on true and false approaches to virginity combined with his exhortations to follow the Scriptures and Mary's example, and to consider virginity as based on free choice (LV 62, 63, 66, 67, 69) and a gift of grace (LV 66) suggests that Arianism not only corrupted the virgins' minds, but also induced them to follow a different regime. The precepts of this regime remain obscure; we know only that the degree to which a virgin took part in public life may have played a role.

Both Alexander and Athanasius are adamant that a virgin is obliged to remain secluded both in body and mind. Any involvement with the earthly world is severely reprimanded; virgins should not

"considérer les opinions du dehors...en pensant tumultuairement à autre chose..." (LV 69).

It is therefore possible that the LV was

"fashioned and narrated in such a way as to preclude the Arian understanding of Christ and the vision of Christian askēsis which it supports."³⁸

Gregg's and Groh's assessment of the Vita Antonii must also be true for the LV.³⁹ The principle aim of the LV is to define the kind of askesis a woman should pursue in order not to become one of the many who are destroyed by false Arian teachings. Athanasius' eagerness to press his point supports the suggestion of Gregg and Groh that:

"The political climate at the time of the work's composition demanded it (sc. propaganda against Arianism)".

It must therefore be assumed that Arian virgins not only played their own role in doctrinal disputes, they had also fashioned their own form of ascetic practice.⁴⁰

Placed in its historical context, Alexander's letter takes on an entirely new significance. It contains the first attack against Arian teachings; it confirms the effects of these teachings upon women, and informs us that Arius' success did not remain without its practical consequences.

II. Hieracas and his Followers

Arius and his virgin-followers are not the only 'deviants' Athanasius^S must contend with. He indicates in LV 65-69 that the teachings of others are also disreputable:

"De ceci il vous est possible ... de refouler toute mauvaises pensées des hérétiques, y compris Hiéracas." (LV 65)

As though all his other admonitions were not sufficient, Athanasius then continues to rebutt Hieracas' ideas. Hieracas apparently claimed that marriage is bad because virginity is better. Athanasius writes that this argumentation, which parallels the argument that man is bad because the sun is better, is clearly an absurdity (LV 66). Hieracas supports his view, based on Mt 19: 12:

". . .there are others who have themselves renounced marriage (eunuchoi) for the sake of the kingdom of Heaven,"

by stating that the institution of marriage is now - after the Gospel - superseded by virginity, but he overlooks that such passages were not intended as universal laws (LV 67). Hieracas furthermore prohibits the consumption of certain foods on principle, in clear contradiction to I Tim 4: 1-3. In short, all Hieracas' teachings are pure vanity and hypocrisy (LV 69).

Who was Hieracas and what did he teach? All we know of Hieracas stems from the pens of his adversaries, Athanasius in LV, Arius in one sentence of a letter to Alexander, and, most eloquently, Epiphanius in Panarion 67. The fact that Epiphanius claims personal acquaintance with Hieracas adds to the historical accuracy of his narrative.⁴¹

Between approximately 285 and the 340's Hieracas, an Egyptian, lived roughly one mile outside Leontopolis in 'τῇ μοναστηρίῳ αὐτοῦ'.

Bilingual in Greek and Coptic, he not only knew the Old and New Testament by heart, he was also well-versed in the classical sciences including medicine and magic (cf. LV 66). These abilities made him a well-known figure in his time, but it was not his erudition, but his ascetic doctrine, which had the greatest impact.⁴² According to Epiphanius, Hieracas taught that Christ's incarnation served only to introduce enkrateia into the world (133, 22; LV 67). This fundamental concept was of profound consequence to Hieracas' asceticism: to be a Christian by definition precludes the possibility of marriage (134, 1). Marriage as well as the consumption of wine and meat were permitted in the Old Testament, but Christ's incarnation made these customs obsolete. To become a Christian is therefore to become an ascetic. Only life-long struggle for purity and perfection via asceticism ensures salvation (134, 8 - 135, 1).

The content of Hieracas' teachings - confirmed by Athanasius' repudiation - together with his personal charisma soon attracted a large following throughout Egypt (133, 18-20). An exact history of the movement and its extent is impossible to reconstruct, but we know that Hieracas' followers conformed to some model of internal organization.⁴³ No one was allowed to come to Hieracas, to 'συνάγεται, ἀλλὰ εἴ εἴη παρθένος ἢ μονάζων ἢ ἐγκρατὴς ἢ χήρα' (135, 7f.). Clearly, only celibates qualified as Christians in Hieracas' view, and they were the only ones allowed to partake in 'συναγωγὰί'.

What are these 'synagōgai'? Some form of stable community? Or, as Heussi concludes, an occasional gathering for the purpose of divine service for which Hieracas wrote his 'ψαλμοί' and 'νεωτερισμοί' (136, 12)?⁴⁴ In this context it is of interest that Epiphanius hints at another aspect of the organisational form of Hieracas' following: it

included women, 'συνεισάκτους γυναῖκας', who lived in the same place as men, namely in the desert around Hieracas' cave, and who followed the same ascetic principles as the men (140, 9-11). The existence of these women, combined with Hieracas' large following, suggest that these synagogai were stable communities consisting of ascetic men and women. Heussi rightly interprets the 'psalmoi' and 'neōterikoi' as elements in specific liturgical practices. They may, however, not have been intended merely for temporary assemblies, but for these stable communities.

Epiphanius' account attests that the Hieracan following was not an obscure deviation from the 'τοῦ χριστοῦ πολιτεία' limited to Leontopolis (133,10). Athanasius' letter proves furthermore that it was not shortlived either. Written during Hieracas' last years, or shortly after his death (above p.116), LV affords additional corroboration of Epiphanius' account. Indeed, Athanasius intended the entire first part of LV as spiritual preparation to enable the virgins to face and counteract Hieracas' 'mauvaises pensées ..' (LV 65), and not Hieracas' alone.

At the time Athanasius wrote his LV, women were living with men in some form of organized community in the desert, guided by ascetic principles as taught by Hieracas.

III. The Melitians

At the beginning of the year 335 Athanasius of Alexandria was on his way to Trier, having been deposed and exiled after only six years as a bishop. What caused his downfall? The years 334 and 335 witnessed the preparations for Constantine's thirtieth anniversary as Augustus. He wanted to celebrate this jubilee with his goals achieved. One of his primary goals was to unify the Christian Church.⁴⁵ At the time, only one obstacle prevented this unity, at least in Constantine's eyes: Athanasius, who refused to rehabilitate Arius and who seemed incapable of dealing with a strong opposition: the Melitians.⁴⁶ To solve these problems, a council had been summoned at Caesarea, but Athanasius refused to attend. Now Constantine called for a second council at Tyre which Athanasius could no longer ignore.⁴⁷ Athanasius' hesitations about leaving Alexandria were well founded: in fact Tyre represented his trial, with the accusations brought forward by the Melitians. They carried the day. Athanasius was deposed and not even his direct personal intervention with Constantine prevented his exile to Trier. ⁴⁸

At the time of Hieracas, or more precisely the time of the 'Great Persecution' (A.D. 304), a dispute arose between Peter, bishop of Alexandria, and Melitius, bishop of Lycopolis, concerning institutional and disciplinary matters. This dispute led eventually to Melitius' excommunication (A.D. 306) and a formal schism. Despite his condemnation, Melitius gathered an increasing following in Egypt and the Thebaid; not even Peter's martyrdom in 311 could reverse this development.⁴⁹

By 325 Melitian bishops occupied 35 sees, that is more than half (54%) of all episcopal sees in Egypt, along the Nile as far South as Hermonthis, four priesthoods, and three deaconates in Alexandria. These

numbers gain their true significance when we note that only 46% of all sees were occupied by followers of Alexander of Alexandria, Peter's successor.

The 'tagma' of Melitius was thus a veritable church of significant proportions, and what had begun merely as a disciplinary dispute had evolved into an opposing Church which constituted a serious threat to the supremacy of the Alexandrian episcopate.⁸⁰ In about 327/28 the antagonists Alexander and Melitius died and were succeeded by Athanasius and John Arkhaph, bishop of Memphis. The clash between these personalities marks the second major breaking point in the schism.⁸¹

The circumstances surrounding Athanasius' election will probably never be clarified. However, it is clear that, contrary to current custom Alexander had designated Athanasius as his successor and Athanasius was elected by only seven bishops against a majority of Melitian bishops. Athanasius completed the *fait accompli* by informing Constantine of his appointment immediately. His letter furthermore conveyed a false impression of unanimity and harmony. In fact, the Melitians immediately contested this election and installed a counter-pope, probably Heraiscos, and sent incessant missions of protest to Constantine to accuse Athanasius of illegitimate ordination, high treason and murder. Athanasius reacted to the opposition with violence and suppression.⁸² However, only a shift of power at the court itself led to Tyre and the success of the Melitian cause: Eusebius of Nicomedia, a supporter of Arius, had regained his position. It was perhaps a coalition of Melitians and Eusebius against their common foe, Athanasius, that induced Constantine to summon the synod at Tyre.⁸³ This was, in any case, how Athanasius presented his case to Constantine: he had been victimized by a conspiracy of Melitians and Eusebians, fabricated to re-install Arianism,

the vilest threat to Christianity.⁵⁴ However, his case failed and Athanasius was exiled to Trier.

Unfortunately, Athanasius' removal did not settle the discord: "...some admired Athanasius, the others John <Arkhaph>," and John, who had not won Constantine's support, became the new scapegoat. In 336 he was exiled; in contrast to Athanasius, however, by imperial edict and in defiance of the synod at Tyre. The Eusebians lost out as well; Constantius did not permit them to propose a successor for John. So, in the end, Athanasius in his exile was triumphant.⁵⁵

This brief and, admittedly, rather abridged account of a highly intricate situation is necessary for an understanding of several points. The Melitians, far from being a mere sect, were a true opposition within the Egyptian Church and possessed their own independent hierarchy, developed since 305/06. Long before the Arian controversy and before Athanasius' election the supremacy of the Alexandrian see was contested. By 325 the situation had become precarious. Canon 6 of the Nicaean council, establishing Alexandria's supremacy, was drafted because Alexandria's position was attacked on two sides: in Egypt and the Thebaid by the spreading Melitian Church and in Libya and the Pentapolis by Arianism.⁵⁶

The increasing strength of the Melitian church not only posed a serious threat to the alleged unity of the Alexandrian diocese; as far as doctrinal disputes are concerned it provided the Arian supporters around Eusebius of Nicomedia with a forceful political handle against Athanasius. Whilst Melitians and Arians differed profoundly on doctrinal grounds, they joined forces to achieve their political goals and it was this political alliance which ultimately became fatal for the Melitians.

Bell's publications of several papyri in 1924 confirmed an aspect vital for the eventual outcome of the Melitian dispute: the involvement of the Egyptian ascetics.⁵⁷ None of the literary sources reflect the role the monastic 'tagma' played within the Melitian Church, although Melitians flourished in the very homeland of asceticism. The Melitians, as these papyri inform us, possessed fully organized monastic communities before 334. The letters published by Bell were mainly addressed to, or written by, a certain Apa Paieous, leader of a large and influential community near P-hator in the Upper Cynopolite nome; other communities existed in the Heracleopolite nome, near Antaeopolis and near Hypselis. The inhabitants of these communities were mainly Coptic; they all wore the classic monastic habit, the 'λευιτῶν'; their economy was thriving, as attested by the importance of the oikonomos, and they were guided by one or several leaders. Women are nowhere mentioned.⁵⁸

However, this omission does not indicate that women did not participate in the Melitian way of asceticism. It has become obvious that the Melitian Church was a true schism, that is, it had the same hierarchical features as the 'orthodox', and was moreover based in the koinē. That the Melitian Church should not also have included women who felt drawn to ascetic life and realised this in the same way as their male counterparts, is quite inconceivable. Our ignorance is therefore a consequence of our source-material rather than a reflection of actual historical facts. That we should know only so little of Melitian monasticism in general is clearly a result of a selective procedure setting in as a consequence of the ultimate victory of Athanasius' orthodoxy. As a result, all oppositional forms of ascetic practice were obliterated, not necessarily because they were less proficient but because their leaders had lost the power struggle.

It is clear that neither Melitian monasticism, and that includes its presumed female version, nor the opposition within the Alexandrian church ceased with John Arkhap's exile, or indeed in the following centuries.³⁹ One factor proves the importance of ascetic communities and their support for the final outcome of the power struggle: immediately after his election Athanasius went into the Egyptian desert to campaign among the fathers for support. Both his early Festal Letters (A.D. 329 and 330) were also letters of propaganda, denouncing

"les hommes mauvais, .. qui tombèrent .. en hérésie,"

and emphasising the virtues of temperance and moderation, achieved with free will via proper ascetic practice.⁴⁰

A consideration of Athanasius' LV and LVJer has thus several surprising results. LVJer provides an account of early female pilgrimage previously overlooked, and both LV and LVJer give insight in organizational features of female religious life in villages as proposed by Athanasius. Placed in their historical context, LV especially, contributes to an assessment of the role virgins played in the propagation of Arianism, confirm their participation together with men in Hieracas' ascetic settlement, and emphasises the probability of women practicing ascetic life within the Melitian Church.

3. THE APOPHTHEGMATA PATRUM

At some time around 300 a young man was forced by his relatives to marry against his will. Once the ceremony was over he declared to his wife that he had no intention of consumating the marriage; he proposed that both of them retain their virginity. Soon afterwards he decided to take this proposition to its conclusion and he departed into the desert to live as a hermit. The place he chose as residence was a mountain-range called Nitria in the desert of Scetis, the area south of Lake Mareotis. This story is possibly legendary, but the young man, named Amoun, became between 315/20-37 the founder of a type of asceticism specific to the area, the semi-hermitic or -anachoretic life of Scetis.¹

Amoun's ascetic model of anachoretic life in loosely connected groups soon attracted followers, and the movement was no longer confined to the mountains of Nitria. As ascetics moved further into the desert other localities emerged: Scetis itself, the Cells or Kellia, and the mountains of Pherme and Petra.² Among the first generation of ascetics populating Scetis were Macarius the Egyptian (not to be confused with his equally important namesake Macarius the Alexandrian) Pambo, Bessarion, Esaias, Paesios, Pior, Athre, Or, Sisoës and the presbyter Isidor.³ This generation lasted until the end of the fourth century - both Macarii died in their ninties - and was followed, after an intermediate period described by Fathers such as Theodor of Pherme and Cronios, by a second generation dominated by such figures as Evagrius Ponticus, bishop Theophilus of Alexandria and in its later years the Roman senator Arsenius. This generation alone leads into the fifth century, and subsequent periods of Scetis' history go beyond the scope of this discussion.⁴

The men populating the desert of Scetis lived an extraordinary life

shaped by their extraordinary surroundings. It is therefore not surprising that they found new, thus far unused, modes of expression that resulted in the literary genre of the so-called Apophthegmata Patrum.⁸

As indicated by the name these Sayings, or Apophthegmata, originated as an oral tradition of practical instructions and charismatic wisdom spoken by experienced fathers for the benefit of younger ones, or as mutual encouragement. As silence was one of the strictest rules of the desert, and loquacity one of its vices, most of these sayings are rather laconic, especially the earlier ones. These are often introduced by the plea: "Father, give me a word."⁹ Considering the importance attributed to a charismatic saying of an elder - many travelled great distances to hear a 'word' - it is not surprising that, despite the general aversion against intellectualism represented by written traditions, fixed versions of sayings began to circulate.⁷ Exactly when the written tradition began is not certain, but a rudimentary corpus existed before 399.⁸ Naturally this corpus became enlarged and altered in the process of accumulation, so that they pose:

"le problème philologique.. des plus complexes que pose l'édition des textes patristiques".⁹

Already the early compilers, especially Pelagius, distinguished three sections of, at times, overlapping sayings creating an alphabetic, systematic and anonymous collection.¹⁰

The overall impression in reading the different collections - the alphabetical one is mainly used in the following - is that of a thoroughly male world, the world of the Desert-Fathers. This world is characterised by fasting, meditation on the Scriptures, silence, and constant work: in short the world of the uninterrupted battle of the athlete against the various demons he has come to fight in their homeland, the desert.¹¹ In such a world of relentless struggle, women would indeed be misplaced, quite apart from the fact that they would also be very unwelcome. Many sayings express these sentiments. Apa Theodore of Pherme's

"Do not sleep in a place where there is a woman."

Similarly, Arsenius 2, talking to a woman who came to see him said:

"How dare you make such a journey? Do you not realize you are a woman and cannot go just anywhere?"

Daniel 2 may speak for many others:

"Never put your hand in the dish with a woman and never eat with her, thus you will escape a little the demon of fornication."

Given these strong sentiments, caused mainly by the force of the demon of temptation, it may appear wrong to even suspect the presence of women in the desert. However, this first impression is misleading. A brief glance at indexes shows that women do appear in the desert, and not only sporadically.¹³ The Apophthegmata contain in fact different categories of women, serving different purposes in the process of edification. Undoubtedly, as a result of the presence of real women in the desert, the ones mentioned in the Apophthegmata are often incarnations of demons, and are as such used to illustrate heroic struggles or shameful falls. Other women were former courtesans restored to saintliness by charismatic Fathers (a topos that corresponds to the salvation of former robbers). They then join in general a 'monastery of virgins'; or they are just women mentioned in various contexts as required by the actual saying.¹⁴ One saying involving the second category of women, former prostitutes, differs from the usual accounts.

John the Dwarf, a Father of the second generation, relates in the saying 47 the story of Paesia, who as a young girl was left an orphan.¹⁵ After this personal tragedy she decided to turn her father's house into a hospice for the Fathers of Scetis. However, after many years of hospitality her resources were exhausted, and she saw no other financial solution than to become a prostitute. Learning of this, John was called to rescue her by other Fathers. John went to see her, was finally admitted and persuaded her to repent. Paesia said:

"Take me wherever you wish." <to which he responded> "Let us go,"...when they reached the desert, the evening drew on. He, making a

little pillow with the sand..said to her: 'Sleep here,' Then, a little further, he did the same for himself.."

During the night, Paesia died.

Two aspects distinguish Paesia's story from other accounts of converted courtesans. Paesia was already a 'parthenos', or at least an intensely religious woman, the Fathers called her 'sister'. As such she founded an institution unique in its kind to the Apophthegmata: a hospice for Fathers (probably in or near Terenouthis), run by a woman.¹⁶ The way in which Paesia is saved after her fall is equally unique. Despite the Fathers' hostility to the presence of women in the desert, John takes Paesia into the desert to save her. Paesia's exodus was sudden, unprepared and based on her own, very explicit free decision; as such her exodus is the source of Paesia's redemption, which manifests itself in the desert, the place of cleanliness and penitence as well as the home of the demons.

Indeed, on a more abstract level Paesia's story reflects all features customarily associated with the desert. Based on certain passages of the Old Testament, as well as aspects of Hellenistic mysticism, the theme of the desert as a place of purity far away from the corruption of the cities became quite popular, especially in Philo's or Jerome's writings.¹⁷ As a place of purity, the desert affords the possibility of redemption and purification. This notion can also come about from a different, more realistic approach to the desert. In contrast to the idealistic concept of the desert as a place of purity - epitomised by John the Baptist - the desert is seen, especially by the Egyptian peasants, as place of sterility and death, a dwelling-place for dangerous animals, the devil and demons.¹⁸ Following Christ, who ventures into the desert to encounter the devil (Mt 4: 1), the ascetic enters the devil's homeland as an athlete of Christ to fight the evil at its roots.¹⁹ This fight against the demons is paralleled by the internal struggle against one's own shortcomings; the demons are a manifestation of the athletes' own temptations and afflictions. A successful battle results therefore in inner peace and

cleanliness. The desert becomes the place where both the battle and the subsequent state of purity are intensified.²⁰ Thus John is justified in saying of Paesia:

"One single hour of repentance has brought her more than the penitence of many who persevere without showing such fervour in repentance."

In leaving her village so suddenly, Paesia leaves her sins behind to enter a place where she can overcome her past in an intensified struggle. The place where the purification of her soul takes place is also the location of her earthly death. John the Dwarf's saying 47 therefore implies that the desert is the proper place for intensified religious struggle for both men and women. The contrast between this concept and the condemnation of female presence suggested earlier is obvious. How can one explain this apparent contradiction of Paphnoutius' saying: "I do not allow the face of a woman to dwell in the desert"²¹

Indeed, Paesia was not alone. Other women entered the desert for religious reasons. N 13 (Regnault 1970/16) and N 518 (ibid. 88) mention 'parthenoi' who paid regular visits to Fathers in search of spiritual advice. In other cases, matters did not rest at occasional visits.

Cassian 2 mentions a virgin who lived with a Father as his servant. The chasteness of this union which may be seen as a pseudo-marriage of the type discussed (above p.122), is later testified by a miracle. It is, however, not certain whether this union took place in the desert itself or in a village close by. The systematic saying 55 mentions an old Father from Scetis who went to Egypt because of illness. There he lived together with a pious virgin as his servant.²² However, this union did not remain pure. Characteristically, sayings mainly from the second and later generations refer to examples of virgins or women living more or less permanently together with Fathers in an obviously unholy fashion.²³ Ammonas 10 is probably the most explicit: in this passage a monk about to be found out by his brothers hides the woman he lives with

in a large cask. Examples of holy women and Fathers living together in the desert are not confined to Hieracas and his followers. Without reference to Hieracas, or even allusion to heretical practices, the Apophthegmata confirm the existence of such customs. Obviously suspicions arose easily and were sometimes not without foundation. Therefore, these practices were not condoned.

Bessarion's saying 4, related by his disciple Doulos, tells of yet another kind of desert-dweller. In 391, at the same time as the temples of Alexandria were overthrown,²⁴ Bessarion and Doulos went to visit John of Lycopolis. On the way, they entered a cave inhabited by an old Father completely immersed in his work, plaiting ropes from palmleaves. As he neither raised his eyes nor acknowledged their presence in any other way, they decided to leave him undisturbed. On their return journey they re-entered the old Father's cave, only to find him dead. In Doulos' words:

"When we took the body to bury it we perceived that it was a woman. Filled with astonishment, the old man said: 'See how the women triumph over Satan, while we still behave badly in the towns.'"

In search of ascetic perfection women apparently did not halt at the boundaries of their villages. They like men ventured into the desert motivated by religious fervour. In this process, certain uniquely female characteristics became obliterated, not least because of the living-conditions these women faced. Use of the plural is justified; Bessarions' Father was not the only woman to inhabit the desert in such fashion.

Palladius' HL mentions in chapter 41 a certain Theodora, wife of a tribune,

"who reached such a depth of poverty that she became a recipient of alms and finally died in the monastery of Hesychas near the sea."²⁵

It is possible that this Theodora, mentioned in a chapter dealing with "γυναῖκες ἀνδρείαι", or 'manly women', was identical with an other Theodora. The latter, also called 'ἄμμα', which is the complementary form of 'ἄμα', deriving from the Syriac for 'mother', was on a par with the 'Fathers' of the Apophthegmata as her sayings demonstrate.²⁶ Anna

Theodora was a formidable figure. She kept frequent contact with bishop Theophilus and was sought after by many Fathers.²⁷ At approximately the same time, an acquaintance of Apa Paphnoutius lived in the 'district of Pelusia' in a recluse with a terrace, not too far away from the river.²⁸ She was Amma Sarah, like Theodora a well-known desert-dweller. Last in the line is Amma Syncletica. Known also through her Vita wrongly attributed to Athanasius, she takes us into the fifth century.²⁹ Theodora and Sarah are therefore more relevant in our context since both these 'amma' are earlier than Syncletica.

There is nothing to indicate the exact location of Theodora's dwelling. However, her acquaintance with Theophilus could suggest that she lived comparatively close to Alexandria. Theodora's sayings deal in the main with monks and praise for an individual's behaviour in a crisis. The majority of these eulogies treat the problem of self-control or 'knowing how to profit in times of conflict' (Col 4: 5) especially when the circumstances are extreme and hard to bear (saying 1).

Thus, saying 2 dwells on the parable of the narrow gate, saying 4 mentions appropriate behaviour when insulted, 6 and 7 deal with humility and perseverance, and saying 9 as well as 4 consider appropriate behaviour in case of sickness, the latter being the only one which addresses both 'monks and virgins'.³⁰

Saying 4 is especially interesting since it enumerates in detail symptoms which a desert-dweller had to suffer. Slipping into the first person singular, Theodora indicates that she is in fact describing her own afflictions (PG 65, 201 C). To talk about oneself is very rare in the Apophthegmata, as they were intended to furnish general instructions and not to discuss personal matters. If the sayings stem from the 'amma' in question, then this slip in particular would be the sole instance in which we hear a female ascetic actually depicting the effects of asceticism on her physical health.³¹ Amma Theodora's prescriptions on how to cope with

these afflictions are quite reminiscent of modern methods of dealing with phobias: she exhorts the afflicted deliberately to seek out difficult situations in order to control and eventually overcome his reaction towards them.³²

Theodora's sayings contain two more interesting items. She discusses the body with a Manichean, and she considers at length the ideal nature of a teacher. The reflection on teaching in saying 5 and the fact that many monks came to her, emphasize quite clearly that Theodora's being a woman did not contradict her capacity as a teacher.³³ Just like other 'Fathers', she was a model to emulate; she had gained her position as 'πνευματοφόρος' by following her own model so closely:

"As pledge, example, and as prototype we have him who died for us and is risen, Christ our God." (saying 10)³⁴

Equally interesting are the sayings of Anna Sarah. In contrast to Anna Theodora, who never mentions fornication, Sarah's very first saying concerns this topic, and in saying 2 the conquest of the demon representing fornication is dealt with. Sarah's sayings, furthermore, reflect far more strongly the fact that she was a woman. Her status as a desert-dweller was not unanimously accepted. Sarah says in saying 5:

"If I prayed God that all men should approve of my conduct, I should find myself a penitent at the door of each one, but I shall rather pray that my heart may be pure towards all."

Clearly Sarah encountered doubts regarding her legitimation as a desert-dweller, illustrated by saying 4 where two ancient anchorites come to see her:

"When they arrived one said to the other, 'Let us humiliate this old woman.' So they said to her, 'Be careful not to become conceited thinking to yourself: "Look how anchorites are coming to see me, a mere woman."' But Anna Sarah said to them: 'According to nature I am a woman, but not according to my thoughts.'"

Saying 9 emphasises the same issue to an even greater degree:

"She also said to the brothers, 'It is I who am a man, you who are women.'"

Clearly her attitude did not remain unquestioned. Sentiments of

conflict regarding the legitimation of ascetic practice are quite unusual for the Apophthegmata. The strong contrast proposed by Reitzenstein and Heussi between the developing hierarchy on the one hand and charismatic ascetics on the other finds expression only in the occasional refusal of a clerical post offered to an ascetic or in random remarks remotely critical of the clergy. On the whole, however, hints alluding to conflicts caused by the Fathers' ascetic practices and their legitimacy are extremely rare.³⁵ While the reasons for such silence are understandable, the fact remains that Anna Sarah's sayings are exceptional and could well indicate that she, as a woman, was confronted by particular problems.

One of the driving forces behind the desert ascetic was the Pauline notion of the 'ἀθλητής', the 'miles Christi' who fights the demons (Eph 6: 12). The imagery of the soldier engaged in battle is, of course, thoroughly male and thus theoretically unsuitable for women. It furthermore represents all three forms of perfection, the bishop, the martyr and the ascetic.³⁶ Although women could not become bishops, their presence in the Acts of Martyrs demonstrates that women did not shun the fight. Their spiritual force and religious determination equalled that of men, hence their participation in the fight against demons in their very homeland does not come as that great a surprise.³⁷ To live in the desert led to unavoidable consequences: female features disappeared after periods of extreme fasting and it was therefore easy to mistake a 'mother' as a 'father'. However, Anna Sarah's sayings express the theoretical concept underlying the phenomenon the anonymous mother embodies: in the struggle for ascetic perfection, sexual distinctions had become irrelevant. Ascetic zeal is not defined by sex and women manifested their inner strength by the adoption of male outer appearance.

This transformation is already very well expressed in the Passio Perpetuae, where the martyr imagines herself in her extreme trial as: "..expoliata sum et facta sum masculus." (Pas.Perp. X)³⁸ The female

desert dweller experiences the same transformation. As Sarah expresses it:

"According to nature I am a woman, but not according to my thoughts."

(Saying 4) Whether or not Anna Sarah and Theodora did indeed look like men is not indicated in either's saying. The figure of the anonymous mother, the survival of the transvestite motive in later hagiographical writings about a woman named Theodora, and Sarah's statements suggest that this was the case.³⁹ Heussi observed that certain traits are often connected with certain 'Fathers' who then become the proverbial model for the traits in question.⁴⁰ Thus Theodora and Sarah could well be representing the primary traits of their sayings: Theodora as a teacher and Sarah^{as} one who successfully confronted conflicts arising from men and women sharing their ascetic experience. If the 'district of Pelusia' inhabited by Sarah was the one in Augustamnica, Sarah would have lived close to Leontopolis, the home of Hieracas and his male and female followers. This neighbourhood could explain the polemic embodied in some of Sarah's sayings. ⁴¹

Fortified by the notion that the female soul was as apt to perform outstanding ascetic feats as the male one, women took radical steps. In Syncletica's words:

"Those who are great athlētēs must contend against stronger enemies."
(Saying 14)

Thus women left the social surroundings of the family, community and indeed village, and went into the desert (though their dwelling was probably in close vicinity to villages). What is more, they did so completely by themselves undaunted by extremes of nature or fierceness of attacks, by men or demons. In other words, women joined the lifelong battle against the devil and his demons, that is against the weaknesses of human nature, as they had done during the persecutions. In accordance with the image of the athlete and soldier, but also as a practical consequence of their harsh way of life, these women became men, not only in the strength of their soul but also in their outer appearance.

To live as an ascetic in a cave in the desert was not the only extreme form of asceticism. Others chose a different form, equally marginal and alienated from society, indeed perhaps more so, since the anchorites were at least settled. In saying 6 Amma Syncletica warns against "... nuns and monks who go from one place to another..." What does she have in mind?

I. Wandering Female Ascetics

"Abba Sisoës' disciple said to him, 'Father, you are growing old. Let us now go back nearer to inhabited country.' The old man said to him, 'Let us go where there are no women.' His disciple said to him, 'Where is there a place where there are no women except the desert?' So the old man said, 'Take me to the desert.'"

It is now clear that Sisoës' saying 3 was partially wishful thinking. Women were in the desert, often only as apparitions in the minds of tormented Fathers, but real human beings also existed. Virtually all women who ventured into the desert did so for specific reasons. The most obvious one is equally the most natural: women simply wanted to visit relatives. Thus, Timothy's and Mark's mothers came to visit them, Carion's wife came in a time of famine together with his son and daughter, and Poemen's sister came to enlist his help for her son.⁴² Other women were forced to come into the desert by circumstances as diverse as the 'professional journey' of a group of actresses, or a need of escaping the tax-collectors.⁴³ Illness also brought women into the desert. The Fathers had, as one of their great gifts, healing-powers and many came to seek their assistance. A woman with a possessed child came to Macarius, Longinus healed a woman of her breast cancer, and Daniel cured a possessed woman.⁴⁴ The most interesting reason for secular women to enter the desert was to visit the Fathers because of an irrational belief that they had superhuman powers. The women's trust of the Fathers' healing powers, was guided by religious motives. The religious aspect of their journey brings them close to yet another category of women who traveled the desert: women on pilgrimage.

Pilgrimages to the Holy Lands begin in the late third and early fourth century. While the pilgrimage of the prophetess of Caesarea (above p. 16) may have been spiritual, it could have been inspired by the first actual pilgrimage known to us, that of her countryman, bishop Alexander

of Cappadocia, which took place at approximately the same time (ca. 212). Alexander went to "Jerusalem to pray and visit the Holy places", but then remained as a bishop.⁴⁵ Others followed his example. The best known was Empress Helena who visited the Holy Land in 326.⁴⁶ The Holy Land was, however, not the only destination which attracted religious pilgrims. The spreading fame of the new ascetics resulted in an expanded itinerary: as Alexandria was already the port of entry for many pilgrims, they began to visit Egypt as well.⁴⁷ Eustathius of Sebaste is said to have visited the early desert fathers in the 320's; Basil of Caesarea followed suit in 356, and the "servant of God Poimenia" visited John of Lycopolis in the middle of the fourth century.⁴⁸ Egeria, the Roman "virgin of senatorial rank" who visited Arsenius, Paula and her daughter Eustochium, and Melania the Elder and the Younger are later examples.⁴⁹ This list highlights the fact that many of the pilgrims were women.

The example of the prophetess demonstrates that from the very beginning women as well as men undertook the strenuous pilgrimage. Another well illustrated case is that of the ladies addressed by Athanasius' letter (LVJer). Both examples prove that not only the rich and famous travelled to Jerusalem to pray. The reasons for such a noticeable presence of female pilgrims can only be surmised. A passage in an early letter by Basil to Gregory Nazianzenus could give a possible clue. Basil says:

".. <he> who is anxious to make himself perfect in all the kinds of virtue must gaze upon the lives of the saints (and the Scriptures) as upon statues, so to speak, that move and act, and must make their excellence his own 'διὰ μιμήσεως'".⁵⁰

Which saints or Scriptural passages were women supposed to follow?

Although in theory it was not thought that:

".. il y eût grande différence à faire entre ascètes des deux sexes. . . ,"

in practice women may have wanted to follow certain 'female models'.

⁵¹ The few passages of the New Testament in which women play a truly

significant role take place in Jerusalem. It is to Jerusalem that Mary accompanies Joseph and Jesus (Lk 2: 22-24, 41-42); it is to Jerusalem that the women in Jesus' company follow their master (Mk 10: 32; Mk 15: 40-42); and it is in Jerusalem where women become instrumental in Christ's burial and resurrection (Mt 27-28; Mk 14: 3-9; 16: 1-13). It would therefore not be surprising if the desire to emulate the women present at the Holy Sepulchre would be a driving force behind many a woman's pilgrimage to Jerusalem.⁵²⁾

Closer observation brings a second factor to light. Almost all of the pilgrims mentioned travelled in groups. The most obvious reason for travelling in groups was security, as the long routes were fraught with many dangers.⁵³⁾ The entourage was not always as splendid as Poimenia's (she was accompanied by several ships carrying a eunuch and bishop Diogenes among others). Egeria sometimes travelled with monks, clerics and for part of the time, bishops; Paula's and Eustochium's entourage included Jerome; and the Roman noblewoman visiting Arsenius was at least introduced to the Father by the famous bishop Theophilus.⁵⁴⁾ Another reason could again lie in the concept of 'μύησης', or re-enactment of Scriptural events. The archetypal pilgrims were the Magi who came to Bethlehem. They were a group of three, and may therefore have induced similar practices in their followers.⁵⁵⁾ Last but not least, all pilgrims shared another characteristic in that they came to "pray and because of the places of the story <of the Holy Land>" and they all intended, at least at the outset of their journey, to return to a more perfect, yet settled life.⁵⁶⁾

To repeat, Anna Syncletica expressed in her saying 6 the following warnings:

"If you find yourself in a monastery do not go to another place, for that will harm you a great deal. Just as the bird who abandons the eggs she was sitting on prevents them from hatching, so the monk or the nun grows cold and their faith dies, when they go from one place to another."

Does Anna Syncletica speak of pilgrims in the sense of wandering as a temporary phase or does she refer to wandering as 'status vivendi'? 87) As a specific form of ascetic life wandering is

"une institution parfaitement naturelle, puisque ces chrétiens suivaient l'exemple de Jésus, qui, lui-même avait été un 'ἑρμῆς'". 88)

Inspired by Scriptural passages such as Hebr. 11: 37-38:

"They were afflicted, maltreated; they wandered over deserts and mountains, in caves and ravines of the earth,"

many chose wandering as manifestation of their ascetic intentions.

89) The Apophthegmata themselves bear witness to this practice, as exemplified by Macarius (1 and 2) and Bessarion 2.⁹⁰ However, all these examples are exclusively men. Could Anna Syncletica's saying imply the existence of women who chose perpetual ἑρμῆς as manifestation of their ascetic intentions? One Scriptural passage indicates that women could find examples for perpetual ἑρμῆς as manifestation of their religious intentions:

"A number of women were also present...Among them were Mary of Magdala, Mary.. and Salome, who had all followed him and waited on him when he was in Galilee, and there were several others who had come up to Jerusalem with him." (Mk 15: 40-41)

More conclusions may be drawn from two fragmentary letters of Evagrius Ponticus, who lived between 345 and 399/400.⁹¹

Both letters were written in response to others which are now lost to us, but which apparently came from important people, since Evagrius' tone is rather deferential. At the same time they reflect the fact that Evagrius was of at least equal authority; both letters answer requests concerning disciplinary matters and Evagrius' opinion was obviously decisive. Letter VII, the first of the two, is addressed to a member of the clergy entitled ' ὁσιότης '. The majority of late fourth-century writers use ' ὁσιότης ' to address bishops, so it may be assumed the recipient of Letter VII held this position.⁹² Evagrius writes that he considers himself unworthy even to pray to God since he is still subject to worldly thoughts and influences, even though he promised withdrawal,

concludes his confession with a cryptic comparison between himself and Lazarus who dwells knowingly in Abraham's bosom (Lk 16: 20-25) and then proceeds to give the practical advice he was apparently asked for:

"As for the wise deaconess Severa, I praise her intentions but I do not condone (approve of) her deed; because I do not know what she will gain from such a long walk over a laborious route; but I can demonstrate with the help of the Lord the damage she and those with her will suffer. But I beseech your holiness to prevent those (women) who have renounced the world from walking in roads without need; because I wonder whether (marvel that) over such a distance they have not drunk the waters of <Γῆυν> either in their thoughts or in their deeds; for such are the deeds of alienation as far as the situation of the wise σωφρονῶς is concerned (from the situation of the wise).."⁴³

In dealing with this fragment the first problem is to tackle the date and place of its origin as these factors are relevant to the definition of Severa's position. Severa is entitled 'deaconess', and as such she is clearly in charge of a community of women 'who have renounced the world'; in other words a community of virgins. As suggested by his name, Evagrius Ponticus was born in Asia Minor, in Iborra in Pontus, and only came to Egypt in 382 or 383, in his thirties.⁴⁴ Was Letter VII written before or after Evagrius' exodus to the desert, before or after the 380's? According to Martimort

"... nous n'avons pas trouvé trace de diaconesses dans les documents et monuments de l'Eglise d'Égypte."⁴⁵

If Martimort's conclusion is correct and there were no deaconesses in Egypt, then three interpretations of Letter VII are possible. First, the letter was written before 382 and deals with a group of women in Asia Minor; second, the letter was written in Egypt and addressed to someone of note in Asia Minor; and third, the letter was written in Egypt and addressed to an Egyptian, but Evagrius uses the terminology he is familiar with from Asia Minor to describe the leader of a female community (above p. 92). If Martimort's conclusion is incorrect, Evagrius' Letter VII would be evidence for the existence of deaconesses in Egypt. Evagrius' reference to himself as a sinner who "still searches every city to buy purchases of vanity" could speak in favour of the first interpretation, whereby the

promised withdrawal could be explained by Evagrius' clerical status. The fact that we possess a late fourth century Cilician inscription commemorating a 'deaconess Severa' is unfortunately only of curiosity value.⁴⁵ There is no further information with which to make a possible identification.

It is, however, a common topos of the desert to profess oneself a constant sinner; Bessarion for instance accused himself of misconduct 'in the cities'.⁴⁶ The conspicuous absence of the term 'deaconess' in Egypt does not exclude the existence of the suitable organizational model to allow Evagrius' use of his native Anatolian terminology for an Egyptian phenomenon. The early writings of Clement of Alexandria and Origen already attest the existence of a substantial order of widows in Egypt, a factor corroborated by the canons (above p111).⁴⁷ In Asia Minor, the order of deaconesses developed alongside the order of widows. The later fourth century witnessed the gradual amalgamation of the 'deaconess' and the leader of a female community (above p92). Evagrius' terminology, given his Anatolian background, is very accurate: Severa guided a female community and so was perceived by Evagrius as deaconess. Assuming that Severa was Egyptian, the second crucial question of where she proposed to go still remains. It is clear that Severa and the women with her attempted "a long walk over a laborious route", which would cover a great distance and expose them to all kinds of dangers, both physical and spiritual. Severa's motives for this walk were laudable, which is to say pious, but the fashion in which she proposed to achieve these pious aims was not considered appropriate.

Was their destination Jerusalem? Evagrius asks ironically:

"I wonder whether (am surprised that) over such a distance they have not drunk the waters of <Γήων> either in their thoughts or deeds".

This name, Γήων, could be interpreted in two different ways.

'Gihon' is one of the water-sources of Jerusalem, divided into an upper and lower section.⁴⁸ 'Gēhon' on the other hand was one of the rivers of

"which flows through Egypt, means 'that which wells up from the opposite world,' and by Greeks is called Nile."⁶⁹

Epiphanius proposes the same identification in his commentary on Genesis 2, the story of Eden in order to reject Origen's allegorical method of biblical exegesis:

"I have seen the waters of Gihon / Gēhon with my own eyes and have drunk real water from the Euphrates."⁷⁰

Evagrius' almost identical reference to Gēhon suggests that he also had this river in mind. He refers to the Nile and Egypt. Egypt in its turn stands for slavery, oppression, wealth, corruption and false idols; in short for all the sins of the world.⁷¹ Isaiah for instance prophesies:

"See how the Lord ..shall descend upon Egypt; the idols of Egypt quail before him,.... The waters of the Nile shall drain away,...its channels shall stink..."(19: 1-15).

Evagrius warns the women strongly against a long journey, for fear that they will be corrupted by the world, and he wants to prevent their undertaking at all costs. Could Evagrius disapprove of pilgrimage to Jerusalem in such strong terms, or did the ladies propose a permanent change of their ascetical conduct, from settled to peripatetic?

Before reaching a definite decision Letter VIII needs to be examined. This letter addresses a religious person, this time without specific title. In it, Evagrius discusses human sentiments and passions, using terms relevant to his systematic classification of vices and virtues which he developed in Egypt. It may therefore be surmised that the letter was written in Egypt and deals with Egyptian concerns.⁷² The addressee, who corresponds with Evagrius via 'holy letters', was in charge of "sisters and brothers," clearly virgins and monks who have all "renounced the world." The addressee is thus either a person of clerical rank or the leader of a community or communities of men and women. After the brief discourse on passions, Evagrius exhorts the addressee to:

". . .teach your sisters and your sons not to take a long journey nor to travel through deserted lands without examining the matter seriously; for this is alien and not becoming to every soul that has retreated from the world; because he (the true Christian) hastens to take the road to

virtue wishing not only to avoid the sin-through-deed but also not to violate the rule through sin-of-thought. . . And I wonder whether a woman roaming about and meeting myriads of people can achieve this conduct."

Evagrius' particular concern is directed towards women 'who have renounced the world', 'roam about' and 'travel through deserted lands'. Not only are they liable to commit physical and spiritual sins, they are also in grave danger of 'alienating themselves from the state of the wise'. Using virtually the same phraseology as in Letter VII, Evagrius does not appear to be speaking of 'pilgrimage'. In contrast to Athanasius in his LVJer (above p116), Evagrius never mentions a specific destination such as the Holy Land, nor does he use the phrases "to go to pray" or "to go to Jerusalem", the technical terms for a pilgrimage.⁷³ Instead he uses the verb 'περιάγειν', to roam about, which as far as I know never indicates a pilgrimage.

Considering that Evagrius in his Sentences for the Monks warns explicitly against 'ἰκυκλευτῆς μοναχὸς', wandering monks, his fragments VII and VIII supports the assumption implied by Syncletica's saying 6: women chose the ξενιτεία, permanent wandering, to express their religious sentiments.⁷⁴

There is, however, only a fine difference between "peregrination as status vivendi" and "pilgrimage for an extended number of years". Both result in a long period of instability. The intention of returning is often hard to discern. Further, both types of wanderings arise from the same theoretical concept: perfection reached by a long journey towards the eternal world. In this sense, both types of wandering resemble stable ascetic life, also perceived as the individual's long struggle towards the heavenly Jerusalem, a new spiritual world.⁷⁵ However, while the internal journey of the stable ascetic is recommended, both types of actual peregrination are strongly opposed by the authorities. Opposition to a peripatetic ascetic life, expressed by Evagrius, Syncletica and other Apophthegmata, is understandable in view of the actual dangers involved,

but another aspect can be detected in Evagrius' letters. Whilst on the road women are no longer 'controlled' by ecclesiastical authorities. By leaving they would defy his and their superior's explicit orders, and thus act in disobedience.

On the other hand the opposition to pilgrimage may come as a surprise.⁷⁶ Arsenius 28 contains some of the affronting aspects of pilgrimage; Jerome's letter 58, 2-24 is perhaps the most eloquent admonition not to undertake a pilgrimage. A single sentence from Gregory of Nyssa grasps the essence of the opposition's point of view:

"Tell the brothers, beloved, the following; they should leave their body behind and go to the Lord, not from Cappadocia to Palestine."⁷⁷

Evagrius' Letters VII and VIII thus serve as testimony on two important aspects of female asceticism: the desire to achieve ascetic perfection led to a female exodus into the desert, and this exodus took three different forms; a temporary pilgrimage to the Holy Land; a permanent pilgrimage without destination on the basis of Heb 11: 37-38 and Mk 15: 42; or an inner pilgrimage in the confinement of the ascetic cell in the desert.

4. PACHOMIUS: THE FOUNDATION OF THE KOINONIA

From settled asceticism within the family as mentioned in the Pseudo-Athanasian canons 97 and 98, to permanent wandering, the models of female ascetic practice represent a progressive separation from well-known surroundings to completely foreign ones sought out for purely ascetic reasons. This progressive separation - the move from village to desert - did not proceed in a chronological sequence. It has rather to be understood as spiritual advancement, and it finds practical expression in the geographic move away from the village into the desert. Within the desert, the last model discussed, the temporary pilgrimage, and in particular the peripatetic lifestyle, epitomizes the most radical separation both spiritually and geographically.

At the beginning of fourth century, in the Thebaid in Upper Egypt, an organizational model developed, which combined the concept of the settled community in the village with that of the desert and its ascetic rigor.

In 292, a pagan couple living in or near the town of Latopolis, in the diocese of Sne, celebrated the birth of a son whom they called 'Great Eagle' or Pachomius.¹ Little is known of his childhood until 312 when he was drafted into Maximinus Daia's army and sent downstream (SBo 3-6 / G¹ 2-3).² Life was difficult for young conscripts: in Thebes, for instance, they were quartered in a prison (G¹ 5). However, Christians pitied the unfortunate soldiers and offered help. This unexpected act of charity and kindness had a lasting affect on Pachomius. Discharged in 313 (SBo 8 / G¹ 5b), he returned to the South until he came

" ..to a deserted village called Šeneset, scorched by the intensity of the heat."³

Nearby in a place "inhabited by not many but few", Pachomius settled in what was called 'the place of baking the bricks', (Pmamposterposen) "to grow vegetables and palm-trees" (SBo 8 / 6¹ 5b).⁴ In a manner reminiscent of his own experience in Thebes, Pachomius began to share his food with the village's destitute and with passing strangers. Soon his kindness became known and attracted new dwellers. Pachomius pursued this life-style for three years, and was eventually baptised (SBo 9, not in 6¹).⁵

Pachomius' popularity increased. Eventually so many people gathered around him, that he felt too constrained and decided to abandon Pmamposterposen. He

"sought to become a monk and to give himself up to the anchoritic life,"

practised already by "all the neighbouring brothers, and .. those on all that mountain." (SBo 10 + 14; cf. 16, 18)

Thus, about 316 Pachomius became the disciple of the famous anchorite Apa Palamon, who initiated him into the rigorous life of the desert dweller (SBo 9 / 6¹ 6). As described in the Apophtegmata this lifestyle was one of extreme deprivations. Fasting was severe, food consisted of rock-hard bread, salt mixed with ashes, very little water and oil; prayer had to be constant and uninterrupted, which was effected with the help of ceaseless strenuous work and frequent nightly vigils; silence had to be maintained and the Father commanded absolute obedience (SBo 9 / 6¹ 6; cf. SBo 77).⁶

Thus Pachomius obeyed Palamon for nearly seven years and advanced in spirituality. One day he wandered, as was his custom, through the acacia forest from which ^YSesnet derives its name, and found another completely deserted village approximately ten miles upstream called Tabennesi. Upon entering it, Pachomius was blessed with a divine apparition, which told him to settle in this very place and to found an ascetic community (SBo 17 / G¹ 12).⁷

Pachomius informed Palamon of his vision as soon as he had returned and both went upstream to construct a new abode. Palamon did not survive the separation for long, he died the same year (SBo 18 / G¹ 3b). In Tabennesi Pachomius was joined soon after Palamon's death by his elder brother John. Both practised the traditional anachoretic life in perfect harmony until Pachomius began to to enlarge his dwellings to receive others in accord with his divine instructions (SBo 19 / G¹ 14, 15 / G¹ 7).

The account of Pachomius' early career in SBo and G¹ attests to the wide reach of anachoresis at the beginning of the fourth century. Long before Antony and Ammoun went into the desert, men had lived in caves outside villages. The description of Pachomius' stay with Palamon creates the impression of a lively community of hermits with regular visits and other established customs. ⁸ Pachomius forms part of a tradition, but his approach differs in one major respect: he intends primarily to serve and support those in need: his own first encounter with Christianity impressed the notion of charity firmly on his mind.⁹ Although attracted by the manifest struggle for perfection as exercised by the hermits, Pachomius discovered that their solitary way neglected the fundamental importance of

charity. Pachomius' combined the advantages of active charity in the village with the severity of the desert-askēsis: the concept of communal asceticism on the basis of a shared routine and mutual service, practised in settlements in deserted places. However, this concept, matured over a number of years, was not to be realized without conflict. Though its theoretical soundness was allegedly proven by Pachomius' vision at Tabennesi, its practicality had to be established in subsequent years of trial and error.¹⁰

Indeed, Pachomius' brother John, favouring 'ἀναχωρησις', was the first to challenge this concept. The brotherly dispute ended in appeasement, rather than a convincing victory for Pachomius (SBo 19 / G¹ 14, 15 / S¹ 7).¹¹ Nevertheless, Pachomius soon attracted followers. About 324, three Fathers called Apa Pšentaesi, Sourous and Pšoi joined him, followed by several others. All lived in separate dwellings surrounding Pachomius' but shared their material needs under his guidance (SBo 22 / G¹ 25a, 24, 25b / S¹ 10). This experiment, still a far cry from Pachomius' ideal of the 'koinonia' or the original community of the Act 4: 32 (S¹ 11), ended in failure. After five years Pachomius was forced to expel some of the fathers.¹²

However, Pachomius' community inevitably increased in size and became more institutionalized, thus requiring a more stringent organization strictly based on Scriptural prescriptions (SBo 25 / G¹ 29, 26 b, 27). Several houses developed, each with stewards, assistants and special assignments. All officers rotated on a three week system; and set prayer-, meal- and work-times were established.¹³ Some time before 330 Pachomius

fixed his prescriptions in writing, in the Sahidic dialect, his and his followers' vernacular. These writings were probably from the outset devised in four different editions: one for the superior of the entire complex, one for the house-masters and stewards, one covering communal activities such as the synaxis, and one regulating punishments. The first versions of these regulations were altered and expanded over the years. Eventually, they formed the Praecepta, Praecepta ac Instituta, the Praecepta at Leges and the Praecepta atque Judicia.¹⁴

The first redaction of these prescription was probably drawn up in about 329. It was then that Pachomius' first foundation expanded into a second, at Phbow, two miles downstream (SBo 49 / G¹ 54a) ¹⁵.

A second generation of foundations came into being in the 340's: Tse under Apa Passo near Tkahšhmin (SBo 56 / G¹ 83); namely one near Šmin (SBo 53 / G¹ 81 a); one in Thbew on the west-bank further north (SBo 56 / G¹n 80); and the third one, Tsmine in the region of Šmin (SBo 57 / G¹ 83a); and one (before 345), Phnom, situated significantly further away in the mountains near Sne, Pachomius' birthplace (SBo 58 / G¹ 83b, 81b, 81d).

¹⁶ Before his death in 346, Pachomius had founded nine monasteries with numerous inhabitants. They were mainly Coptic peasants, but some brothers were of Greek or Roman origin (SBo 89a + b, 90, 91 / G¹ 94, 95). His new ascetic model, the κοινοβιον, had catapulted Pachomius to the summit of ecclesiastical personalities; many came from far away to seek his advice (Athanasius was one of the first in 329) (SBo 28 / G¹ 30).

It was not the purpose of this discussion to deal extensively with Pachomius' system and its complexities, but it is important to note that his concept transformed the shape not only of monasticism in Thebes, but - with the help of Jerome's translation- of the entire ascetic world.¹⁷ Thus at the beginning of the early fourth century, Pachomius (to quote de Vogüé):

"introduced a society into the Church; Constantine introduced the Church into society".¹⁸

I. Pachomius' Foundations for Women

Shortly before Athanasius' visit to Tabennesi (according to SBo 27) or shortly afterwards (according to G¹ 32) someone came downstream from further south to see Pachomius. According to SBo 27, this visitor was a 'virgin from childhood' called Maria. Although G¹ 32 contains neither piece of information, both sources agree on the fact that the lady in question was Pachomius' sister.

Although Pachomius had been away from home for more than fifteen years when he learnt of his sister's arrival and her desire to see him, instead of going to the door himself he sent his apologies via the doorkeeper:

"Do not be distressed, however, because you have not seen me. But if you wish to share in this holy life so that you may find mercy before God, examine yourself on every point. The brothers will build a place for you to retire to. And doubtless, for your sake the Lord will call others to you. ."
." (SBo 27)

Apparently Pachomius' sister assented. Brothers were sent

"to build a monastery for her in that village, a short distance from his own monastery...".

Maria's solitary life was soon over; before long others began to gather around her (SBo 27). As soon as Pachomius discovered the increase,

"..he appointed an old man called Apa Peter, whose 'speech was seasoned with salt', to be their father and to preach frequently to them on the Scriptures for their souls' salvation. <Pachomius> also wrote down in a book the rules of the brothers and sent them to them through <Peter> so that they might learn them." (SBo 27)

Other brothers were chosen to perform necessary labours (G¹ 32), and Maria became 'mother and elder' of the monastery. Nothing could be more natural and straightforward than this account of Pachomius' first foundation for women. 19 It is hard to imagine that Pachomius' innovation would prosper when it neglected an important section of the ascetic community: the women.

Thus, the visit of his sister provided Pachomius with an excellent opportunity to give ascetically inclined women the benefit of his new system. Pachomius' sister is called Maria in SBo 27; but G¹ 32 does not contain this information. G¹ 32 furthermore omits Maria's condition as 'parthenos'. Whereas SBo is usually more explicit, G¹ is here possibly more accurate since a fragment of S¹ 24 mentions a son, Pachomius' nephew, who had to be expelled from the monastery because of misconduct. Of course, Pachomius could have had more than one sister, but Maria's age at the time of her visit - she must have been well into her twenties - does not exclude a possible son.²⁰

'Maria' and 'John', Pachomius' siblings, are children of pagan parents and have Jewish-Christian names. Pachomius' own name is pagan. The general onomastic change to more Christian proper names took time; Christian names were certainly not widely used before the middle of the fourth century.²¹ It is therefore curious that Pachomius' brother and sister should both bear Christian names.

Furthermore, it appears as though Pachomius' first foundations in Tabennesi were, like Basil's in Annesi, essentially a family affair. The parallels between Pachomius and Basil do not end there; both had brothers, John and Naucratus, who embody the ideal of 'anachōrēsis', while Pachomius and Basil themselves promote the community ideal and both sisters, Maria and Macrina, guide a female community closely linked with their brothers' foundations. The only differences are chronological: Macrina adopted the ascetic life before Basil, whereas Maria's foundation was supervised by Pachomius.

We have seen that family relations between ascetics are not uncommon. Drastic attempts to sever all family ties, promoted by passages like Lc 14: 26 and demonstrated in Pachomius' reaction to Maria's visit and repeated by

his disciple Theodore's reaction to a visit by his mother (SBo 37-38/ G¹ 37), resulted frequently in a conversion of family members to monastic life. The 'brother-sister' combination is one of the most common; another Egyptian example would be Antony.²² The curious coincidence between Annesi and Tabennesi can therefore not be challenged as mere fabrication. The frequency of family relations indicates rather a parallel development in both cases.

According to SBo 27 Maria lived at first by herself in a location built for her by Pachomian brothers. She lived there without the benefit of teachings from her brother. Her experience qualified her to be 'mother and elder' of the ascetics who soon gathered around her. At some unspecified point Pachomius dispatched one of his most reliable brothers to the sisters to instruct them in spiritual matters. At the same time or shortly afterwards he also felt it necessary to send written rules to the sisters, the same as applied in his own community. Peter supervised the sisters' progress in learning them. This function was not linked to Peter as a person, rather it became an institution conducted by a series of Fathers: Peter was succeeded upon his death by Apa Titoue (G¹ 79,123).

What exact position did Peter occupy in relation to Maria and Pachomius? The only information to be gained from the Life is that Apa Peter was sent to the women "as their Father". Yet Maria was already "mother and elder" of some standing. The title 'elder' is an addition of the SBo 27 (its Coptic form is 'chello' or 'hello' (Ⲫⲉⲗⲗⲟ), usually translated as 'old man' (sometimes 'woman' according to prefix and dialect).²³ Maria was not very old by the time of the events related. Therefore, this title bears primarily spiritual significance: formed in accordance with the topos of the 'puer senex', the title 'elder' reflects the spiritual advancement of its bearer.²⁴ The title 'chello' is not without ambiguity; though applied to a woman it has a certain

male character and is thus reminiscent of Anna Sarah, Theodora and the 'Father' of Bessarion (above p. 148). It is worthy of note that Maria and her community had a father as advisor and supervisor, although Maria was a spiritually advanced person and the community in the possession of written rules. This practice is reminiscent of the function of a cleric as 'spiritual advisor'; here carried out by a brother.

The application of identical rules for the male and female communities indicates that the organizational principles for both koinonia were the same.²³ Indeed, the Praecepta include only one section dealing explicitly with the sisters: it explores the question of relatives visiting each other (Pr. 143 / Koin. II 166) since the theoretical request of Lk 14: 26-27:

"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters..."

was not strictly observed, one of Apa Peter's and his successor's main obligations was to coordinate visits of relatives:

"...a mother, sister, or daughter, some relatives or cousins, or the mother of his own children".

These visits were permitted for

"...any evident reason, and if some paternal inheritance is due to them from the time before the renunciation of the world and their entry into the monastery, or if there is any obvious reason." (Pr. 143 / Koin. II 167)

Upon fulfillment of these conditions, Apa Peter informed the superior, who could grant permission; thus Peter sent word to the mother who came out with the relevant sister. Both were always present during the visit to prevent the discussion of worldly matters.²⁴

Another specialised prescription concerned the burial of sisters (SBo 27 / 6¹ 32). While it was performed by analogy with that of the brothers, it involved a considerable number of brothers as carriers of the bier; at these times the brothers had occasion to mingle with sisters (Pr. 127-28). Hence specific prescriptions were necessary to prevent dangers. ²⁵

Economically, the women co-operated with the men. Women were responsible for the fabrication of garments, apparently for all communities, male as well as female. They may even have produced a certain clothing surplus (G¹ 134).²⁹ In return the sisters apparently depended on the brothers for everything else, from assistance in manual work to the provision of food. Brothers especially dispatched for the purpose of supporting the women have already been mentioned (G¹ 32). These brothers were compelled to return to their own community before the evening meal (G¹ 32), but nothing is said concerning Apa Peter's dwelling. It is possible that he actually lived in the female community.

G¹ 134 tells rather fleetingly of Pachomius' second female foundation near Tsmine (not in SBo).²⁹ A mother for this community is nowhere mentioned, but Apa Peter supervised this monastery as well. After his death Apa Peter was succeeded by Apa Eponyches rather than Apa Titoue. Two brothers thus fulfilled Peter's function.³⁰ G¹ 134 adds another aspect of this economic organization: Eponyches was responsible for the exchange of raw material and finished goods between the male and female community. Pachomius' successor Theodore founded a third female community

"in the village called Bechne, about a mile from the monastery of Phbow." (G¹ 134).³¹

Pachomius' new organizational model offered the advantages of village-life, the opportunity of practising active charity in a closely knit community, and with the strict asceticism of the desert. The location of the koinonia in deserted villages is a manifestation of these spiritual concepts embodied in both village and desert. Women as well as men were attracted by this new alternative. However, the female foundations depended even more strongly on the male 'koinonia' than subsequent male foundations on the 'Great

Monastery'. The story of the foundation of Maria's community thus gains a symbolic meaning reflecting future developments. It is worth note that for practical as well as spiritual reasons the female foundations appear to have been more inside the actual village than their male counterpart. The degree to which the female community maintained its independence, the relation to the mother, the supervising father and the head of the main community compared to the relation of other filial foundations with Tabennesi and later on Phbow cannot be clarified in all details. In any case, there can be no doubt that Pachomius and Maria provided the opportunity of leading a different ascetic life, and that many women from all ages and walks of life made use of this alternative.

5. SHENOUTE OF ATHRIPE

Pachomius' immense impact on later generations was not quite matched by his influence on his contemporaries, especially since the charisma of the founder did not maintain its vigour under his successors. Neither did Pachomius' system of 'koinonia' convince everyone.

Around the middle of the fourth century, two anchorites called Apa Pgōl and Apa Pschaj, settled in the desert near Šmin, an area which already housed four Pachomian foundations.¹ Pgōl and Pschaj soon attracted others, eventually transforming their cells into monastic communities (Pschaj on the mountain Psoy near modern Sohâg, Pgōl further South near the deserted village Atripe).² Influenced by Pachomius, Pgōl furnished his developing community with a rule. Despite many similarities, the new foundations were not Pachomian, since they had their own marked characteristics.³

One of these characteristics was an intensified austerity. Thus, Pgōl's community was situated in the desert itself, not in a deserted village like Tabennesi. Pgōl maintained stronger and longer lasting connections to his anachoretic roots, which in turn influenced his rule. Even as superior of his community, Pgōl continued to retreat into the desert for certain periods and the ascetic routine of his community was much harsher than that of Pachomius.³

Possibly because of the vicinity of Pachomius' monasteries, Pgōl and Pschaj did not attract numerous followers. However, those who came included women. Already during Pgōl's lifetime, a female community grew next to his own at Atripe.⁴

While Pachomius was still alive others used his basic principle of

communal asceticism, but altered its practice to suit their own concepts. Some of these were women. While Pgōl and Pschaj never reached the same significance as Pachomius, they shared in a certain sense the fate of Apa Palamon, Pachomius' mentor: Pgōl in particular found a disciple who not only succeeded him, but was to far surpass him.

Under the leadership of Pgōl's nephew Shenoute, who was superior from about 383, at the age of approximately thirty years, until 451, Pgōl's foundation gained an overwhelming influence. As far as Coptic Christianity is concerned, Shenoute ultimately became more important than Pachomius, in part because the latter's foundations began to suffer under incompetent leadership after Horsiesius' death.⁶ To quote Leipoldt's assessment: "Shenoute hat ferner als der Erste eine national ägyptische Auffassung des Christentums geprägt."⁷ Shenoute's own importance and his concept shaped in response to Pachomius' necessitate the inclusion of his monastic system in the discussion, although this leads into the middle of the fifth century.

Pgōl's monastery, called the "White Monastery" because of the colour of its walls, increased its size considerably under Shenoute's leadership.⁷ Indeed, the term 'monastery' is somewhat misleading. The monastery included not only the building itself but also the surrounding land. Reaching from

"the brook north of Atripe north up to the brook south of Pschaj's house in which he dwelt at the beginning in the desert,"⁸

the land-holding of the White Monastery comprised around 75 square miles if it extended east towards the Nile. It was large enough to permit not only intense farming but also to house several smaller filial communities described by Shenoute as 'συναγωγαί'.⁹

One of these communities was occupied by women. Possibly together

with another male community it was situated in what Shenoute calls 'the village' south of the main monastery. A second, smaller community of male and female ascetics was located further north.¹⁰ Again, as in Maria's case, the female monastery was in the village itself, which was at that point, if it had ever been, no longer deserted. The location of the female community in the village was partially caused by security concerns: around 400 the banks of the Nile were subjected to recurrent attacks of Bedouins (Blemys) or Ethiopians. In case of danger a monastery within a village also inhabited by others was far safer than one at the edge of it or actually in the desert.¹¹ To an even larger degree than the Pachomian foundations all filial communities or 'synagōgai' depended entirely on the White Monastery, and were subject to Shenoute's ultimate authority. This centralisation ensured equality. All monks received the same food, the same garments and all other necessities from the main monastery. Unity was further enhanced by a quarterly meeting of all monks. This meeting seems, however, not to have included the sisters.¹²

The leader of the female community bore the title 'mater et anus' or 'mother' and 'chello'. This title is the same as Maria's (above p.169).¹³ The mother, together with a 'second' and a committee of elder sisters, supervised the main female monastery. They were also responsible for the small community in the north.¹⁴ With the help of Shenoute's rules, based on Pgol's earlier reduction and augmented by numerous 'canons', it is possible to reconstruct the internal organization of the female monastery.¹⁵

Men and women (and possibly even children) who decided to join the community were admitted only after passing a novitiate of several months during which their intentions and capacities were tested. Upon passing the probation period, the novices were formally admitted by swearing a

solemn oath, called ' διαθήκη ',¹⁶ Its text is preserved: future monks and nuns had to renounce property and declare their willingness to obey the rules completely, but neither celibacy nor the definite character of the vow is mentioned (they must have been too self-evident to even be an issue).¹⁷ Nothing is said concerning the way in which this vow was sworn, for instance whether or not some members of the clergy or the congregation were present. It appears that this vow was private, that is, sworn within the community itself.¹⁸

Once admitted, two monks or nuns at a time shared a cell. This contrasted with the Pachomian arrangement, where each brother and sister had their own cell. Shenoute's brothers were allowed to sleep on a bed, while Pachomius' monks had to sleep on chairs; and Shenoute did not require nightly vigils. However, these are virtually the only points where Shenoute is less drastic than Pachomius. Shenoute allowed only one meal a day (although he exhorts some women to eat regularly); seclusion was far more severe; and visits by the opposite sex were not permitted at all despite the fact that many blood-relations occupied the communities.¹⁹ Similar severity can be detected in prescriptions dealing with the conduct between sisters (and brothers). Everything that could involve 'touching', such as oiling and bathing the sick, had to be performed under the suspicious eyes of the mother and several elders, although the sick were in general treated extremely well.²⁰

As in Pachomius' communities, the sisters' principal duty was to make textiles. Several brothers assisted them in all other labours. Like the brothers, the sisters received their food from the 'White Monastery'. It is possible that the elder brothers dispatched for work constituted the 'brothers in the village'; they may furthermore have lived permanently within the female community rather than occupying a separate locality.²¹

An elder father was especially chosen to supervise the female monastery.

22)

Parallels to Pachomius and Maria are evident. Not only was the female community economically and spiritually dependent on its male counterpart, the superior of the male community also sought to exercise supreme authority over the female community, despite the fact that it already had its own leader. A similar dependence existed between the other male community(-ies) and the central one, but in the women's case the situation differs.²³⁾ After all, the female community had its own 'sub-community' and could therefore be regarded on a par with a male one.

While it had to be inferred that Pachomius' female monastery was run according to the same rules as the male one, Shenoute consistently addresses his rules or canons to men and women alike: "... sive mas sive femina" is a recurrent expression. The notion of equal standing thereby implied rested on a sound theoretical principle as expressed in canon 52. of Shenoute's rule De Pietate Feminarum:

" An regnum caelorum unis paratum est maribus? Feminis id ut ingrediantur paratum non est? . . . Sane sicut multi sunt mares, qui ad tempus sunt fortes, et multae sunt feminae, quae sunt imbecillae, ita rursus multae sunt feminae, quae ad tempus sunt fortes atque victrices, multi etiam mares, qui ipsis inferiores sunt et infirmi(ores). Idem maribus et feminis statutum est certamen et corona eadem praesto est simul et maribus et feminis perseveraturis. . ." (CSCO 108) 23, 2-21

One practical aspect enhances this theoretical concept of equality. It has been mentioned that Pꝓōl and then Shenoute had preserved far stronger links to their anachoretic roots than Pachomius. Pꝓōl used to retreat periodically into the desert and so did Shenoute. However, the retreat into a cave in the desert was not the privilege of the superior: some monks, although linked with the monastery, lived permanently in the desert. A father, called Psate, brought them food from the monastery and they were expected to attend the quarterly meetings to demonstrate their

loyalty. Of course, their ascetic practices were subject to close scrutiny and any transgression punished with extreme severity: an offending anchorite was expelled and his cave completely destroyed to annihilate his memory.²⁴⁾

Some of these anchorites may well have been women. Shenoute addresses his canons concerning anchorites again to both men and women. These women might be, then, the only ones explicitly mentioned as attending the meetings.

Considering Shenoute's explicit postulate that the sexes are equal in ascetic respects, made manifest in addressing both men and women in the rules and in granting the right to be an anchorite to both sexes, it comes as a surprise that he demanded absolute control over the female community, enforced through the supervising elder father, who was more than a spiritual advisor.

One of the elder father's duties was to keep Shenoute abreast of all developments in the female community. Apparently this flow of information was neither as voluminous nor as uninterrupted as desired: Shenoute "again and again" has to repeat his request, often in vain (71 De V. Mon. 8 (CSCO 108) 64²⁴⁻²⁶). He even promises to do the same in return, in line with his theoretical position, but one aspect in particular renders the execution of this promise more than doubtful.²⁵⁾

Shenoute reserved absolute authority for himself in all disciplinary matters.²⁶⁾ He was the only one who could judge trespasses and administer appropriate penalties, always via the elder brother. One letter addressed to a mother contains the most remarkable evidence for the practical execution of this prerogative.²⁷⁾ This letter contains a list of female names, their offences and the appropriate punishment (beating the feet). The exact way in which the beating is to be executed is also stated: the

mother and her second, a certain Tachom, were required to hold the feet while the elder father administered the beatings, whereby he - not the mother - was permitted to make adjustments. He could vary the number of strokes according to his own judgement. The crimes committed demonstrate that Shenoute was familiar with the sisters in question. Most of them were related to his brothers, so he knew what he was talking about. Even more revealing, however, is his assessment of the offences' severity.

'Carnal desires' were punished with 15 strokes; stealing (in one case of the altar-wine), with 20 strokes; lying and disobedience earned up to 40 strokes. Lying (including failing to disclose certain facts) and disobedience were clearly the most threatening issues as they received the most drastic punishment.²⁸

Shenoute's reasons for this hierarchy of punishments are made evident in his Letter VII, addressed to Tachom Matrem. Tachom, female for Pachom, is almost certainly identical with the 'second' who helped the mother during the punishments. Now she has succeeded the former as mother.²⁹

Apparently Tachom refused to accept Shenoute's authority, rendered more painful by its execution through the elder father. Presumably Tachom had witnessed the damaging effects of Shenoute's authority on that of the mother in her own community: how can someone who is subjected to the supervision of a mere father be an effective leader herself? Tachom refused to make similar concessions, and she apparently denied the elder's competence. In questioning the elder's legitimation Tachom evidently also questions Shenoute's own; and Shenoute's Letter VII answers this challenge. In it, he uses the only possible line of argument to deal with such insubordination. Answering her:

"sicut homo barbarus ad barbaram, non autem sicut pater ad matrem

Other passages indicate that the incident treated in Letter VII was not isolated.³¹ Shenoute's demand for control, based on a noble sentiment, namely to ensure equal treatment for men and women, met the opposition of a woman who felt that she occupied a position comparable to Shenoute's own, yet was asked to subject herself completely. The ultimate result was constant tension.

6. THE EVIDENCE OF THE HISTORIA LAUSIACA AND THE HISTORIA MONACHORUM

When in 419/20 Theodosius II's chamberlain Lausus asked the Galatian Palladius to write the history of his most formative years, Palladius drew brief biographical sketches of the most famous ascetics of the fourth century.¹ In order to support his own memory he resorted to several sources, including oral traditions, with their miracles and legends. However, the varied array of sources he brought together does not impair on the Historia Lausiaca's historical value, as its many geographic and other details indicate.²

However, the information contained in the HL would be incomplete without a contemporary work drawing independently from similar sources. The Historia Monachorum in Aegypto is a travelogue of seven Palestinian ascetics who spend one year in Egypt visiting the famous brothers.³ Their itinerary, from Lycopolis through the Thebaid, the Hermopolite 'nome' and its deserts, the Oxyrhynchite and Scetis to Alexandria, is very accurate and can thus prove the work's historical value.⁴ While written from a different angle, the HM pursues the same aim as the HL: to educate the readers with the help of the admirable deeds performed by the Egyptian ascetics

"...dans les déserts et la campagne habitée...dans les cavernes des déserts ou dans les lieux les plus reculés.." (Prol. 10-11/8)

Palladius states in his prologue that in writing the HL he intends to relate "...the deeds of the Fathers, men and women.." (Prol. II, 10).⁵ It is indeed remarkable that Palladius should describe men and women as

"Fathers". Indeed, of the 38 chapters dealing with the Egyptians, roughly a third include women.

Paul the Simple, who lived on Mount Pherme together with other ascetics, is the subject of chapter 20 (II 62).⁶ Paul distinguished himself from his fellow-brothers by an astonishing capacity for prayer: his maximum was three hundred prayers per day which he kept track of by counting little stones.⁷ He confesses to the famous Macarius of Alexandria, that his zeal was greatly affected upon learning that a 'parthenos' in a nearby village had surpassed him: she managed seven hundred prayers a day, foregoing food during the entire week to achieve this aim. Macarius consoles Paul in pointing out that he offers up only one hundred prayers a day, 'stable prayers' he calls them, and eats a satisfying amount of food every day. What is more, he works for his food.⁸

Two factors here are remarkable. First, during the second half of the fourth century a 'parthenos' lives within a village, apparently alone since no relatives or companions are referred to, and she practises an extreme fast and prays incessantly, which prevents her from working. Second, although not condemned outright, her behaviour is implicitly criticised when it is contrasted with the moderate routine practised by an acclaimed ascetic.

A small village on the banks of the Nile was the home of another virgin called Piamun (c. 31, II 86). Piamun lived with her mother and spent her days weaving linen; other aspects of her routine are not disclosed. Piamun possessed, however, one remarkable feature: she was endowed with prophetic gifts (χαρίσματος προφητεωσ). When once during the flood-season the well-armed occupants of the neighbouring village threatened to attack Piamun's own in order to divert the vital water flow,

Piamun not only predicted the impending disaster but managed to transfix the attackers on the spot by standing all night in prayer.⁹

This account contains curious elements of reality and legend. While papyrological and canonical evidence attest the frequency of such attacks, the fixation-motif is an ancient legendary topos which may shed a glance on a non-Christian aspect of a 'parthenos': she commanded magic powers similar to those of a pagan priestess, by now adapted to Christian needs.¹⁰ Piamun is an Egyptian name: this virgin may have been born around 320, though the evidence is not compelling;¹¹ she lived within her village, where she occupied a significant position even in 'administrative' questions; she earned her living by producing textiles; and she shared her house with her mother.¹²

Palladius recalls in chapter 60 (II 154) an episode which occurred in his later years in Arsinoe.¹³ Here, a virgin had spent sixty years as an ascetic in complete seclusion, living with her mother.¹⁴ One night an apparition of the local martyr Colluthos came to her. He indicated that the hour of her death was approaching and invited her to celebrate this with a meal at his sanctuary outside the town.¹⁵ The next day the virgin prepared bread, olives, and vegetables, spent the day in prayer at the sanctuary, returned home for final arrangements, which included the dedication of "a book by Clement of Alexandria on the prophet Amos" to Palladius. She died the following day.¹⁶

Martyrs at this time were considered to be the highest examples of perfection. Their deed ensured their acceptance into heaven and they became ipso facto angels. A distinct feature of hagiography is that the future angelic state of the hero is ascertained by an announcement of his or her forthcoming death, normally through an angel. This virgin's death is further preceded by a meal in the fashion of a 'Last Supper'.

Palladius' account thus reveals that in his eyes - and in the eyes of the congregation at Arsinoe - this virgin had reached the highest degree of perfection. Like other famous ascetics, her eternal life is ensured, and she will be accepted into heaven.¹⁷ The three virgins discussed so far lived within their village community, two of them alone with their mothers. They also represent an increasing degree of holiness; although the last virgin practices the strictest seclusion without lapsing into extremes.

By the time Palladius lived in Arsinoe, the town housed no less than twelve female monasteries one of which was guided by a certain 'amma Talis' (c. 59, II 153).¹⁸ Talis supervised a community of sixty virgins, who loved her to such a degree that locking the front door became unnecessary: their care was protection enough. One of Talis' virgins was especially zealous. She never accepted a new dress, veil or sandals, so that she did not have to leave the monastery ever, not even for mass on Sundays. Taor, who was of exceptional beauty, could thus work and pray constantly.¹⁹ It is interesting that the women acquired parts of their clothing from outside the monastery; presumably they did so through some trading arrangements.²⁰

'Ammas', the title given to the desert-mothers, appears to have become by the end of the fourth century the title for the leaders of ascetic communities. 'Ammas' is in fact the translation of the title 'mother' given to Maria and Tachon, and its connection with exceptional ascetic capability makes it appropriate for a spiritual as well as administrative authority.²¹ However, Amma Talis' authority was confined to the internal affairs of the community. Members of the clergy exercised the ultimate spiritual guidance. Not only did the virgins visit the Church (as prescribed in the Pseudo-Athanasian canon 92), Palladius in person

frequently visited the community. He was surprised by the degree of detachment Talis had reached.²² She did not hesitate to touch him, so far had she surpassed human aspects of sexuality that even bodily contact could not affect her. Palladius - the foreign bishop - exercised the spiritual care of at least some virgins in Arsinoe.

Quite a different kind of ascetic community is referred to in chapter 29 (II 84). Elia, a known ascetic, owned property in Athribe, which at some point he decided to use because

"...feeling compassion for those women who belonged to the order of ascetics...he built a large monastery, where he collected those who wandered about (...τάγμα τῶν ἀσκητριῶν...συνήγαγε πᾶσας τὰς ἄλωμένους ἐν τῷ μοναστηρίῳ...)"²³

Elia's foundation provided these women with all amenities, medical care, household goods, and gardens, but nonetheless

"having been united from different ways of life the women squabbled constantly with each other."

Therefore, Elia lived among them within the monastery. As he was still young, this practice caused some difficulties, and at some point Elia left for the desert to purify himself and to regain his composure. His prayers were answered, albeit more drastically than he had perhaps anticipated: three angels appeared and castrated him with a razor-blade.²⁴ Successfully freed from temptations, Elia returned to the monastery where he remained for the following forty years. He was succeeded by Dorotheos, who, however,

"could not continue to live in this situation, in the heart of the monastery."

Dorotheos solved the problem by enclosing himself in a chamber in the attic without stairs. From there he communicated with the women through a window. (c. 30, II 86).

The facts conveyed by this chapter leave little room for doubt. The

women characterised as "belonging to the *tagma tōn askētriōn*" must be women who had chosen 'wandering' as their ascetic lifestyle.²⁵ The harshness of this life filled Elia (and perhaps others) with compassion and compelled him to look after them. The extent of his monastery, supposed to have housed at least three hundred virgins, demonstrates that wandering ascetic women, 'ἁλωμέναι', constituted a significant minority.²⁶

Elia, a man, guided and lived with these women for whom he had founded the monastery, a tradition continued by Dorotheos. Palladius supports this practice by characterizing Elia throughout as exemplary and as authorized by divine intervention to continue his style of leadership.²⁷ Apparently his institution was a necessity, and had to be maintained. The question is whether Elia was the only man to live in the monastery or whether there were others as well. Dorotheos is described as an 'old man' upon taking charge of the monastery, although he then guides it 'growing old'. His description as 'old man' may correspond to the topos of the 'puer senex' indicating that Dorotheos already lived in the monastery during Elia's lifetime.²⁸

A community which has left the village behind and ventured into new surroundings, the desert, is the subject of chapter 11 (II 32).

Ammonius, a disciple of Pambo and himself a famous desert-father of the second generation, lived in Nitria together with

"[τρισὶν ἀδελφοῖς ἑτέροις καὶ] δυσὶν ἀδελφαῖς αὐτοῦ"
 "[three other brothers] and two sisters."²⁹

All brothers and sisters lived in individual dwellings within some distance from each other and had attained "the summit of the love of God."

³⁰ Ammonius' ascetic routine, presumably shared by those around him, was

very rigorous. He ate only raw food with the exception of bread, and exercised his intellect not only with the Old and New Testament, but also with the writings of Origen and others.³¹ Ammonius was in fact a protagonist of an intellectual group adhering to Origenism called the 'Tall Brothers'.³² Closer observation suggests that the 'Tall Brothers' included 'sisters' who shared their semi-hermit lifestyle as well as their intellectual interests.

Another parthenos called Alexandra had withdrawn from the world to an extreme that complements that of the wandering virgins (c. 5, II 21).³³ Just as they shunned the world by completely abandoning any form of settlement, she did so by choosing a diametrically opposed approach: she had herself walled into a tomb outside Alexandria.³⁴ She persevered in this extreme confinement for ten years, praying every hour and weaving linen. Her only bond to the world and its possessions was a servant-girl, who brought her daily meal - bread - probably purchased with the earnings from the textiles Alexandra produced.

Palladius does not omit Pachomius and his foundations for men and women. Whilst it is superfluous to deal with the details of his account, one story should be related (c. 32, II 87 and 33, II 96).³⁵ One woman in the female monastery distinguished herself by her extreme humility. She was the lowliest of the lowliest, always performing the humblest services, never talking, never eating, never complaining, in fact she was considered a fool. One day a desert-father, Piterum, was told to visit the monastery where he would find a woman more religious than himself. He did as he was told, was admitted after much deliberation and inquired after this woman. She turned out to be the 'fool'. Seeing her, Piterum exclaims:

"You are the fools, for me and you this one is 'ammas' (thus with the name of 'mother' do they call the women of highest spirituality (πνευματικός))."

Besides introducing the topos of the 'religious fool' and giving a definition of the term 'ammas', the story also contains a surprising end: unable to bear the new honours bestowed upon her, the 'ammas' suddenly left the monastery: "no one knew where she went and how she died."³⁴ Is it possible that this woman converted her already considerable ascetic zeal into a new way of life, that of a wandering virgin?

It has been mentioned above that it was the intention of the HM to educate the reader with the admirable deeds performed by the Egyptian ascetics

"...dans les déserts et la campagne habitée...dans les cavernes des déserts ou dans les lieux les plus reculés.."(Prol. 10-11/8)

In fact, almost all Egyptian towns were surrounded by ascetics and monasteries, according to the HM Oxyrhynchus in particular (c. 5 / 41).³⁷ The size of the monastic community surrounding the town was apparently twice that of the town itself, which already housed more monks than seculars. Monks lingered at the city gates, around the front doors of houses, in the former temples and the capitol. No place was safe from monastic dwellers.³⁸ According to the bishop the town counted 10 000 monks and twice as many virgins.

The effects of this monastic community on the daily life of the town were considerable. The bishop constantly celebrated mass, even in the open; hospitality was practised everywhere, no pagan or heretic was within sight, and the magistrates distributed surplus grain to needy strangers, perhaps to the occasional needy monk as well.³⁹

It is indeed difficult to imagine how the city continued to function with such a considerable monastic community. While numbers are of course exaggerated, it is striking that the town housed twice as many virgins than monks. Some monks and virgins seem to have lived in houses which had

their own oratories (εὐκτήρια)⁴⁰ whilst other monks did not occupy clearly defined spaces: the HM's picture of Oxyrhynchus coincides surprisingly with that drawn by Dagron of early fourth century Constantinople:

"...ils forment une population mouvante, installée dans les quartiers, autour des hospices, des martyria. . .dans la rue, à y sortir..."⁴¹

Monasticism at Oxyrhynchus according to HM was a flexible phenomenon including all possible models of ascetic life, settled and unsettled, in and without the town. The explicit denial of heretical doctrine could suggest a broad level of doctrinal flexibility as well: the differences between orthodox and heretical could have gone widely unnoticed.⁴²

A welcome insight into some practical aspects of a parthenos' life in Oxyrhynchus and other towns, here a village in the Hermopolite nome, is provided by chapter 10 (76). The first monk in the region, incidentally the alleged inventor of the monastic 'schēma', had been a "brigand and plunderer of graves."⁴³ One night, while exercising his then profession, Pathermouthios went to the 'monasterion' of a virgin with the intention of inspecting her 'inner room'. Unfortunately he was trapped on the roof, fell asleep and an apparition he received in a dream converted him to Christianity. In the morning he asked the virgin for directions to the nearest Church and was eventually baptised by the community of priests who lived near the Church.⁴⁴ The description of the virgin's hermitage conforms exactly with what we know of private town-houses. She apparently occupied two rooms, an outer and an inner one, whereby the Greek word used for the inner room can also mean treasury or store room. This was perhaps the incentive for Pathermouthios the thief, who obviously did not associate the virgin - if he knew at all that the virgin was a parthenos - with poverty.⁴⁵ The virgin lived near the church and its community of priests, who may have assisted her; otherwise she apparently lived alone.⁴⁶

In fact, the only family-members mentioned so far as living with virgins were mothers; the only exception being the virgin briefly referred to in chapter 21 (128), who lived with her family.

Another type of family-based asceticism, already alluded to in Athanasius' LVjer (above p.123), is referred to in chapter 14 (106).

Paphnoutius, an accomplished ascetic, was suddenly affected by doubts about the level of his achievements. He therefore searched for other examples of ascetic virtue in order to have a basis for comparison.⁴⁷ Divine indications directed him to a certain 'πρωτοκωμήτης' or magistrate, in the Heracleopolite. ⁴⁸ Paphnoutius was at first surprised by the implicit comparison, but soon found that the magistrate had led a secret life: in thirty years he has never consummated his marriage. In other words, he and his wife practised the same kind of marital asceticism Athanasius referred to, the so-called 'mariage blanche'.⁴⁹

Mariage blanche was also practised, albeit for a short time only, by Amoun, the father of Scetian monasticism already mentioned (above p. 140).

⁵⁰ Amoun's parents forced him into an unwanted marriage and he solved the dilemma by proposing to his bride on the wedding-night that they both should maintain their virginity. She consented, but even so Amoun departed soon afterwards into the desert. His wife, however

"invited the servants to become ascetics as well and turned her house into a monastery" (c. 22/128).

The same story is told by the HL 8 (II 26) where the spiritual marriage lasts eighteen years rather than 'a short time'; and by Socrates, whose account conforms that in the HL, with one exception. According to Socrates both Amoun and his wife

"..retired into the desert of Nitria, where they shared one common dwelling, disregarding the differences of sex, being.. 'one in Christ' (Gal 3: 28)."

After some time this arrangement became undesirable and both continued their ascetic practices in two separate cells.⁵¹

It appears that all three authors derive their information independently from the same sources, and that Socrates may have used a separate Nitrian source. However, one factor common to all three versions, the cohabitation or at least close proximity of ascetic men and women in the desert, is confirmed by other sources discussed.⁵² HM's version suggests a community developing around Amoun's wife. This would be the classic example of a family home being transformed into an ascetic community; the family character is preserved by the fact that men and women lived together. Nowhere is it made explicit that Amoun's and his wife's servants were all female; or that male servants were excluded from the invitation to find salvation in asceticism.

One last virgin is encountered in the context of Paphnoutius' search for a comparable example of virtue. The very first person Paphnoutius has been instructed to visit is a flute-player who lived in a nearby town.⁵³ This flautist had a criminal past: he had been leader of a gang of brigands. Only Paphnoutius' perseverance unearths a good deed justifying the flautist's selection as a model: once, while still a brigand, he saved a 'virgin of God' from being raped by villains and accompanied her by night to the village.

What was a virgin of God doing outside a village by herself? Was she a 'peripatetic'? If so, the dangers alluded to in Evagrius' letters dissuading virgins from undertaking wanderings are here vividly illustrated (above p. 158).

While it was not our purpose to discuss all the intricacies of both the HL and the HM, both sources confirm and augment the information gained in previous discussions. Women are mentioned as practising ascetic life in

villages and in the desert, alone, with their mothers, as partners in a marriage blanche, in communities, as anchorites, and as wandering ascetics. It is important to notice that neither property nor commerce was an obstacle to being a 'parthenos', the title used exclusively apart from 'annas'. It is perhaps more important that virtually all communities referred to, with the exception of Amma Talis', include men who live in close proximity to the women.

In fact, Palladius considers ascetics of both sexes as fathers, and it is he who characterises ascetic women as having attained a male degree of virtue: they are 'γυναῖκες ἀνδρεῖαι'.²⁴

7. THE PAPYRI

Fourth century literary sources, mutually dependend, replete with legends, and at times biased views, find a unique complement in Egypt: the papyri. It would therefore be inexcusable not to investigate this type of source-material for traces of women who lead an ascetic life. Indeed, a careful survey of all documents belonging to the third or fourth century and identified as Christian results in a dossier of papyrological evidence documenting female ascetic life. Although this dossier is small (it forms only one sixth of all documentary papyri relating to asceticism) it is by no means insignificant and careful analysis might provide useful information.¹

The left margin and the opening line of papyrus PSI VI 698 are severely damaged, making a precise dating difficult: it could have been written on 24 January 391 or 392, 'during the year of the consulship of Fl. Tatianus and Symmachus' or in the subsequent year. The document belongs to the town of Oxyrhynchus and deals with a fairly rare legal proceeding, the division of an inheritance.²

In line 6-7, one of the important parts of the inheritance, a plot of land, is described in the customary way by denoting its boundaries with neighbouring plots:

"...in the south <the plot> is limited by the public lane, in the east by <the property> of Ἀνν...μοναχῆ, and in the west by the inheritance of Aprion.."

Who was Ann.. monache? According to the editors Ἀννίτου is the genitive of a female name otherwise unknown and μοναχῆ, originally the top-copy of a document or a piece of clothing, means 'single' or 'alone'.³

Eight or nine years later, in June or July 400, another document was written, also in Oxyrhynchus: P. Oxy XLIV 3202.*

This document contains a lease contract following the conventions common to this kind of transaction. An 'ἐξέτρα', or

"one ground-floor room, namely a hall, together with the one cellar in the basement, with all appurtenances"

is leased to "Aurelius Jose, son of Judas, Jew" from the first of the month Mesore, by

"Aurelia Theodora and Aurelia Tauris, daughters of Silvanus...!μοναχαὶ ἀποτακτικαί".

Two sisters owning a fairly large house in the Cavalry Camp quarter let part of the building to a man of different faith.

P. Lips. 43 was probably written before 371 in the town of Hermoupolis. The document again contains a division of an inheritance, this time of a slightly different nature. The heirs of Bessarion accuse a certain Thaesis, herself one of the heirs, of having appropriated Christian books out of the inheritance before its official division. The case is to be tried in the court of the catholic church by bishop Plusianos in the presence of magistrates acting as witnesses. The defendant, who ultimately inherits the larger portion of the inheritance, is mentioned without patronymic, legal aid or relatives; she is called "Thaesis αἰῖπάρθενος."

In 371, two citizens of Panopolis confirmed that they had obtained a receipt for clothes their father procured for the army as part of his tax (P. Lips. 60). These two citizens were "Αὐρήλιος.....ἀδελφὴ Διδύμη ! αἰῖπάρθενος."

P. Mich. inv. 431 is a fourth century letter transmitting greetings to: Ἡδὲν μετὰ τῆς αἰπαρθένου θυγατρὸς."⁶

P. Laur. II 43 is another letter from the Oxyrhynchites, written at the end of the fourth century. On the verso, someone expresses his concern at the behaviour of a sailor, a drunkard; and on the recto, the author criticises actions towards a certain

"Atheas who is a Christian, and because of that, although she is a laywoman, she never mingles in the affairs of the world."⁶

To summarize briefly, thus far three 'monachē' have been mentioned, two are sisters, also characterized as 'apotaktikai', three are 'aeiparthenoi' and one is a Christian who is a laywoman but behaves uncharacteristically.

In the early part of the fourth century, a certain "Didyme and the sisters" wrote to a certain κυρεῖα τῆ ἀδελφῆ Ἀτιενατεῖη and to a κυρεῖα τῆ ἀδελφῆ Σοφιάτι."⁷ Both letters, P. Oxy. XIV 1774 and SB VIII 9746, deal with business matters conducted by Didyme on behalf of the sisters. The recipients are likewise sisters who live with other sisters, though brothers are mentioned as well. Both letters end with greetings in the Lord.

In P. Lond. VI 1926, a lady named Valeria writes to a well-known ascetic who lived in about 340 in the Heracleopolite.⁸ The lady suffers from a respiratory disease, and trusts that the revered Apa Paphnoutios as an ascetic and very devout person will be able to help her. At the same time she asks Apa Paphnoutios to greet her daughters, Bassiane and Theoklia.

P. Iand 100 dates from the second half of the fourth century. A certain Bessemios has business dealings with the Fathers Doilos and Valerios and greets a number of brothers, amongst them:

"Aron and Maria and Tamunis together with the brothers of the monastery."⁹

Finally, an early papyrus, SB VIII 9882, transmits the greetings of: "Amna Thaubarin and Appa Dion and the brothers..."

The first three women listed are called 'monachē' and 'monachē apotaktikē'. 'Monachos' in a metaphorical sense appears for the first time in literature around 330, in Eusebius' Comm. in Psalmos 67, 7, which defines monachoi as those who advance Christianity by being in the forefront of the battle.¹⁰ P. Co. VII 171, a petition dating from June 7th 324, refers to an 'Isidor monachos' and a deacon, thus antedating Eusebius' usage of monachos as a title. With its connotations 'alone, single' and even 'single minded', monachos lends itself to describing a social phenomenon already well established and ubiquitously recognised, that of a male ascetic. However, the term 'monachos' remains rare in papyri. The only other occurrence is a damaged address in P. Lond. VI 1925.¹¹

It is thus all the more interesting that three women are given this title. "Ann... monachē" is the earliest datable occurrence; an unknown taxpayer from Skar in a fourth-century tax-list from the Hermoupolite is another (CPR V 26); and the two sisters have been mentioned. None of the 'monachē' is referred to as having close relatives, especially male ones. All of them lived in a village and owned property.

ἀποτάσσειν', originally 'to detach soldiers' for instance, gained a new significance in the wake of its usage in Lc 14: 33

".. none of you can be a disciple of mine without parting with all his possessions."

Indeed, 'ἀποτακτικός' soon became a title indicating a religious person who should no longer own worldly goods.¹² Theodore addresses the superiors of Pachomian communities as 'apotaktikoi'; an Athanasian letter uses the term in connection with anachorites; and several papyri employ it. In short,

"the form apotaktikos was an accepted professional identification."¹³

Now, six of the eight 'apotaktikoi' mentioned in the papyri, people defined as 'having renounced the world', own property and live in villages. Lc 14: 26 applies the same word in a slightly different context: "... if anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, ...brother and sister...he cannot be a disciple of mine."

None of the 'apotaktikoi' appears to have a husband or close relative, except the two sisters and one man who adopted his brother's son (P. Lips. 28 / Ad 381).

The same is true for the three women called 'aeiparthenoi'. Again, they all lived within villages, and neither patronymics nor husbands are mentioned. One of the ladies lived with her brother, the other with her mother, whether spiritual or otherwise is impossible to say. The term aeiparthenos, 'forever-virgin'

"could ... be simply a legal way of indicating that they were unmarried women."¹⁴

However, would not in such a case 'parthenos' be sufficient? If they were unmarried, this status could be quickly altered; there is no need to imply a 'forever'. Moreover, Thaesis is tried by a bishop in the court of a catholic Church for the theft of Christian books.¹⁵ Nonna, the mother

of the ' θυγάτηρ αειπαρθενος ', is a predominantly Christian name and the ascetic mother-daughter combination one of the most common organizational form.¹⁶ That both Didyme and her brother had to pay their father's tax does not refute Didyme's possible religious involvement; all other monachai owned property.¹⁷ A definite decision to remain unmarried rather than to be unmarried must therefore be assumed for all three ladies. It is interesting that in their case family involvement is more obvious. Even Thaesis fights with other heirs, presumably relatives.

All women discussed so far must have made their unconventional way of life obvious for outsiders to recognise, for instance by their dress. The phenomenon as such must have existed long enough to give rise to specific titles unanimously recognised and acceptable in legal documents.¹⁸ All titles presuppose celibacy and one of them presupposes withdrawal from the world, but none specifically requires renunciation of possessions. The titles thus do not conflict with the fact that virtually all of the documents deal with property issues.

The only papyrus to define the meaning of 'apotaktikos' never actually mentions the word:

"... Atheas, who is a Christian, and because of that, though she is a λαεικῇ, has never (sought after) mingled in the affairs of the world." (P. Laur. II 43).

By the fourth century the term ' χριστιανός ', originally given to members of the religion by its adversaries and hence loaded with negative connotations, began to be transformed.¹⁹ Its use here indicates the reasons prompting Atheas not to mingle with the affairs of the world, she does so although she is a laywoman.²⁰ This λαεικός, by the fourth century generally indicating the congregation as opposed to the clergy, is here set in opposition to something else.²¹ Atheas renounced the world though she was a laic and because she was a Christian. Her behaviour seems

therefore to be that of a non-laic person, a member of the clergy, or by someone who could easily be mistaken for holding a position superior to that of a laic and close to the clergy.²² That of an 'apotaktikos' or a 'monachē'? Why was she then not described as such? Or was she an intensely religious woman who failed to fulfill one vital prerequisite of a 'monachē', to be single, because she was married or widowed? One other factor is interesting; the only other contemporary papyri using 'christianos' in the sense of 'specific' behaviour is Melitian, P. Lond VI 1919, where a brother is supposed to pray as "...Christian in Christ."

The evidence of these seven papyri confirms the findings of the canons, Athanasius' Letters, and the HL and HM. All these sources mention virgins as members of the village community, living with mothers, sisters, or brothers, and presumably owning the property they inhabited. Another papyrus, P.Oxy XII 1592, could even confirm the special relationship between a virgin and a priest described in Athanasius' Letters or the Pseudo-Athanasian canon 48.²³ The same sources also mention the existence of communities formed by several women, at times even including men, within villages. It is therefore not inconceivable that traces of similar organizational forms exist in the papyri.

The two letters written by Didyma could indeed suggest just such a community. Both letters deal with business transactions. Didyma acknowledges the receipt of travelling provisions: a piece of clothing for one Loukios, seven double containers of wine and a leather bag of unripe grapes for another woman. Didyma says she and her sisters have not yet received things sent for them, but she has dispatched an ostrich-egg and a small basket for Pansophios' wife and sandals for Loukilos. Didyma

inquires whether the 'good Biceutia' has received a head-band and two cakes, and she informs Atienatia that she has credit for 1300 denarii while acknowledging the receipt of two cakes. Of course, as has been pointed out, we could be faced with a group of natural sisters dealing in business which also included men,²⁴ Since most of the mentioned women, more than ten altogether, are addressed as 'sisters'. While that in itself is not uncommon ('adelphē' is a frequent term of address) there are some peculiar features in this papyrus.²⁵ First, both recipients are called 'sister' and 'kyria'. Didyma's sisters appear to include a 'kyria and a kyria Valeriana' (or two Valerianas). 'Kyria' is a much rarer form of address and it seems unlikely to describe natural sisters as such. If both ladies Valeriana form part of Didyma's immediate group, a family enterprise must be excluded.²⁶ Second, Didyma always operates on behalf of her sisters and, third, one sister is called 'μακάρια'.²⁷ Fourth, a different Didyma is described as 'γλυκυτάτη'; she is mentioned together with one 'φιλιτάτος' Favorinos; and Didyma and the sisters found some of her items in the bag of a Severos.²⁸ Fifth, only one patronymic, that of a courier, is mentioned. The papyrus refers to another group around three men: Pansophios, Loukilas, and Philososphos. Pansophios had a wife. We find thus that Didyma is surrounded by the sisters including two kyriai; a brother Piperas; Severos, who had the other Didyma's items; Aionos and Loukilos. The recipients include Sophias, an unknown lady, Italia, Theodora, the 'good' Biceutia, Didyma, and Favorinos, and the group around the three men. The second letter was addressed to Atienatia, an Ausos, her mother, and others. The goods traded are also interesting. They contain nothing which would be unacceptable in ascetic circles, and furthermore they include an ostrich-egg, sandals, and a head-band, all three items with ascetic connotations.²⁹ It is, of course, necessary to

be cautious, but the evidence is in favour of a non-related community of women united by other than business interests alone, namely by ascetic principles.³⁰

Bessemios' letter to two superiors and the brothers of a community also contains business matters, including the sale of a small amount of goods, several cheeses and a 'κολόβιον', or tunic. The business volume is small, a factor relevant in view of the business-volume referred to in Didyma's letters, although one or even two monastic communities are involved.³¹

After several greetings to brothers mentioned by name, Bessemios continues his greetings by saying:

"greet Aron, Maria and Tamunis and all other brothers in the monastery."

Maria and Tamunis are female names.³² Two possible interpretations come to mind: either Aron, Maria, and Tamunis are for some reason included in the greetings to all brothers without actually being a part of the monastery, or the two women are also members of the monastery.

The notion of male and female ascetics living in close proximity is further emphasised by P. Lond VI 1926, written by a certain Valeria. As has been mentioned, she asks a famous ascetic for his help in healing her illness and praying for her well-being. She also asks the ascetic to include her daughters - one must presume her natural daughters - in his prayers. This request, line 20, prompted Tibiletti to write the following remark:

"l' integrazione dà adito a perplessità, essendo più verosimile che le figlie siano con la madre." ³³

Valeria writes in fact: "I greet my daughters.." This can only be

explained if Valeria's daughters do not live with their mother but with the ascetic Apa Paphnoutius, who is supposed to greet them. Valeria's daughters were closer to the ascetic than to Valeria, their mother. Apa Paphnoutius was, according to Judge, the perfect model of a withdrawn anchorite.³⁴ However, as the sources prove, even the sternest anachoresis does not preclude the presence of ascetic women.³⁵

Three men and three women are the subject of P. Strass. 1900. They are called kyrios Joulianos in Alexandria, kyrios Phoibammon and kyrios Philoxenos, the recipient, entitled 'διδάσκαλος'. The women, mentioned without patronymic or relatives are called κύρια Ξενική, κύρια Ἀρσίνοη and κύρια ἡ διδάσκαλος. Phoibammon is the only man who lives with an οἰκία, near the three women.³⁶

'Didaskalos' as a title for men is quite rare in papyri. It appears 32 times, mainly in contracts of apprenticeship. In Christian usage, 'didaskaloi' were teachers of theology for catechumens, before baptism. A 'διδασκαλίον' existed in Alexandria, at times guided by a lay-person, for instance Didymus the Blind.³⁷

In about 324, Licinius advocated amongst other legal measures the segregation of men and women for purposes of prayer and instruction. Women were to be instructed by women. P. Oxy 2785 perhaps supports this decision as it tells of a 'sister' and several catechumenes recommended to 'papas Sotas'.³⁸ Indeed, the notion of a woman as instructor is not alien to Christianity. The Acts of Thekla exhort her to "διδάσκειν τὸν λόγον" in the world; the notion of women as teachers is present in Athanasius' Letters, Anna Theodora's saying 5 defines the role of a 'didaskalos', and all desert-women are by virtue of their charisma perceived as instructors; Macrina the Younger is entitled 'didaskalos' and

'paidagōgos', as is her grandmother, Tekousa in the Vita of Theodotus and the virgins in Basil of Ancyra's De Virginitate had educational function; and Theodoret of Cyr mentions two women called 'didaskalos', one the leader of a 'choros', the other a deaconess.³⁹

At the same time the pagan world accepted women as eminent teachers of philosophy, especially Sosipatra and Hypatia. The latter's courses in Alexandria were followed by Christians as well.⁴⁰

Yet I Tim 2: 11-14 clearly opposes the teaching by women:

"A woman must be a learner listening quietly and with due submission. I do not permit a woman to be a teacher, nor must woman domineer over man; she should be quiet."

Numerous treatises and canons reiterate this interdiction.⁴¹ In other words, women were allowed to receive education, mainly through women as teachers, and they were praised as educational models, but they were not allowed to teach. This apparent paradox can be solved by regarding the degree of officiality involved. Women were allowed to teach in private, but not in public, hence not if men were involved.⁴² Clearly the distinction between private and public was marginal and often not clearly perceived, as demonstrated by the frequent canonical condemnations. This margin becomes even smaller where, upon the basis of Gal 3: 28:

"There is no such thing as male and female..in Christ Jesus,"

the distinction between sexes became obsolete, in radical ascetic groups like the Montanists or the Messalians.⁴³ It is not surprising that the Messalians, for instance, knew 'γυναῖκες διδάσκαλοι'.⁴⁴ P. Strass. 1900 could therefore attest a woman who as teacher of other female catechumens greeted a male counterpart, or a women who taught a specific group of women, or a women who acted as teacher in a radically ascetic community.

The etymology of the term 'amma' or 'ammās' is certainly an interesting facet of early female asceticism. Originally amma meant mother, more specifically 'foster-mother' or 'nurse'. It appears in this sense in a small number of papyri, mainly from the second or third century.⁴⁵ In most cases the amma is mentioned without proper name or patronymic, thus perhaps emphasising the professional nature of the term.⁴⁶ Then there is a gap in papyrological evidence until the IVth century where one papyrus mentions an 'ammās Eva and Maria'.⁴⁷ As literary evidence proves, 'amma' begins by this time to assume the sense of 'spiritual mother' or 'πνευματικῇ', eventually becoming 'leader of a community'.⁴⁸ This shift in meaning is mirrored in late fourth and early fifth century papyri speaking of ἁγία ἀμμάς Χριστινῶν or ἁγία Θήκλα καὶ ἀμμά Ψουλιῶνα'.⁴⁹

The state of semantic development indicated by SB VIII 9882 dating from the third century is therefore interesting. Here greetings from an

"Ammās Thaubarin and Appas Dios together with the brother.."

are transmitted. None of the other papyri mentions 'amma' together with 'appas', and only one of the pre-fourth century papyri mentions an amma by name. Leclercq states that:

".. apa et ama correspondent aux doublons honorifiques égyptiens..ces titres ont été parfois conservés à ceux qui étaient morts. . ." ⁵⁰

Both Thaubarin, a name rare after the second century, and Dios are alive. One second century papyrus has apa as religious title and it appears twice in the sense of father, once in a doubtful form. Parallel to 'amma', 'apa' assumes the meaning 'ascetic' or 'clerical personality' from the fourth century onwards. ⁵¹

SB VII 9882 could suggest a father and a mother but addressed in an unusual way; or else it could represent a step in the transition to a

more honorific title which precedes the Christian usage of 'amma' and 'appa' as titles for 'pneumatikoi'.

The five papyri dealing with ascetic communities likewise confirm the literary evidence of the canons, the HL and the HM and in particular that of the Apophthegmata Patrum. However, the papyri also raise new questions. None of the women bearing a title is mentioned with either a patronymic, a male relative or a 'kyrios', a tutor, despite the fact that most documents pertain to legal transactions. In theory a woman could not perform certain legal acts without a male representatives or 'kyrios'.⁵² In practice exceptions can be observed. It is certainly worth noting that all women bearing a religious title belong to these exceptions, and that they are mentioned without 'kyrios' in exactly those cases where others always had one.⁵³ However, since a comprehensive study of a woman's position in Roman and Byzantine Egyptian Law is outstanding, it is impossible to assess the precise significance of this observation.⁵⁴ The possibility that a religious title endowed a women with a different legal status must be borne in mind.

Further, none of the papyri mentions the title expected most from the literature, 'parthenos'. Instead, we find a great variety of titles, which cannot be easily explained. Geographical distribution, for instance, appears not to be relevant.⁵⁵ Whilst the absence of 'parthenos' may be due to the small number of extant papyri, it must be considered that the consistent use of parthenos (and amma) in literature could indicate a conscious effort to establish greater unity.

IV. GENERA OF FEMALE ASCETICISM AND FORMS OF ORGANIZATION IN CAPPADOCIA AND EGYPT IN COMPARISON

While a comparison of the genera of female asceticism in the two regions, Cappadocia and Egypt, reveals a number of differences in points of detail, far more striking is the similarity of the pattern of the underlying organization. And this remains constant despite differences of degree with regard to institutionalization, the social composition of women practicing an intense religious life, and the acceptability of female ascetics living outside the boundaries of a village or town.

In Cappadocia religious women were at an early stage perceived as forming a 'tagma' or order. Enrollment into the order followed after a trial-period and upon swearing a vow in public, that is in the presence of members of the clergy or congregation. Members of the 'tagma' could live in specific accommodation and were materially provided for.

The social composition of the 'tagma' reflects that of the Cappadocian society. It comprised members of all strata, former slaves and orphans as well as women from the highest echelons, although the latter dominated the movement. Virtually all leaders came from the rank of the possessors, and remained firmly embedded in their social network. While some women joined the tagma to gain financial support, many may have chosen personal poverty in reaction to their extremely wealthy family background.¹⁾ This latter may serve to explain the intrinsic connection between female asceticism and social commitment. Macrina freed slaves and fed orphans as well as victims of famine; ptochotropheia and hospices grew juxtaposed to ascetic communities. The office of the deaconess and its distinctive social function could also be explained in a similar way, as asceticism was a way to bridge the formidable gap between the very rich and the very poor characteristic of Cappadocian society.

Female asceticism was essentially an urban phenomenon. Virtually all female ascetics mentioned in the Cappadocian sources lived in towns of varying size: Sebaste, Ancyra, Caesarea, Colonia, Amasia, Tyana, Nazianzus, Venasa, Sannabodae, Annesi. Indeed, any venturing into the country side, into the 'desertum', was opposed by certain members of the clergy.

In Egyptian sources the term 'tagma' does not appear. Religious women seem to have made their decision, though no less binding, on a more private basis. The vow was not sworn in the presence of members of the clergy, punishment in case of breach was less legally defined, and we do not learn of financial support other than from private sources. Female asceticism in Egypt could on the whole be described as a middle - class phenomenon. Most virgins mentioned in the sources have their own private income, or own property, and whilst hand-maids are occasionally referred to, there seems to be a lesser percentage of the very poor and very rich involved. Virtually all women of very high rank are visitors, like Poimena or Melania the Elder. Again, this finding mirrors the social structure of Egypt, where the upper class never gained the same financial and political importance as in Cappadocia. It is interesting that in Egypt the office of the deaconess was far less prominent (if it existed at all). Contrary to the example of Cappadocia, women who felt able to face the challenge were permitted to venture out of the village into the desert. Female desert dwellers, be it alone or in communities with others were accepted, though not unanimously, provided they adhered to the correct doctrine and ascetic regime.

Two reasons for these differences in organizational details come to mind. Rather than reflecting existing differences in the historical situation, the apparent differences could be caused by different emphases and biases within the sources. These differences could also be explained in terms of regional diversities. Several features favour the latter suggestion. Already the canons, that is non-literary sources, attest to differences in the degree of institutionalization. This could be explained by the fact that in both areas people followed different charismatic leaders with different personalities. Further, both areas dealt differently with rigorous movements. Recurrent waves of rigorous movements were known in Cappadocia from the third century onwards, and reaction against these movements was far more radical. The absence of this problematic could have allowed for the development of a more individual approach in Egypt. A possible explanation for the attempted confinement of asceticism to an urban environment in Cappadocia and the greater tolerance of desert-

asceticism in Egypt could, apart from the historical development sketched above, also lie in geographical features. In Egypt with its short distances (the desert was often only ten minutes walk away from towns) even anchorites could remain closely connected to the village community and the clergy. In Cappadocia with its vast distances the wilderness was truly wild, and supervision became much more difficult. In both areas safety was an important factor favouring female asceticism within the village or town.

Despite these differences one is struck by the congruence of the development of ascetic models. In both areas there is a twofold process, taking place in two analytical stages, which do not necessarily reflect historical chronology. Initially, there is a wide variety of experimental approaches ranging from virtual enclosure in the family to a nomadic existence outside the community at the margins of society. At the same time, there is a process of selection at work which ultimately leads to the survival of only a limited number of organizational models. Since this underlying process occurs both in Egypt and Cappadocia, we have succeeded not only in establishing the existence of different models of female ascetic life, which had so far not been adopted, but also that the forms which arose followed one clearly defined line of development. At the beginning, in both areas women made a conscious decision to lead a chaste life and are from that moment characterized as virgins.²⁾ At the same time these women gained a new social position, emphasized by a distinct dress.³⁾ In both areas the choice of a new life then resulted in different women contemporaneously practicing asceticism either within their family, or with a brother as his ascetic sister, or within the framework of a pseudo-marriage, or in small communities, which grew around charismatic individuals. In both areas a common ascetic life shared by men and women was a natural consequence, and one which comprised an acceptable way to lead an ascetic life.⁴⁾

In both Egypt and Cappadocia forms of ascetic life existed outside the village. These forms followed two basic models of development: they are either settled or migrant. In Egypt settled forms are more wide spread and more institutionalized. Women live alone, in small eremitic communities, or in desert coinonia such as the ones of Pachomius and Shenoute, but we find also examples of 'wandering' female ascetics. In Cappadocia there are

references to women as members of migrating ascetic groups, but only one inscription, from the fifth century, mentions a "Μαρία Ἀσκητρία στυλιτρίσσα", while the graffiti in caves above Ibora may indicate female hermits.²¹) In both areas the so-called 'founders of monasticism' are firmly embedded in existing traditions, many of which are shaped by the participation of women. The second stage of development, the selective procedure, will be considered in the conclusion.

There are two major reasons for the parallel development of organizational forms in two regions as disparate as Cappadocia and Egypt. In both regions women practiced a way of life based on essentially the same concept: the closest possible observance of Scriptural precepts. In both regions the aim of this specific way of life was also the same: to achieve the highest possible degree of spiritual perfection in imitating Christ the Saviour, an aim that would ultimately lead to a spiritual union with Christ. In following these aims, the organizational options for implementing the ascetic ideals were essentially limited. Further, these concepts did not develop in isolation. There was also a regular contact between Asia Minor and Egypt, both through the written word and by means of personal visits. Alexandrian Fathers like Origen or Athanasius visited Asia Minor, and Cappadocians like Eustathius, Basil or Gregory of Nyssa went to Egypt. This exchange of ideas and the strong link between both regions created by individuals familiar with both can be best demonstrated by a Father who grew up in Asia Minor, but followed his personal path to spiritual perfection all the way to Egypt, and whose writings provide one theoretical concept for the organizational models discussed: Evagrius Ponticus. Links of this kind served to consolidate the basic similarity of ascetic developments in both areas.

V. BETWEEN CAPPADOCIA AND EGYPT: EVAGRIUS PONTICUS AND HIS "SENTENTIAE AD VIRGINEM"

1. Evagrius Ponticus: His life and literary activities

In about 345 A.D. Evagrius was born in Ibora, a small town in Pontus, the son of the chorepiscopus Evagrius the Elder.¹⁾ Ibora's closeness to Annesi and his father's position indicate that Evagrius not only grew up in a Christian household, but became acquainted early on with Basil's monastic circle.²⁾ Indeed, Basil, to whose diocese Ibora belonged, installed Evagrius as a lector (ἀναγνώστης) in about 375. Unfortunately, Palladius' HL, the main source, omits the following period in Evagrius' life to continue its report only after Basil's death in 379. Fortunately, another source, Basil's letter 8, gives us first hand information of the interim period, since it has to be ascribed to Evagrius. In this letter Evagrius speaks of his sudden flight to Constantinople, primarily caused by an unexpected event that left him disturbed, but also by a great yearning to learn the doctrine of God and his philosophy. He asks the addressees to grant him some time, not because he is attracted by the life in the city but because he has found a teacher whose eager pupil he became, "acquiring the doctrine of God." ³⁾ Basing himself on letter 8 Bousset concluded that Basil not only installed Evagrius as a lector, but also admitted him as a member of his monastic community at Annesi.⁴⁾ If so, Evagrius left this community for Constantinople, probably after 379 A.D., an embarrassment Palladius preferred to omit in his eulogy on Evagrius' life. Bousset's hypothesis, although highly plausible, as yet remains conjecture and has therefore not been unanimously accepted.⁵⁾

However, Palladius' silence did not extend to the subsequent years. Evagrius became the favorite pupil of Gregory Nazianzenus, well versed in philosophy, rhetoric and doctrine.⁶⁾ Evagrius describes his teacher as "the just Gregory who planted me"⁷⁾ and affirms in the Gnostikos the impact of Gregory's teaching on his philosophical conceptions.⁸⁾ Gregory for his part ordained Evagrius as a deacon, mentioned him in his testament, speaks of him as his

"beloved brother the deacon Evagrius, who only recently embraced the philosophical life"

in letter 228. In 381 Gregory particularly recommended Evagrius to his successor Nectarius as an assistant in the disputes of the synod since Evagrius

"was well trained in fighting (διαλεκτικώτατος) all heretical doctrines" and a brilliant rhetorician.⁹⁾ Evagrius rapid success did not continue without negative consequences. Apparently he grew rather fond of the wife of a prominent member of the highest society and decided after a warning received in a dream to leave Constantinople before any more harm was done. This episode must be considered as

". . . la première phase d'une conversion à la vie ascétique: rupture avec le monde et renoncement à la brillante carrière. . ."¹⁰⁾

Thus in 382/83 Evagrius left for Palestine, where Rufinus and Melania the Elder received him with great hospitality. Not long after his arrival in Jerusalem, he fell ill and was nursed by Melania, who used the protracted and serious illness to persuade him to become an ascetic. In 383 Evagrius left for the desert of Nitria and only two years later he was able to transfer himself further into the desert of Cellia, where he remained until his death in 399/400.¹¹⁾

Despite his former partiality to a luxurious living - Palladius mentions his fondness of beautiful garments - ¹²⁾ Evagrius practiced the most austere asceticism. He ate one pound of bread every day and a "ξέστης" of oil every three months; and he practically died of starvation: since his stomach could not hold bread any more he lived the last two years of his life on vegetables.¹³⁾ Evagrius, at the time 54 years old, died as a true Father of the Desert, after a life of asceticism, strict even by contemporary standards, in fulfillment of his search for perfection.

During his later years Evagrius had become familiar with the famous Desert Fathers, most of all the two Macarii,¹⁴⁾ and he was the focal point of a group called the "Tall Brothers".¹⁵⁾ This group was characterized by a strong interest in intellectual activities, in particular in Origen's writings: an interest they shared with Rufinus and Melania.¹⁶⁾ It was because of this tendency that they were regarded by the other Fathers with some reservation a fact that is corroborated by the Apophthegmata.¹⁷⁾ Before long, friction arose, kindled by the growing aversion from Origenism

and after bishop Theophilos of Alexandria withdrew his previously strong support in 399, the "Tall Brothers" were actively persecuted, a fate Evagrius was spared by his death.¹⁹⁾

Evagrius, unlike the majority for his fellow desert-dwellers, expressed his ascetic principles in his own writings. The titles of his major works, the Praktikos, Gnostikos, the Kephalaia Gnostika and the Antirrhetikos, indicate the subject of his literary work, a subject that was at the same time the quintessence of his own life: the best possible way to achieve ascetic perfection.

Unlike most Fathers quoted in the Apophthegmata, Evagrius did not limit himself to practical prescriptions, uttered in an ad hoc manner and with little but rather basic spiritual concern. Although interested to a degree in practical questions, as the title Praktikos indicates, Evagrius is the first, according to Gennadius, not only to systematize the practical approach, but to expand it into an extensive doctrinal system.¹⁹⁾ He is, in fact, the first to carry ascetic issues beyond the more direct approach by intellectualizing their characteristic features (for instance the fight against demons) and to give them their relevant position in a system, which led Bousset to characterize Evagrius as "Anfänger der Mönchsmystik."²⁰⁾ This systemization of monastic practice and theory was possible only because of a rare combination: a profound classical education and the life-style of the desert. Evagrius' classical background was derived from the school of the Cappadocians. Origen's doctrine, with which he may have become familiar through the community at Annesi, where Gregory and Basil composed the Philocalia in the 360's, exercised a decisive influence on his later concepts.²¹⁾ Evagrius, then, combined his intellectual training and profound knowledge of Christian spirituality with new and previously not discussed experiences.²²⁾

The influence of Evagrius' system on contemporaries and followers in the West, and to a greater degree in the East, was immense. Via Climachus, Hesychus and Maximus Confessor his influence reached into Byzantine concepts,²³⁾ via Philoxene of Mabboug and Isaak of Ninive into Syria,²⁴⁾ letters addresses to Melania the Elder and translations by Rufinus testify Evagrius' influence on Palestine,²⁵⁾ and from there via Cassian into the West.²⁶⁾ Through the work of his disciple Palladius, the HL, Evagrius'

influence reached an even larger audience.²⁷⁾ Despite this relatively fast and widespread distribution of Evagrius' teachings his affinity to Origen's doctrines soon proved to be fatal. Parallel with the progressive hostility against Origen and his followers Evagrius' teachings were placed on the defensive, until the Council of 553 passed the final anathema.²⁸⁾ This eventual suppression of Evagrius' teaching, initially contrived by his opponent Jerome,²⁹⁾ is responsible for the comparative obscurity of his writings, many of which have been handed down under the names of other authors, and, until recently, for a lack of scholarly interest. Evagrius' rehabilitation began with O. Zöckler's monograph "Evagrius Ponticus. Seine Stellung in der altchristlichen Literatur - und Dogmengeschichte", published in 1893 in Munich. Most of Zöckler's conclusions were drawn from the scanty selection of works contained in Migne's *Patrologia Graeca*, but the work has not lost its fundamental value.³⁰⁾ It was soon to be followed by a comprehensive Armenian study published in 1907 by H.B.V. Sarghisian.³¹⁾ In 1912 the study of Evagrius became greatly facilitated by W. Frankenberg's edition of a number of Syriac manuscripts.³²⁾ This edition contains parts of all the major works, the Kephalaia Gnostika, the Praktikos and Gnostikos, the Antirrhetikos and a collection of letters, including a long letter to Melania. As a result of this publication in the following years the interest in Evagrius was intensified. Attempts to reconstruct his doctrine began in 1923 with W. Bousset and R. Melcher, to be followed by H.U. v. Balthasar, I. Hausherr, I. Moysesescu and M. Viller.³³⁾ The main task, to reconstruct a complete edition of Evagrius' work, is as yet incomplete, rendered difficult by the disguise in which large parts of his work have been handed down. J. Muyldermans with his "A travers la tradition manuscrite d'Évagre le Pontique" and the "Evagriana Syriaca"³⁴⁾, and most of all A. and C. Guillaumont, have made fundamental contributions.³⁵⁾ Though the research concerning Evagrius is extensive, some shortcomings are obvious. Almost all works mentioned deal either with the textual tradition or with the reconstruction of the doctrine, and hardly any specific attempt has been made to interpret Evagrius and his work in their historical context.³⁶⁾

This is particularly the case with one admittedly not very long treatise, the Sententiae ad Virginem (SV). The Sententiae, together with a parallel

treatise, the Sententiae ad Monachos (SM), is referred to by Socrates:

"... , στιχηρὰ δύο· ἓν πρὸς τοὺς ἐν τοῖς κοινοβίοις ἢ ἐν συνοδαῖς μοναχοῖς
καὶ ἓν πρὸς τὴν παρθένον." ³⁷⁾

and Gennadius:

"... .coenobitis ac synoditis doctrinam aptam vitae communis et ad virginem Deo sacratam libellum competentem religioni et sexui." ³⁸⁾

Jerome says in his Epistula ad Ctesiphontem:

"Euagrius Ponticus Hiberita, qui scribit ad virgines, scribit ad monachos." ³⁹⁾

These Sententiae are extant in several versions. For a long time they were known only in a Latin translation by Rufinus, preserved in a ninth century codex (Cod. Vat. Regin. 140). They were first published by Holstenius in the Appendix to the Codex Regularum in 1661 and reprinted in a version revised by M. Brockie in Migne's Patrologia Graeca.⁴⁰⁾ In 1911 Dom A. Wilmart published a second, independent Latin version preserved in a tenth century codex of the Bibliothèque National (Bibl. Nat. Nouv. Acq. lat. 239) with the title Epistola Evagri ad virginem (directa).⁴¹⁾ In the following year, the first complete Syrian version, preserved in the British Library (Brit. Mus. add. 14578), was edited by Frankenberg under the title Epistula ad virginem ("de virgine" or "de virginitate").⁴²⁾ Frankenberg also used an unedited Syriac version of the first 50 sentences, preserved in the Cod. Vat. Syr. 126. Muyldermans mentions another complete, though unedited, Syriac manuscript preserved in the British Library (Add. 17165), several unedited incomplete Syriac versions (Brit. Mus. Add. 14579, Oriental 2312 and Brit. Mus. Add. 14728), and an incomplete Armenian version.⁴³⁾ Sarghisian published another incomplete Armenian manuscript titled Sententiae ad virginem.⁴⁴⁾ The most important version is, however, in Greek, the original language. Only one thirteenth century Greek manuscript has so far been discovered, the Cod. Barb. Graec. 515.⁴⁵⁾ This text, entitled "παράφρασις πρὸς παρθένον", was edited in 1913 by H. Gressman, together with the Sententiae ad Monachos.⁴⁶⁾ Gressmann used Rufinus' Latin translation and Frankenberg's Syriac versions as a basis for his edition. Despite the generally acclaimed standard of this Greek edition, its completeness is problematic. Both complete Syriac versions as well as the two Latin ones agree almost literally on a doctrinal passage at the end, which is missing in the Greek manuscript. Gressmann remarks with respect to this passage:

"In pr. 54 ist ein längeres Glaubensbekenntnis eingeschoben, dass die kirchlichen Dogmen gegen Ketzereien schützen soll. Es ist ungefähr gleichlautend im Lateiner und Syrer zu lesen, fehlt aber noch im griechischen MS".

Gressmann defends this interpretation with the following arguments:

"Sein fremder Ursprung wird zweitens dadurch bestätigt, dass es den Zusammenhang sprengt, und drittens dadurch, dass ihm die eigentümliche Form des Parallelismus membrorum fehlt..."⁴⁷⁾

It is hard to explain how an identical passage has been handed down both in Latin and Syriac, without a common Greek source, especially since the Greek codex is much younger than the Latin or the Syriac ones. Muyldermans expressed doubts by pointing to a methodological error on Gressmann's part, who in his opinion failed to consider the sentences as a part of a doctrinal entity.⁴⁸⁾ He comes to the conclusion that there is no valid reason to doubt the authenticity of the doctrinal part. In my opinion stylistic considerations favour caution, though a final solution can be achieved only by referring to a second independent Greek manuscript. Apart from the point of view of the textual edition, the SV as such have not received any attention.⁴⁹⁾ Neither the SV nor SM have been considered in their doctrinal and historical context. It is the aim of the following discussion to establish the value and position of the SV as a complement of Evagrius' doctrinal and ascetic theory and as a document relating to female spirituality and ascetic practice in the fourth century.

2. Sententiae ad Virginem: Contents

Evagrius' contemporaries, such as Jerome, who uses the phrase "scripsit ad", had already categorized the sentences as "epistula", an interpretation corroborated by the later Syrian and Armenian tradition.¹⁾ The impression of an epistle did not arise by mere chance; it is induced by the appellative character of the SV, addressed to one person only, who is never identified. Moreover, the text as a whole is formally introduced by a quasi-liturgical evocation (SV 1 - 3), exhorting the addressee to observe the "greatest and first commandment", and it is concluded with a final reminder to worship the Trinity (SV 56). The major part of the manuscripts, however, characterize the work as a collection of aphorisms: as sententiae or 'parainesis'.²⁾ The text is indeed a collection of advice for practical and spiritual aspects of ascetic life, modelled after the Proverbs, and subdivided by Gressmann into 56 individual sections. The order of these sections has never been altered in either of the manuscripts, an indication for the inherent unity of SV despite its seemingly loose structure.

From the opening sentences the addressee is shown to be one of several sisters under the command of a mother. SV 1-3 demand not only to love and serve God, but also to honor the mother "ὡς μητέρα χριστοῦ" and the sisters "ὡς θυγατέρας μητροῦ". SV could, of course, have been addressed to blood-relations, to a family consisting of a mother and several daughters, a possibility emphasized by SV 2:

"Do not provoke the white hair of the one, who has borne you".

However, the fact that several sisters are mentioned, also entitled 'parthenoi', who should love their mother as the mother of Christ and each other, as if they were daughters of the same mother, points to a spiritual rather than a blood-relationship. SV was addressed to an ascetic community.³⁾ This ascetic community lived within a village or town, and whilst a number of sentences suggest that the sisters ought to observe the strictest possible seclusion, occasional contacts with the outside world were still possible. The virgins visited the local church (SV 33); the virgin addressed is exhorted to avoid all contact with men (SV 6, 7, 46); and she should not be present at the weddings of strangers (SV 14); or mingle with

other women (κοσμικαί), in particular not with actresses (SV 48, 49).⁴⁾ In contrasting the virgin to 'kosmikai' (SV 24), Evagrius also indicates her social status.⁵⁾ He frequently uses 'κοσμικός' as opposed to 'monachos', and Gregory of Nyssa describes married people as 'kosmikoí'.⁶⁾ The virgin is thus distinct from married women and must avoid contact with the latter, mainly to avoid negative influences on her psyche. Two other categories of women should be avoided; virgins "who touch a man" (SV 44), perhaps syneisactes, and "γράφαι κυκλοθεύσαι", old women who wander around (SV 13). Evagrius uses the same expression, κυκλοθεύειν, for wandering monks in his *Sententiae ad Monachos* (= SM 81) and warns in SV 26 against "ἐπιθυμία περιπάτων καὶ πόθοσ οἰκιῶν ἁλλοτρίων".⁷⁾ The strong recommendation to remain settled, together with the evidence of wandering female ascetics discussed already, suggests that Evagrius warns here against this practice.

Internally the community was centred around the 'mother', who had to be honoured as the 'mother of Christ'. The interpretation of the title 'mother', frequently encountered before as designating the leader of a female community, thus gains a new dimension. Whilst being the spiritual mother of the virgins, the leader further represents the mother of Christ, Mary, and becomes therefore the spiritual mother-in-law of her virgins. Another aspect of the community's internal structure is revealing: according to SV 12 the sisters had hand- or waiting-maids,⁸⁾ who must not be reprimanded nor treated as slaves, since "there is no slavery among the daughters of God." (Phil 10: 12 + 15: 16). Whether these maids were strictly speaking members of the community is uncertain. The existence of maids in an ascetic community, in clear defiance of the Phil. - passage, Col 3: 11, Gal 3: 28 or SV 12 itself, is no isolated incidence. Basil of Ancyra referred to maids in c. 29; Macrina, Emmelia and Ammoun's wife lived with servants; the 'foolish virgin' in Pachomius' female community performed slave work; and even the enclosed Alexandra had her servant.⁹⁾ As the discrepancies in Basil's, and the two Gregory's opinions indicate, slavery was a controversial issue (above p. 64 + 66). Despite the fundamental requirement of renunciation, here made explicit in SV 18 and 31, social distinctions remained. The virgin has to be reminded not to "boast of her noble birth" (SV 32).¹⁰⁾ Whilst she may have succeeded in ignoring her status, the virgin addressed - like Macrina, Vetiana, or Olympias -

apparently did not manage to forget her origins.¹¹) One factor may have facilitated this lingering consciousness of one's origins: although poverty was requested, this did not lead to the renunciation of property as such. SV 30 and 36 state explicitly that individuals ought to be poor and reprimands virgins who 'love money' (SV 36). However, the community as such was able to afford its housing, it appears to have supported itself, and was able to make generous gifts of charity (17, 32, 36, 41). Evagrius' SV corroborates once more a curious paradox already observed in virtually all sources referring to settled ascetics. In all but the most radical cases renouncing the world was interpreted in a way still reminiscent of and therefore compatible with, the social surroundings. To renounce the past (SV 31) did not obliterate social distinctions; many virgins of noble birth became leaders of their community; and to renounce personal luxury did not result in poverty.¹²) Instead, property was owned communally. This common property derived in part from work (SV 4), although the existence of a virgin of 'noble birth' could indicate donations. An interpretation of Scriptural passages demanding renunciation in the way described, namely in a metaphorical rather than a literal way, was facilitated by an aspect of ascetic communities already implied in other sources. Ascetic communities of women often developed out of a family; Macrina and the case described in Basil's letter 46 were the most explicit examples. SV reinforces this impression. The terminology used to describe the members of the community is that of the family, mirrored in their organization. As in a household, members of the community lived with their servants, all fulfilling their relevant role, and all benefiting from the household's property. The external circumstances of the SV's community described thus far corroborate previous information concerning female ascetics in villages, as gained from the Egyptian canons, Athanasius' Letters, Basil of Caesarea's letters and some aspects of Basil of Ancyra's treatise. Similar congruences can be observed in a domain where SV is far more informative: the principles of life in common. SV 31 forbids every woman wanting to enter the community to inquire after the life of another. Theoretically, the past, whether it was worth remembering or not, had to be forgotten. Otherwise, it could lead to boasting, (SV 32 and 50), envy, and jealousy (SV 28). To enter the community meant to adopt a new identity;

it presumes a definite decision to abide by the obligations connected with this new identity. Though no vow is mentioned, the whole tenure of the SV suggests a life-long membership.¹³⁾

Once a member of the community, the virgin has to adhere to certain basic requirements, the most important of which is peace. In SV 8 anger and rage ($\theta\upsilon\mu\acute{o}\varsigma$ and $\delta\rho\gamma\eta$) are reprimanded, and the virgin is reminded not to be rancorous ($\mu\nu\eta\sigma\iota\kappa\alpha\kappa\acute{\iota}\alpha$). Love and generosity are methods conquering both, anger and rancour (SV 41), and they help the virgin to achieve a highly recommended state of mind: to be gentle and merciful (SV 19, 29, 32, 43). Gloating is reprimanded (SV 31) and the most severe fate awaits a sister who secretly slanders another (SV 42). Avarice is similarly reproached virgins ought to share even the bare essentials (SV 36). The demand for peace, mercy, and mutual consideration culminates in the request for equality. The sisters are not allowed to own property individually, because "in Jesus Christ everything is in common" (SV 30). To secure the basic functioning of community-life, obedience is as important as peace (SV 20, 21); particularly obedience to the mother is requested in SV 2 and 3. Abstinence, work, and prayer are the practical foundations granting a life based on mutual charity, equality, and obedience.

Abstinence "diminishes the evil desires" (SV 40) and is therefore basic and essential. However, it must not be overdone. Regular food-intake is strongly recommended and excessive abstinence branded as harmful, dangerous, and unwise (SV 9). No one should despise a sister because she is eating and no one should boast of her own abstinence (SV 50). The exact diet is not mentioned, except that it is vegetarian: meat and wine are only for the sick and weak (SV 10). The times of the meals are not stated, nor whether they are communal. The sisters were supposed to get up at dawn to start the day by reading the Scriptures, on which the entire life of the community was based (SV 4).¹⁴⁾ Work was to begin after the second hour; its precise nature is once more not mentioned, but its fruits were owned communally.¹⁵⁾ The most important part of the day was occupied by prayer, which had to be constant and uninterrupted.¹⁶⁾ Prayers consisted of the "meditation" on Christ (SV 5) and psalm-singing (SV 35), at night, in solitude and with tears (SV 25), although vigils were perhaps not

practiced (SV 40).¹⁷⁾ Prayer is worthless if not performed in all sincerity; merely moving the lips is not sufficient (SV 35); it has to be done with a "pure heart", from which all evil thoughts as well as "pictures of men" have been previously removed with the help of abstinence (SV 6, 38, 40). However, this harsh life must not lead to sadness, or even worse, 'ἀκηδία'. 'Akēdia', a term describing an affliction peculiar to the life of a desert-father, cannot be fully rendered in translation. 'Depression' in the modern clinical sense perhaps comes closest, considering the symptoms as captured in A. Theodora's saying 3. Evagrius' c. 12 in the Praktikos is probably the most detailed psychological study of this particular problem.¹⁸⁾ 'Akēdia' or depression leads to 'Wanderlust' and obstructs purity; the best remedy against it are tears. Tears are of special significance, not shed out of sadness, but "before God" (SV 39 and 25).¹⁹⁾ In accordance with the importance attributed to crying, laughter is not permitted; it is shameful and foolish, because it is an unnecessary expression of sentiment, and it creates a noise unbecoming to constant prayer.²⁰⁾ So, for that matter, does talk. A virgin ought to remain silent, she must not speak, unless she needs to utter a "word of God" (SV 15, 33).

How this was maintained in practice is hard to imagine. The virgins had to keep their eyes under control; they were not supposed to raise them in order to avoid all distraction, especially when leaving the house (SV 13, 26). However, despite occasional outside contacts, the virgin is expected to stay at her place and to maintain a secluded life, oriented towards prayer and spiritual perfection. One other reason calls for seclusion: a virgin ought to live for the "glory of God"; to seek "glory among men" (that is to strive for a prestigious social position) by becoming a virgin, is entirely the wrong reason for doing so (SV 18). "Glory among men" is a result of vanity, which a virgin must shun (SV 23). As long as there is any trace of vanity left, a virgin might regret the fact that she has to strive for virginal beauty (SV 51): hollow-eyed because of vigils, her face marked by frequent tears, careworn and thin because of lack of sleep and fasting, silent without a smile, eyes cast down, dressed poorly and subjected to constant work.²¹⁾ The wish to achieve this kind of beauty had to be very strongly motivated; another hint that the decision to join the community was intended to be final.

Again, whilst agreeing with most other sources, SV helps to focus some of the precepts regulating virginal life previously observed. The ideal virgin is often described as pale, hollow-eyed, and thin, her face marked by constant tears, silent and restricted as much as possible in her movements, an ideal achieved through vigils and fasts.²²⁾ Indeed, the entire monastic literature abounds with exhortations to fast and many laudable examples are presented.²³⁾ At the same time, almost all sources addressed to virgins (and indeed Basil's, Pachomius' and Shenoute's rules) are unanimous in prescribing regular food-intake, or, in Basil's words,

"τὸ ἐν ἑγκράτειᾳ εὐτόνον".²⁴⁾ Many authors warn against extreme fasts, for instance Basil of Ancyra in his De Virginitate c. 1, 9, 10; Palladius reprimands the virgin who prays instead of eating; Gregory of Nyssa warns against excessive fasts, and the same is true for the Pseudo-Athanasian De Virginitate.²⁵⁾ Evagrius is perhaps the most explicit:

"Do not say: today I shall eat, tomorrow I will not eat, because you will not do so in wisdom. It will harm your body and hurt your stomach", (SV 9) and "Do not despise your sister when she eats and do not boast with your abstinence" (SV 50).

Considering the medical description of a psychological illness afflicting young women in particular, though not exclusively, one is led to conclude that Evagrius and others imply cases today classified as anorexia nervosa. The symptoms of depression and refusal to eat may well have been observed and rejected as harmful. The strict ascetic practices possibly favoured anorectic tendencies in young girls and further gave these girls not only an excuse but encouraged them to pursue their illness. Asceticism fulfilled in this regard a truly therapeutic function. Rather than being dismissed as demented, these girls could become ascetic heroines. However, even fathers who themselves followed a strict ascetic routine condemned these excesses.

One major theological reason supported this refusal of extremes. As the SV 18 points out: everything has to be done for the glory of God. It is the soul of the virgin that really counts, not her body, and all practical precepts are mere means to the end of its perfection. A virgin has to be gentle (SV 19), humble (SV 16), grateful and zealous to serve God (SV 5, 21, 26, 48), she has to be obedient, full of pity and without anger, fear, rage, jealousy, envy, grudging, gloating, or sadness (SV 5, 8, 12, 17, 19, 21, 27, 32, 29, 41, 43, 45, 51). Chastity has to be preserved in body and

mind, and lasciviousness will be punished (SV 11). Evil thoughts (ἐπιθυμία κακά), clearly sexual thoughts, have to be avoided with the help of hunger and thirst (SV 38, 40), since evil desires attract enemies, that is the devil (SV 39).²⁶ If a virgin fails, it is extremely difficult, though not impossible, for her to redeem and repent (SV 37). The previous characterization makes the substance of the virginal perfection obvious: total liberation from emotion, 'ἀπάθεια' (SV 31), which results in purity. The exhortations and prescriptions for achieving 'apatheia' are numerous, and altogether 28 sentences deal with this problem.²⁷ On the way to this ideal the virgin is invited to emulate the model of the wise virgins, Mt 25: 1-13. The foolish virgins personify the vices to be avoided (SV 17, 22, 29, 36, 42, 43, 56) and the wise virgins show what rewards await the enduring virgin once she has fulfilled her earthly tasks. Not only will she be permitted to the bridal chamber, she herself will be the bride of Christ.

The entire life of the virgin is regarded as a perpetual preparation for her wedding in heaven (II Cor 11: 2). This her future position is already reflected on earth, she is a "daughter of God" (SV 12), and true virginity is compared to a "pearl in a golden setting" (SV 41).²⁸ The true reward will, however, await the virgin after her death. Then she will find fulfillment in the union with her bridegroom Christ, and, modelled as they are on the Song of Songs, the sentences find very vivid words to describe this wedding night. Unlike a mortal union, this union will be everlasting; the virgin will inherit the kingdom of heaven and achieve an angelic state (SV 55).²⁹ Doubtless, purity of the soul, more essential to the final fulfillment than bodily purity, is also harder to achieve.³⁰

3. The Sententiae ad Virginem and Evagrius' System of Eight Vices

A formal question which has yet to be answered concerns the composition of the Sententiae. SV 1-3 form an introduction or brief prologue, exhorting the virgin in a quasi liturgical manner to observe the "greatest and first commandment". Likewise the last part from SV 54 onwards forms an epilogue, containing a quasi climactic description of the culmination of every virgin's career: the final union with the spouse, Christ in heaven. This is then followed by the final address.

Apart from these rather obvious formal features, the internal structure of the SV remains somewhat enigmatic. There is no order immediately apparent and individual topics re-occur at random. In view of Evagrius' careful application of rhetorical technique in order to achieve variation it seems surprising that the same care was not taken with the internal structure.¹⁾ To decipher the structure of the SV, it is therefore necessary to look for a guiding-line in Evagrius' other works. In Gennadius' account of Evagrius' literary activities, the following statement occurs:

"Euagrius Monachus . . scripsit multa monachis necessaria, e quibus ista sunt: Adversus octo principalium vitiorum suggestiones, quas aut primus advertit aut inter primos didicit . . ."²⁾

The Benedictines published a small discussion, almost a collection of definitions entitled . περὶ τῶν ὀκτῶν λογισμῶν πρὸς ἀνατολίου , later identified as forming chapters 6-14 in the so-called Praktikos.³⁾ Three other treatises with similar content, originally published under the name of Nilus and Macarius, have been identified as belonging to Evagrius: "De octo spiritibus malitiae"; "De diversis malognis cogitationibus" and "Tractatus de vitiis quae oppositae sunt virtutibus".⁴⁾

The simple number of treatises dedicated to the subject of the "eight vices" attest to the importance this concept must have had in Evagrius' entire doctrine. Basing myself on the respective chapters in Pr. which contain the first systematized discourse of the topic (Pr. c. 6-33), I shall try to outline Evagrius' concept of the eight vices.⁵⁾

In SV 38 Evagrius exhorts the virgin to prevent "διαλογισμοὶ πονηροί"

from entering her soul. The term 'dialogismoi', though by itself of a neutral character, gains a negative connotation when combined with 'ponēroi'. In the Pr. this negative character prevails, here Evagrius employs 'dialogismoi' throughout in a pejorative sense.⁶⁾ Pr. c. 48 explains why a mere thought can be something to be avoided:

"with secular people the demons fight using preferably objects, with the monks they use mainly the thoughts".⁷⁾

Evil thoughts emanate from demons and the notion is not very distant that both, demon and thought, are essentially the same.⁸⁾ The entire purpose of the Pr. is therefore to furnish the monk with appropriate equipment to fight evil thoughts (λογισμοί). Since it is easier to fight a well-known evil than an unknown one, Evagrius arranged a specific group of thoughts, which had to be avoided and fought against, into a stringent system. This system presents itself in Pr. c. 6 as follows:

Πρῶτος ὁ τῆς γαστριμαργίας καὶ μετ' αὐτὸν ὁ τῆς πορνείας· τρίτος ὁ τῆς φιλαργυρίας· τέταρτος ὁ τῆς λύπης· πέμπτος ὁ τῆς ὀργῆς· ἕκτος ὁ τῆς ἀκηδίας· ἑβδομος ὁ τῆς κενοδοξίας· ὀγδοὺς ὁ τῆς ὑπερηφάνειας·

In the following chapters Evagrius describes the individual thoughts in detail, at times identifying the thought with the demon who causes it.⁹⁾ Thought, demon, and vice thus become indistinguishable. These thoughts appear always in the same fixed order: gluttony, fornication, avarice, sadness, anger, akēdia, vainglory, and pride.¹⁰⁾ This sequence determines the structure of the Antirrhetikos as well as the Pr., and the remedies that Evagrius has to offer are arranged correspondingly.¹¹⁾ In deciding to systematize the thoughts in the way he did, Evagrius must have had a principle, and the question is, what was this underlying principle? The most obvious place to look for a model is in the Bible: the temptations of Jesus in the desert (Mc 1: 12-13; Lk 4: 12-13).¹²⁾ Jesus' main temptations were in the following order: gluttony, avarice, and vainglory. Evagrius does indeed use these three vices as the basis of his system.

To counter gluttony the monk has to restrain his food intake; this is necessitated by the inherent link between gluttony and fornication: "gluttony is the mother of luxury."¹³⁾ 'Enkrateia', defined as the abolition of active sin (οὐ τῆν κατάλυσιν τῆς κατ' ἐνεργεῖαν ἁμαρτίας. . .), is the virtue enabling the monk to forego both gluttony and fornication.¹⁴⁾

A monk still haunted by the demon of avarice has not overcome the desire to possess goods of "this world". As a consequence he will fall into sadness, because sadness is "frustration of desires" (Pr. c. 10). The link between avarice and sadness is thus firmly established and it is worthwhile to point out that the development of vices so far observed shows the depth of Evagrius' psychological insight. If a monk indulged too long in sadness, he might become angry; angry, because he left the world for wrong reasons, and in doing so, his prayer becomes impure. Impure prayer, overshadowed by anger, is the prime source for 'akēdia', or "disgust", "general frustration", and "depression".¹⁵⁾ Vainglory was the third temptation of Jesus and it is indeed hard to evade, because it attacks the mind of the monk after he has overcome all the other evils.¹⁶⁾ Vainglory is extremely dangerous, for if it is not overcome it induces the monk to pride, which in its turn causes the deepest fall (Pr. c. 14 / 580).

Deriving primarily from the three temptations of Jesus, Evagrius' order of the eight evil thoughts is based on philosophical traditions, as well as his own empirical experience.¹⁷⁾ The progression from gluttony and fornication as basic vices to the struggle against avarice, sadness, anger, akēdia, and from then on to vainglory and pride, the cause of the final fall, suggests that Evagrius' anthropology was influenced by the Platonic concept of the tripartite division of the soul: ἐπιθυμητικόν, θυμικόν and λογιστικόν.¹⁸⁾ The first two vices, gluttony and fornication, affect the epithymētikon, the following four, avarice, sadness, anger and depression (akēdia) the thymikon, and vainglory and pride the logistikon. The assumption that Evagrius had the tripartite division of the soul in mind is sustained by his arrangement of the remedies. The remedy for gluttony and fornication is 'enkrateia', fasting (Pr. c. 17).¹⁹⁾ The virtue counteracting avarice and sadness is 'ἀγάπη'. According to Paul he who follows the commandments of 'agapē' leaves this world to be reborn in Christ therefore agape destroys this world (Rom 6: 8; Jn 15: 13; Pr. c. 18). By destroying this world 'agapē' avoids sadness, because there will be no desires to be frustrated (Pr. c. 19). Evagrius dedicates six chapters to the fight of anger, which is divided into angry thoughts within the soul of the monk and anger against others. The remedy for the first is gentleness, for the second compassion and charity (Pr. c. 20-26). 'Akēdia', a vice difficult

to combat, needs three remedies: tears (Pr. c. 27), perseverance, that is the willingness to remain in one's cell (Pr. c. 28), and vigilance against its demon combined with constant readiness to encounter God (Pr. c. 29). The demon of vainglory appears after all the others have been fought off. Only when the monk has reached the state of pure spirituality can he feel safe from this particular demon (Pr. c. 30-32). The remedy for ὑπερηφανία (pride) is the reminiscence of the past sinful life combined with awareness that only God's grace allows the monk to escape from his former sins (Pr. c. 33), and that only God's mercy will allow him to reach the summit of every monk's life: apatheia.

The 'praktikē', the fight against eight specific thoughts, is nothing other than a method to attain apatheia. As Evagrius states in his prologue:

"Faith (πίστις), children, is affirmed by the fear of God and this in its turn by abstinence (enkrateia). This is rendered constant (inflexible) by perseverance (ὑπομονή), and hope (ἐλπίς); from them impassivity (apatheia) is born. Apatheia creates charity (ἀγάπη), this in turn creates knowledge of nature (γνώσις φύσεως), which is succeeded by theology and finally beatitude (μακαριότητες, Prol' 8)."

'Apatheia' is the starting point for a higher level: the gnosis of God, leading to theology and beatitude.²⁰) What does Evagrius imply by 'apatheia'? In c. 56 of Pr. he defines 'apatheia' as "sanity of the soul". The soul is divided into three parts, "τριμερὺς δὲ τῆς λογικῆς ψυχῆς οὐσία", but in Evagrius' conception there lies a marked difference between the *logistikon* on the one, and the *thymikon* and the *epithymētikon* μέρος' on the other hand (Pr. c. 8).²¹) The *logistikon* is the intellectual part or the νοῦς, and both *thymikon* and *epithymētikon* are deteriorations (fallen parts) of the former, enclosed in a body, but generically deriving from the soul. In other words, they represent the body-part of the soul (Pr. c. 84). In order to achieve sanity of the entire soul these parts have to be cured first of all with "the spiritual method of purifying the passionate part of the soul" (Pr. c. 78). Once these parts have been healed or purified, that is freed from their passion, the *logistikon* is delivered of their burden and ready to practice its proper activity: the "γνώσις τοῦ Θεοῦ". Harmony and sanity of the three parts of the soul are the best possible condition allowing the *logistikon* to function unimpaired (Pr. c. 89).²²)

This harmony is achieved when each part of the soul practices its own appropriate virtue, and Evagrius defines this harmony of the soul, not the

oppression of passions, as 'apatheia'. 'Apatheia' does not mean to become "like God or like a stone", but to reach the starting point to perfect harmony, to approach the higher state of contemplation of God.²³) The key concept in reaching for 'apatheia' is propriety and moderation, to practice virtues natural to the parts of the soul in question without excess (Pr. c. 1-3, Prol. 8).

Having attempted to outline Evagrius' basic principles of the ideal ascetic life leading to the contemplation of God (γνωσις) via 'praktikē' and 'apatheia', it has to be asked, whether this concept is also valid for the SV. Reviewing SV under the aspect of the system of 'praktikē', one makes a surprising finding: although quite a number of reminiscences are detectable, SV does not contain the characteristic system of eight vices, with the possible exception of SV 39-41. These sentences contain the system of eight evil thoughts in nuce: in SV 39 we find the vices sadness and 'akēdia' with their remedy tears (Pr. c. 27).²⁴) This is followed in SV 40 by a warning against fornication and its appropriate remedy: 'enkrateia', hunger and thirst.²⁵) In the original system fornication precedes sadness and 'akēdia', the remedy, however, is again the same, 'enkrateia' (Pr. c. 17). SV 41 mentions 'orgē', 'thymos', and 'mnēsikakia' with their appropriate remedies 'agapē', charity, and compassion (Pr. c. 20). SV 43 refers to avarice (ἀνελεήμωνος), so that we find five of the eight vices with their remedies in SV 39-43, albeit not in the set order observed in the other treatises: sadness, akēdia, fornication, (including gluttony), anger, and avarice. Vainglory and pride are the only exception. What is immediately striking is the fact that only vices affecting the thymikon and the epithymetikon are mentioned. The two vices which could conceivably attack the logistikon, vainglory and pride, do not appear in this rudimentary system (SV 39-43). However, SV 6, 7, and 8 contain in this order warnings against fornication and anger, SV 16 warns against pride, SV 17 against avarice, SV 18 against vainglory and SV 19 against 'orgē', but the resemblance of these notions to the original system is very slight. 'Enkrateia' is the only virtue mentioned expressis verbis, in SV 50 and 52. 'Pistis' as such is not mentioned, but referred to in SV 27, fear of God does not appear, perseverance is intended in SV 26, 'elpis' implied by the constant reference to the parable of the wise and foolish virgins (Mt. 25: 1-13). Whilst the

elements of the 'praktikē' are, in other words, present, their systematization cannot be detected, and not much progress was made with regard to SV's internal structure. Apart from SV 39-43 there is no immediately obvious resemblance to the system of the eight thoughts.²⁶⁾

Considering Evagrius' tendency

"agissant à la manière d'un scolastique, a donné une formulation fixe et définitive à un enseignement traditionnel qui, avant lui, avait une forme encore flottante,"

the conspicuous absence in SV of the system used in the Pr. is significant.²⁷⁾ The question immediately arises whether the same observation can be made in SM. Both the style and the close similarities, at times verbatim quotations, leave little doubt that SM must be understood as SV's male equivalent.²⁸⁾ SM's content may therefore furnish more information concerning the use of the system of the eight evil thoughts and their remedies and the system of progressing virtues, thus helping to decipher the composition of the SV.²⁹⁾ Like SV, SM begins with a brief address to the heirs of God, the monks, exhorting them to listen to the words of our Lord. In sharp contrast to the SV, this address is immediately followed by a general outline of the system of virtues, in the same fixed order as described in the Prol. 8 of the Pr.: 'pistis', 'φόβος τοῦ Θεοῦ', 'enkrateia', 'hypomonē', and 'elpis' (SM 3-5). Then the author exhorts the monks to the virtue of 'enkrateia', which enables them to fight fornication. 'Agapē' is called upon as remedy against 'misos' or anger, SM 12-15 deal with 'thymos' and the appropriate remedies, 16-18 with avarice, 19-20 with arrogance and humbleness. SM 24-29 deal with the incompatibility of wealth and the above mentioned virtues, SM 30-37 deal with the aspects of 'thymos' and suggest gentleness and compassion as remedies, SM 38-45 contain a description of negative consequences of 'gastrimargia'. SM 55-60 give a brief description of akēdia, its nature, relation to sadness and the delight felt by the monk who succeeded in overcoming it. SM 61-62 warn again against vainglory and pride by giving a brief description of these vices, while SM 63-73 contain a series of advice as to how to avoid them. With regard to structure and content there are more similarities to be detected between SM and Pr. than between SM and SV. SM like Pr. begin with a theoretical definition of the virtues to be followed, in an identical order in both. Then, as in the Pr., Evagrius gives a rough

outline of his concept of 'praktikē', followed by a description of vices and remedies according to the tripartite divisions of the soul. Evagrius then proceeds to a more concrete description of the monk's daily life, a doctrinal outline mainly concerned with gnosis and including a warning against heretical doctrines. In contrast to the SV it seems much easier to detect a composition in the SM; a composition which follows that of the Pr. The system of eight vices is present, although not as stringent, the vices are vaguely arranged in pairs, which occur in the following order: 'gastrimargia' and fornication (SM 11, 22, 23 eg.), avarice and anger (SM 25, 30) 'akēdia' and sadness (SM 55) and finally vainglory and pride (SM 61). The resemblance between Pr. and SM is clearly detectable. One great difference is, however, obvious: the paramount importance attributed to gnōsis in the SM. The following figures are to give a mere numerical impression of the important place given to gnōsis in SM: the word occurs 30 times altogether, four times as frequently as 'γνώσις Θεοῦ', three times as 'γνώσις ἀληθείας'. 'Σοφία' occurs 8 times, 'φρόνησις' 8 times as well, but 'apatheia', which was so important in Pr., only four times. The reason for this difference is obvious. The Pr. serves as a guide for the acquisition of 'apatheia', which in turn is the preparation to reach 'gnōsis'. 'Gnōsis' is not part of the 'praktikē', but its sequel in the strife for perfection. 'Gnosis' holds a fundamental position in Evagrius' entire doctrinal system, sometimes described as "theoretical mysticism".³⁰) His theoretical approach is primarily based on the concept of a progressive rise in several stages to a final culmination. In accordance with the concept of the tripartite division of the soul, this rise passes through three stages. The first step as conceived by Evagrius is the praxis, the ascetic preparation via purity and avoidance of passions, as made explicit in Pr.. The aim of the first step is to achieve 'apatheia' or inner harmony, this is achieved by the help of 'agapē'. As SM is not confined to 'praktikē', it contains advice for the subsequent step, the theory of God and finally his 'gnōsis'. The approach to 'gnōsis' is divided into two parts, the 'γνώσις ὁσώματων' (or φυσικῆς) and the ultimate 'gnōsis tou Theou'. The knowledge of nature has to be a theological one to recognize God's wisdom in nature, always sustained by 'agapē'. The final aim, however is 'gnōsis Theou' (SM 3), which represents in its turn the last step as well as being the aim of the

second step.³¹⁾ The gnosis of God and the Trinity is ascetic perfection (SM 136).³²⁾ Gnosis is the aim and the interpretation of monastic life, the quasi-mystical union of monk and God through gnosis its climax. This doctrinal concept is reflected in a concise form in the SM. The paramount importance of gnosis is also reflected in the restriction of this "mystical knowledge" to the advanced monks; whereas Pr. was intended for every aspirant, but especially beginners, only the proven monks were supposed to understand the mystical depths of 'gnōsis Theou'.³³⁾

It is therefore all the more necessary to reconsider SV in the light of this important concept. The finding is striking. Gnōsis does not occur once in the SV. The system of the rise towards pure gnōsis, which later became fundamental to Eastern monasticism, is evidently not the theme of the Sententiae written to the virgin.³⁴⁾ There is not even the slightest hint of a further rise towards a theology or gnōsis of nature. Gnōsis and all the notions connected to it do not play any role whatsoever in SV. Why then a virginal life; what is the purpose of it, if not 'gnōsis Theou'? Evagrius has the answer. He does not sacrifice the concept of the rise, but he substitutes another goal. The virgin has to prepare herself for a different aim. The aim is not the 'gnōsis' of God, but the union with Christ as the bridegroom. Christ is not to be conceived by the intellect, but through an almost sexual union (Cant. 1, 3,4). This "unio mystica" is achieved via the maintenance of the body in a pure fashion to receive the heavenly bridegroom. In other words: the virgin is not striving for an abstractum, 'gnōsis', her aim is far more personal, almost a concretum, the heavenly bridegroom Christ.

This different concept of the aim of male and female ascetic life runs through both the SM and the SV like a leitmotif. Whenever the reward of the life or punishment in case of a fall is referred to, it is the gaining or loss of knowledge in the monk's case and the gaining or loss of the bridegroom in the case of the virgin. The same applies to the feast of the drunk and the love of money (SV 36, SM 18; SV 14, SM 43). This discrepancy becomes most remarkable in the eulogion-passage in SV and SM respectively. In SV this passage has the character of an epithalamium, a bridal chant, glorifying the final union with Christ, in SM it is a

glorification of the merits of 'gnōsis'.³⁵⁾ This is the most important and fundamental discrepancy as far as the spiritual concept is concerned.

The question arises immediately why the aim of ascetic life should be so distinct in SM and SV. SV could possibly have been written before Evagrius had developed his fixed system. This could be supported by the fact that the concept of "logismoi" as evil thoughts is not apparent in SV;³⁶⁾ and that the system is not applied. Guillaumont assumes SV to be later than Praktikos, referring to a number of similar phrases, and this would be supported by the apparent similarity of SV and SM.³⁷⁾ Another possibility is implicit in Guillaumont's suggestion that Pr. was written specifically for anchorites such as the ones living at Cellia or Scetis.³⁸⁾ However, SM contains advice specifically directed at monks in a community (SM 73-103), life in common can therefore, not account for the omission of the system in SV. The only apparent reason why the system of the praktike should be less important and the aim of ascetic life different in SV must be that SV was addressed to women.

SV is indeed Evagrius' sole work regarding ascetic practice which does not draw on his own original concept. Whilst containing elements of his system of vices and remedies, SV corresponds with its emphasis on the virgin as bride of Christ to all other sources discussed. Virtually all literary sources, and even non-literary ones like the canons of Ancyra, stress that it is the essence and the purpose of virginal life to strive for the union with Christ. The notion of the virginal soul as Christ's future bride was, at least originally, not limited to women. Methodius of Olympus for example speaks of the virginal soul striving for Christ regardless of gender, and the canon at Ancyra as well as the Anonymous Homily had a certain a-sexual slant.³⁹⁾ However, the motive of an ascetic engagement gains progressively an exclusively female nature. The case of SM and SV shows most clearly that the topos of the virginal bride is not an issue for male ascetics. Since in the men's case the metaphor is much less applicable, the recession of its application to the ascetic soul in both genders in favour of the virgin as Christ's bride is understandable. The question also poses itself, whether the increasing importance of the bride-motive can be linked to an increase in institutionalization. To become a bride reflects the normal course of a

woman's life, and to transfer this concept to a spiritual level would serve a dual purpose: it would make female asceticism desirable by virtue of the choice of the bride-groom and it would also make this way of life more understandable by phrasing its aim in a traditional form. However, fulfillment of a women's ascetic life was thus conceived as posthumous; her entire life was but a preparation for an event to take place after her death. Macrina embodies this concept most clearly: on her death-bed she is clad in a wedding outfit.⁴⁰) Men on the other hand could strive for perfection while still alive: their abstract goal of perfection, be it gnosis, obedience, or service, was attainable on earth. Both had to persevere in a constant struggle and both needed divine grace to achieve their respective aims.

The posthumous nature of a woman's ascetic aim as presented by the authoritative authors, raises the problem of whether such a goal was indeed desirable for women. No writings of ascetic women themselves are extant to convey their attitudes to such a goal. However, the emphasis placed on the earthly advantages of a heavenly bridegroom suggests that such a spiritual concept was not unanimously welcomed. Other forms of spiritual perfection with a more immediate appeal existed, as the example of the desert-mothers, the teachers, the wandering ascetics or indeed the women as members of the hierarchy in heretical sects show.

In any case, there can be no doubt that the spiritual aim of a women's ascetic life differed essentially from that of a man. Does this mean that there are corresponding differences with regard to the organization of male and female life, and if so, are they reflected in both SM and SV? It seems as though the monks in SM lived outside a village - though not in strict seclusion, since visits to the village and advice on how to confront women are mentioned (SM 83) - whereas the virgins lived within a village-community. At first sight the structure of communal life seems more developed in SM. A father as well as an 'oikonomos' are referred to, far greater stress is laid upon work, almost certainly agricultural work. Individual poverty, simple dress, obedience towards the head of the community, silence, the observance of peace, compassion and care for the sick, prayer, and vigils are common practice for both men and women. Another common feature was the regulated diet, but in SV the possible dangers of

gluttony are almost omitted, on the contrary the importance of regular food-intake is especially emphasized, and irregular diet is branded as a health-hazard. Though SM and Pr. in particular (29, 91) also prescribe a regular and balanced diet, they do not stress the necessity to eat in the same manner. It is possible that the monks of SM had their own chapel or place of worship no church visit or anything similar is mentioned. The most striking difference, however, is the greater detail with regard to the communal organization and the greater emphasis on economic aspects. Similar observations could be made with regard to Basil's, Pachomius' and Shenoute's regulations. In all these cases information regarding the organizational structure was directed towards men, and all female communities were at least economically dependent on the male ones. Could this, combined with the emphasis on the bridal status of the female ascetics, reflect the original structure of a family? Could the female communities rely economically on others, at times a male community, at times the congregation, in ways in which a wife relies on a husband?

In any case, the conspicuous discrepancy between the two monastic ideals, 'gnōsis' for men and bodily union with Christ for women, is certainly of paramount importance. The absence of any notion of intellect in the prescription for virgins compared to their respective abundance in the ones for monks leans towards the conclusion that intellectual pursuits were not considered appropriate for women, it was more expedient to let them strive for a personified aim, bridal union with Christ, rather than an abstract concept, 'gnōsis'. At least in Evagrius' concept the latter was reserved for men, though exceptions were possible for exceptional women.

4. The Sententiae as Regulations for Female Ascetic Life and their Historical Context

SV is a collection of prescriptions enabling the future bride of Christ to perfect her soul and body. In that regard it would be possible to classify SV as one of the treatises on virginity discussed, or to consider it as one of the many letters written to exhort a virgin to follow the correct regime. SV certainly forms part of a body of normative texts ensuring a certain homogeneity of ascetic practice. The question arises whether it is possible to classify SV more precisely, that is, to establish different literary genres within this body of normative writings. Three descriptive categories could come into consideration: SV could be a treatise, a "Speculum Virginum" or a rule. A treatise is here understood as a lengthy piece containing spiritual admonitions for a virgin, generally not too much concerned with practical aspects. The same is true for a Speculum, which depicts an ideal virgin, thus providing other virgins with a model to aspire to.¹⁾ Rules, on the contrary, are considered to be 'canons', containing specific instructions regulating life in common from a practical point of view. The question is whether these genera, conceived in the light of later developments, can be applied in a historically accurate way for the fourth century SV.

What was Evagrius' intention in instructing an individual, the virgin, but implying several? Though SV are directed towards one, the concerns of an entire community are implied, which in its turn allows one to generalize about the prescriptions made. SV contains organizational precepts and defines the spirit in which more detailed decisions ought to be made. It therefore addresses problems that the head of a community may encounter in its administration, and furnishes guidelines. Essentially representing the leader, SV can assure continuity, for instance in the case of absence or death of the community's actual leader.²⁾ Ought SV therefore to be regarded as a treatise, a Speculum or perhaps as a rule?

A distinction between these three genera is difficult, and requires a comparison with contemporary or slightly later normative texts, considering content as well as style. All normative texts discussed so far agreed, with regard to their content, on certain set precepts. They all addressed

ascetic women who lived in a community with a degree of size and institutionalization. In virtually all cases the community is an integral factor for perfection, since only life in common allows one to excel in harmony and peace, which has to be striven for through charity, mercy, equality and obedience towards the leader as the representative of the divine on earth, as well as towards the fellow sister. Only the three basics, chastity, prayer, and work, can also be practiced individually. All normative texts also included practical prescriptions on how to achieve these aims, including set prayer routines and set diets. Content alone is therefore no decisive factor. The emphasis attributed to certain aspects and the style in which the text was written have to provide further clues. SV is not a treatise. It addresses a specific individual, and compared with other treatises discussed, is shorter and more concise, and has a less prominent emphasis on doctrinal questions. Basil of Ancyra described in his De Virginitate 30-31 the virgin's soul as a picture; Augustine recommended his Ep. 211, since:

"...ut autem in hoc libello tamquam in speculo vos possitis inspicere";

Ambrose follows Basil in considering his De Virginibus:

"Vestrae virtutis... imaginem quasi in speculo quodam sermonis istius cernitis refulgere."³⁾

Based on these and other passages the literary genre of the Speculum developed, which reached the heights of its influence in the Middle Ages. SV does contain elements later considered essential for a Speculum: it presents an example, the wise virgins, and contains precepts allowing the individual to strive for the perfect model.⁴⁾ Gressmann therefore considers SV to be a Nonnenspiegel. However, the title Speculum is widely adopted only since Honorius Augustodunensis, so that this literary category, if applied in the fourth century, is problematic.⁵⁾ Although worth keeping in mind in the light of its later impact, this category may be set aside for the moment, as SV is the only text characterized as Speculum in the fourth century. The only rule for women, which could help to define SV's genre, is the one by Augustine titled Regularis Informatio.⁶⁾ It has, however, been proven to be a later transcription of a rule originally addressed to men, the so-called Praeceptum (A.D. 397).⁷⁾ The actual adaptation took place after 411, when the male version was sent to a female community.⁸⁾ Another female rule ascribed to Augustine, the Ordo monasterii feminis

datas, is the transcription of a work of Alypius (after 411 and before Isidore of Seville).⁹⁾ These prescriptions or rules addressed to women have therefore to be dated to a time after 411, at least twenty years after SV. If compared to the only earlier rules available, Pachomius' and Basil's in the form we now possess them, it can be argued that SV cannot be considered as such. Both Pachomius' and Basil's rule contain a number of very detailed organizational precepts which arose during the development of their specific communities and answer very specific needs. However, neither Pachomius' nor Basil's rule represent ad hoc conceptions, they were based on an original basic set of precepts. Basil's letter 22 (I 52) represents such a set of original precepts, later enlarged and adapted to changing needs of a growing community. A comparison of SV with letter 22 shows some surprising conformities. Both are essentially letters, addressing one but implying a community; both phrase their precepts in sentences. Similar congruences can be observed with regard to Augustine's letter 211.¹⁰⁾ Augustine phrases his advice in short paragraphs, and deals with all relevant subjects, both spiritual and practical. Neither SV, nor Basil's or Augustine's letter contain precise details with regard to practical matters, but all three address these aspects clearly enough to grant an organizational consensus, which in turn grants the continuity of practices observed within the community addressed. In the absence of a clear definition of a rule for the time in question - Basil never considered his work as a rule, though already Gregory Nazianzenus characterized it as ὁποῖο γραπτοῖς καὶ κανόσιν, and at the same time Basil addressed religious women as 'kanonikai' - SV should be considered a règle épistolaire, in the same right as Basil's letter 22 (or indeed 173) or Augustine's letter 211.¹¹⁾ If it is accepted that SV has to be characterized as a règle épistolaire, it is a very early, if not the earliest example of a rule written explicitly for women.¹²⁾ The first editor of Rufinus' Latin translation, Holstenius, was obviously of the same opinion, since he published SV in 1661 in the appendix of his Codex Regularum.¹³⁾

No rule or precept is written without a recipient; it has no justification in a historical vacuum. In the case of the SV the question is immediately posed who was the intended recipient? As has already been shown, SV was intended for a community of sisters, although one virgin only, of noble

birth, was addressed. SV is further classified as an Epistula in Frankenberg's, Wilmart's and Sarghisian's edition.

Who could this mysterious virgin have been? According to our scanty knowledge of Evagrius' life there was only one virgin with whom he cultivated a regular correspondence. This virgin was Melania the Elder, the same who received him in Jerusalem and induced him to become a Desert Father.¹⁴⁾ After his move to Egypt, Evagrius' correspondence with Melania was quite extensive, a large number of his extant letters are addressed to her, and their close relationship was commonly known.¹⁵⁾ Jerome for instance writes:

"Euagrius. . . scribit ad eam <Melaniam>, cuius nomen nigredinis testatur perfidiae tenebras . . ."¹⁶⁾

In the history of early monasticism Melania the Elder certainly occupies an important position. She is known to us mainly through the writings of Palladius, Paulinus of Nola, and Rufinus.¹⁷⁾

Born around the middle of the fourth century of Spanish-Roman origin, she belonged to one of the richest and noblest Roman families, the 'gens Antonia' (her grandfather Marcellinus was consul in 341 AD).¹⁸⁾ She married as a very young girl, and was widowed at the age of 22. Only one of her three children, her son Publicola, survived.¹⁹⁾ These personal tragedies induced her, against the strongest opposition of her family, to renounce the kind of life she was expected to lead. She parted with her fortune, or at least started to do so (the quantity of her possessions made this a long drawn-out process) and began to practice an ascetic life-style.²⁰⁾ Probably in the November of 372 she left Rome with a small party of similar-minded persons, heading at first for Alexandria. In 373 she had already visited the Desert Fathers in Nitria and Cellia, and even followed the Fathers exiled to Diocaesarea because of Theophilus' Arian persecutions.²¹⁾ Melania finally decided to settle in Jerusalem, probably in 377-378.

"After they (sc. the exiled Fathers) were recalled she founded a monastery in Jerusalem and spent twenty-seven years there in charge of a convent of fifty virgins."²²⁾

Meanwhile Rufinus of Aquileia had returned to Jerusalem and had joined Melania as "spirituali via comitem". Later he guided a male monastery himself.²³⁾ The exact location of these monasteries is unknown, but the most likely site seems to have been between the sanctuary of St. Helena

and that of the Ascension on the Mount of Olives. Melania and Rufinus received numerous pilgrims as guests and treated the sick among them; the financial side of the foundations was cared for by Melania.²⁴⁾ This led Jerome to allege that the community lived like Decius, Croesus, Crassus, and Sardanapales: in luxury and decadence.²⁵⁾ Apart from these factors precious little is known as far as the organization of Melania's monastery is concerned:

"ni les austérités de Mélanie . . . ne permettent de saisir le genre de vie et l'idéal monastique des compagnes de Mélanie." ²⁶⁾

Various suggestions as to how her monastery functioned have, however, been brought forward. Gordini assumes:

". . . che il sistema di vita in vigore in questi monasteri fosse molto simile a quello che la pellegrina Egeria (Silvia) ammirò a Gerusalemme in quegli stessi anni."²⁷⁾

F.X. Murphy states that

"quite evidently, Rufinus and Melania had a double monastery under their mutual guidance - a procedure with which they were familiar through their knowledge of the practice in the Egyptian desert. . . As to the type of monastic observance. . . we have very little information."

Murphy then points to an important factor, namely that

"Rufinus. . . was immediately responsible for the translation and spread of the *regulae* of St. Basil. . ."

and he continues:

"Hence it is not going too far to presume that this was at least the basis of the regular life followed by the monastic settlements of Rufinus and Melania. . ."²⁸⁾

Rufinus, who frequently exchanged MSS with Melania, had, however, also translated most of Evagrius' works into Latin, the SV among them.²⁹⁾ Evagrius, by this time famous for his intellectual grasp of monastic practice and the development of appropriate systems, was like Rufinus Melania's "spirituali via comes," a development which had not remained unnoticed in Jerusalem.³⁰⁾ His intellectual training and preference was based on Origen, Gregory Nazianzenus, and Basil, the very names favoured by Melania and Rufinus, and Evagrius' Letter to Melania contains the essence of this very doctrine.³¹⁾ Further, Evagrius' SV, written in Greek, not in Coptic (no Coptic MS has as yet been found), were addressed to a virgin of 'noble birth' and intended for a community.³²⁾ Could not this community have been Melania's convent? Melania's convent was founded between 374 and 378, it had in other words existed for nearly a decade by the time Evagrius came to Jerusalem (383). Melania herself was by that

time an experienced ascetic. Though of roughly the same age as Evagrius she had already spent some time among the Desert Fathers. Why should she want to turn to Evagrius for advice on monastic life? The answer may lie in Melania's decision to return to Rome in ca. 399/400. Her granddaughter Melania the Younger, who had recently adopted ascetic life, needed advice: "lest she should be injured by bad teaching or heresy or by bad living," caused by Jerome's propaganda against Rufinus and Melania herself.³³) During the same period, the anti-Origenist feelings had risen sharply. Rufinus had already left Jerusalem in 397, another indication that return to the West must have lingered in both their minds from the early nineties onwards.³⁴) As long as Melania with all her ascetic experience was present herself, her convent did not need any regulations, or at least no regulations in a fixed, written form. However, Melania's return to Rome may have made it expedient to ensure continuity during her absence through prescriptions written by an ascetic authority of the same doctrinal convictions: Evagrius, who, unlike Rufinus, lived himself as a Desert-Father. It was Rufinus who translated Evagrius' SV into Latin, and it is very probable that he did this to provide Melania's convent with a rule.³⁵) SV's lack of detail can be explained by the long-standing ascetic experience of Melania and her virgins.³⁶) SV's advice does not differ from what we know of Melania's practices. The Scriptures stood in high regard, and prayer is obviously paramount, as is the strict but not overly severe abstinence. Work was prescribed, and the lack of information concerning the economic situation of the convent in SV may well be explained by Melania's financial position. Seclusion was not absolute; according to Egeria, visits to the local church were customary in Jerusalem.³⁷) Hospitality and caring for the sick were essential (cf. SV 9, 10) for both Melania and the community of SV. The description of Melania's outer appearance agrees with the one given in SV as well. We know but little of Melania's spiritual aims, apart from the fact that her life was guided by poverty and service. Palladius ensures us that

"elevated by kindly hopes, she had made herself a spiritual bird, and journeyed to Christ."³⁸)

Of course, any certainty with regard to the recipient of SV can be gained only through a third, independent source. As long as this source is

unavailable, only the high probability that SV was addressed to Melania the Elder as a rule for her convent can be stated, granting its continuity. On the occasion of Melania's death in 409 or 410 Palladius tells us:

"Then having got rid of her possessions, within forty days she fell asleep in a good old age. . . leaving behind both a monastery in Jerusalem, and the endowment for it."³⁹)

The question is how long this convent existed, or how long SV had a chance to be observed, and how large a circle it could possibly have reached. According to Gerontius' biography of Melania the Younger, Melania's granddaughter arrived in Jerusalem in 417.⁴⁰) Neither then nor during the following 14 years did she stay in her grandmother's convent; the latter's foundation is in fact never referred to.⁴¹) The general silence concerning Melania the Elder in every respect in Gerontius' biography is more than mere chance.⁴²) Far from attesting to the discontinuity of Melania the Elder's foundation, it bears testimony to a fate shared by Melania and her circle, including Evagrius: the eventual dominance of the anti-Origenist movement.⁴³)

The common interest in Origen shared by Melania, Rufinus, Evagrius and their circle led eventually to the downfall of the entire community. In 399, Theophilus, bishop of Alexandria, decided to withdraw his support for Origenism, caused by his need to placate the anthropomorphic Desert-Fathers and his wish to curb Isidore's increasing influence. Theophilus' political and doctrinal change opened the way for anti-Origenist persecutions.⁴⁴) Evagrius was about to die, Rufinus had left the country, Melania was on her way to do the same, the 'Tall Brothers' were persecuted and exiled. Jerome erased a passage in his Chronici Canones, where he had called Melania "nobilissima mulierum Romanum," and had compared her to a second Thecla.⁴⁵) In 384 he still thought of her as "inter Christianos nostri temporis vera nobilitas."⁴⁶) Now he calls her "cuius nomen nigredinis testatur perfidiae tenebrae."⁴⁷) Until 393 himself an admirer of Origen, Jerome had turned against Evagrius, Rufinus, and Melania, subjecting them to a proper damnatio memoriae, a condemnation only very few dared to withstand. Cassian, who spent 5 years in the same desert as Evagrius, does not mention his name once, though Evagrius' influence on his writings is obvious.⁴⁸)

What effect under these circumstances could Evagrius' rule have had? The

question is purely rhetorical. Even if the rule was observed, who dared mention it in Jerusalem after 400? Who could admit to being influenced by it in face of Jerome's verdict (and indeed the later anathema)? It is obvious that the effect of a rule does not primarily depend on its quality, be it in the practical, spiritual, or even semantic sense, but on the personality and later influence of its author and the receiving community. Considering the fate of the latter in Evagrius' case, the obscurity of SV is sufficiently explained.

We do possess in SV an important rule, most important because it is in all probability the first rule addressed to and written for women, more precisely for the community of Melania the Elder. Fate, the political and doctrinal controversies surrounding author and recipient, prevented the rule from gaining the merit it deserved, but it does provide us with an early insight into the constitutional basis of a convent of women.

C. CONCLUSION

My aim has been to place the process of institutionalization of female asceticism in its specific historical and geographical context, by comparing two regions of the Roman empire which are separated geographically and historically, but connected by a common Roman past and a Christian present. I have discovered a surprising degree of parallelism. The first stage in the process of institutionalization towards organizational monasticism was necessarily an experimental one. In both regions, a wide variety of forms of ascetic life came into being. However, behind this apparent diversity, there were two underlying patterns of development. The first involved a progressive separation from ordinary family life, but one which, at each stage, adapted some elements of the structure of the traditional family for new ascetic requirements. The second, by contrast, broke away radically and entirely from the family structure.

The first pattern of development had several distinct phases. (These phases were not always chronologically consecutive, as several existed during the same historical period). The ascetic individual sought an adequate way of life either within the family or alone; the pseudo-marriage represents an intermediate phase, in which the individual no longer lives within the family, but still lives in a model related to it. Next, communities developed, leading to a new specific organizational model with its own normative system and almost complete economic autarchy: the 'coenobium' or monastery. Here, all elements of institutionalization were present: internal hierarchy, formal structure, set regulations, and voluntarily accepted yet obligatory affiliation and continuity. In this last phase of community development, the family-model has been given a new spiritual significance. Indeed, each phase in this pattern of development can also be interpreted as representing a greater spiritual achievement, resulting from an increased detachment from the confines of ordinary family life. This is so even though they employed throughout structural elements derived from family life.

Thus, a woman's decision to become a parthenos was itself perceived in terms of engagement and marriage. Similarly, members of the clergy adopted

a role which can be seen as spiritual fatherhood or as representing the bride-groom on earth ('cura monalium' in the Middle Ages). An ascetic mother-daughter relationship also frequently developed (perhaps related to women's greater longevity than men's once they survived the childbearing age). From this arose female communities comprising relatively small numbers under the guidance of a 'mother'. The notion of the ascetic community as a spiritual family led naturally to the development of ascetic communities comprised of men and women, for this fully accords with the character of a family, consisting of male and female members, as well as with Scriptural passages like Gal 3: 28:

"There is no such thing as. . . male and female. . . in Christ Jesus."

Even in communities where the sexes were clearly segregated, such as Basil's, Pachomius' and Shenoute's, close proximity between male and female monasteries was maintained, partially because the founders and many members were blood-relatives.

The persistence of the family model, with its distinctive traditions, also serves to explain some further surprising details. Given that the primary goal of ascetic life was to withdraw from the world and its possessions, continued adherence to some worldly attitudes and institutions seems inappropriate. Although personal poverty was a paramount prerequisite, asceticism did not necessitate complete renunciation of property: asceticism and property-ownership were not mutually exclusive. Many ascetics turned their family homes into ascetic communities, but they retained their property, although they no longer derived any personal benefits from it. They continued to inherit and bequeath, and they participated actively in business transactions. Property also included the ownership of slaves. Customs varied from person to person, but many ascetics retained their 'hand-maids' - in clear contradiction to Scriptural precepts, but in line with their contemporary mores.

The importance of the family model arises almost inevitably from the need to find a way for intensely religious people who followed an essentially anti-social ideal to survive within their actual environment. The family model appeared best suited to their requirements because its structure was universally understood and known to be practical and stable. In transforming the natural family into the spiritual one, the individual ascetic was

offered the possibility of a new way of life which did not depart too dramatically from his or her previous social milieu. In this way it was possible to combine new ideals with familiar ones to ensure easier and more general acceptance.

The second pattern of development emerged at the same time as the first. It comprised sectarian groups and radical movements which based their life style on scrupulous observance of Scriptural passages. The Gospel, the New Testament, encapsulates in many passages the beliefs of sectarian and millenarian movements. Since the second coming was thought to be imminent, many concerns which arise from a settled and established society became obsolete. Thus, the New Testament contains precepts such as Lc 14: 33:

" . . . none of you can be a disciple of mine without parting with all his possessions. . . . ;"

Lc 14: 26: ". . . if anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, . . . brother and sister. . . he cannot be a disciple of mine;"

Mt 8: 22: "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their dead,"

and Gal 3 : 28.

As a consequence, the church was continuously faced in its process of institutionalization with the zealous, or 'perfect', who attempted to follow the Gospel to the letter. The church-hierarchy was therefore forced into the paradoxical situation of having to discourage its most 'perfect' followers in order to maintain the very social conventions which the Gospel had set out to overthrow.

The development of settled and socially acceptable organizational forms, modelled after the family, proceeded in constant interaction with these more radical forms. Understanding the interaction can also serve to illustrate the goals of institutionalization. Originally, asceticism was a popular movement, involving the lay-population. It was kindled by the new ideals of withdrawal and by drastic social change. Institutionalization therefore had to find a way of integrating individuals with sometimes extreme views into the hierarchic structure of society and the Church. We have seen that this process of integration was a continuous and complex procedure.

It remains to consider the second stage in the process of institutionalization, and the way in which certain forms of ascetic life emerged preeminent. It appears that the more practical the ascetic models,

the more generally accepted they were. Radical movements, based on absolute poverty and a wandering life-style, constituted a challenge to the official church hierarchy, and were clearly opposed. However, the authority of the Church alone proved insufficient to suppress the radicals, and state authority, as exercised through imperial edicts, also had to be invoked. Since suppression was a constant phenomenon, it cannot have been fully successful. Therefore, it proved necessary to promote an alternative at the same time. Alongside the oppression of the radical extremes, a complex process of adaptation and integration took place.

Within this process, the first phase was to define which practices were heretical. Once a clearly heretical doctrine and practice such as the wandering life was identified, it was opposed. However, when practices were less blatantly 'heretical', other factors came into play. The multitude of approaches to perfection caused considerable problems. It was difficult to determine what should be suppressed and what should be tolerated, what was practicable in the long run and what was not. Thus, the 'bios eremitikos' was far more accepted in Egypt. Here, it had its own structure: an initiation period, certain formal and normative features, a hierarchy defined by merit and custom, and a certain continuity. The source-material suggests that the 'bios eremitikos', though it existed in Cappadocia, was less developed and enjoyed a lesser status. It appears therefore that it was less willingly accepted.

While it is easy to trace the disadvantages of the eremitic life, the selection procedure becomes more complicated in the case of an alternative approach which developed almost simultaneously from the 330's onwards in Cappadocia and Egypt: communal asceticism.

We saw that, contrary to the prevailing opinion, several models of communal ascetic life did in fact exist prior to and alongside Basil's and Pachomius'. These shared approximately the same structure, with only marginal differences. In Cappadocia, Macedonian foundations existed by the 330's, in Egypt, Hieracas seems to have presided over communities at the same time, Pschoi and Pgōl had their communities in about 350, and Melitian monasticism was well developed in the early fourth century. If such a diversity of communal models existed, why did certain forms prevail, in particular those of Basil and Pachomius, and others not? Why

were just certain normative texts widely distributed, while others, for instance Evagrius' SV, containing essentially identical normative values, remained almost completely unknown? Three aspects seem to have been jointly responsible for this result. First, there must have been practical advantages enjoyed by some forms of communal asceticism over others, however marginal. While the nature of the evidence is inconclusive, one may conjecture that one factor may have been the segregation of sexes. The foundations of Basil, Pachomius and Shenoute were segregated. The same appears not to be true for Macedonian monasticism, or the desert communities of Hieracas, Ammoun, Paphnoutius and others. Second, the charisma of the founder-figures and their ability to integrate others into a stimulating and accepted model should not be underestimated. Third, the doctrinal affiliation of the founders was crucial to the historic survival of certain ascetic models, mainly through their normative writings. There is no conclusive evidence to suggest specific causal connections at the outset between certain doctrinal view-points and certain ascetic practices ¹⁾; asceticism was in general a popular and non-doctrinal movement. Nonetheless, the acceptance of the doctrine of leading figures, whose names were associated with communal models of essentially the same practical value as others with no such acceptance, prove in fact decisive for the former's historical survival. The Macedonian and Melitian communities provide the best example. Both were very popular in their time, and both existed either earlier than or contemporaneously with Basil's and Pachomius' 'coinonia', but both were forgotten once their leaders had been condemned as heretical, and, as a consequence, their normative writings declared anathema. It is important to note that the leaders were condemned during the latter part of the fourth century. Unless other major practical disadvantages of these communities remain obscured, the final dominance of Basil's and Pachomius' model was determined on other than organizational grounds; Basil and Pachomius belonged to the ultimately successful doctrinal party.

The first stage of institutionalization occurred in the fourth century, when it was made possible by the legalization of Christianity. Similar developments can be observed in subsequent centuries.²⁾ Continuous reassessment of these institutions arises at all

periods from the recurrent revival of radical tendencies in the church, together with the rapid decline of organizations which are founded on the wish to live in poverty.³⁾

Within the general structure of institutional development in the fourth century, women played a distinctive role. One can see from the proliferation of treatises on virginity (which Camelot has already observed), and from the evidence collected in the preceding chapters, that the role of women in the ascetic movement was considerable. Christian asceticism provided women with a new role. The fourth century was a decisive period in which this new role was being formulated.

The essence of an ascetic life is to gain spiritual perfection, to prepare the soul in the most perfect way for a life after death. On earth, this is achieved by living in 'mimesis' of the angels, by leading an 'angelikos bios'.⁴⁾ Angels were perceived as a-sexual, and so was the soul. Spiritual advancement was therefore not defined in terms of gender: men and women were equally capable of attaining ascetic perfection. Thus St. Paul writes: "There is no such thing. . . as male and female in Christ Jesus." (Gal 3: 28).

This spiritual tradition supported the practical conclusion that women could fulfill the same function as men. Female ascetics adopted the external appearance of their male counterparts, and they occupied positions as teachers of doctrine, presbyters and bishops. Indeed, female ascetics played an extremely public role.

The theory that men and women are equal in Jesus Christ, created specific practical problems, especially for ascetics. In general society did not traditionally allow women to fulfill a conspicuous public role, and neither did the Church. Women who played a visible public role implicitly questioned the legitimation and authority of the clergy, and cast doubt on the accepted criteria for becoming an ecclesiastical leader. It is therefore no surprise that the role of women was most conspicuous in movements clearly identified as critical of the established hierarchy, such as the Montanists, radical Eustathians, and the Messalians, where women held clerical positions. Contemporaneously with these clearly radical movements there was - as in the case of the communal model - a more ambivalent type of development. Thus, women played an important role in the propagation of Arianism, but did not hold clerical positions.

Further, even orthodox authors are found employing the same terminology to describe their own leading ascetic women as they employed elsewhere to condemn others. Gregory of Nyssa characterizes Macrina as teacher and 'gynē andreia', Palladius attributes the same quality of a manly woman to his female ascetics, and the desert-mothers, although of male appearance, were acclaimed ascetic heroes. Within this grey area between extreme radicalism and outright orthodoxy, what was acceptable and what was not depended first on what was practical, and second on how publicly conspicuous the role of women was. The degree to which women occupied official functions and played a public role may have been crucial. However, indecision on the part of the 'orthodox' when defining women's position within the ascetic movement suggests that it was not sufficient simply to condemn unwanted developments. The position offered to women in 'heretical' movements was too attractive and too deeply rooted in the Scripture to lose its appeal in this way. Thus, there had to be a convincing alternative which would attract women without threatening the established hierarchy. It appears that, as before, the family was the answer.

Throughout the literature, ascetic relationships are formulated in family-terminology: the mother Church, the mother as leader of her ascetic community, the virgin as daughter of the Church, members of the clergy as spiritual fathers, the male ascetic as brother, and most important of all, Jesus Christ as the bride-groom. Whilst the motive of the heavenly marriage, the eternal union of the virginal soul with Jesus Christ, is also applied to men, it is of paramount importance in all writings addressed primarily to women. The parthenos' vow is phrased in terms similar to those of an engagement or a marriage. Macrina is dressed like a bride on her death bed. The true fulfillment of the ascetic woman, like that of her secular counterpart, lies in a successful marriage. In the virgin's case, this marriage takes place after her death, but it is the supreme marriage: to Christ the Saviour in the Kingdom of Heaven. The family model therefore provided the spiritual solution to integrate ascetic women, and to provide them with a status and a goal both attractive to them and acceptable to society.

The specific case of the institutionalization and organization of female asceticism, therefore, mirrors the general pattern of monastic

institutionalization. In both, we find extreme radicalism in conflict with the requirements of church hierarchy and social tradition. In both, specific new institutional models were developed which sought to bring extremists into an acceptable, and still traditional, framework.

In each case, an initial variety of such attempted solutions, was ultimately reduced to a limited number of persisting forms on doctrinal grounds, independent of their organizational merit.

