# Christian Gaza in Late Antiquity

*Edited by* Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony and Aryeh Kofsky

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In memory of Yaron Dan,
who explored the secrets of city life in late antique Palestine

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# INTRODUCTION

In mid-October 2000 a conference on Christianity in the region of Gaza in late antiquity was to take place in Jerusalem and Gaza. The groundwork had been laid during the time of rapprochement between Israelis and Palestinians, and hopes for future collaboration between Arab and Israeli scholars were high. Many scholars from various countries shared our enthusiasm for this topic—hitherto relatively neglected—and expressed their willingness to participate in the conference. Unfortunately, two weeks before the opening day, the al-Aqsa *intifada* broke out, resulting in the indefinite postponement of the conference. This book is based on some of the papers originally intended for the conference. Its aim is to launch a discussion on this ancient center of Christianity. Most of the articles are revised versions of the original papers; a few, however—for various reasons—retain their original informal nature, that of a conference presentation.

Gaza and its environs were the last pagan stronghold in late antique Palestine. From the early fifth century on, the city developed into a flourishing and important Christian center with a celebrated school of rhetoric and leading monastic communities scattered around it.

Much scholarly energy has been devoted to exploring the transition from paganism to Christianity in Gaza as well as its school of rhetoric and its prominent figures. Sporadic studies have treated the Gazan monastic center, and since the 1960s, new editions of texts and modern translations of its literature have appeared, thanks especially to the efforts of the monks of Solemes. Nevertheless the picture we have of this flourishing Christian community remains partial, and the story of Christianity in Gaza and its surroundings merits further investigation of the various aspects of its social, spiritual, and material history. The last decade has witnessed a growing interest in the topic, especially on the part of young scholars; several have chosen the topic for their dissertations and some of them have contributed to this volume.

It is not by chance that the book opens with a study of pagan culture in Gaza. Pagan festivals and spectacles survived well into the city's Christian era, forging its public life into a unique synthesis of the new and old worlds. Nicole Belayche's detailed depiction of pagan festivals in fourth-century Gaza testifies to pagan vitality in the city up to the beginning of the fifth century. She demonstrates the extent to

which the pagan mentality had persisted in the Christian community. Although buildings devoted to entertainment have not yet been found in Gaza, Zeev Weiss argues for their existence. He too, then, claims the continuity of pagan culture in Christianised Gaza.

Geographical and administrative aspects of the territory of late antique Gaza are traced by Leah Di Segni, emphasizing the difficulty inhering in any attempt to determine the exact administrative and ecclesiastical boundaries, and the changes they underwent in this period. Her article contains the first publication and analysis of a precious late-sixth century inscription from Horvat Gerarit, that plausibly reflects already existing rival ecclesiastical organizations of Chalcedonians and Monophysites in the village. A geographical and archaeological survey of the monasteries of Gaza by Yizhar Hirschfeld is presented here, for the first time. In addition to tracing the historical-geographical background of the monasteries, Hirschfeld, on the basis of their geographical location and archaeological remains, sketches their character.

Between the fourth and seventh centuries a monastic colony developed in the region of Gaza that continued the tradition of Scetis yet at the same time had its own intellectual profile. This uniqueness is reflected in its spiritual leaders and their literary works. Seven articles in this volume deal with various aspects of this prominent monastic center. With its consolidation in Gaza in the first half of the fifth century, and in the wake of the Council of Chalcedon, this monastic community became the stronghold of Monophysite resistance in Palestine. Jan-Eric Steppa and Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony devote their articles to this turbulent phase of Gazan monasticism, tackling especially the anti-Chalcedonian hagiography of John Rufus, Monophysite propagandist and biographer of Peter the Iberian. While Steppa focuses primarily on Rufus' *Pleroforiae* as a work of polemical propaganda, Bitton-Ashkelony concentrates on Rufus' *Life of Peter the Iberian*, analyzing the function of pilgrimage and the motif of *imitatio Mosis*, integral to Rufus' polemical tactics.

In the time of emperor Justin (518-527), Gazan monasticism changed its image and adopted a Chalcedonian stance. The new status of the leaders of Gazan monasticism in the sixth century can be seen especially in the rich *Correspondence* of Barsanuphius and John. This unique and fascinating collection is a gold mine for the study of late antique social and religious history in Palestine. Lorenzo Perrone explores the cultivation of the monastic value of spiritual direction and argues that

the *Correspondence* of Barsanuphius and John reflects a "school-situation"—one in which the great masters bequeath their monastic *paideia* of spiritual dynamism to their disciples. Perrone further perceives this spiritual direction as a "school of Christianity." The particular components of the monastic education in this circle are elaborated upon by François Neyt. According to Neyt, it revolved primarily around the study of the Holy Scriptures and emulation of the example set by the desert Fathers and recorded in their *vitae* and in the *Apophthegmata*. Another important aspect of the *Correspondence* raised by the late Lucien Regnault, is that of the social interaction between monks and laymen in the region of Gaza in the sixth century. Regnault emphasizes the secular and practical nature of the questions addressed by laymen to the holy men; theoretical questions were seldom raised.

Another theme present in the *Correspondence* of Barsanuphius and John is the second Origenist controversy of the mid-sixth century, which greatly troubled the Palestinian monastic world. Daniël Hombergen's article is devoted to the group of letters in the correspondence dealing with this issue and compares it with Cyril of Scythopolis' treatment of the controversy. Hombergen argues that the sixth-century Origenist controversy was also a clash of different conceptions of the spiritual life.

A further question concerning the monastic center of Barsanuphius and John, particularly its rise, is the disappearance of the Monophysite monastic centers of Gaza in the early sixth century. In the face of the scant extant evidence, Aryeh Kofsky speculates on what may have taken place in the monastic circle of Barsanuphius, John, Seridus, and Dorotheus: in reaction to the changing political ecclesiastical climate in the empire and in the region, there was a transformation into a kind of crypto-Monophysitism, the adoption of a Chalcedonian or neo-Chalcedonian veneer. The success of this dissimulating tactic can be seen in the absorption of these figures into Byzantine monastic orthodoxy in the ensuing centuries.

The classical legacy of fifth-and sixth-century Christian Gaza, and its challenge to the Christian community, is the subject of the two closing articles of this book. Yakov Ashkenazi discusses the interaction between the secular intelligentsia of Gaza—centered on the school of rhetoric—and the local ecclesiastical leadership. Ashkenazi focuses on Choricius, examining the attitude of the sophists to the Church and to religious life in Gaza. Rina Talgam's study explores the preservation of classical culture in Palestine and Arabia through an analysis

of the *Ekphrasis Eikonos* of Procopius of Gaza. She traces the manner in which mythological scenes were addressed in Byzantine art in the region, by comparing the case of Gaza with finds from the Christian city of Madaba, and from Sepphoris, a predominantly Jewish city of mixed population. The paintings and mosaic floors reveal the wide spectrum of ways in which the Byzantine artists treated themes derived from pagan mythology.

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We would finally like to thank all the participants in this volume for sharing with us their enthusiasm for this topic. We also thank Jonathan Cahana for his valuable help in preparing this volume for publication. A special debt of gratitude is owed to Evelyn Katrak for her rigorous editing of the manuscript.

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# PAGAN FESTIVALS IN FOURTH-CENTURY GAZA

Nicole Belayche

> "The pagans were celebrating a public festival (πάνδημον γάρ τοι τῶν ἐθνῶν ἑορτήν) and (holding) the usual spectacles (συνήθεις θέας ἀγόντων)".
>
> Eusebius, *De Martyribus Palaestinae* 3, 2.

The strength of pagan cults in Gaza, an *urbs gentilium* for Jerome, [1] before Christianization in the fifth century, is indisputable. Epigraphic and literary testimonies are numerous and clearly indicate the religious fabric of the city. Pagan cults were rooted in the ruling classes, for whom religious duties—such as a *Gazensis duumvir, Marnae idolo deditus*—were part of their political function.[2] When Porphyrius, newly ordained as bishop, arrived in Gaza in 394, "Christians … were few in number,"[3] less than three hundred in a population estimated at between 20, 000 and 25, 000 inhabitants.[4] The situation was no different in the surrounding villages. The monk Hilarion was born in 291 near Thabatha, a village five miles to the south of Gaza. His family of notables "worshipped the idols (*cum haberet parentes idolis deditos*)," as did the grandfather of the Christian historian Sozomen, a native of Bethelea northwest of Gaza, in the mid-fourth century.[5] "In the houses

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[1] Jerome, *Vita Hilarionis* 8, 5; 11, 7 (A. A. R. Bastiaensen and C. Moreschini, eds., Milan, 1975): *Gazenses adversarios Dei.* When Hilarion came back from Alexandria, he settled "in the desert" along the coast 7 miles from Maiuma, with some hermits.

[2] Jerome, *V. Hil.* 11, 3; cf. also 23, 5: under Julian, the magistrates went to arrest Hilarion with their lictors. Mark the Deacon, *Vita Porphyrii Gazensis* 41, 9-10 (H. Grégoire and M.-A. Kugener, eds., Paris, 1930): "in stripping the idols' devotees of their honours and public functions (τὰς ἀξίας τῶν εἰδωλομανῶν καὶ τὰ ἄλλα πολιτικὰ ὀφφίκια)."

[3] *V. Porph.* 11, 10.

[4] M. Broshi, "The Population of Western Palestine in the Roman-Byzantine Period," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 236 (1979), p. 5. Porphyrius was reproached for having built a church "too large in comparison with the small number of Christians in the city (ὀλίγων ὄντων τῶν Χριστιανῶν)," *V. Porph.* 93, 2-3 (in 402).

[5] Jerome, *V. Hil.* 2, 1. Cf. R. Van Dam, "From Paganism to Christianity at Late Antique Gaza," *Viator* 16 (1985), p. 9.

and villages (ἐν ταῖς οἰκίαις καὶ ἐν ταῖς κώμαις), there were still so many idols that no one could count them. In fact the demons [...] had carried out their bad deeds all over the city and the surrounding area (ἐπλήρωσαν τῆς πλάνης πᾶσαν αὐτῶν τὴν πόλιν καὶ περιοκίδα)."[6] Gaza's conversion did not occur until the beginning of the fifth century.[7] It was a hard process, one requiring recourse to imperial intervention, which had been lukewarm for a long time, and coercion by troops sent from Constantinople and Caesarea Maritima. This solidly anchored pagan tradition is not surprising in the major city of the region. Literary sources, such as the lives of Hilarion and Porphyrius, tell of the confrontation with the burgeoning Christian community in the fourth century. Although these apologetic works need to be used cautiously, their evidence enables us to reconstruct the pagan cults in southern Roman Palestine's largest city.[8] I shall focus on a less-studied aspect of pagan religious life in Gaza:[9] the periodic festivals during which citizens of Gaza and their neighbours from Maiuma, the port of Gaza (*Gaza emporium*),[10] came together, as in any city of the empire.

## *Regular Rituals*

To sketch in the religious background, I shall comment briefly on the regular rituals performed for the *theos patrios* Marnas in his temple—or throughout the city in times of distress—as well as those conducted in the eight public temples listed in the *Vita Porphyrii*.[11] Thanks to Mark

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[6] *V. Porph.* 64, 10-14.

[7] Jerome in 400/401, *Epistulae* 107, 2, lines 17-19 (J. Labort, ed., Paris, 1955): "At Gaza Marnas mourns in confinement and every moment expects his temple overturned." In fact, Hilarion was sent from Constantinople with an edict ordering the closing of the temples, but he left untouched the secret performance of rites in the Marneion, having been bribed by the devotees. *V. Porph.* 27, 16-19.

[8] For an extensive study of pagan cults in Gaza, see N. Belayche, *Iudaea-Palaestina: The Pagan Cults in Roman Palestine (Second to Fourth Century)*, Tübingen, 2001, pp. 232-256; 303-309.

[9] In general, studies on pagan Gaza emphasize the resistance, and then destruction, of the Marneion as an example of paganism's last stand. See B. Caseau, "ΠΟΛΕΜΕΙΝ ΛΙΘΟΙΣ. La désacralisation des espaces et des objets religieux païens durant l'Antiquité tardive," in *Le sacré et son inscription dans l'espace à Byzance et en Occident*, M. Kaplan (ed.), Paris, 2001, pp. 96-97.

[10] Jerome, *V. Hil.* 2, 7.

[11] "In the city (ἐν τῇ πόλει) there were eight public temples to the idols (ναοὶ

the Deacon, we can reconstruct quite well the rituals of the Marneion. His *Life of Porphyrius of Gaza* can be relied upon here, inasmuch as we consider only descriptive information, divested of all marvel, apology and potential manipulation, and since it can be compared with other data.[12] Pagan rites performed in the town were those of any contemporaneous Graeco-Roman city. Gaza became a Roman colony at the end of the third century, if we may rely on a bronze civic weight: Κολωνίας Γάζης.[13] Another civic weight mentions a ἱε(ρεύς ?)—more probably a Marnas priest[14] than a public pontiff in spite of the colonial mention.[15] This is the only epigraphic evidence as to the existence of pagan priests; but priesthood must have played

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εἰδωλων δημόσιοι ὀκτώ), that of Helios, that of Aphrodite, that of Apollo, that of Kore, that of Hecate, the so-called *Heroeion* (τὸ λεγόμενον Ἡρωεῖον), that of the city's Fortune (τῆς Τύχης τῆς πόλεως), which was called the *Tychaeon*, and the *Marneion*," *V. Porph.* 64, 4-7. See F.-M. Abel, *Histoire de la Palestine de la conquête d'Alexandre à l'invasion arabe*, Paris, 1952, vol. 2, pp. 244-246.

[12] For this particular study it is unnecessary to enter into the great historiographic debate that to this day surrounds this text and prompts some historians (among them R. MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire. A.D. 100-400*, New Haven and London, 1984, pp. 86-87) not to use it. For the development of this debate, see H. Grégoire and M.-A. Kugener (eds.), *Marc le Diacre, Vie de Porphyre évêque de Gaza*. Paris, 1930; P. Peeters "La vie géorgienne de Saint Porphyre de Gaza," *Acta Bollandiana* 59 (1941), pp. 65-216; Trombley's important appendix in F. R. Trombley, *Hellenic Religion and Christianization*. Leiden-New York, 1995, vol. 1, pp. 246-282; and more recently Z. Rubin, "Porphyrius of Gaza and the Conflict between Christianity and Paganism in Southern Palestine," in *Sharing the Sacred: Religious Contacts and Conflicts in the Holy Land*, A. Kofsky and G. G. Stroumsa (eds.), Jerusalem, 1998, pp. 31-66. Nor is it necessary to consider the questions arising from successive stages of the establishment of the Greek text, because philologists have always based them on passages that were not affected by pagan information. We may also avoid the problems posed by the later Greek hagiographic version based on the first, late fourth- to fifth-century Syriac one, which concerns the clash of authority between the bishoprics of Maiuma and Gaza. For G. Mussies, "Marnas, God of Gaza," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* II.18.4 (1990), p. 2457, the original version was in Greek, and in Trombley's opinion, the text aimed at supporting the cause defended by Porphyrius at the Council of Diospolis in 415, grouping the two sees of Gaza and Maiuma under his single authority.

[13] *Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie* [*IGLS*] n° 1904. L. Di Segni, *Dated Greek Inscriptions from Palestine from the Roman and Byzantine Periods*, Ph.D. diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1997, p. 117.

[14] Mark the Deacon, *V. Porph.* 65, 4.

[15] It is preserved in the *Bibliothèque Nationale* (Paris). See C. A. M. Glucker, *The City of Gaza in the Roman and Byzantine Periods*, Oxford, 1987, p. 148 no. 42/1. Di Segni, *Dated Greek Inscriptions*, pp. 556-557, no. 191*, reads *hierophantes*: Κολωνίας Γάζης ἐπι Ἡρώδου Διοφάντου ἱε(ροφάντου) ? The inscription is unusual because in a Roman colony on a very official document, we would expect to see the citizen's *tria nomina*.

an important civic role for it to be mentioned in this kind of public document. The official cult thus came under the city, as in Caesarea Maritima. Places of public worship were urban and suburban as well. When Porphyrius reached his new see, during a persistent drought, the pagans were appealing in vain to Marnas, "Lord of the rains,"[16] as was the case during the terrible drought of Ahab's reign.[17] Beside sacrifices and prayers in the urban temple during a seven-day ritual ("after having, for seven whole days, constantly chanted hymns"), the faithful organized "processions outside the town (ὕμνους καὶ ἐξερχόμενοι ἔξω τῆς πόλεως) to a spot they called 'the place of prayer' (εἰς τόπον καλούμενον προσευχῆς)."[18] This was doubtless an open-air shrine with an altar erected inside a sacred precinct. The deacon's description of the rituals corresponds perfectly with what we know about pagan practices throughout the Roman Mediterranean world. During the procession, acts were performed that constitute the bulk of pagan ritual: hymns (ὕμνους), sacrifices (θυσίας), prayers in the form of vows (εὐχας) and processions, [19] to which may be added libations with the vases the priests had done their best to protect when the temple was attacked.[20] We should not let ourselves be misled by Porphyrius' biographer's deliberate insistence on presenting this paganism as essentially mystical, if not magical, these being the practices that the Christians considered most diabolic.

## Ἡ πανήγυρις Ἀδριανή

I shall examine more scrupulously the great public festivals, because our knowledge about them remains unclear on some points. There is evidence of two festivals in Gaza during the Roman period. The *Chronicon Pascale* notes in 135 the panegyry where the surplus of Jewish slaves were sold—a combined religious festival and fair, as in Mambre

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[16] Mark the Deacon, *V. Porph.* 19, 7-10: "And the zealots of the idol-cult, assembled at the Marneion (Συναχθέντες δὲ οἱ τῆς εἰδωλομανίας εἰς τὸ Μαρνεῖον), made a lot of sacrifices and vows (πολλὰς θυσίας καὶ εὐχὰς ἐποίουν) for this reason : they pretend that Marnas is the Lord of the rains (τὸν Μαρνᾶν κύριον εἶναι τῶν ὄμβρων), and that he is the same as Zeus (τὸν δὲ Μαρνᾶν λέγουσιν εἶναι τὸν Δία)."

[17] 1 Kings 17-18.

[18] Mark the Deacon, *V. Porph.* 19, 11-12. There is no Jewish influence in the use of the word "*proseuchè*," a technical word designating a synagogue.

[19] *V. Porph.* 19, 8.

or Scythopolis. The anonymous seventh-century chronicler testifies that the festival was held right up to the Byzantine period: "Still now (καὶ ἕως τοῦ νῦν), this festival (ἡ πανήγυρις ἐκείνη) is called Hadriane (Ἀδριανή)."[21] It had been founded in 130 to honour the emperor's visit[22] and can be listed among the ceremonies of the imperial cult, at least at that time.

Precise information about the rituals is lacking, but we can compare them with the better-attested ceremonies in Mambre, listed with those of Gaza in a passage of the *Avodah Zarah* treatise in the Jerusalem Talmud: the *yarid* of "Gaza, Akko and Botna [the Terebinth of Mambre] only for the latter of which is there any certainty of an idolatrous purpose."[23] Away from the antique rural setting of Hebron in Judaea, [24] the Mambre summer festivals were celebrated around a tree (ἡ δρῦς Μαμβρῆ ἡ καὶ τερέβινθος, according to the Madaba mosaic inscription)[25] and Abraham's sacred well. Rituals described by fourth- and fifth-century Christian writers—Jerome and above all Sozomen[26]—portray a votive festival, καθ' ὑπόσχεσιν, [27] with sacrifices—evidenced also by a little altar decorated with rosettes and the remains of animal bones and cocks' feet, found in the basement of Constantine's basilica.[28] Hadrian favoured the shrine; he sanctioned monumental improvements to a place about which our sources are sadly silent. Crowds of devotees of all faiths—pagans, Jews and Chris-

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[20] *V. Porph.* 65, 5. The furnishings were the same as in the other temples of the city. *V. Porph.* 65, 14.

[21] *Chronicon Paschale* I, 474 (ed. L. Dindorf).

[22] G. F. Hill, *Catalogue of Greek Coins of Palaestina in the British Museum*, London, 1914, p. LXVII; Glucker, *The City of Gaza*, p. 40.

[23] *y. Abodah Zarah* 1, 4, 39d. On the location of the festivals and the meaning of their names, see I. Lévy, "Cultes et rites syriens dans le Talmud," *Revue des études juives* 43 (1901), pp. 183-205; A. E. Mader, *Mambre, die Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen im heiligen Bezirk Râmet el-Halîl in Südpalästina, 1926-1928*, Fribourg, 1957, pp. 289-293 (*Der Terebinthen-Markt in Talmud und Mischna*).

[24] Josephus, *Bellum Judaicum* 4, 533: "at a distance of six furlongs from the city."

[25] *IGLS, Jord.* 2, no. 153-87. Cf. Eusebius, *Onomasticon* 6, 13; 76, 1-3 (Ed. Klostermann).

[26] Jerome, *Commentariorum in Jeremiam libri VI* 31; Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2, 4 (G. Sabbah, ed., Paris, 1983); Mader, *Mambre*, pp. 288-289.

[27] Sozomen, *HE* 2, 4, 4.

[28] A. E. Mader, "Chronique. Les fouilles allemandes au Ramet El Khalil," *Revue biblique* 39 (1930), pp. 101-102; idem, *Mambre*, p. 137 no. 6 and pl. LXXVI. See there also the remains of a stone figure featuring a lamb.

tians—"praying to the God of the universe,"[29] filled the big market, which was held at the same time as the religious festival and which the Talmud forbade to Jews.[30]

Given the lack of ritual evidence for Gaza's panegyry, it is impossible to ascertain that the Jerusalem Talmud had this in mind when it mentioned the Gaza *yarid*.[31] I. Lévy, in a valuable study, interpreted *yarid* as being a procession to the spring, with the Hierapolis panegyry as model.[32] This type of festival is common to several Anatolian, Egyptian and Syrian cults. Lucian described it in his treatise on the *Syria Dea*, [33] the ceremony consisting of a procession and a *lavatio* of sacred objects and the cult statue, as is known to be so for the *Mater deorum* even in Rome.

The festival in Mambre and the panegyry in Gaza may be linked to establish the date of the Gaza festival. We must start with the date of the fall of Bether, the last Jewish refuge, fixed on the ninth of the month of Ab (end of July- beginning of August) by rabbinical tradition. Since Jewish slaves were first sold on the market in Mambre and the surplus transported to Gaza, this gathering could have taken place only at the end of the summer or very beginning of the autumn (September?), but not after November, at which time navigation was interrupted, since some of these of slaves were to be taken to Egypt.

## *The* Consualia

The rites of the second festival—a chariot race—are clearer, but the name is strange. Jerome calls the feast the *Consualia*.[34] In the Roman

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[29] Sozomen, *HE* 2, 4, 3.

[30] *y. Abod. Zar.* 1, 4, 38d. Hadrian sold the Jewish slaves there; Jerome, *Comm. Jer.* 68, 6; *Commentariorum in Zachariam libri III* 3, 11, 4; S. Krauss, *Talmudische Archäologie*, Leipzig, 1911 (= Hildesheim, 1966), vol. 2, pp. 356-361. See the study by A. Kofsky, "Mamre: a Case of a Regional Cult ?" in *Sharing the Sacred*, Kofsky and Stroumsa (eds.), pp. 19-30. J. E. Taylor (*Christians and the Holy Places: The Myth of Jewish-Christian Origins*, Oxford, 1993, pp. 86-95) examines mainly the Christian roots of the Constantinian sacralization of the place, which she considers a deliberate creation. On the coincidence of religious festivals and fairs, see R. MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire*, New Haven and London, 1981, pp. 46-48.

[31] See n. 23, above.

[32] Lévy, "Cultes et rites," pp. 192-205.

[33] Lucian, *De Syria dea* 47-49, the "descents towards the lake (ἐς τὴν λίμνην καταβάσεις)" and the river Euphrates (ἐς θάλασσαν).

[34] Jerome, *V. Hil.* 11, 4-11.

calendar, the *Consualia* took place at the underground altar of the Circus Maximus on 21 August and 15 December. They consisted of "races for unbridled and unharnessed horses" that were held after a sacrifice to Consus, the god of stored grain.[35] Jerome knew of the mythographic tradition that dated the rape of the Sabine women to the December festival. He writes that seven laps of the course were run in honour of the god Consus, *quasi conciliorum deo*, according to the etymological exegesis of the god's name.[36] The monk does not link this festival to the local god Marnas; but within the context of religious confrontation described in the *Life of Hilarion*, the two chariots opposing each other during the race could have supported the two rival factions, pagan and Christian. While pagans and Christians were assembled at the circus, before the race, the Christian charioteer begged Hilarion to counter the "diabolical imprecations (*daemoniacis quibusdam imprecationibus*)" pronounced in the pagan duumvir's camp (*Marnae idolo deditum*), to support their cause and work some magical constraint on the race.[37] "Agonistic curses" are well attested during this late period. They reveal the importance of socio-political issues embedded in spectacles, here exacerbated by the religious rivalry.[38] We know their function from a *defixio* tablet depicting a circus, found in a tomb in Carthage. It quotes twenty-eight horses' names: "I call upon you, devil who lives here. I hand these horses over to you (*trado tibi os equos*) in order that you detain them and that they get tangled up [in their harness] (*ut deteneas illos et inplicentur*) and can no longer move on (*nec se movere possent*)."[39] Jerome writes that the request embar-

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[35] Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Antiquitates romanae* II, 31, 2; G. Dumézil, *Idées romaines*, Paris, 1980², pp. 289-304; J. Scheid, "À propos de certaines fêtes d'été. Réflexions en marge d'un livre de G. Dumézil," *Annali Archeologia e Storia Antica*, *Istituto Orientale di Napoli* 2 (1980), pp. 49-50.

[36] Jerome, *V. Hil.* 11, 4.

[37] *V. Hil.* 11, 3-5.

[38] A curse graffito was discovered in the stadium in Sebaste. See J. W. Crowfoot, G. M. Crowfoot and K. M. Kenyon, *Samaria-Sebaste: Reports of the Work of the Joint Expedition in 1931-1933 and of the British Expedition in 1935*, *vol. III: The Objects at Samaria*, London, 1954, p. 40 no. 36. For a curse tablet found in Scythopolis, see *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* 35 (1985), 1566. On the role of the circus factions in the redefinition of the balance of power in urban societies, see C. Roueché, *Performers and Partisans at Aphrodisias in Roman and Late Periods*, London, 1993. For Christian magic, see M. W. Meyer and R. Smith, eds., *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power*, Princeton, 1999.

[39] A. Audollent, *Defixionum tabellae*, Paris, 1904, no. 233, quoted in F. Graf, *La magie dans l'Antiquité gréco-romaine*, Paris, 1994, p. 179. On the role of the "links," see

rassed the monk, who considered the issue to be derisory. Can one perhaps also detect in his reaction a condemnation of practices that scarcely seemed "Christian" to him? Hilarion finally cedes to the requests. The effect of the water blessed by the holy monk to oppose the demons was the same as that of the pagan curses: "Some ran with worn-out bridles, others were shackled" (*hi avolant, illi praepediuntur*).[40] The public well understood the divine challenge and paid tribute to the magical powers of the monk and his God: "The spectators let out a great shout and the pagans themselves cried out (*ita ut ethnici quoque ipsi concreparent*): 'Marnas is vanquished by Christ'"(*Marnas victus est a Christo*).[41]

Although Jerome pointed out that the *Consualia* tradition was preserved in *Romanis urbibus*, and although Gaza had apparently been granted Roman colony status, the mention of this festival in connection with such a Roman tradition is surprising in a city that had given little, if any, recognition to Romanness.[42] Devotion to Consus might be conceived of farmers gathering in the harvest in August and taking it out of store in December; rich Gaza landowners would therefore have an interest in honouring a deity who protected the fruit of the earth. But apparently Marnas as "Lord of the rains" already filled this function, and efficiently enough for the elite to have defended him vigorously even after his disappearance. Independent of this adapted function, the mention of this festival as part of the Roman calendar could prove that it had become an imperial calendar for the Roman "offshoots," as we know to be the case for other, better-documented, Roman colonies.[43]

We can go further and compare the Gaza *Consualia* with an analogous situation in Scythopolis-Beth Shean. The Talmud mentions another

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ibid., pp. 142-147. See also J. G. Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*, Oxford, 1992, pp. 18-21. Rituals of the same kind are reported in rabbinical sources without being specifically connected with pagans. See S. Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine: Studies in the Life and Manners of Jewish Palestine in the II-IV Centuries CE*, New York, 1942, pp. 108-113.

[40] The same paralysing effect is seen in Martin of Tours' blocking a pagan burial in Gaul. See Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Sancti Martini* 12, 3-4.

[41] Jerome, *V. Hil.* 11, 11.

[42] E. Pottier, "Consus, Consualia," in *Dictionnaire des Antiquités grecques et romaines* [*DAGR*], Paris, 1877-1919, vol. 1, p. 1484, does not mention any *Consualia* outside of Rome, where the Consus altar stood.

[43] M. Crawford, ed., *Roman Statutes*, London, 1996, vol. I, pp. 400 ff., ch. 64 ff, esp. pp. 70-71.

festival there with a Roman name. "R. Zeira sent R. Bebai to buy him a small web [yarn] from the *Saturnalia* of Beshan."[44] Roman *Saturnalia* were celebrated after the harvest had been brought in, at the winter solstice. An acclamation opened the ceremonies, which continued with a time of jubilation marked by inversion rituals.[45] Disappointingly, the rabbinical treatise is mute on the festival's proceedings,[46] which could have confirmed an influential Roman presence, since *Io Saturnalia! Bona Saturnalia!* served as a rallying cry for Romans abroad. It tells us only that it coincided with a fair that took place regularly during all big festivals because of the gathering of crowds and their needs.[47] This type of panegyry, in which the commercial is carried on the back of the religious, existed in Mambre, as noted, where Hadrian took advantage of it to sell the prisoners of the Bar Kokhba war. That the Roman-style *Saturnalia* enlivened the city of Scythopolis, where Roman influence was evident only through its military presence in the surroundings and which received colonial status late—probably during the Tetrarchy—seems as astonishing as in Gaza. The adoption of the Roman calendar demanded a minimum of Romanization. Besides, the Talmudic Sages knew about the principal Roman rites, such as those for the New Year,[48] but tended to use generic terms for the various

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[44] *y. Abod. Zar.* 1, 3; B. Lifshitz, "Scythopolis. L'histoire, les institutions et les cultes de la ville à l'époque hellénistique et impériale," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* II.8 (1977), p. 276; M. Goodman, *State and Society in Roman Galilee*, Totowa, 1983, p. 48.

[45] J.-A. Hild, "Saturnalia," *DAGR*, vol. 4, 2, pp. 1080-1082; W. H. Roscher, "Saturnus," in idem, ed., *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie*, Leipzig, 1884-1937, vol. 4, cols. 436-440.

[46] Apart from the date, "*la 'Gemara' … demeure quasiment muette pour tout ce qui touche aux Saturnales*", M. Hadas-Lebel, "Le paganisme à travers les sources rabbiniques des II^e^ et III^e^ siècles. Contribution à l'étude du syncrétisme dans l'empire romain," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* II.19.2 (1979), p. 430; L. Vana, *Le traité de la Mishna 'Abodah Zarah : Traduction, notes, analyse. Contribution à l'étude des relations entre Juifs et païens en Judée romaine*, Thèse EPHE V^e^ Section, Paris, 1996, pp. 356-360. Lifshitz's argument (Lifshitz, "Scythopolis," p. 276) that the "material" recalls ritual *mappae* known from Martial, is not sufficient because Scythopolis was famous for its material. See *Expositio totius mundi* 31, J. Rougé, ed, Paris, 1966, p. 164.

[47] Rabbi Hiyya b. Abba also asked for sandals to be bought at the Tyre festival, *y. Abod. Zar.* 1, 4, 39b; R. MacMullen, "Market-Days in the Roman Empire," *Phoenix* 24 (1970), pp. 333-341; P. Debord, *Aspects sociaux et économiques de la vie religieuse dans l'Antiquité gréco-romaine*, Leiden, 1982, pp. 11-17.

[48] On Roman festivals in the Talmud, see Krauss, *Talmudische Archäologie*, pp. 122-127; M. Jacobs, "Theatres and Performances as Reflected in the Talmud Yerushalmi," in *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture*, P. Schäfer (ed.), Tübingen, 1998,

pagan practices and names of gods.[49] One can therefore put forward the hypothesis that the term "Saturnalia" implied here a generic sense of a local festival with loose behaviour, perhaps in winter. In this respect, should we consider that in Gaza also the name "Consualia" derived from the similarity that Jerome noticed of its ceremonies to rituals he knew from Rome? It is impossible to be sure.

In the sixth century, the people of Gaza celebrated the *Brumalia*, a winter solstice festival, originally held in honour of Dionysus Bromios (Quivering), god of seeds and wine.[50] We know of it only through a speech given on this occasion, in honour of Justinian, by the rhetorician Choricius, whose comments were replete with classical references, in the fashion of the Sophist school in Gaza, and who invoked Zeus' name as the creator of the world.[51] As with the springtime *Rosalia*, we could be dealing here with an earlier pagan winter festival that crossed into the Christian empire; but, apart from the date, it is impossible to relate it to Jerome's *Consualia* because of the dearth of ceremonial information.

### *No Maiouma in Gaza*

In the historiographic tradition, some scholars have imagined another festival: the *Maiouma*. No festival of that kind is explicitly mentioned by the sources in Gaza or Maiuma.[52] However, Franz Cumont, taking as a base point the shrine consecrated by Gaza's citizens to Marnas in Ostia under Gordian III, linked the Ostia festival called *Maiouma*

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vol. 1, pp. 334-336; G. Veltri, "Römische Religion an der Peripherie des Reiches: Ein Kapitel rabbinischer Rhetorik," in *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture*, P. Schäfer and C. Hezser (eds.), Tübingen, 2000, vol. 2, pp. 104-132.

[49] *m. Sanhedrin* 7, 6; S. Lieberman, "Palestine in the Third and Fourth Centuries," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 36 (1946), p. 344; S. Krauss, *Griechische und lateinische Lehnwörter in Talmud, Midrasch und Targum*, Berlin, 1898, *s.v.* "Mercurius," pp. 353-354. For the perversion of pagan gods' names, see *b. Sanhedrin* 63b; D. Flusser, "Paganism in Palestine," in *The Jewish People in the First Century*, S. Safrai and M. Stern (eds.), Assen-Amsterdam, 1976, vol. 1, p. 1075.

[50] E. Patlagean, "Christianisme et mythologie," in Y. Bonnefoy, ed., *Dictionnaire des mythologies*, Paris, 1981, pp. 173-174.

[51] Choricius of Gaza, *Oratio in Iustiniani Brumalia* 1-2, R. Foerster and E. Richsteig (eds.), p. 175; F.-M. Abel, "Gaza au VI$^{e}$ siècle d'après le rhéteur Chorikios," *Revue biblique* 40 (1931), pp. 6-10.

[52] Glucker, *The City of Gaza*, p. 54: "the widespread water festival Maioumas, for which there is no evidence at Gaza."

to a Marnas festival:[53] "*c'est probablement avec le culte du dieu de Gaza que s'introduisit la fête du Maïoumas.*"[54] In consequence, the Belgian scholar's authority gave credence to the idea that the *Maiouma* was a Marnas festival exported to the West.[55] Admittedly the nature of the *Maiouma* feast is obscure and our sources on these Graeco-Syrian festivals are complex.[56] "*Que tirer de textes aussi disparates et embarrassants?*"[57] Our informants are mostly Byzantine lexicographers or late chronographers[58] acting as antiquarians, who give the same name to different festivals. In addition, the festival's name conceals a place-name, Maiuma. There is no reason to link the *Maiouma* festival specifically with Gaza's harbour on the basis of the toponymic argument.[59] In the sense of "port of," we know of the Maiuma of Ascalon, the Maiuma of the Tyrians and even the Maiuma of the Alexandrians, which was none other than the island of Pharos.[60] The Madaba map features a town in

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[53] Perhaps on the basis of Baronius or K. Stark, *Gaza und die philistäische Küste*, Leipzig, 1852**,** pp. 596-598, but he did not quote them. In 1904, E. Saglio ("Maiumas," *DAGR*, vol. 3, 2, p. 1555) cautiously surmised a link.

[54] F. Cumont, *Les religions orientales dans le paganisme romain*, Paris, 1929[4], p. 253 n. 26; also p. 102 more vaguely on the place: "*l'on célébrait au printemps sur le rivage d'Ostie, comme en Orient, la fête aquatique et licencieuse du Maïoumas.*"

[55] M. Floriani Squarciapino, *Culti orientali ad Ostia*, Leiden, 1962, p. 62; R. Turcan, *Les cultes orientaux dans le monde romain*, Paris, 1989, p. 168: "*Pour [le dieu ] de Gaza, Marnas, on célébrait en mai au port d'Ostie et à Rome même les Maïoumas, fête populaire…*"; G. W. Bowersock, "Polytheism and Monotheism in Arabia and the Three Palestines," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 51 (1997), p. 6: "Gaza with a port of the same name and a lively pagan cult of Marnas is a prime candidate for the celebration of the Maioumas." However, no such link is made in W. Drexler, "Maiumas," in Roscher, *Lexicon*, vol. 2, cols. 2286-2288; K. Preisendanz and F. Jacoby, "Maïumas," in *Paulys Realencyclopädie des Klassischen Alterumswissenschaft*, Stuttgart, 1893-1978, vol. 14, 1, cols. 610-613; or P. Chuvin, *Chronique des derniers païens. La disparition du paganisme dans l'Empire romain, du règne de Constantin à celui de Justinien*. Paris, 1991[2], pp. 272-275. For J. Carcopino, *Virgile et les origines d'Ostie*, Paris, 1919, p. 145, it was an archaic Roman festival honouring Maia, Vulcan's consort: "*pas plus de rapports entre Gaza et la fête dite Maiuma qu'entre Gaza et Ostie*" (p. 147). Carcopino, then, considered that the *Maiouma* had spread from Ostia to the East.

[56] For a comprehensive study, see N. Belayche, "Une panégyrie antiochéenne: le Maïouma," in *Colloque Intern. Antioche de Syrie. Histoire, images et traces de la ville antique* (Lyon, 4-6 October 2001), *Topoi* (forthcoming 2004).

[57] Carcopino, *Virgile*, p. 146.

[58] In 1716 a research on *Maioumas* was published in a "*Collectio dissertationum rarissimarum historico-philologicarum*," quoted by Drexler, "Maiumas," col. 2286, and Preisendanz and Jacoby, "Maïumas," col. 612.

[59] G. Schmitt, *Siedlungen Palästinas in griechisch-römischer Zeit*, Wiesbaden, 1995, p. 239; K. Mentzu-Meimare, "Der 'ΧΑΡΙΕΣΤΑΤΟΣ ΜΑΙΟΥΜΑΣ,'" *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 89 (1996), pp. 60-63.

[60] For *Maïouma* of the Tyrians see *IGLS* Tyr, 1977, no. 151. For the dedication

Jordan, between Callirrhoe and El-Kerak, that is also inscribed as *Maioumas*.[61] It is a fact that the most famous Maiuma was the port of Gaza, *Gazae emporium*, [62] endowed with city rights and the status of an episcopal see by Constantine as well as a new, imperial name: Constantia. Julian cancelled its city rights, but the bishopric remained.

In literature, the three *Maioumas* explicitly named took place in Antioch, Ostia and Constantinople. Only two of these towns are really coastal. The three epigraphic testimonies to *Maioumas*, in third-century Nicea, in Tyre and in Gerasa in 535, are also divided between the coast and the interior, [63] and only Tyre offers the toponym and the feast as well. All the evidence refers to water and/or buildings for aquatic festivals, increasingly appreciated in the later period.[64] In Gerasa the inscription recalls a building equipped with pools, [65] as in Aphrodisias in Caria, where a pool still shows an honorific inscription dedicated to a *maioumarchès*.[66] Malalas mentions the Antiochean *Maiouma*, with the foundation of the Olympic games and the financial reforms for festivals decreed by the emperor Commodus.[67] The sixth-century Antioch chronicler ranks it amongst the "Orgies" (τῶν λεγομένων Ὀργίων). It was a triennial (κατὰ ἔτη γ') festival that "lasted for the whole month of May (which is also called *artemisios* in the Greek calendar), hence its name" (ἐστὶ τοῦ λεγομένου Μαϊουμᾶ διὰ τὸ ἐν τῷ

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in Hammat-Gader of a *scholasticos* native of the "*Maïouma* of the Tyrians," see L. Di Segni, "The Greek Inscriptions of Hammat Gader," in *The Roman Baths of Hammat Gader, Final Report*, Y. Hirschfeld (ed.), Jerusalem, 1997, pp. 194-195 no. 7. On the *Maïouma* of Ascalon and of the Alexandrians see Preisendanz and Jacoby, "Maïumas," col. 612.

[61] M. Avi Yonah, *The Madaba Mosaic Map*, Jerusalem, 1954, p. 41 & pl. III; *IGLS* XXI, Jord. 2, no. 153, 15; Schmitt, *Siedlungen Palästinas*, p. 109.

[62] Jerome, *V. Hil.* 2, 7.

[63] L. Robert, "Epigraphica. Inscription de Nicée," *Revue des études grecques* 49 (1936), pp. 9-14 (= *Inschriften von Nikaia* 63); J. and L. Robert, *Bulletin épigraphique* 1978, no. 522, 599; C. B. Welles, "The Inscriptions," in *Gerasa*, C.H. Kraeling (ed.), New Haven, 1938, no. 279 line 4; *Année épigraphique* 1996, 1596.

[64] For aquatic games equipment in theatres, e.g. in Caesarea Maritima, see J. Ringel, *Césarée de Palestine. Étude historique et archéologique*, Paris, 1975, p. 49.

[65] Mentzu-Meimare, "Der 'ΧΑΡΙΕΣΤΑΤΟΣ ΜΑΙΟΥΜΑΣ'," pp. 69-73. See also G. Greatrex and J. W. Watt, "One, Two or Three Feasts? The Brytae, the Maiuma and the May Festival at Edessa," *Oriens Christianus* 83 (1999), p. 11.

[66] C. Roueché and J. M. Reynolds, *Aphrodisias in Late Antiquity*, London, 1989, p. 69 no. 40.

[67] J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *Antioch: City and Imperial Administration in the Late Roman Empire*, Oxford, 1972, pp. 230-231.

μαΐῳ τῷ καὶ ἀρτεμισίῳ μηνί). The festival consisted of particularly brightly lit processions and nocturnal theatrical performances (σκηνικῆς ἑορτῆς τῆς νυκτερινῆς) which re-enacted the mysteries of Dionysus and Aphrodite (ὅπερ ἐστὶ μυστηρίων Διονύσου καὶ Ἀφροδίτης)[68] and concluded with banquets.[69] The Antioch festivals were legendary. Libanius bragged that his town "was the nearest to a panegyry."[70] That was precisely the reproach of the austere Julian: "These festivals, all jubilation and pleasure ... with their ballet performances uniting men, adolescents and pretty women aplenty"; "Many waste ... crazy sums for the *Maiouma* banquets" (εἰς τὰ δεῖπνα τοῦ μαϊουμᾶ).[71]

The Antioch festivities organized in the theatre are hardly comparable to the Ostia *Maiouma* that John Lydus, who inspired the *Souda*, describes. For the Lydian author, it was part of the May festivities during which the Romans celebrated "the festival of *Rosalia*" (ἡ ἑορτὴ τῶν Ῥοσαλίων). In sixth-century Gaza, a spring festival was held that the local rhetorician Choricius called "the day of roses." This must have been a Christianized perpetuation of the *Rosalia* that had been celebrated during the Roman period.[72] It was held in the spring like the *Maiouma*, but with regard to Ostia, John Lydus distinguishes between them. "Elsewhere (ηὔχοντο δέ), the merchants made vows to Maia and to Hermes, asking them to look favourably on their affairs.[73] They called the celebration of this festival 'making the *Maiouma*' (μαϊουμίζειν), which comes from *maiouma*, a festival (πανήγυρις) that

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[68] Mussies, "Marnas," p. 2453, concludes that the *Maiouma* in Ostia was part of the Adonis cult. The licentious behaviour would suit it, but the participants' games—pushing one another into the water in Ostia—are more unclear.

[69] See John Malalas, *Chronographia* XII, 285 (ed. L. Dindorf) and XIV, 65, for a *Maiouma* in 441 in addition to other feasts (chariot races and Olympic games).

[70] Libanius, *Orationes* XI, 265 (ed. F. Foerster).

[71] *Orat.* VII (*Misopogon*) 14 [346c] & 35 [362d]. For Roueché and Reynolds, *Aphrodisias*, this reproach is proof of the non-religious nature of the feast. John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Matthaeum* VII, 6 (PG 57:79), castigated those who were pushing for nude aquatic spectacles; G. Traversari, *Gli spettacoli in acqua nel teatro tardo-antico*, Rome, 1960, pp. 48-51. Libanius reported a new licentious feast in Daphne, but he did not call it *Maiouma*. Chuvin, *Chronique des derniers païens*, p. 273, elaborates on the identification.

[72] J.-A. Hild, "Rosalia," *DAGR* 4, 2, p. 895: a happy May festival dedicated to Flora. The *rosaliae signorum* are celebrated on 31 May in the *Feriale Duranum*.

[73] See Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 1, 12, 19 (J. Willis, ed., Leipzig, 1963): "During this month, all the merchants offer a sacrifice to Maia and Mercurius." For Carcopino, *Virgile*, p. 147, the feast would have been named after the goddess, Vulcan's consort, rather than after the spring date.

takes place in Rome in the month of May. Invading the coastal town which is called Ostia, the leading men of Rome give themselves over to pleasure (ἡδυπαθεῖν) by throwing one another into the sea (ἐν τοῖς θαλαττίοις ὕδασιν). This is why the time of this festival has also been called *Maioumas* (ὅθεν καὶ Μαϊουμᾶς ὁ τῆς τοιαύτης ἑορτῆς καιρὸς ὠνομάζετο)."[74] According to literary tradition, [75] these spring water sports, featured as shameless and licentious, [76] had nothing in common with the Syrian theatrical, mystic rites, except for the condemnation they incurred from the authorities. An edict issued by Arcadius and Honorius on 25 April 396 had authorized these festivals, after an earlier ban (*ut Maiumae provincialibus laetitia redderetur*), on condition that they respected decency (*honestas et verecundia castis moribus*). However, three years later (2 October 399), the same emperors withdrew their authorization because of the "license"(*licentia*) and the "shameful and indecent spectacle"(*foedum atque indecorum spectaculum*).[77] Finally, with regard to Constantinople in 777, a Byzantine chronographer writes that Leon IV "made a *Maiouma*" (ποιήσας Μαϊουμᾶν) in the Sophianae baths, during the celebration of his triumph over the Arabs.[78] The formula recalls the manner in which the Midrashic source points out that each of the twelve tribes had their *yamasioth* (or *mayumsaoth*, depending on the manuscript), and that a thirteenth was the property of all of them.[79] Etymology veers toward a Semitic origin for the word, [80] which could have been Hellenized and brought closer to

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[74] John Lydus, *De mensibus* IV, 80 (ed. R. Wünsch, pp. 132-133) = *Suidae Lexicon*, *s.v.* "Maïumas" (ed. A. Adler, pp. 308-309); Carcopino, *Virgile*, pp. 145-149. It is difficult to understand why the author talks about a "*bain rituel que prenaient les matrones romaines lors des fêtes dites Maiuma*," if not because he has extrapolated it from Maïa as *Terra-Mater*.

[75] The date of the Gerasa inscription—November—cannot serve as a chronological argument for the feast if it commemorates the mending of the pools.

[76] For the same presentation by the rabbis, see E. E. Urbach, "The Rabbinical Laws of Idolatry in the Second and Third Centuries in the Light of Archaeological and Historical Facts," *Israel Exploration Journal* 9 (1959), pp. 242-243.

[77] *Codex Theodosianus* XVI, 6, 1 & 2 (T. Mommsen and P. Meyer, eds., Berlin, 1905). For Carcopino, *Virgile*, p. 148, the date of the two laws (April and October) allows placing the feast in Ostia in August, close to the time of the *Volcanalia*, 23-24 August.

[78] Theophanes, *Chronographia* I, 541, in Preisendanz and Jacoby, "Maïumas," col. 611; Mentzu-Meimare, "Der 'ΧΑΡΙΕΣΤΑΤΟΣ ΜΑΙΟΥΜΑΣ'," pp. 64-66.

[79] *Midrash Rabbah Leviticus* V, 3 (ed. Sancino, pp. 64-65). Cf. Krauss, *Griechische und lateinische Lehnwörter*, *s.v.* "μαιουμᾶς ," p. 334; idem, *Talmudische Archäologie*, vol. 3, p. 127; 298 n. 365; Mussies, "Marnas," p. 2453.

[80] *Mai* and *yam* in Hebrew: water and seashore. See Preisendanz and Jacoby,

the Greek word *maia*, either by a coincidence in the calendar or by etymological word play.[81] Therefore when *Maiouma* means a feast, [82] it is a generic name for a Graeco-Syrian festival[83] with two components: water and rejoicing[84]—ὁ χαρίεστατος Μαειουμᾶς, according to the expression from Gerasa. "Those who celebrate the *Maiouma* spend agreeable days," recalls the Tyre inscription.[85] Whatever the *Maiouma* was, it has no special link with nor does it originate from Marnas, Gaza's *theos patrios*, despite the close and regular relationships of that city with the cities of the Syrian coast.

### *Pagan-style Panegyries in Christian Gaza*

Solemn dedications of sixth-century churches still gave off a whiff of pagan panegyries with their festive look.[86] Under Justinian (532 or 533), the celebration of the *Brumalia* gave the famous local orator Choricius an occasion for a ceremonial speech. Faithful to polished stylistic rules, he was inspired by Pindar and made the name of Zeus (and the Olympian gods) resound as the demiurge and as the one who had organized everything.[87] In appearance, the towns, henceforth officially Christian, preserved elements of Hellenism, if only in the re-employment of architectonic and decorative pieces. Large public and private mosaic floors continued to dwell upon mythological figures and as well as upon the gods formerly worshipped.[88] At the beginning

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"Maïumas," cols. 612-613; Mentzu-Meimare, "Der 'ΧΑΡΙΕΣΤΑΤΟΣ ΜΑΙΟΥΜΑΣ'," p. 60 ; Greatrex and Watt, "One, Two or Three Feasts ?" p. 13.

[81] *Mai* (Hebr.) was a term used for "water," and *mèiuri* for "aqueducts." See John Lydus, *De mens.* IV, 76 (ed. Wünsch, p. 128).

[82] For other meanings, see Mentzu-Meimare, "Der ΧΑΡΙΕΣΤΑΤΟΣ ΜΑΙΟΥ-ΜΑΣ."

[83] As a kind of festival, it does not necessarily take place everywhere on the same date.

[84] Chuvin, *Chronique des derniers païens*, p. 274, doubts that these were religious festivals because the two laws regarding them are not registered in the title *De paganis* of the *Codex Theodosianus.*

[85] See n. 63, above.

[86] Abel, "Gaza au VI$^{e}$ siècle," pp. 27-31; Glucker, *The City of Gaza*, pp. 54-55. Pagans are still attested to in Caeasarea Maritima in the sixth century. See Procopius of Caesarea, *Historia Arcana* XI, 31-32.

[87] Choricius of Gaza, *Or. in Iust. Brumal.* 1-2 (ed. Foerster-Richsteig, p. 175).

[88] As in the Orpheus mosaic in Jerusalem. See A. Ovadiah and S. Mucznik, "Orpheus from Jerusalem: Pagan or Christian Image?" *The Jerusalem Cathedra* 1 (1981),

of the sixth century, shortly after Marinus of Neapolis, a Samaritan converted to paganism, succeeded Proclus as head of the Academy in Athens, Procopius inaugurated the public clock that decorated Gaza's market according to the rhetorical rules of the *ekphrasis*. In the guise of the two victorious/*invicti* pagan gods, Sol-Helios and Hercules, it perpetuated Hellenism, which Christianity had adopted by separating it from its religious component. Under the command of Helios in his chariot, with twelve eagles carrying a crown, the twelve labours of Hercules span the hours. Each hour, Medusa succumbs to Perseus' blows, as in Ascalon in mythical times. Now Pan, surrounded by satyrs, rejoices and turns toward the nymph Echo.[89] We could believe ourselves to be in the Syrian Panias sanctuary, still frequented then, which preserved the engraved dedications left by the faithful of centuries past: "to Pan and to the Nymphs" (Πανί τε και Νύμφαις),[90] "to Diopan Echo's lover" (φιλευήχῳ Διόπανι),[91] and "to lady Echo" (τὴν κ[υρίαν] Ἠχω).[92] In the following century, Procopius' most illustrious disciple, Choricius, "attached to the true religion," continued to pay homage to the thenceforth concealed presence of the gods in Pales-

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pp. 152-166; C. Dauphin, *La Palestine byzantine. Peuplement et populations*, Oxford, 1998, pp. 199-203; and the solar decoration in the synagogues. The fact is not peculiar to Palestine. See M. Piccirillo, *Mosaics of Jordan*, Amman, 1993.

[89] Abel, "Gaza au VI[e] siècle," p. 10; J. Geiger, "Aspects of Palestinian Paganism in Late Antiquity," in *Sharing the Sacred*, Kofsky and Stroumsa (eds.), Jerusalem, 1998, p. 13.

[90] An epigram dated to 148 (W. H. Waddington, *Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie*, Paris, 1870 [= Rome, 1968], no. 1891 = Di Segni, *Dated Greek Inscriptions*, pp. 139-141 no. 2): "Πανί τε καὶ Νύμφαις Μαίης γόνον ἔνθ' ἐνέθηκεν Ἑρμείαν Διὸς υἱὸν εἰκασμένον ἐν πέτρῃ Οὐίκτωρ Λυσιμάχου παισὶ συνευξάμενος (To Pan and the Nymphs, Victor, son of Lysimachos, in fulfilment of a vow he made with his children, dedicated this stone image of Hermes, son of Zeus and born of Maia." See also Y. Hajjar, "Dieux et cultes non héliopolitains de la Béqa', de l'Hermon et de l'Abilène à l'époque romaine," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* II.8.4 (1990), pp. 2596-2598.

[91] Waddington, *Inscriptions grecques et latines*, no. 1892 = Di Segni, *Dated Greek Inscriptions*, pp. 142-144 no. 3. For the relationship between Pan and Echo, see P. Borgeaud, *Recherches sur le dieu Pan*, Rome, 1979.

[92] Waddington, *Inscriptions grecques et latines*, no. 1894 = Y. E. Meimaris, *Chronological Systems in Roman-Byzantine Palestine and Arabia: The Evidence of the Dated Greek Inscriptions*, Athens, 1992, p. 144 no. 1 = Di Segni, *Dated Greek Inscriptions*, pp. 147-148 no. 5: "Agrippa son of Marcus, archon in 223 [= 220-221 or 221-222 C.E.], after receiving an oracle in a dream (ὀνείρῳ χρησμοδοτηθείς), dedicated [a statue of] the Lady Echo (τὴν κ[υρίαν] Ἠχὼ ἀνέθηκεν), with his wife Agrippias, with Agrippinos, Marcus and Agrippa *bouleutes*, with Agrippina and Domna, their children." The nomenclature betrays a Herodian tradition.

tine. "In his writings he mixes fables and pagan narratives (μύθους καὶ ἱστορίας ἑλληνικάς) […] even sometimes when treating sacred subjects" (ἔστι ὅτε καὶ ἱερολογῶν).[93]

## *Conclusion*

These festivals—and their continued survival—clearly testify to pagan vitality up to the beginning of the fifth century at least. We have seen that the pagan mentality rubbed off twice on the Christian community: First, during a circus race, Hilarion yielded to Italicus' plea to protect him from the pagan curses by means of the holy water. One generation later, the holy bishop Porphyrius, after a miracle, was himself the subject of a traditional pagan-style acclamation, which was not censored by the deacon: "Great is the God of the Christians, great the priest Porphyrius."[94] The acclamation: μέγας ὁ κτλ. is a constant formula, one that showed the providential sentiments the great pagan deities—Artemis of Ephesus, Aelius Aristides' Asclepius, and in Palestine Kore, Helios and Serapis—aroused. These two episodes are reported in the respective hagiographies of Hilarion and Porphyrius, and both speak of miraculous deeds. Considering that this literary genre sought above all to celebrate the holy men's divine works—and not the "magical ones," which were considered diabolical—it may be safely concluded that these anecdotes were only the surviving part of a much more extensive series that had sunk into obscurity. They demonstrate that, at the end of the fourth century, pagan religiosity—and the pagan relationship to the gods—was so profoundly anchored that even when Christian neophytes are mentioned in an edificatory work, they continue to be described as acting in accordance with traditional rules.

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[93] Photius, *Bibliotheca* 160, 102b, 34-36.

[94] *V. Porph.* 31, 2. I fail to understand Trombley's judgement (Trombley, *Hellenic Religion*, vol. 1, p. 199): "The naming of the bishop is, however, a clear departure from ancient practice." It seems rather to be the opposite, and I do not know of any other Christian parallel. Acclaiming a man after the god signaled recognition of his magical powers, at a time when theurgy was flourishing. On the contrary, the δύναμις of the holy man is always that of God. See P. Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*. Berkeley, 1982, p. 131: "The holy man is frequently confused with the θεῖος ἀνήρ … of late classical times … This is a superficial parallel … the holy man drew his powers from outside the human race."

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# GAMES AND SPECTACLES IN ANCIENT GAZA: PERFORMANCES FOR THE MASSES HELD IN BUILDINGS NOW LOST

Zeev Weiss

The Roman games held an important place in the cultural environment and architectural plan of the cities in ancient Palestine. Buildings for entertainment, first introduced into the region by Herod the Great, were built in many locales.[1] The construction of theaters, hippodromes, and amphitheaters, their ongoing maintenance, and the staging of performances were carried out primarily with the local funds of the cities in ancient Palestine. The spectacles held there attracted the local population, including Jews, who frequented them on a regular basis.[2]

Gaza, the stronghold of paganism in ancient Palestine, flourished in antiquity during both the Roman and Byzantine periods.[3] On the one hand, the known archaeological remains from Gaza are scanty and barely provide any evidence connected with the ancient city. On the other, the literary sources and other forms of data, such as the Madaba map, inform us about the city's appearance. One may assume that ancient Gaza was architecturally well planned and furnished with vari-

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[1] See, for example, A. Segal, *Theaters in Roman Palestine and Provincia Arabia*, Leiden, 1995, pp. 16-34; Z. Weiss, "Games and Spectacles in Roman Palestine and Their Reflection in Talmudic Literature," Ph.D. diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1995; idem, "Roman Leisure Culture and Its Influence upon the Jewish Population in the Land of Israel," *Qadmoniot* 109 (1995), pp. 2-19 (Hebrew).

[2] Z. Weiss, "Adopting a Novelty: The Jews and the Roman Games in Palestine," in *The Roman and Byzantine Near East: Recent Archaeological Research*, J. H. Humphrey (ed.), Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary Series 31, Portsmouth, 1999, vol. 2, pp. 23-49.

[3] E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ 175 B.C.-A.D. 135 (A New English Version)*, vol. 2, G. Vermes et al. (eds.), Edinburgh, 1979, pp. 98-103; C. A. M. Glucker, *The City of Gaza in the Roman and Byzantine Periods*, B.A.R. International Series 325, Oxford, 1987, pp. 38-74; G. Downey, *Gaza in the Early Sixth Century*, Norman, Okla., 1963, pp. 14-59; J. Schwartz, *Jewish Settlement in Judaea*, Jerusalem, 1986, pp. 147-55 (Hebrew). For the absorption of pagan culture into Christian Gaza, see P. Chuvin, *A Chronicle of the Last Pagans*, Cambridge, Mass., 1990, pp. 115-18; Y. Ashkenazi, "Paganism in Gaza in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries," *Cathedra* 60 (1991), pp. 106-15 (Hebrew).

ous public buildings such as colonnaded streets, temples, bathhouses, entertainment buildings, and private dwellings. During the Byzantine period, temples throughout the city were abandoned and replaced with churches to fulfill the populace's religious needs. It emerges from the sources that the city was politically, economically, and culturally an important center in the region.

The Roman games, and in all probability other cultural activities, were held in ancient Gaza throughout antiquity. Although, no buildings have been excavated in the city to date, and their location cannot even be suggested, Gaza, as will emerge from the non-architectural documentation discussed below, undoubtedly had at least two entertainment buildings somewhere in the city. By analyzing and comparing the available data to what is known in other cities of ancient Palestine, I shall attempt to shed light on some details regarding the games and spectacles held in ancient Gaza, one of the major cultural centers in the region.

## *The Theater: Location and Construction*

In the early fifth century CE, Sozomen mentions the theater of Gaza in relation to the struggles in the city between pagans and Christians.[4] Choricius' oration in the following century regarding the mime (see below) is further evidence for the existence of a theater in the city. The depiction of Gaza in the Madaba map, dated to the mid-sixth century CE, includes a semicircular structure appearing in the upper right side of the city (fig. 1). Michael Avi-Yonah has identified the structure as either a theater or a *nymphaeum*;[5] Carol Glucker has drawn some parallels with the depiction of the theater in Neapolis, also represented in the Madaba map, but raises some doubts regarding the identification of the former as a theater.[6] Others who have identified

[4] Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5, 9, J. Bidez and G. C. Hansen, eds., GCS 50, Berlin, 1960, p. 204.

[5] M. Avi-Yonah, *The Madaba Mosaic Map*, Jerusalem, 1954, p. 74. Others identified it solely as a theater. See H. Donner, *The Mosaic Map of Madaba*, Kampen, 1992, p. 75; N. Duval, "Essai sur la signification des vignettes topographiques," in *The Madaba Map Centenary, 1897-1997: Travelling Through the Byzantine Umayyad Period*, M. Piccirillo and E. Alliata (eds.), Jerusalem, 1999, pp. 136 and 145.

[6] Glucker, *City of Gaza*, p. 19; Guadalupe López Monteagudo goes one stemp further and identifies it as a semicircular peristyle. See "The Architectural Models on the Madaba Mosaic Map," in *Madaba Map Centenary*, Piccirillo and Alliata (eds.), p. 256.

the semicircular structure as a theater suggest that the building stood outside the city walls.[7] The location of the theater, accordingly, was a compromise reached by the pagans and Christians residing in the city and approved by the church clergy.

The cities depicted in the Madaba map are represented in some detail. In addition to the basic architectural plan of each city, several important structures were included in each depiction. In doing so, the artist sought to give a distinctive character to each locale. Although the map represents the Byzantine cities and their churches, as in the case of Jerusalem, the architectural plan of each city represented in the map did not originate in the mid-sixth century CE.[8] Excavations conducted at various sites of ancient Palestine clearly indicate that the basic plan of the cities constructed during the Roman period was in continual use (with some changes, mainly in the religious sphere) throughout the Byzantine period.[9] In addition, it should be noted that in certain cases theaters constructed in Roman Palestine remained in use during the Byzantine period and were sometimes renovated, but no structure in the region was built in this late period.[10] Therefore, any discussion of the theater in Gaza must relate to it as a Roman structure dated to the early history of the city.

The depiction of Gaza in the Madaba map reflects the architectural reality known in other cities of ancient Palestine, where the actual remains are visible at the site and thus reinforce the proposed identification. The semicircular structure represented in the depiction of

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[7] Y. Dan, *The City in Eretz Israel during the Late Roman and Byzantine Periods*, Jerusalem, 1984, p. 203 n. 18 (Hebrew); Ashkenazi, "Paganism in Gaza," pp. 111-12.

[8] W. Pullan, "The Representation of the Late Antique City in the Madaba Map," in *Madaba Map Centenary*, Piccirillo and Alliata (eds.), pp. 165-171; Monteagudo, "Architectural Models," pp. 256-58.

[9] See, for example, Y. Tsafrir and G. Foerster, "Urbanism at Scythopolis–Beth Shean in the Fourth to Seventh Centuries," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 51 (1997), pp. 85-146; Z. Weiss and E. Netzer, "The Hebrew University Excavations at Sepphoris," *Qadmoniot* 113 (1997), pp. 2-21 (Hebrew); S. T. Parker, "An Empire's New Holy Land: The Byzantine Period," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 62 (1999), pp. 144-58; P. Watson, "The Byzantine Period," in *The Archaeology of Jordan*, B. MacDonald et al. (eds.), Sheffield, 2001, pp. 484-86.

[10] The Roman theater of Elusa, for example, was renovated in 454/455 CE, as indicated in a dedicatory inscription found there. See A. Negev, "Excavations at Elusa, 1980," *Qadmoniot* 55-56 (1981), pp. 122-24 (Hebrew); H. Goldfus and P. Fabian, "Haluza (Elusa)," *Hadashot Arkheologiyot (=Excavations and Surveys in Israel)* 111 (2000), pp. 93*-94*. For the history of the theater in the Byzantine period throughout the empire, see D. Claude, *Die byzantinische Stadt im 6. Jahrhundert*, Munich, 1969, pp. 74-76.

Gaza is aligned or incorporated into the city wall and approached by a road running southward from the east-west colonnaded street. The building is oriented northward and, in addition to the yellowish semicircle in its center, has two wider strips around it, one with a black diamond-shaped design and the other with dark red vertical lines on a pinkish background.

The theaters constructed in the region in the first three centuries CE were largely oriented northward. In most cases, they were located along one of the main streets of the city, while in others they were situated outside the civic center, possibly on the outskirts but still within the city's boundaries.[11] The location of the theater within the city was not randomly selected. The theater in ancient Palestine, and in particular the *ima cavea*, was usually constructed on a natural slope within the city, sometimes on its limits. It stands to reason that the desire to curtail expenditures led to this decision, even if, as a result, the building deviated slightly from the alignment of the city's infrastructure. The second century CE theater at Neapolis, for example, was built on the outskirts of the city, along the northern slope of Mount Gerizim, adjoining the city wall.[12] This is also indicated by the depiction of Neapolis in the Madaba map, where a semicircular structure is situated south of the main colonnaded street that runs the length of the city, from east to west.[13] Access to the building was gained through an additional road running perpendicular to the colonnaded street, leading toward the theater in the case of Neapolis. In fact, elsewhere such roads led to the site of the theater even when it was located on the periphery of the urban plan, thus linking it with the other public buildings in the Roman city.[14] Similar locations were chosen in other Roman cities as well, such as Laodicaea in Syria, where the theater was built on the eastern fringe of the city, adjacent to the city wall.[15]

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[11] Z. Weiss, "Buildings for Entertainment," in D. Sperber, *The City in Roman Palestine*, Oxford, 1998, pp. 79-83.

[12] Y. Magen, "The Roman Theater of Shechem," in *Zev Vilnay's Jubilee Volume*, E. Schiller (ed.), Jerusalem, 1984, vol. 1, pp. 269-77 (Hebrew); idem, "The History and the Archaeology of Shechem (Neapolis) during the First to Fourth Centuries A.D.," Ph.D. diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1989, pp. 114-44, pl. 34 (Hebrew).

[13] Donner, *Mosaic Map of Madaba*, pp. 47-48.

[14] W. L. MacDonald, *The Architecture of the Roman Empire*, New Haven, 1986, vol. 2, pp. 130-33; E. J. Owens, *The City in the Greek and Roman World*, London, 1991, pp. 121-48.

[15] J. Sauvaget, "Le plan de Laoddicée-sur-mer," *Bulletin d'études orientales* 6 (1936),

The semicircular structure included in the Madaba map's depiction of Gaza corresponds with some of the theater construction methods known in the region, indicating that the map's artist wished to reflect, or base his depiction on, the known reality. In light of the above, it is probable that the theater building in Gaza was constructed on the outskirts of the city owing to the availability of a natural slope or folding terrain that was essential for its construction. The building in the map was oriented northward, as was commonly the case elsewhere in the region, and was reached via a smaller road leading from the east-west colonnaded street, reminiscent of theaters such as those in Neapolis or Bostra.[16] The theater was aligned with the city wall or, what seems more probable, was incorporated in the latter, which presumably was added to the city in a later period.[17]

Further support for this theory comes from a comparative analysis of the structure appearing in the Madaba mosaic with known buildings in ancient Palestine. The artist intentionally used different colors, designs, and shading to emphasize the various sections inside the building. The yellowish semicircle in the center of the structure represents the *orchestra*, while the two additional strips symbolize the *cavea*, which was divided horizontally into two smaller sections (the *ima* and *summa cavea*). The passageway (*praecinctio*) running across the width of the theaters at Caesarea, Gadara, and Gerasa, for example, divided the *cavea* into two unequal sections.[18] The dark red vertical lines

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pp. 51-52; E. Frézouls, "Recherches sur les théâtres de L'Orient Syrien, II," *Syria* 38 (1961), pp. 72-73; W. Ball, *Rome in the East: The Transformation of an Empire*, London, 2000, pp. 157-59.

[16] Magen, "The History and the Archaeology of Shechem," pp. 114-44; Segal, *Theaters*, pp. 53-55.

[17] Choricius mentions that the city wall of Gaza was significantly restored by the bishop Marcianus in the early sixth century CE. See Choricius of Gaza, *Laudatio Marc.* 2, 16 (R. Foerster and E. Richtsteig, eds., *Choricius Gazaeus, Opera*, Leipzig, 1929, p. 32); Glucker, *City of Gaza*, p. 55. Several cities, as revealed by the finds from Beth Shean and Gerasa for example, were fortified during the late Roman or early Byzantine period. See Tsafrir and Foerster, "Urbanism," pp. 100-103; J. Seigne, "Jérash romaine et byzantine: dévelopment urbain d'une ville provinciale orientale," in *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan*, G. Bisheh (ed.), Amman, 1992, vol. 4, pp. 331-41, esp. 341. For the evidence in other locales, see Parker, "An Empire's New Holy Land," pp. 155-56.

[18] Big theaters, such as the one in Amman, were divided into three parts: *ima*, *media*, and *summa cavea*. For details regarding the plan of the *cavea*, with references to studies discussing the theaters in the region, see Weiss, "Games and Spectacles," pp. 65-70.

in the outer, pinkish, band represent the *scalariae* (staircases) running along the length of the *cavea*, thus dividing it into eight *cunei* (vertical tiers), a number that recurs in Scythopolis and in Gerasa, Amman, for example. The *praecinctio* and *scalariae* facilitated the movement of the masses inside the building before and after performances. Alternatively, some scholars have suggested that the vertical lines in the outer band represent columns.[19] If the latter is true, then the columns may resemble the *porticus in summa cavea*, a colonnade constructed along the top of the *cavea* of several ancient theaters, such as the one preserved in Bostra.[20] People could either spend time in the portico during intermission, hide there from the heat of the sun, or shelter themselves on rainy days.

The location, orientation, and details of the building's architectural layout support the suggested identification of the semicircular structure appearing in the depiction of Gaza in the Madaba map as a theater. This building seems to have been incorporated in the mosaic in the actual place of its construction, most probably in the Roman period; the same building continued to be used in the Byzantine period.

### *Theatrical Performances*

Classical comedies, tragedies, and satires, which were rarely presented in the Roman theater, were replaced by mimes and pantomimes of a merrier and lighter bent.[21] Choricius' oration *Apologia Mimorum* is a crucial source of information regarding the performances held in the city's theater during the early sixth century CE.[22] His oration speaks in favor of the mime and emphasizes its importance to men's

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[19] Avi-Yonah, *Madaba Mosaic Map*, p. 74; Glucker, *City of Gaza*, p. 19.

[20] H. Finsen, *Le levé du théâtre romain à Bosra, Syrie*, Copenhagen, 1972, plan 2, 5; see also J. B. Ward-Perkins, *Roman Imperial Architecture*, Harmondsworth, 1989, pp. 376-77.

[21] M. Bieber, *The History of the Greek and Roman Theater*, Princeton, 1961, p. 227; R. C. Beacham, *The Roman Theatre and Its Audience*, London, 1991, p. 150. For additional performances held in the theater, see E. J. Jory, "Continuity and Change in the Roman Theatre," in *Studies in Honour of T. B. L. Webster*, J. H. Betts et al. (eds.), Bristol, 1986, pp. 145-46.

[22] Chuvin, *Chronicle*, pp. 116-17. On the religious festivals and performances held in the city in the time of Choricius, see F. K. Litsas, "Choricius of Gaza and His Description of Festivals at Gaza," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 32/3 (1982), pp. 427-36.

education.[23] The mime, which held a premier place on the Roman and early Byzantine stage, [24] presumably was performed in theaters throughout Palestine, the main evidence for which comes from literary sources.[25] As a secular art form, mime adopted a critical and derisive stance toward religion. Parodies of the gods were often presented, and in the course of time Christianity became a rich source for the mime.[26] It emerges from several talmudic sources that neither were the Jews and Judaism spared from the mime. Rabbi Abbahu, who lived at the end of the third century in Caesarea, makes reference, for example, to a short mime, presumably performed in his city, that originally consisted of a few acts mocking some types of Jewish behavior.[27]

Pantomime, another type of theatrical show, featured a single actor wearing a simple garment and a mask, who played all the roles.[28] Dancing without words and accompaniment by a chorus and music were the main elements of such performances. Several inscriptions and literary sources indicate the presentation of pantomimes in Palestinian theaters.[29] Choricius also refers to such performances, which

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[23] Choricius, *Apol. Mim. Theor. et Or.* 32 (Foerster and Richtsteig, pp. 344-80); see also U. Albini, "Il mimo a Gaza tra il V e il VI sec d. C," *Studi italiani di filologia classica* 15 (1997), pp. 116-22.

[24] For the themes used by the mime, see A. Nicoll, *Masks, Mimes and Miracles*, New York, 1963, pp. 111-26. On the mime in the Byzantine theater. See V. Cottas, *Le théatre à byzance*, Paris, 1931, pp. 35-55; T. D. Barnes, "Christians and the Theater," in *Roman Theater and Society*, W. J. Slater (ed.), Ann Arbor, 1996, pp. 161-180.

[25] A mime named "Amazonios the *biologos*" is mentioned in a burial inscription from Bostra. See E. Littman, D. Magie, and D. R. Stuart, *Publications of the Princeton University Archaeological Expedition to Syria in 1904-1905*, Division IIIA: *Greek and Latin Inscriptions*, Leiden, 1921, no. 549; M. Sartre, ed., *Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie*, vol. 13, Paris, 1982, no. 9407. Tyre and Berytus were praised for their excellent mimes. See *Expositio totius Mundi et Gentium* 32 (ed. J. Rougé, Paris, 1966, p. 166). Mime performances were held in Caesarea in the early fourth century CE. See Eusebius, *De Martyribus Palaestinae* (Syriac Version), p. 11 (W. Cureton, ed., *History of the Martyrs of Palestine*, London, 1861). See also Dan, *The City in Eretz Israel*, pp. 203-5. Several talmudic references also indicate that mime was prevalent in our region. See, for example, *Genesis Rabbah* 80, 1 (eds. Y. Theodor and C. Albeck, Jerusalem, 1965, pp. 950-53); *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 7, 14.

[26] H. Reich, *Der Mimus*, Berlin, 1903 (repr. Hildesheim, 1974), pp. 80-89.

[27] *Lamentations Rabbah*, Proem 17 (ed. S. Buber, Vilna, 1899, p. 7b); see also Z. Weiss, "The Jews and the Games in Roman Caesarea," in *Caesarea Maritima: A Retrospective after Two Millennia*, A. Raban and K. G. Holum (eds.), Leiden, 1996, pp. 446-47.

[28] E.Wust, "Pantomimus," *Paulys Realencyclopädie der Klassischen Altertumswissenschaft*, vol. 18.3, Stuttgart, 1949, pp. 834-70; E. J. Jory, "The Drama of the Dance: Prolegomena to an Iconography of Imperial Pantomime," in *Roman Theater and Society*, W. J. Slater (ed.), Ann Arbor, 1996, pp. 1-27.

[29] *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, vol. 14, suppl. 4624; see also R. Last, "Pantomimus

consisted of dancing as well as musical and choral shows, but regards them as tasteless and vulgar.[30] His other remarks concerning these performances clearly indicate that he was far more willing to ban them than the mime.[31] Nevertheless, Choricius' polemical attitude toward the pantomime may very well imply that such performances were also held in ancient Gaza in the early sixth century CE.

In the course of his oration, Choricius mentions a law that forbidding teachers from attending mime performances in the local theater. He devotes a long diatribe against this law and indicates that while willing to accept the ban on other forms of entertainment—such as chariot races, hunting, or athletic performances—he is opposed to banning the mime.[32] He points out that in Phoenicia, for example, it was unheard for a teacher not to attend such theatrical performances, [33] noting that it was unlikely that mature, educated persons would be corrupted by such spectacles. Choricius does not designate his opponents; nevertheless, one may assume that his statements were directed at the Church, which, as reflected in various Christian sources, generally regarded games and spectacles as immoral.[34] Although the law refers simply

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from Judea - A Commentary on a New Fragment of an Inscription from Ostia," in *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Jerusalem, 1986, vol. B/1, pp. 27-32 (Hebrew). An anonymous pantomime actor from Magnesia in Asia Minor performed in the Caesarea theater, but it is not clear whether this reference is to Caesarea Maritima or Caesarea Philippi (Paneas), the latter constructed by Herod's son. See O. Kern, *Die inschriften von Magnesia am Meander*, Berlin, 1900, no. 192. One pantomime actor from the Byzantine period is specified by name in a dedicatory inscription found at Hammat Gader. See L. Di Segni, "The Greek Inscriptions of Hammat Gader," in *The Roman Baths of Hammat Gader*, Y. Hirschfeld (ed.), Jerusalem, 1997, pp. 193-94. In the fourth century, Caesarea was praised for its pantomime. See *Expositio totius Mundi* 32 (Rougé, p. 166). Evidence for the pantomime performed on stage in our region is found in the talmudic sources as well. See Weiss, "Adopting a Novelty," pp. 32-33.

[30] Choricius, *Laud. Marc.* 2, 70 (Foerster and Richtsteig, p. 45); see also Dan, *City in Eretz Israel*, p. 205.

[31] Choricius, *Apol. Mim.* 32, 107 and 153-54 (Foerster and Richtsteig, pp. 369, 379).

[32] Choricius, *Apol. Mim.* 32, 106-7, 116-18 (Foerster and Richtsteig, pp. 368-69, 370-71); see also Glucker, *City of Gaza*, pp. 54-55; Barnes, "Christians and the Theater," pp. 178-80.

[33] Choricius, *Apol. Mim.* 32, 106 (Foerster and Richtsteig, pp. 368-69).

[34] A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire 284-602*, Norman, Okla., 1964, p. 978; R. F. DeVoe, *The Christians and the Games: The Relationship between Christianity and the Roman Games from the First through the Fifth Century*, Ann Arbor, 1987, pp. 2-11, 134-65; A. Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity*, London, 1993, pp. 69-71. For the attitude of the church to the games in the region, see Y. Ashkenazi, "The Palestine

to teachers, it seems that its original intention was to forbid clergy to attend the local games.[35]

A comparable reality is recorded in Jewish society of late antiquity, although no one there speaks in favor of the Roman performances. The rabbis, who condemned games and spectacles from a moral standpoint, as did the church fathers, confronted similar problems in their communities and acted likewise. Rabbi Abba bar Kahana, a late third-century sage, for example, criticizes the Roman games and concludes one of his sermons, as follows: "And of joy. 'What would it [accomplish]?' (Eccles. 2:2). What point would there be in the attendance of the sages (disciples?) at theaters and circuses?"[36] Rabbi Abba bar Kahana not only questions what rabbis were doing at the games but clearly expresses his opinion on the matter—i.e., although aware that some people, even those of his own society, are frequenting games and spectacles, he clearly indicates that the sages, who in certain cases considered themselves educators or spiritual leaders, were not expected to participate in or watch the Roman games. It is also possible that the sermon simply reflects reality and, in fact, embodies Rabbi Abba bar Kahana's criticism of certain rabbis or their disciples who cannot resist the temptation of attending the games and spectacles. In a similar vein, although Christian clergy generally avoided the Roman games, Socrates, in the early fifth century, mentions that members of Bishop Cyril of Alexandria's circle attended the local theater to hear about the nature of the regulations regarding theater performances.[37]

The situation in Gaza during the early sixth century CE, as was the case earlier in Jewish society, was characterized by the gap and tension between the preaching of the religious leadership—the rabbis

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Church and the Leisure Culture in Late Antiquity," in *Aspects of Theatre and Culture in the Graeco-Roman World*, A. Segal (ed.), Haifa, 1994, pp. 95-102 (Hebrew).

[35] A. Rabbinowitz, "Choricius of Gaza on Eretz Israel," in *The Yohanan Levi Volume*, M. Schwabe and I. Gutman (eds.), Jerusalem, 1949, p. 182 (Hebrew).

[36] *Pesiqta of Rab Kahana* 26, 2 (ed. B. Mandelbaum, New York, 1962, p. 385); cf. *Tanhuma*, Acharei 2 (ed. S. Buber, Jerusalem, 1964 [reproduction], p. 28); *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 2, 2. This is intimated again in another sermon delivered by Rabbi Abba bar Kahana, in which he cites the Jewish people pleading before God: "Master of the universe, never have I gone into the theaters and circuses of the nations of the earth, nor have I made merry and rejoiced with them." See *Pesiqta of Rab Kahana* 15, 2 (Mandelbaum, p. 250). Rabbi Abba bar Kahana, who speaks in the first person, is apparently indicating that he personally did not attend the Roman games, but he may be inferring that others—rabbis or disciples—did so.

[37] Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 7, 13.

or church fathers—and the behavior of their respective communities. Both the rabbis and the church fathers presented games and spectacles as religiously and morally reprehensible; however' their communities did not necessarily heed their leaders' advice.[38]

### *Athletic Contests and Chariot Racing*

Evidence for athletic contests and chariot races in ancient Gaza is found in both literary and non-literary sources, indicating that the city probably had a stadium or more likely a hippodrome. Contrary to the practice in other parts of the Roman Empire of providing each type of contest with its own structure, chariot races and athletic contests in ancient Palestine were held in the hippodrome.[39] Sometimes called a stadium in literary and other sources, the hippodrome was adjusted to meet these needs; this may have been the case in Gaza. Most of the known hippodromes in the region, and presumably in Gaza as well, were constructed in the second to third centuries CE and located on the outskirts of the city, usually along one of the major roads leading to it.[40]

Gaza, like other cities of ancient Palestine, conducted seasonal games that attracted the best athletes, who sometimes even came from outside the region. Games were conducted in Gaza during the festival in honor of Hadrian, [41] and a papyrus mentions one Aurelius Serenus who participated in the Isolympian games held in the city in the time of Gallienus.[42] Aelius Aurelius Menander, who won a contest held in Gaza during the mid-second century CE, hailed from Aphrodisias, and Aurelius Serenus, in the mid-third century CE, came from

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[38] Z. Weiss, "The Jews of Ancient Palestine and the Roman Games: Rabbinic Dicta vs. Communal Practice," *Zion* 66 (2001), pp. 427-459 (Hebrew).

[39] Weiss, "Adopting a Novelty," pp. 24-25, 34-39.

[40] See, for example, the case of Scythopolis and references to other cities in the region: Z. Weiss, "New Light on the Rehov Inscription: Identifying 'the Gate of Campon' at Bet Shean," in *What Athens Has to Do with Jerusalem*, L. V. Rutgers (ed.), Leuven 2002, pp. 211-33.

[41] *Chronicon Paschale* 1 (ed. L. Dindorf, *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae*, vol. 14, Bonn, 1832, p. 474). See also Dan, *City in Eretz Israel*, p. 201. Wallner doubts whether any games were conducted during the πανήγυρις Ἀδριανή held in Gaza in honor of the caesar, see C. Wallner, "Zur Agonistik von Gaza," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 135 (2001), pp. 125-30.

[42] C. Wessely, ed., *Corpus Papyrorum Hermopolitanorum* (hereafter cites as *CPH*), Leipzig, 1905, 5.1, no. 70; see also Schürer, *History of the Jewish People*, vol. 2, p. 46.

Hermopolis in Egypt.[43] The Isolympian games were established in Gaza most probably during the third century CE, either in the time of Caracalla or Elagabalus, or later, during the reign of Gordian III, Valerian, or Gallienus.[44] The program of the Isolympian games and the prizes awarded to the winners followed the pattern of the Olympian contests held every four years.[45] These games included the running of distance races, over stretches made up of multiple laps of the stadium, pentathlon and combat sports, wrestling, boxing, *pankration* (a combination of the latter two), and chariot races.

The meager evidence regarding the athletic contests held in Gaza refers primarily to combat sports. Although the papyrus cited above mentions the games held in Gaza during the mid-third century CE, it does not specify the type of contest in which Aurelius Serenus participated. Aelius Aurelius Menander of Aphrodisias won the ἀνδρῶν πανκράτιν ("the men's *pankration*"), a contest held in several other ancient Palestinian cities, including Gaza.[46] In the fourth century, Gaza gained renown for its excellent pankratists.[47] In the sixth century, Choricius refers to boxing matches held in the city.[48] Combat sports such as those held in Gaza are attested elsewhere in Palestine as well.[49] Boxing, in which the combatants attached to their gloves pieces

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[43] L. Moretti, *Inscrizioni Agonistiche Greche*, Rome, 1951, no. 72; C. Roueché, *Performers and Partisans at Aphrodisias in the Roman and Late Roman Periods*, Journal of Roman Studies Monograph 6. London, 1993, pp. 232-36; Wessely, *CPH*, 5.1, no. 70.

[44] Wallner, "Zur Agonistik von Gaza," pp. 130-35.

[45] Isolympian games were held at the same time in Sidon: Wessely, *CPH*, 5.1, no. 65. See also L. Robert, "Notes de numismatique et d'épigraphie grecques," *Revue Numismatique* 4.39 (1936), pp. 274-78. Olympian games were established in Bostra in the mid-third century CE. See C. Wallner, "Der olympische Agon von Bostra," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 129 (2000), pp. 97-107.

[46] Moretti, *Inscrizioni*, no. 72.

[47] *Expositio totius Mundi* 32 (Rougé, p.166).

[48] Choricius, *Apol. Mim.* 32, 150 (Foerster and Richtsteig, p. 379). An inscription dated to 569 CE found in Gaza mentions a young athlete who passed away at the age of seventeen while "completing the contest in the prize winning stadia…." See W. M. F. Petrie, *Gerar*, London, 1928, p. 26, pl. LXXI. Glucker (*City of Gaza*, pp. 128-30) believes that the boy died in the actual contest held in the city at this time, whereas Leah Di Segni ("Dated Greek Inscriptions from Palestine from the Roman and Byzantine Periods," Ph.D. diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1997, vol. 1, pp. 528-30) interprets it in a Christian context as "carrying out the struggle of life in the service of God."

[49] Aelius Aurelius Menander (Moretti, *Inscrizioni*, no. 72) won the *pankration* held in Damascus, Berytus, Tyre, Caesarea Maritima, Neapolis, Scythopolis, Caesarea Paneas, and Philadelphia. Similar contests were held in Gerasa at the beginning of the third century CE. See C. B. Welles, "The Inscriptions," in *Gerasa City of the*

of metal covered with leather, and the *pankration* were brutal compared to wrestling,[50] and in this respect boxing and *pankration* contests such as those held in Gaza did not differ much from gladiator fights.

Chariot races held in the city's hippodrome enjoyed great popularity in the region during late antiquity.[51] One charioteer from Gaza, struck in his chariot by a demon, was healed by Hilarion.[52] According to Jerome, the horses of Italicus, a Christian resident of Gaza, raced in the late fourth century CE against those of the local duovir, one of the two magistrates of the city.[53] Jerome's description sheds light on the actual races held in the city, their organization, as well as the behavior of the crowd. Later, in the early sixth century, Choricius mentions chariot races but does not speak in their favor, although presumably he was depicting the reality of his day.[54] Chariot racing in Palestine during the first centuries CE also emerges from the story of Italicus in Gaza, which followed the tradition prevalent in the Hellenistic period. Races were financed by private benefactors, and participation in them was not restricted to certain groups. Only later, in the Byzantine period, were factions introduced into ancient Palestine that greatly changed the character and organization of competitions in the region.[55]

According to Jerome, Italicus asked Hilarion, prior to a race, to bless his horses so they would win in the hippodrome against his pagan rival, whose magician strengthened his horses with demonic forces.[56]

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*Decapolis*, C. H. Kraeling (ed.), New Haven, 1938, no. 193. Combat sports were held in other cities as well. See Weiss, "Adopting a Novelty," p. 38, with references to other locales in the region. Of all the athletic contests that took place in the region, combat sport matches are given the widest mention in talmudic literature. See Weiss, "Jews," pp. 442-45.

[50] M. Poliakoff, *Combat Sports in the Ancient World*, New Haven, 1987, pp. 75-79; F. Scanlon, "Greek Boxing Gloves: Terminology and Evolution," *Stadion* 8/9 (1982-83), pp. 31-45. For general information regarding these contests, see E. Gardiner, *Athletics of the Ancient World*, Oxford, 1930, pp. 181-221; H. A. Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome*, Ithaca, 1972, pp. 22-27.

[51] For the popularity of chariot races in our region, see Y. Dan, "Circus Factions (Blues and Greens) in Byzantine Palestine," *The Jerusalem Cathedra* 1 (1981), pp. 105-19.

[52] Jerome, *V. Hil.* 16.

[53] Jerome, *V. Hil.* 20; Dan, *City in Eretz Israel*, pp. 81 and 210.

[54] Choricius, *Apol. Mim.* 32, 107, 114, and 151 (Foerster and Richtsteig, p. 369, 370, and 379). See also Rabbinowitz, "Choricius of Gaza," pp. 180-82.

[55] Dan, "Circus Factions," pp. 117-18; Weiss, "Games and Spectacles," pp. 159-63.

[56] Jerome, *V. Hil.* 20.

A similar practice is also noted in Jewish society; the author of *Sefer Harazim*, who, according to M. Margalioth, lived in Roman Palestine during the third or fourth century CE, recommended to those who hoped to win in the hippodrome contests to recite an amulet text: "If you wish to race horses, (even) when they are exhausted, so they will not stumble in their running, that they will be swift as the wind, and the foot of no living thing will pass them, and they will win popularity in their running, take a silver *lamella* and write upon it the names of the horses and the names of the angels and the name of the prince who is over them and say: 'I adjure you angels of running, who run amid the stars, that you will gird with strength and courage the horses that N is racing and his charioteer (ἡνιοχός) who is racing them'."[57] The use of amulet texts—sometimes containing curses directed at rival charioteers and horses—to win a horse race is known in other such texts found in several hippodromes throughout the Roman world.[58] Thus the story about Italicus or the suggested formula in *Sefer Harazim* indicates not only the involvement of pagans, Jews, and Christians in chariot races held in the hippodromes throughout the region, but also that similar practices, even magic, were used to help win the race, as in Gaza.

### *Animal Baiting in the Arena*

Arena performances in Gaza are referred to only by Choricius, who mentions the κυνηγέσια (*kunegesia*) that was most probably held in the city.[59] Such performances included the exhibition of exotic animals that were sometimes baited and hunted in the arena but did not present any risk to the hunters participating in the show. In the Byzantine period, these performances replaced the gladiatorial combats, which were completely banned by law.[60]

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[57] M. Margalioth (ed.), *Sefer Ha-Razim*, Jerusalem, 1966, p. 94, 3:35-43. For the English translation, see M. Morgan, *Sepher Ha-Razim: The Book of the Mysteries*, Chico, Calif., 1983, p. 64.

[58] D. R. Jordan, "A Survey of Greek Defixiones not Included in the Special Corpora," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 26 (1985), pp. 151-97, nos. 149, 167, 193; idem, "New Defixiones from Carthage," in *The Circus and a Byzantine Cemetery at Carthage*, J. H. Humphrey (ed.), Ann Arbor, 1988, vol. 1, pp. 117-34.

[59] Choricius, *Apol. Mim.* 32, 107 (Foerster and Richtsteig, p. 369).

[60] Dan, *City in Eretz Israel*, p. 208.

Very few cities in Roman Palestine had an amphitheater in addition to the theater and hippodrome. In fact, oval amphitheaters were initially built to meet the needs of a growing community oriented more toward Roman culture that had settled in the central administrative cities of Palestine at the end of the first century CE and especially after the Bar-Kokhba revolt. In other cities, such as Neapolis, Scythopolis, or Gerasa, an amphitheater was constructed in a later period on the semicircular part of the hippodrome that was no longer in use at that time.[61]

The distribution of oval amphitheaters in ancient Palestine may indicate that Gaza, like other important cities in the region, did not have an amphitheater from the outset. The evidence presented above regarding the hippodrome clearly indicates that the building was in active use during the Byzantine period as well, thereby precluding any possibility that it was transformed into an amphitheater, as was the case elsewhere in the region. One may assume that the *kunegesia* referred to by Choricius was held either in the city's local theater or in the hippodrome constructed there earlier.

### *The Masses and the Games*

Literary sources provide further information regarding the behavior of the crowd during performances held in Gaza. Jerome, who describes the race in Gaza mentioned earlier, indicates that the crowd gathered in the hippodrome was ecstatic even before the gates opened. After the signal was given and the chariots had begun racing, the shouts of the crowd swelled and the heathens declared in unison: "Marnas victus est a Christo" (Marnas is conquered by Christ).[62] According to Sozomen, who describes the martyrdom of Saints Eusebius, Nestabus, and Zeno, the Gazaeans gathered in the theater and cried out loudly against these saints, declaring "that they had committed sacrilege in their temple and had used the past as an opportunity for the injury and insult of paganism."[63]

The ecstatic behavior of the crowd in Gaza corresponds with the

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[61] Tsafrir and Foerster, "Urbanism," pp.134-35; Weiss, "Adopting a Novelty," pp. 39-41.

[62] Jerome, *V. Hil.* 20.

[63] Sozomen, *HE* 5, 9.

appearance of the crying mobs during spectacles known elsewhere. The masses that occasionally gathered in the theater, hippodrome, or amphitheater expressed their needs or raised their voice regarding various issues affecting their lives in their hometown.[64] The requests in Rome were aimed at the caesar, while in the provinces they were directed at the governor or local magistrate.[65] The fear that postponing the appeals would cause discontent in the town, as was the case elsewhere, moved the official to act on the masses' requests or needs.[66] In other instances, tension in the city or clashes among segments of society flared up in the entertainment buildings, causing heated arguments and at times mayhem in the town.[67]

Other literary sources reveal that, like the Gazaeans, the public in the region would express its opinions, expectations, or emotions while assembled in the local entertainment building.[68] Several traditions in talmudic literature bear out this point. Rabbi Nathan, for example, permitted participation in the games "because [the people] cry out and save human lives,"[69] and Rabbi Samuel bar Nahmani, in the name of Rabbi Jonathan, indicates during the third century CE that, "One may go to theaters and circuses and basilicas to watch over public affairs on the Sabbath."[70] In both cases we learn that the voice of every spectator, either applauding a certain individual condemned to death or acclaiming some benefit for the entire community, was extremely important. The power of the masses and their ability to influence the decisions made by the officials on such occasions led certain rabbis to approve participation in such events. Both applauding someone condemned to death, as indicated by Rabbi Nathan, or

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[64] Jones, *Later Roman Empire*, pp. 722-24; R. MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order: Treason, Unrest and Alienation in the Empire*, Cambridge, Mass., 1966, pp. 170-72.

[65] For example, according to Libanius, the people of Antioch complained before Icarius that the water in the bathhouse was not hot enough. See Libanius, *Orationes* 26, 5 (ed. R. Foerster, *Libanius, Opera*, vol. 3, Leipzig, 1906, p. 6).

[66] MacMullen, *Enemies*, p. 172. The riots in the theater in Antioch, for example, started after the increase of taxes in the second half of the fourth century; see R. Browning, "The Riot of A. D. 387 in Antioch: The Role of the Theatrical Calques in the Later Empire," *Journal of Roman Studies* 42 (1952), pp. 13-20.

[67] A. Cameron, *Circus Factions: Blues and Greens at Rome and Byzantium*, Oxford, 1976, pp. 271-96. For the evidence in the region, see Dan, "Circus Factions," pp. 110-18.

[68] Weiss, "Jews," pp. 433-36.

[69] *t. Avodah Zarah* 2, 7 (ed. M. Zuckermandel, Jerusalem, 1937, p. 462). Cf. y. *Avoda Zarah* 1, 7, 40a and textual variants.

[70] *b. Ketubbot* 5a; *b. Shabbat* 150a.

protesting those who profaned the temple in Gaza, as described by Sozomen, demonstrates the power of the boisterous masses gathered in the entertainment building and their role in determining public life in the region.

## *Summary*

In light of the limited available sources, one may deduce that Gaza boasted at least a theater and a hippodrome constructed for the local citizens, and were used during both the Roman and Byzantine periods. Although buildings for entertainment have not yet been found in Gaza, the evidence presented above nevertheless attests to their existence. An analysis of the literary and non-literary sources reveals some information regarding the type of performances held in the city in both periods and correlates with evidence from elsewhere in the region. In addition, later sources clearly indicate the continuation of some of these performances in the city during the Byzantine period, despite the church's strong objection to the Roman games. These sources, and especially the comments made by the early sixth-century Choricius, echo a certain revival of pagan culture in Christianized Gaza, after which the entertainment buildings in the city, as elsewhere in the region, dwindled and were abandoned in subsequent decades.

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# THE TERRITORY OF GAZA: NOTES OF HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY

Leah Di Segni

Looking at the distribution of eras and calendars in epigraphic and documentary material from southern Palestine, one notices the prominence of the era and calendar of Gaza in inscriptions and papyri of the Byzantine period (5th-7th centuries) over a large area in the western, northern, and even central Negev. Outside of the city, the era of Gaza (61 BCE) is used in inscriptions from Horvat Gerarit, Kissufim and Shellal in Wadi Ghazzeh (Nahal Besor),[1] at Melilot east of Gerar (Tel Haror),[2] at Horvat Karkur northwest of Beersheba,[3] in Beersheba itself (here side by side with the era of Eleutheropolis and, less common, that of Provincia Arabia),[4] and in Shivta (along with the era of Arabia).[5] The era of Gaza is also used in a papyrus from Nessana dated 602/3 CE.[6] The calendar of Gaza is consistently

[1] The inscription from Horvat Gerarit (map ref. 096 091) is still unpublished: see below. Kissufim (map ref. 096 089): *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* [*SEG*] 30, nos. 1688-89; Y. E. Meimaris, *Chronological Systems in Roman-Byzantine Palestine and Arabia*, Athens, 1992, pp. 132-33, nos. 134-35; Shellal (map ref. 100 078): M. Avi-Yonah, "Mosaic Pavements in Palestine," *Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine* [*QDAP*] 3 (1933), p. 42, no. 306; Meimaris, *Chronological Systems*, p. 131, no. 131.

[2] Map ref. 116 089: *SEG* 36, no. 1330; Meimaris, *Chronological Systems*, p. 124, no. 107.

[3] Map ref. 126 081: *SEG* 36, nos. 1334, 1337-38; Meimaris, *Chronological Systems*, p. 131, no. 129.

[4] *SEG* 8, no. 299; A. Alt, *Die griechischen Inschriften der Palaestina Tertia westlich der ʿAraba*, Berlin and Leipzig, 1921, p. 17, no. 16; *SEG* 34, no. 1467; Meimaris, *Chronological Systems*, pp. 127-28, 130, nos. 115-17, 126. For the dated inscriptions from Beersheba, see L. Di Segni, "Dated Greek Inscriptions from Palestine from the Roman and Byzantine Periods," Unpublished Ph.D. diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1997, pp. 695-733.

[5] G. E. Kirk, "Era Problems in the Southern Desert," *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society* [*JPOS*] 17 (1937), pp. 211-15, nos. 2-3; Meimaris, *Chronological Systems*, pp. 130-31, nos. 127, 130. For the dated inscriptions from Shivta, see Di Segni, "Dated Greek inscriptions," pp. 813-53.

[6] H. Dunscombe Colt (ed.), *Excavations at Nessana*, III: C. J. Craemer, *Non-Literary Papyri*, Princeton, N.J., 1958 [*PNessana*] 45, l. 6. The document was apparently drawn in an unidentified place called Oindos, which the editor locates in Palaestina Prima because of the use of the era of Gaza. But in light of the several inscriptions

used in inscriptions dated by the era of the city; besides, it appears in a double dating, along with the Greco-Arabian calendar, in inscriptions from Beersheba dated by the era of Eleutheropolis, [7] as well as in two papyri from Nessana.[8] It is apparent that in this period the use of a specific era or calendar does not constitute evidence that, when an inscription or papyrus was written and dated, the place where the writing took place was included in the territory of the city whose era or calendar were used. Still, the choice of a chronological system is not without significance, and it is worth trying to ascertain whether it derives from cultural or economic influence, or from geographical proximity to a centre with a strong urban tradition, including an old and well-known time-reckoning system, or if the choice of a specific era reflects the strength of a local tradition surviving a shift of boundaries. In Beersheba, for instance, the era of Eleutheropolis was in much wider use than the era of Arabia, in spite of the fact that almost all the dated inscriptions found there belong to the period after Beersheba had been attached to Palaestina Tertia, [9] and had therefore come within the territory of Elusa, which used the era of Arabia. Though it is questionable if Beersheba was ever actually included in the municipal territory of Eleutheropolis, created in 200 CE, its links to ancient Idumaea and to southern Judaea went back to a very early period. Eusebius views the region of Beersheba, called Geraritica from the biblical Gerar, as the natural continuation

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dated by the same era and undoubtedly located in Palaestina Tertia, it is conceivable that Oindos was located in the vicinity of Nessana, since the papyrus deals with local business.

[7] Alt, *Die griechischen*, p. 20, no. 25; Meimaris, *Chronological Systems*, p. 312, no. 9. For the dated inscriptions from Gaza, see Di Segni, "Dated Greek Inscriptions," pp. 504-57.

[8] *PNessana* 55, l. 9, dated 681/2, and 59, l. 15, dated 684. The influence of Gaza in Nessana is also apparent from the use of a gold weight unit, "karat of the Gaza standard": *PNessana* 21, l. 33, dated 562; 26, ll. 15, 17, dated 570; 46, l. 5, dated 605.

[9] Jerome, *Hebraicae Quaestiones in libro Geneseos*, 21, 30-31, ed. P. de Lagarde, CCSL 72, Turnhout, 1959, p. 26. The annexation of Beersheba to the newly created province of Palaestina Salutaris or Tertia took place either ca. 357 or at the latest in the late eighties of the 4th century, shortly before the composition of the *Hebraicae Quaestiones* (389-92). For a summary of the chronological question, see P. Mayerson, "Justinian's Novella 103 and the Reorganization of Palestine," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Resarch* [*BASOR*] 269 (1988), pp. 65-71. At the beginning of the 7th century Georgius Cyprius (*Descriptio* 1052) lists Beersheba among the main centres of Palaestina Tertia: E. Honigmann, *Le Synekdèmos de Hiéroclès et l'opuscule géographique de Georges de Chypre*, Brussels, 1939, p. 68.

of the Daroma and Eleutheropolis; moreover, Beersheba may have been included with Eleutheropolis in the province of Nea Arabia for a short time, in the first half of the 4th century; hence its adoption of the era of Eleutheropolis, which continued in use for centuries after the shift of the regional boundaries.[10]

The aim of this paper is to collect data pertaining to the extension of the territory of Gaza. How large was it, and did changes occur in its boundaries in late antiquity? In looking into the matter, I have made use of ecclesiastical data as well as of administrative information, on the surmise that the coincidence of ecclesiastical and administrative borders, both of provinces and of urban territories, attested in canons 12 and 17 of the Council of Chalcedon, reflected a situation already in existence at least by the end of the 4th century.[11]

The boundary of Gaza to the north is easily identified: it reached up to the border of Ascalon, probably marked by Wadi el-Hesi (Nahal Shiqmah). To the north of the wadi, the city of Diocletianopolis-Sarafia formed a small enclave in the territory of Ascalon;[12] in the area between Nahal Shiqmah and the city of Gaza, another small enclave was formed by Anthedon, a city at least since its refoundation by Herod as Agrippias, and an episcopal see from the 5th century.[13]

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[10] On the location of Geraritica, see Eusebius, *Onomasticon* (ed. E. Klostermann, *Das Onomastikon der biblischen Ortsnamen*, GCS 11/1, Leipzig, 1904) [*On.*], p. 60. Eusebius defines the southern boundaries of the territory of Eleutheropolis as being along the line of Anab and Eshtamoa, although villages farther to the south (Thala, En Rimmon, Iethira, Anaea) are also included by him in the Daroma, which belonged entirely—or almost entirely?—to the territory of Eleutheropolis: Eusebius, *On.*, pp. 26, 88, 98, 108. See also Y. Tsafrir, L. Di Segni and J. Green, *Tabula Imperii Romani. Judaea-Palaestina*, Jerusalem, 1994 [*TIR*], pp. 62, 122, 123, 151-52, 247, s. vv. On Nea Arabia, mentioned in a papyrus from Oxyrhynchus dated 314-318 and probably also in the *Laterculus Veronensis* (J. B. Bury, "The Provincial List of Verona," *Journal of Roman Studies* 13 [1923], pp. 127-51), see P. Mayerson, "P. Oxy. 3574: Eleutheropolis of the Nea Arabia," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* [*ZPE*] 53 (1983), pp. 251-58; idem, "Nea Arabia (P. Oxy. 3574): an Addendum to ZPE 53," *ZPE* 64 (1986), pp. 139-46.

[11] J. D. Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, 1758-1798, Graz, 1960, vol. 7, cols. 364-65.

[12] See the short discussion in C. A. M. Glucker, *The City of Gaza in the Roman and Byzantine Periods* (BAR Internat. Series 325), Oxford, 1987, pp. 25-26. On Diocletianopolis-Sarafia, see *TIR*, pp. 112, 222-23, s. vv. The name Diocletianopolis shows that the place was promoted to city status under the Tetrarchs. It was an episcopal see from the mid-4th century.

[13] The urban status of Anthedon in the Roman period is shown by the emission of city coins: Y. Meshorer, *City Coins of Eretz Israel and the Decapolis in the Roman Period*,

To the south, along the Mediterranean coast, the territory of Gaza included Bethaglaim, believed to be the site of ancient Gaza, destroyed by Alexander;[14] Thabatha, the birthplace of St. Hilarion;[15] and Beth Dallatha, a privately owned village where the monastery of Isaias the Egyptian was located.[16] The border of Raphia was somewhere to the southwest. Raphia had been an important city in the Hellenistic period and did not lose its status in the Roman period; it must therefore have had a territory of some size. It was an episcopal see at least since the 5th century.[17] Sycomazon, east of Deir el-Balah, was also an episcopal see by the early 5th century, but it had no municipal tradition and may have been nothing but a market place (*Shuk hamazon*?), promoted to city rank perhaps to protect its privileges.[18] Accordingly, it probably had

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Jerusalem, 1985, p. 31. Anthedon never lost its independence to its powerful neighbour, as happened for instance to Dora, which was for a time—in the 4th century and possibly longer—annexed to the territory of Caesarea (see Di Segni, "Dated Greek Inscriptions," pp. 437-38). This is shown by the story of the Christian Zeno, who tried to salvage the remains of the martyrs Eusebius, Nestabos and Zeno, executed under Julian, ca. 362; he was flogged and expelled from Anthedon, and found refuge in the port of Gaza. The jurisdiction of the Anthedonian authorities clearly ended somewhere along the 20 stadia that separated Anthedon from Gaza: Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* V, 9, 7-8 (eds. J. Bidez and G. C. Hausen, *Kirchengeschichte*, GCS 50, Berlin, 1960) [*HE*], p. 205. *TIR*, p. 63, s. v. Anthedon is identified with Blakhiyah, north of Gaza (map ref. 098 106), a location that the Arab geographer Idrisi referred to as Theda. Remains of the Roman and Byzantine periods were uncovered there: J-B. Humbert et al., "Fouilles de Blakhiyah-Anthédon," in J-B. Humbert, ed., *Gaza méditerranéenne. Histoire et archéologie en Palestine*, Paris, 2000, pp. 105-20.

[14] Identified with Tell el-'Ajjul (map ref. 093 097): *TIR*, p. 79, s.v.

[15] Identified with Umm el-Tut (map ref. 090 096): *TIR*, p. 246, s.v.

[16] Beth Dallatha is tentatively identified with el-Damita, near Deir el-Balaḥ (map ref. 090 092): *TIR*, p. 81, s.v. The proximity of Gaza, Thabatha and Beth Dallatha is stressed in the story of the friendship between Peter the Iberian, when he resided in Thabatha, and Isaias in his monastery: see B. Bitton Ashkelony and A. Kofsky, "Gaza Monasticism in the Fourth-Sixth Centuries," *Proche Orient Chrétien* 50, 1-2 (2000), pp. 31, 42.

[17] *TIR*, pp. 212-13, s.v.

[18] Perhaps an ἀτελὴς πανήγυρις or tax-free market. We learn of the existence of such markets and fairs in Eretz Israel from Jewish sources not later than the early 2nd century: see S. Lieberman, "Eser milin," *Eshkolot* 3 (1969), pp. 75-81 (Hebrew). See also Z. Safrai, "Hayeridim beEretz-Israel betqufath haMishnah vehaTalmud," *Zion* 49 (1984), pp. 141-58 (Hebrew). On Sycomazon, identified with Khirbet Suq Mazen (map ref. 091 090), see *TIR*, p. 238, s.v. One might wonder if the promotion of Sycomazon to episcopal see really meant that it had acquired the status of an independent city, for Maiuma at least, though it had its own bishop, is said by Sozomen to have had the same administration as Gaza: see below. However, given the leading role of bishops in their cities in this period, and the distance between Sycomazon and Gaza, it seems likely that the former had its own administration.

only a small territory, carved out from the municipal territory of Gaza; for as we shall see, villages to the east of Sycomazon were included in the boundaries of Gaza. It is worth noting that another episcopal see, Maiuma, was formed in the territory of Gaza in the 4th century, when Constantine decided to separate Christian Maiuma, the port of Gaza, from the still pagan mother city. He renamed it Constantia Neapolis, from which we learn that it was a proper city. Julian reversed the process, and Sozomen tells us that afterward, although Maiuma had its own bishop, clergy, ecclesiastical calendar and diocesan territory, it shared its magistrates and administration with Gaza.[19] Thus it clearly had no administrative territory of its own.

It is much harder to determine how far the Gazan boundaries extended toward the east and southeast. Sources of the Hellenistic and Roman period tell us that Gaza bordered on Idumaea.[20] But where was the border? And how can the situation be described in the late Roman and Byzantine period, when Idumaea was no longer a geographical, much less an administrative reality?

Before trying to reconstruct a history of geographical boundaries in the area, let us examine the data available for the 5th-6th centuries. A number of inland villages are definitely known to have belonged to Gaza: Asalea (today Nazle), Bethelea (Beit Lahia), and nearby Chapharchonbra (unidentified).[21] A Byzantine site excavated at Ruhama, east of Gaza and about midway between it and Eleutheropolis (map ref. 121 101), has yielded an inscription dated by the era of Eleutheropolis.[22] Probably the site was within the boundaries of the latter, since Agla,

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[19] Sozomen, *HE* V, 3, 6-9, p. 196. Cf. A. H. M. Jones, *The Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces*, 2nd ed., Oxford, 1971, p. 280; Glucker, *The City of Gaza*, p. 43.

[20] *Testamentum Iudae* II, 6 (ed. M. de Jonge, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* [Pseudoepigrapha Veteris Testamenti Graece I, 2], Leiden, 1978, p. 53); Josephus, *Ant.* XIV, 10; idem, *Ap.* II, 116.

[21] See *TIR*, pp. 68, 81-82, s.vv. Asalea, Bethelea. For Chapharchonbra, a Gazan village near Bethelea, see Sozomen, *HE* VI, 32, 7, p. 288. Other toponyms in the territory of Gaza are known—e.g., Adia (Eusebius, *On.*, p. 24) and Capharbiana (*Apophth. Isaiae*, PO 8/1, p. 164), but no hint is given as to their location. On the other hand, of other inland villages east of Gaza, like Oga, Seana and Sobila (*TIR*, pp. 197, 225, 234, s.vv.), the location is known, but at the present state of research it cannot be determined whether they were included in the territory of this city.

[22] B. Lifshitz, "Inscriptions de Sinaï et de Palestine," *ZPE* 7 (1971), pp. 161-62, no. 20; Meimaris, *Chronological Systems*, pp. 312-13, no. 11. On Ruhama, a farm (or monastery?) and chapel, see *TIR*, p. 217, s.v.

due north of Ruhama on the Gaza-Eleutheropolis road (map ref. 123 108), appears also to have been in the territory of Eleutheropolis—at least, Eusebius locates it by means of its distance from that city.[23] Bethagidea of the Madaba map, identified with Kh. el-Jundi or Beth ha-Gaddi southwest of the site of Ruhama, seems to have belonged to the territory of Gaza.[24] In Wadi Ghazzeh (Nahal Besor) several Byzantine sites in a row from northwest to southeast may have belonged to the territory of Gaza. At the mouth of the streambed, Bethaglaim is known as a village in the territory of Gaza.[25] Next is Edrain, which appears on the Madaba map: name and situation both help to identify it with Khirbet el-'Ader (map ref. 096 093).[26] No information about the place is available, but judging by its location—about 8.5 km from Gaza as the crow flies, less than the distance between Gaza and Thabatha—it is reasonable to believe that it was included in the territory of that city. Just 2 km southeast of Khirbet el-'Ader is Horvat Gerarit (map ref. 096 091), where a still unpublished Greek inscription, dated 599 CE by the era of Gaza, mentions a bishop Misael. The same bishop is mentioned in two dedicatory inscriptions, dated 576 and 578 CE by the era of Gaza, in the church of Kissufim, a further 2 km south of Gerarit (map ref. 096 089).[27] Was Misael a bishop of Gaza? The

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[23] Eusebius, *On.*, p. 48; *TIR*, p. 58, s.v. The fact that Eusebius located a certain place by its distance from a particular city is not absolute proof that it was included in the boundaries of that city. However, since it seems that the bishop of Caesarea had access to official road maps of the Roman administration (see B. Isaac, "Eusebius and the Geography of Roman Provinces," in D.L. Kennedy [ed.], *The Roman Army in the East*, *JRA* Suppl. no. 18, Ann Arbor, 1996, pp. 153-67), this datum is not without significance, and may point to a measure of responsibility resting on the cities for the maintenance of public roads within their borders. If Jacques Seigne ("Les limites orientale et méridionale du territoire de Gerasa," *Syria* 74 [1997], p. 133) is right in his interpretation of rock-cut inscriptions to the east and south of Gerasa as boundary marks, the limits of its municipal territory would correspond to the change of *caput viae* along the roads connecting Gerasa to Adraa and Philadelphia; in other words, in official maps or itineraries, distances of villages situated along a public road would be consistently given with reference to the city in whose boundaries the villages were located.

[24] Sozomen, *HE* III, 14, 28, p. 122, mentions Bethagathon among the places near Gaza from which disciples came to Hilarion, who continued his work of converting the Gazan countryside. Cyril of Scythopolis, *Life of Euthymius* 57 (ed. E. Schwartz, *Kyrillos von Scythopolis*, TUGAL 49 ii, Leipzig, 1939, p. 78), locates Bethakabea by its distance from Gaza—12 Roman miles. See *TIR*, p. 79, s.v. Bethagidea (map ref. 113 092).

[25] See above, note 14.

[26] *TIR*, p. 115, s.v.

[27] On Horvat Gerarit, see *TIR*, p. 133, s.v. H. Gerarit, Kh. Umm Jerar. The

episcopal list of the city is devoid of names between 540 and the 11th century.[28] The proximity of Gerarit to Gaza strengthens the likelihood of its being included in the city territory, and the mention of the same bishop—Misael is an uncommon name, and it is unlikely to have been borne by two different bishops in the same period—brings Kissufim into the same bishopric. If not to Gaza, Gerarit and Kissufim must have belonged either to the Saltus Constantinianus, west of the wadi, or to the Saltus Gerariticus, east of it, if they reached far enough to the north. We shall discuss the location and extension of these imperial estates below: but already at this point it can be stated that, for several reasons unconnected with the extension of the two *saltus*, it is unlikely that the sites of Gerarit and Kissufim were included in one of them. First, it is reasonable to surmise that the streambed formed the border between the two *saltus*,[29] whereas Gerarit and Kissufim are located on opposite banks. Second, the inscriptions of Kissufim mention a hegumen, but the church did not belong to a monastery: the hegumen was only its warden (παραμονάριος)—obviously because while it was being erected and decorated the sacred building still lacked a priest in charge. The vignettes in the mosaic pavement depict patrons: a gentlewoman labelled "the lady Silthous" (or "the lady of Silthous"), a man portrayed in the act of hunting, and another man leading a camel laden with gifts.[30] This choice of subjects gives the impression that the

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inscriptioin is set in the pavement of a church located on the eastern bank of the ravine, some hundred metres from the ruins of a village, where a second church was identified (A. Ovadiah, *Corpus of the Byzantine Churches in the Holy Land*, Bonn, 1970, pp. 128-29, no. 131). On Kissufim, see R. Cohen, "The Marvelous Mosaics of Kissufim," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 6 (1980), pp. 16-23 (*SEG* 30, nos. 1688-93); *TIR*, p. 168, s.v.

[28] G. Fedalto, *Hierarchia Ecclesiastica Orientalis*, II, Padua, 1988, p. 1022.

[29] Rivers and other natural features often served as geographical, political or administrative borders: for instance, according to Ptolemy (V, 15, 4, 5; 16, 2, ed. C. F. A. Nobbe, Leipzig, 1843-1845, repr. Hildesheim, 1966), the river Eleutherus marked the boundary between Syria and Phoenicia, and the river Chorseos that between Phoenicia and Judaea; the Gaaton (not, as often stated, Nahal Kezib) separated the territory of Ptolemais from that of Tyre (L. Di Segni, "Greek Inscriptions in Western Galilee and the Question of the Border between Phoenice and Palaestina," *Conference of Galilee Studies*, Haifa and Galilee Research Institute 4, Haifa, 1989, pp. 4-10 [Hebrew]; ead., "Dated Greek Inscriptions," pp. 220-23); and as noted above, Nahal Shiqmah separated the territory of Gaza from that of Ascalon. Mountains could serve the same purpose: Eusebius sets up the Carmel as the border between Palestine and Phoenicia (*On.*, p. 118, ll. 8-9). Seigne ("Limites," pp. 130-33) has suggested that the crest of the mountains closing the basin of Wadi Jerash toward the east formed the eastern border of the territory of Gerasa, and other crests bounded it to the south.

[30] The meaning of the last two vignettes is not quite clear. The picture of the

church belonged to a private estate, which contradicts the hypothesis that it may have been located in an imperial estate. The use of the era of Gaza in the inscriptions of Kissufim proves nothing; still, it is worth noting that Menois, the centre of the Saltus Constantinianus, seems to have used an era of its own (on which below): if Kissufim, located on the western bank of Nahal Besor, had belonged to the Saltus Constantinianus, one might have expected this era to be used in the church inscriptions.

All these are pieces of circumstantial evidence, no more; still, they seem to strengthen the likelihood that the municipal territory of Gaza extended southeast at least up to Kissufim. If this is true, we can assign to Gaza also the village of Kefar She'arta, where was located the Monophysite monastery founded by Peter the Iberian's friend, Zeno; for Kefar She'arta is identified with certainty with Khirbet Sha'arta, midway between Horvat Gerarit and Kissufim (map ref. 098 090).[31] The biographer of Peter the Iberian indeed located the village through its distance from Gaza, though as already observed, this in not in itself proof that it belonged to the territory of that city.

Continuing along Nahal Besor, we come upon Shellal, about 12 km southeast of Kissufim, where the dedicatory inscription of a church is dated 561/2 CE by the era of Gaza. The inscription is fragmentary and the name of the bishop is unfortunately lost.[32] Are we still in the territory of Gaza? This is doubtful, for the land on either side of Shellal seems to have been occupied by the two imperial estates mentioned above: the Saltus Constantinianus to the west and the Saltus Gerariticus to the east. As they were the property of the emperor, the *saltus* were not attached to cities: therefore these two districts, which after

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hunter is labelled ῎Εργον ᾽Αλεξάνδρου, which can be interpreted either as the artist's signature or as referring to the subject, which in turn may be interpreted either as a classical scene of Alexander the Great hunting or as a portrait of a benefactor of the church at leisure. The second vignette is labelled ῎Ορβικον, which is unlikely as a personal name and unknown as a noun. I suggest viewing it as a term influenced by the Latin *orbis*, "cycle," and synonymous of κυκλικὸν φόρον, "periodical offering"—a reference to seasonal gifts offered to the church. The man leading the beast may be just an anonymous camel driver but in the context of the other vignettes his act can well be seen in connection with the exaltation of an aristocratic family—represented by Lady Silthous and Lord Alexander—who were patrons of the church.

[31] John Rufus, *Life of Peter the Iberian*, ed. R. Raabe, *Petrus der Iberer*, Leipzig, 1895, p. 50 (tr. p. 51); idem, *Plerophoriae* 8, ed. F. Nau, *Jean Rufus évêque de Maïouma, Plérophories*, PO 8/1, p. 20. For the identification, see *TIR*, p. 165, s.v. Kefar She'arta.

[32] A.D. Trendall, *The Shellal Mosaic*, Canberra, 1957; *TIR*, p. 230, s.v. Shellal, 'En ha-Besor. See also above, note 1.

the partition of Palestine were included in Palaestina Prima, did not belong to the territory of Gaza.

The region called Geraritica, according to Eusebius and Jerome, extended beyond the Daroma (Southern Judaea), 25 Roman miles south of Eleutheropolis, and included Beersheba.[33] It is advisable to advance the observation that Jerome's identification of the Gerar region with Beersheba, originating from the events recounted in Genesis 20-21, brings him to utter a misleading statement in his commentary of these chapters: "From this passage and the preceding ones we must note that Isaac was not born at the Oak of Mamre or in the Valley of Mamre, as is written in the Hebrew text, but in Gerar, where the town of Beersheba is until this very day. Not long ago, following a division of the governors, this province has been named Palaestina Salutaris."[34] Whether the division of Palaestina Salutaris is dated to ca. 357 or to a later period, just before this passage was written, a large part of the Geraritica—namely, the Saltus Gerariticus —remained attached to Palaestina Prima even when Beersheba was included in the newly created Salutaris.

The Geraritica extended far to the west and northwest of Beersheba. Eusebius seems to imply a geographical continuity between the Geraritica and the territory of Ascalon.[35] The Madaba map correctly located biblical Gerar between Beersheba and Gaza.[36] Since 451, if not earlier, the term Gerara no longer applied to a mere geographi-

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[33] Eusebius, *On.*, pp. 60, 166. Eusebius must have had in mind a specific spot when he gives 25 miles as the distance of the Geraritica from Eleutheropolis. Twenty-five Roman miles is roughly the distance from Eleutheropolis to biblical Gerar, which is identified with Tel Haror (Tell Abu Hureira, map ref. 112 087): see *TIR*, p. 132, s.v. Gerar, Saltus Gerariticus. Tel Haror is southwest of Eleutheropolis, which can fit Eusebius' expression: πρὸς νότον (*On.* p. 60, ll. 8-9). Notus, the southwertern wind, can designate in Greek both the south and the southwest. Jerome on the other hand translated *ad meridiem* (*On.*, p. 61, l. 7): either he had no clear idea of the respective positions of Eleutheropolis and Gerar (which is more than likely) or he was thinking of the Geraritica as the Beersheba region, as he does in the *Hebraicae Quaestiones* (see note 34).

[34] Jerome, *Hebr. Quaest. Gen.*, 21, 30-31, p. 26. On the date of creation of Palaestina Salutaris, see above, note 9.

[35] Eusebius, *On.*, p. 168: "The Well of the Oath (Beersheba: Gen. 26:33). Where Isaac and Abimelech swore (their oath). It is also called the city of Isaac. Many other wells are also mentioned in the Scripture, and until today they show them in Geraritica and beside Ascalon." Africanus even identifies biblical Gerar with Ascalon: *Chronicon*, Fr. 14, ed. M.J. Routh, *Reliquiae Sacrae* II, Part ii, Oxford, 1814, p. 153.

[36] M. Avi-Yonah, *The Madaba Mosaic Map*, Jerusalem, 1954, p. 72, no. 101.

cal entity, but designated a bishopric, whose seat—at least in the 6th century—seems to have been in the town of Orda.[37] The bishopric was created in what was already an administrative unit, whose headquarters were at first in Birsama, a fort and settlement garrisoned by Equites Thamudeni Illiriciani.[38] In fact, Birsama is mentioned in a law of the Codex Theodosianus, dated 409, as one of two *castra*—the other being Menois, on which below—where the ducal office tried to subvert the imperial statutes in force in the three Palaestinae and exact the *annona militaris* in kind instead of admitting the *adaeratio*.[39] In this period the land-tax was exacted as a rule by the cities, each in its own territory: in this case the two *castra* clearly functioned as administrative centres of districts not included in a municipal territory. The district whose headquarters was Birsama was the Saltus Gerariticus, which is listed by Georgius Cyprius as Σάλτον Γεραριτικὸν ἤτοι Βαρσάμων.[40] A Greek inscription discovered in a 6th-century church at Horvat Beer Shema' names a bishop of Gerar called Helladius:[41] its is clear, therefore, that the bishopric created in the Saltus Gerariticus extended at least from Gerar through Orda to Birsama, in the basins of Nahal Gerar and Nahal Besor, up to the eastern bank of the latter. The Madaba map adds to the label ΓΕΡΑΡΑ the words "where is the Saltus Gerariticus" (ἔνθα τὸ Γεραριτικὸν σάλτον).

The Saltus Gerariticus is first mentioned as such by Theodoret, who writes: "Nobody, I think, will deny that Gerar belongs to Palestine; for to the present day (the area) in the vicinity of Eleutheropolis

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[37] A. Alt, "Beiträge zur historischen Geographie und Topographie des Negev. I. Das Bistum Orda," *JPOS* 11 (1931), pp. 204-21; idem, "Beiträge zur historischen Geographie und Topographie des Negev. II. Das Land Gari," *JPOS* 12 (1932), 126-41; Fedalto, *Hierarchia*, p. 1023. See also *TIR*, p. 198, s.v. Orda; G. Schmitt, *Siedlungen Palästinas in griechisch-römischer Zeit*, Wiesbaden, 1995, pp. 167-69, 269. Orda is identified with Kh. 'Irq (map ref. 108 086).

[38] *Notitia dignitatum: Notitia Orientis*, XXXIV, 10, 32 (ed. O. Seeck, 1876, repr. Frankfurt a.M., 1962], pp. 72-73); *TIR*, p. 91, s.v. Birsama. The site is identified with Kh. Far, Horvat Beer Shema' (map ref. 106 074).

[39] *Codex Theodosianus* VII, 4, 30 (23 March 409), eds. T. Mommsen and P. M. Meyer, Berlin, 1954.

[40] Georgius Cyprius, *Descriptio* 1027 (Honigmann, p. 67). The *Synecdemos* of Hierocles does not mention the Saltus Gerariticus, unless the unknown Ariza in the list of Palaestina Prima designates Orda: see Schmitt, *Siedlungen*, p. 65.

[41] V. Tzaferis, "Greek Inscriptions from the Ancient Church at Horvat Be'er-Shema'," *Eretz Israel* 25 (1996), pp. 75*-85* (*AE* 1996, no. 1566); and see the corrections of D. Feissel, "Bulletin épigraphique," *Revue des études grecques* 111 (1997), pp. 597-99, no. 659.

(περὶ τὴν καλουμένην Ἐλευθερόπολιν) is called Saltus Gerariticus (Γεραρηνῶν σαλτόν)."[42] Theodoret, a native of northern Syria, had no direct knowledge of the region but must have received this piece of information from someone who had. Whoever the source, it is interesting to note that he located the Saltus Gerariticus in relation not to Gaza but to Eleutheropolis, in spite of the fact that the villages known to belong to the Saltus Gerariticus are nearer the former than the latter. Either the Saltus extended to the north much farther than we know—perhaps to include villages such as Oga and Buriron, whose location is known but not to which city they belonged—or else this statement was influenced by a different factor. If we exclude a purely learned notion, for which there seems to be no grounds, [43] a likely surmise is that the source knew of a direct link between the Saltus Gerariticus and Eleutheropolis. Such a link may have gone back to an early time: if, for instance, the area occupied by the Saltus had traditionally belonged to Idumaea, before it became an imperial estate, a native of the region would instinctively have connected it to Eleutheropolis rather than to Gaza, even if the distance from the former was greater than from the latter. But the link may have been in existence more recently, perhaps not long before Theodoret was writing the *Quaestiones*, in the second quarter of the 5th century. Before the creation of the bishopric of the Saltus, or bishopric of Orda, first attested in 451, the area was probably included in the bishopric of Eleutheropolis. A hint of this can be found in the story of the *inventio* of the tomb of the prophet Zechariah, told by Sozomen, a well-informed source for southern Palestine. The tomb was discovered at Caphar Zacharia, a village in the territory of Eleutheropolis, by a local steward who had seen the prophet in a dream. Together with the remains of the prophet, the body of a child in royal attire was discovered, and "the learned men and the priests wondered who this child might be, where he came from, and why was he so attired." The riddle was solved by Zacharias, the abbot of the monastery in Gerar, who found in an ancient Hebrew non-canonical book a report that King Joash'

[42] Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Quaestiones in II Paralipomenon* XIV, 13 (PG 80, col. 828).

[43] It does not seem likely that Theodoret was influenced by Eusebius in this statement. Admittedly, both deal with the Geraritica in commenting on the Scripture, but the scriptural texts are not the same. Moreover, the mention of the Saltus is not a piece of bookish lore but must originate from information about local realities.

son had died a week after his father had killed the prophet (II Chron. 24:22), and had been buried with him.[44] The *inventio* can be dated to the beginning of the 5th century at the latest, as Zacharias was the successor of the 4th-century monk Silvanus, the founder of the monastery of Gerar.[45] It seems most likely that the discussion about the identity of the child—which was crucial for identifying the old man whose body had been found in the tomb—was held among the clergy and scholars of the bishopric of Eleutheropolis before the discovery of the precious relics was announced to the other churches. Among those who took part in the debate was the abbot of Gerar, a learned man who could read ancient Hebrew and had access to an outstanding library. In the early 5th century the Saltus Gerariticus was a district with headquarters at Birsama, as attested by the Theodosian Code, and thus it was not part of the municipal territory of Eleutheropolis: its inclusion in the diocese of the city points to the early connection of this area to Idumaea.

Σάλτον Κωνσταντινιακῆς appears in Georgius Cyprius' list of Palaestina Prima immediately before Σάλτον Γεραριτικὸν ἤτοι Βαρσάμων; hence its location by scholars in the western Negev. It is also mentioned as Σάλτον Κωνσταντινιακόν in a fragment of the Beersheba edict that speaks of tribal chiefs of this Saltus who paid the land tax.[46] Its name hints that the Saltus was formed, or its administrative status was changed, under Constantine or his son Constantius. Alt saw a parallel between the constitution of the Saltus Constantinianus and the elevation of Maiuma to city status. Moreover, he suggested that the headquarters of the Saltus was Menois (Khirbet Ma'in, map ref. 093 082), which is mentioned in the Theodosian Code as a place of exaction of the land tax, and later (at least since 449) as an episcopal see.[47] This hypothesis was strengthened by the discovery of three inscriptions on the site, which are dated by an era starting under Constantine or possibly Constantius.[48] About the origin of the Saltus

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[44] Sozomen, *HE* IX, 17, pp. 407-08.

[45] Sozomen, *HE* VI, 32, 8, p. 289.

[46] Georgius Cyprius, *Descriptio* 1026, ed. Honigmann, p. 67; Alt, *Die griechischen*, p. 12, no. 4.

[47] A. Alt, "Limes Palaestinae," *Palästina Jahrbuch* 26 (1930), pp. 53-54, 75-78; *TIR*, pp. 183, 220, s.vv. Menois, Maon II; Saltus Constantinianus; Schmitt, *Siedlungen*, pp. 247-48, 298.

[48] Meimaris, *Chronological Systems*, pp. 324-25, 328-29, nos. 10-12. A fourth inscription (*ibid.*, no. 13) was copied in Jerusalem but probably did not originate there. Inscribed

Constantinianus, one wonders whether Constantine's motivation may have been the same as in the case of Maiuma: a wish to grant independence from the pagan authorities of Gaza to a newly Christianized population. In this case, it may have been Arab tribes settled in this area that had been converted by the saintly monk Hilarion.[49] It is not to be excluded that the imperial estate was carved out of the territory of Gaza with a multiple aim: providing land for these tribes to settle on, pre-empting the loyalty of the new Christians to the Christian emperor, and ensuring their security from the municipal authorities of the pagan city. We have no information about the extension of the Saltus, though it has been suggested that a Byzantine settlement excavated at Kibbuz Magen was included in it.[50]

Let us now go back to the Roman period. In his description of the Mediterranean coast from Egypt to Phoenicia, Pliny describes as "Arabia" the tract between Pelusium and Ostracina, then goes on to say: *Mox Idumaea incipit et Palaestina ab emenso Sirbonis lacus* ("Then begins Idumaea, [a subdivision of] Palaestina, from the starting point of the Serbonian lagoon," i.e., just east of Ostracina).[51] Though Pliny was well aware that Idumaea was located inland,[52] his mention of it in this context makes clear that, according to his information, Idumaea was just beyond a narrow strip of coast occupied by a string of maritime cities whose names he lists immediately below: Rhinocorura, Raphia, Gaza, and so on. Interestingly, Pliny treats Idumaea as an entity apart from Judaea, while Flavius Josephus listed it among the toparchies of Judaea.[53] This does not mean, of course, that it was not part of

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stones from the area of Gaza and the Negev were often brought to Jerusalem in the 19th century by scholars, members of the clergy, or dealers in antiquities.

[49] On Hilarion's activities among the pagans, and especially the Saracens of the desert between Gaza and Elusa, see Jerome, *Life of Hilarion* 14, 25 (PL 23, cols. 24, 41); 8, 16 (ed. A.A.R. Bastiaensen, Verona, 1973, pp. 90, 108-110).

[50] V. Tzaferis, "Mosaics and Inscriptions from Magen," *BASOR* 258 (1985), pp. 1-32.

[51] Pl., *NH* V, 68. For the interpretation of "Idumaea et Palaestina", see M. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, I, Jerusalem, 1974, p. 472.

[52] Cf. Pl., *NH* V, 70: *Supra Idumaeam et Samariam Iudaea longe lateque funditur*, in which *supra* is to be understood in the sense of *in mediterraneo*, in contrast to *in ora*: see Sterm, *Greek and Latin Authors*, I, p. 474.

[53] Jos., *Bell.* III, 54-56. Beside Idumaea, another toparchy in Josephus' list is missing from that of Pliny: Engaddi, which after the revolt was attached to the district of Jericho. While Josephus describes the administrative situation before the revolt, Pliny reflects the changes brought about by the war: see B. Isaac, "The Babatha Archive: A Review Article," *IEJ* 42 (1982), pp. 67-69. Isaac suggests that Idumaea may have

*provincia Iudaea*—later Syria Palaestina—as was also Samaria.

In the 2nd century, the region of Judaea extended along the western coast of the Dead Sea—En Gedi and Thamara were included in it[54]—while Idumaea occupied the inland area. Ptolemy lists the following towns of Idumaea: Birsama, Capharorsa, Gemmaruris, Elusa, and Mampsis, thus defining a large area which comprised the southern Judaean Hills, [55] and the western and northern Negev.[56] The rest of the Negev, as well as Zoara on the southeastern coast of the Dead Sea, belonged to Arabia.

We shall not go into the vicissitudes of the Negev and southern Judaea in the late 3rd and 4th centuries: the transfer of the Negev from Arabia to Palaestina, the possible creation of a Nea Arabia more or less corresponding to the old Idumaea, the date of creation of Palaestina Salutaris. All these changes are still far from clear and do not touch on the subject of the present discussion. Rather, we shall consider Ptolemy's testimony about Birsama belonging to Idumaea, and note that it is consistent with the reality of the 5th and 6th centuries, when Birsama and the Saltus Gerariticus are not included in the territory of Gaza but nevertheless remain attached to Palaestina Prima (Theodoret's and Georgius Cyprius' testimonies). It seems beyond doubt, therefore, that the area which later formed the Saltus Gerariticus was never included in the territory of Gaza but belonged to Idumaea and was administered with all the rest of it.

This surmise makes possible the formulation of two working hypotheses. The first is that any sign of Gazan influence in the Byzantine Negev—the use of the era of Gaza or of a Gazan standard—was due not to actual political domination in the past, [57] but rather to economic

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been attached, at least partly, to the neighbouring districts of Oreine and Herodion. In fact, in the list of villages of Judaea and Idumaea given by Ptolemy (V, 16, 8, 10), ancient Idumaea is divided: Beth Govrin is included in Judaea, while the area to the south of it—Gemmaruris and Capharorsa—are ascribed to Idumaea.

[54] *Babatha Archive*, pap. 16, l. 16, ed. N. Lewis; *The Documents from the Bar Kokhba Period in the Cave of the Letters. Greek Papyri*, Jerusalem, 1989, p. 66; Ptol. V, 16, 8.

[55] Ptol. V, 16, 10. Gemmaruris is Kh. Jemrura southeast of Beth Govrin (map ref. 147 110), and Capharorsa is Kh. Khureisa in the southern Hebron Hills (map ref. 162 095): *TIR*, pp. 98, 132, s.vv.

[56] Birsama, Horvat Beer Shema' (map ref. 106 074); Elusa, Halutza (map ref. 116 056); Mampsis, Mamshit (map ref. 156 048): *TIR*, pp. 91, 119, 177, s. vv.

[57] The only time Gaza and Idumaea were under a single administration was in Herod's time; but then it was Gaza that found itself under Idumaean administration, when Herod gave his brother-in-law Kostabarus the charge of both districts: Josephus, *Ant.* XV, 254.

reasons. It may have been the result of the activity of merchants from Gaza on the commercial route to Petra, or even of the simple fact that the people of the city depended, at least partly, on this hinterland for their supplies, and the farmers of this area in turn, if they had agricultural surplus to sell, would naturally bring it to the port of Gaza. The interdependence of the western Negev and Gaza is well reflected in the Nessana papyri of the early Arab period, which show that the whole of this area—Sycomazon, Elusa, and Nessana—had become administratively dependent on Gaza.[58]

As a second result of the same surmise, one may perhaps hazard a guess about the origin of the imperial estate later known as Saltus Gerariticus. As it was part of Idumaea in the early Roman period, the first possibility that comes to mind is that this was a royal estate of the Herodian house, and as such passed into the hands of the emperor when Judaea became a Roman province. We hear of royal estates—some going back to the Hasmonaeans and inherited by the Herodian dynasty—in several parts of the country.[59] However, there is no information, as far as I know, about an estate of the Jewish kings in this area. Another occasion for the creation of an imperial estate in this region may have been created by the circumstances of the great Jewish revolt against Rome. Idumaeans took part in the revolt, and therefore their lands conceivably suffered the same fate as those of Judaea. About the fate of the latter, scholarly opinion is divided. The passage of *The Jewish War* in which Josephus describes Vespasian's treatment of the land after the defeat of the Jews is interpreted by B. Isaac as meaning that only the property of the insurgents was confiscated, and the emperor ordered that it be sold to anyone who could afford to buy it—except for the land he assigned to veterans at Emmaus (Colonia).[60] Most scholars in the past, however, interpreted the passage to mean that Vespasian held the land as his private property and leased it out to his own advantage. The only difference of opinion was about the

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[58] *PNessana*, nos. 61, 62, 63, 65, 66, 67 (Elusa), 64 (Sycomazon), 70-71 (Nessana).

[59] Cf. S. Applebaum, "Royal and Imperial Estates in the Sharon and Samaria," *Judaea in Hellenistic and Roman Times*, Leiden, 1989, pp. 97-110; M. Sartre, *D'Alexandre à Zénobie*, Paris, 2001, pp. 406-07, 738-41.

[60] Jos., *Bell.* VII, 216; B. Isaac, "Judaea after AD 70," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 35 (1984), pp. 44-50. Sartre accepts Isaac's view in principle but still believes that large areas of the Hasmonaean kingdom were royal estates, and later became imperial estates parcelled out to lessees: *D'Alexandre*, pp. 406-07, 556-57, 597, 737-43, 749-50.

area affected: Judaea proper or the whole province of this name.[61] If Isaac's interpretation is accepted, it is clear that not only the land of Judaea proper would have suffered this fate, but also lands in Idumaea whose owners had taken an active part in the revolt. Even if one accepts the view of a general confiscation, Idumaea may still have been involved in it, as part of Provincia Iudaea. It is conceivable, therefore, that the Saltus Gerariticus came into existence—perhaps not under this name—at that time and in those circumstances. As already noted, Pliny's list of Judaean toparchies seems to show a dismemberment of Idumaea: part was probably attached to Oreine and Herodion, part remained outside the list. Can this be a hint that part of old Idumaea was not administered in the framework of the toparchian system but through procurators of the imperial estates?

## *Appendix: The Inscription of Horvat Gerarit*

Some hundreds of metres from the ruins of the ancient village at Horvat Gerarit, which include a Byzantine church, a second church was excavated.[62] It is located on the bank of Wadi Ghazzeh, and erosion caused part of the building to collapse into the streambed. A medallion enclosing a seven-line inscription was set in the mosaic pavement of the northern aisle. The round frame, 18 cm wide, is made of red, white and black tesserae. The external diameter of the medallion measures 140 cm, the inner one 102 cm. The letters are traced in red tesserae and vary in size: they are 11 cm high in the first line, 10 in the second and third, 9 in the fourth and fifth, 10 in the sixth, and 9 in the seventh. The lines are separated by two rows of white tesserae, larger than those forming the characters. The letters are a mixture of square and round shapes; *omicron* and *theta* are pointed. The diphthong ΟΥ is monogrammed. In l. 3, the *rho* of the truncated word πρ(εσβυτέρου) probably had a small diagonal stroke across its stem, indicating the abbreviation, but the lower part of the letter is destroyed. In l. 6, a small crooked mark above *mu* probably indicated the overhanging *eta* of the abbreviated μη(νί).

The text reads:

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[61] See bibliography *apud* Isaac, "Judaea," p. 44, note 1.

[62] Only a short note was published by the excavator: Y. Porath, "Horvat Gerarit," *Hadashot Archeologiyot* 61-62 (1977), pp. 37-38. The inscription was first read by V. Tzaferis. I wish to thank both for giving me permission to publish it.

ЄΠΙΜΙCΑΗΛ
ΤΥΑΓΙΩ̄ΗΜSЄΠS
SZΑΧΑΡΙΥΠ₱SΧWΡ
SΑΛΦЄΙΥΔΙΑ₭SΟΙ
ΚΟΝΟΜSЄΓЄΝЄΤΟΗ
ΨΗΦWCSΜΠΑΝΗΜS
ЄΤΥΘΝΧΙΝΒ

Ἐπὶ Μισαὴλ
τοῦ ἁγιω(τάτου) ἡμ(ῶν) ἐπ(ισκόπου)
(καὶ) Ζαχαρίου πρ(εσβυτέρου) (καὶ) χωρ(επισκόπου)
4 (καὶ) Ἀλφείου διακ(όνου) (καὶ) οἰ-
κονόμ(ου) ἐγένετο ἡ
ψήφωσ(ις) μη(νὶ) Πανήμ(ου)
ἔτου(ς) θνχ' ἰν(δικτιῶνος) β'.

Under Misael, our most holy bishop, and Zacharias the priest and *chorepiscopus*, and Alphius the deacon and church steward, the mosaic was made in the month of Panemos of the year 659, indiction 2.

Year 659 of the era of Gaza corresponds to 598/99; Panemus in the city calendar fell between June 25 and July 24. The date is therefore June-July 599, which fell in the second indiction. Besides the bishop, Misael, who was already in office in 576, as attested by the inscriptions of Kissufim, two other clergymen are mentioned: a *chorepiscopus* and a steward. The role of the *chorepiscopus* in the supervision of communities in the countryside is well known, and it is not unusual to find his name in building inscriptions of rural churches.[63] Probably the *chorepiscopus* helped the rural community build the church by providing instructions, technical assistance, and possibly financial support. Zacharias was a simple priest, as was usually the case for *chorepiscopi* in this period. The third man, Alphius—a Semitic name, like the others—was a deacon and steward, obviously of the diocesan church. The title οἰκονόμος in ecclesiastical context applies to three different offices: the steward in charge of the revenues and property of a diocese on behalf of the bishop, the administrator of an individual church,

[63] Y. E. Meimaris *Sacred Names, Saints, Martyrs and Church Officials in the Greek Inscriptions and Papyri Pertaining to the Church of Palestine*, Athens, 1986, pp. 214-17. To Meimaris' list, we can add an inscription from the church of Khirbet Tawas, south of Eleutheropolis, which mentions a bishop and *chorepiscopus* of this city: L. Di Segni, "Greek Inscriptions in the Church at Khirbet Tawas," in Y. Magen and V. Tzaferis (eds.), *Christians and Christianity in Judaea and Samaria* (forthcoming).

and the steward of a monastery.[64] In this case, the man was probably a steward of the church of Gaza, which had provided the funds for the building. The church did not belong to a monastery, as is clear from the contents of the inscription, for as a rule, building inscriptions in monasteries mention the abbot's name. Moreover, there are no remains of a monastery in the vicinity: the large cistern in front of the church is a common feature of all churches.

One wonders, why would the bishop and the church officials of Gaza erect a sacred building outside a village that already had a church of its own? The answer can probably be found in the strength of Monophysitism in the Gaza region. If the village of Horvat Gerarit was mostly Monophysite, the orthodox could not come to Mass in the village church and partake of the Eucharist there: consequently, the orthodox bishop of Gaza would probably feel it to be his duty to build another church at a short distance from the village in order to provide a cult site for any orthodox inhabitants, and in the hope of tempting others away from their heretical church.

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[64] On the office of οἰκονόμος, see Meimaris, *Sacred Names*, pp. 256-59, with a collection of epigraphic examples from Palestine and Arabia. The office of steward of a bishopric was made obligatory for every diocese by canon 26 of the Council of Chalcedon, but Justinian's legislation deals also with οἰκονόμοι of single churches or religious institutions. For instance, *CJ* 1, 3, 45 establishes the right of testators to have a steward appointed for the church or pious institution they endow: the official was called οἰκονόμος or παραμονάριος or by other specific names, according to the type of charitable activity in which the foundation specialized. In Palestine and vicinity, only laurae had an οἰκονόμος, while in the coenobia the task fell upon the deputy of the hegumen (δευτεράριος): Y. Patrich, *Sabas, Leader of Palestinian Monasticism*, Washington, D.C., 1995, pp. 174-77 (Palestine) and cf. 15-17 (Egypt), 26 (Syria).

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## *Abbreviations*

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| *AE* | = | *L' Année Épigraphique* |
| *Babatha Archive* | = | *The Documents from the Bar Kokhba Period in the Cave of the Letters. Greek papyri*, ed. N. Lewis; *Aramaic and Nabatean signatures and subscriptions*, eds. Y. Yadin and J.C. Greenfield, Jerusalem, 1989. |
| *BASOR* | = | *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Resarch* |
| CCSL | = | Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina |
| *CJ* | = | *Corpus Iuris Civilis II: Codex Justinianus*, ed. P. Krueger, Berlin, 1954. |
| *CTh* | = | *Codex Theodosianus*, eds. Th. Mommsen and P.M. Meyer, Berlin, 1954. |
| GCS | = | Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte, Kirchenväter Kommission der königlichen Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften |
| *IEJ* | = | *Israel Exploration Journal* |
| *JPOS* | = | *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society* |
| PG | = | J. P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus*, Series graeca |
| *P.Nessana* | = | H. Dunscombe Colt, *Excavations at Nessana*, III: C. J. Craemer, *Non-Literary Papyri*, Princeton, N.J., 1958. |
| PO | = | *Patrologia Orientalis* |
| Ptol. | = | *Claudii Ptolomei Geographia*, ed. C.F.A. Nobbe, Leipzig, 1843-1845 (Hildesheim, 1966). |
| *REG* | = | *Revue des études grecques* |
| *SEG* | = | *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* |
| *TIR* | = | Y. Tsafrir, L. Di Segni and J. Green, *Tabula Imperii Romani. Judaea-Palaestina. Maps and Gazetteer*, Jerusalem, 1994. |
| TUGAL | = | Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Altchristlichen Literatur |

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# THE MONASTERIES OF GAZA: AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL REVIEW

Yizhar Hirschfeld

## *Introduction*

This article is devoted to an archaeological review of the Byzantine monasteries within the sphere of the city of Gaza. In this period, Gaza's territory was bordered on the north by Ascalon, on the east by Beth Govrin (Eleutheropolis), and on the south by the imperial estates of Saltus Gerariticus and Saltus Constantinianus (Fig. 1).[1] The literary sources reveal a rich picture of at least ten monasteries in the territory of Gaza.[2] However, only two sites in this region have been identified with certainty as monasteries—i.e., isolated building complexes, including a church, of the Byzantine period: the monastery of Seridus (Arabic: Deir e-Nuseirat) southwest of Gaza and the monastery near Khirbet Jemameh east of Gaza.[3] The main reason is the widespread practice of exploiting ancient building stones for secondary use. In contrast to the Judaean desert and the deserts of Sinai and the Negev, in which there was only a sparse population of nomads, the area of Gaza was and still is densely settled. Its inhabitants throughout the generations have made use of ancient sites, including monasteries, as a source of building stones. The poor preservation of the remains poses a considerable challenge to the archaeologist attempting to identify, as far as possible, the location of the monasteries of Gaza. To the

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[1] M. Avi-Yonah, *Historical Geography of Palestine from the End of the Babylonian Exile up to the Arab Conquest*, Jerusalem, 1962, pp. 117–118. See also idem, "Palästina," in *Pauly's Realencyclopädie*, Supplementum and XII, Munich, 1974, pp. 424–425.

[2] For the most up-to-date summary of Gazan monasticism, see B. Bitton-Ashkelony and A. Kofsky, "Gazan Monasticism in the Fourth–Sixth Centuries," *Proche Orient Chrétien* 50 (2000), pp. 14–62. See also D. J. Chitty, *The Desert a City: An Introduction to the Study of Egyptian and Palestinian Monasticism under the Christian Empire*, London and Oxford, 1966, pp. 71–77, 103–105, 132–140.

[3] A report on the excavation of the monastery of Seridus at Deir e-Nuseirat has not yet been published. I am grateful to the Palestinian archaeologist Yasser Khassouna, who permitted me to visit this important site with its impressive remains. The monastery near Khirbet Jemameh was excavated in the 1950s. See R. Gophna and N. Feig, "A Byzantine Monastery at Kh. Jemameh," *'Atiqot* 22 (1993), pp. 97–108.

best of my knowledge, no archaeological research on these monasteries has previously been conducted, and a map of them has not been published.[4] In the present study, despite the limitations, I will attempt to remedy this lack.

The distribution of the monasteries connected with Gaza may be divided into three geographical circles: an inner circle with a radius of some 15 km from Gaza that contains most of the monasteries known to us by their historical names, an intermediate circle encompassing the farther periphery of the city (up to 25 km), and an outer circle containing the monasteries of the Negev. Though the latter are situated beyond the territory of Gaza, it appears that, at least from the historical point of view, the influence of Gaza on them was dominant.[5] Thus, for example, we hear that Hilarion, the founding father of Gazan monasticism in the fourth century, was active in proselytizing the nomadic tribes in the area of Elusa in the Negev.[6]

The article consists of three parts. The first describes the historical-geographical background of the monasteries of Gaza. The second, and longest part presents a survey of the monasteries located in the three circles relative to the city of Gaza. The third part discusses the character of Gazan monasticism as reflected by the geographical location of the monasteries and their archaeological remains.

## *The Historical-Geographical Background*

Gaza is located in an area that is transitional between the temperate Mediterranean and the arid desert.[7] The area that corresponds to

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[4] In his comprehensive historical-geographic survey of the region between Gaza and Pelusium in the Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine periods, Figueras presents a short summary of Gazan monasticism. See P. Figueras, *From Gaza to Pelusium: Materials for the Historical Geography of North Sinai and Southwestern Palestine* (Beer-Sheva 14), Beersheva 2000, pp. 132–136.

[5] On the monasteries of the Negev, see P. Figueras, "Monks and Monasteries in the Negev Desert," *Liber Annuus* 45 (1995), pp. 401–447. The present summary does not include the monasteries of the Negev that were founded next to churches in the middle of settlements, such as the North Church at Shivta and the North Church at Nessana, but relates exclusively to monasteries that were located on the margins of rural settlements or outside them.

[6] On the activity of Hilarion in the area of Elusa, see P. Mayerson, "The City of Elusa in the Literary Sources of the Fourth-Sixth Centuries," *Israel Exploration Journal* 33 (1983), pp. 247–248; C. A. M. Glucker, *The City of Gaza in the Roman and Byzantine Periods*, Oxford, 1987, p. 45.

[7] The geographical data for the Gaza Strip and the western Negev are taken

today's Gaza Strip is about 40 km long, and its width varies from 6 km in the north to some 12 km in the south. The conditions in this area change drastically toward the south and the east. Thus, for instance, Gaza enjoys ca. 400 mm of annual rainfall, while Raphiah (ancient Raphia), located about 20 km to the south, receives only 200 mm. The geography of the area is dictated by two sandstone ridges running parallel to the coast and a valley 2–3 km wide between them. Along this valley runs the traditional King's Highway, which conferred on Gaza its status as a significant port city. The highway formed junctions with land routes running from the Negev and the deserts of Transjordan. Consequently, the port of Gaza was not only the gateway to the settlements of southern Palestine, but also the entrepôt for traders and goods arriving from India and southern Arabia on their way to the Mediterranean.

### *The Gaza Region*

The two ridges that form the Gaza Strip are of great importance in the scheme of the landscape. The western ridge, 40–60 m above sea level and bordering the shore, is largely covered by sand dunes. The eastern ridge is higher (80–100 m) and constitutes an effective barrier to the encroachment of sand dunes. The only watercourse that succeeds in crossing both ridges on its way to the sea is Nahal Besor (Wadi Ghazzeh). This is a watercourse of impressive proportions: its drainage basin is larger than 3, 000 $km^2$ and includes Hebron and the Negev highlands. Though torrential floods rage in the watercourse each winter, it does not breach the ridges in a straight line but meanders for a distance of some 20 km, creating a landscape of imposing cliffs in the process.

The other watercourses reaching the region from the east are unsuccessful in breaching the sandstone ridges. In the area of Deir el-Balah, for instance, a seasonal lake is created each year several hundred

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from D. Gazit, *Archaeological Survey of Israel, Map of Urim (125)*, Jerusalem, 1996, p. 9*; idem, *Hevel HaBesor (The Besor Region)*, Tel Aviv, 1986, pp. 11–19 (Hebrew); R. Izrael, "Region of Gaza," in *Israel Guide: Sinai and Gaza Plain*, ed. A. Yitzhaki, Jerusalem, 1979, pp. 283–302 (Hebrew); Y. Karmon, *Eretz Israel: Geography of the Land and its Regions*, Tel Aviv, 1973, pp. 373–375 (Hebrew); E. Orni and E. Efrat, *Geography of Israel*, Jerusalem, 1964, pp. 16–41.

meters from the coast. This phenomenon has a decisive impact on the groundwater of the area. In the area of Gaza some 800 private wells enable the irrigation of a large area of about 55, 000 acres (220, 00 dunams). The abundance of water, the fertile soil brought as alluvium by the floods, and the temperate climate make the area extremely fruitful. To this day, the region of Gaza is a blend of orchards, fields of wheat and barley, vegetable gardens, vineyards, and groves of olive, almond, and palm trees. Between the date palms of Deir el-Balah are fields of wheat and barley, increasing the agricultural potential of the land (Fig. 2). The waters of Gaza are rich in fish (or were before the construction of the Aswan Dam in Egypt), and fishing provides an important source of income to the region.

### *The Western Negev Plain*

To the east of Gaza is an area known as the Besor region. Part of the western Negev, it extends over a large area (some 500 $km^2$) between Gaza and Beersheva from west to east, and between Buriron (Kibbutz Beror Hayil) and Elusa from north to south. This is an alluvial plain covered with loess and sandy soils at an elevation of 60–80 m above sea level (Fig. 3). To the north of the plain is an area of gentle hills reaching an elevation of about 120 m above sea level. To the south of the plain is the stretch of sand dunes known as the "Sand of Elusa."

Nahal Besor crosses the plain in a wide, deep watercourse that creates a landscape of gorges and cliffs (Fig. 4). Along its course are numerous oases, nourished by the winter floods. Shallow wells (5–6 m deep) that have been dug along the watercourse at various points comprise an important source of water for the flocks of the Bedouin who live in the area.

The loess that characterizes the area is easily cultivated. It consists of dust that is carried over considerable distances and creates a light brown soil that is friable and free of stones. The loess is covered by a thin layer of sand, a combination that is beneficial to agriculture since the layer of sand permits the percolation of rain and prevents evaporation. The sandy loess covers the plain and the hills to its north, endowing the area with considerable agricultural potential.

From the climatic point of view, the Besor region is on the aridity border (an annual rainfall of around 250 mm) and is greatly influenced by variations in precipitation. In its northern part the annual rainfall is 300–350 mm, enabling the cultivation of winter grain crops without irrigation. In contrast, the precipitation in the southern part of the region, which declines to 150–200 mm annually, does not permit the cultivation of field crops. The aridity border is not a permanent feature but shifts in accordance with global climatic changes that influence the region. Thus, for instance, a negative change is presently taking place: long periods of drought have moved the aridity border northward to the area between Ascalon and Kiryat Gat. On the other hand, in the Byzantine period, which was more humid, the aridity border moved southward to the area between Deir el-Balah and Elusa.[8] This phenomenon made widespread settlement possible in the area in the fourth to seventh centuries CE, as attested by archaeological surveys.[9] From the sources we learn of the large imperial estates (Saltus Gerariticus and Saltus Constantinianus) in the region, which were the granary of Palestine in the Byzantine period.[10]

The Besor region possesses several other features that are favorable for agriculture. Its proximity to the sea gives it a temperate climate. Gentle winds (20 km per hour) from the northwest generally prevail. Another feature that is beneficial to agriculture is the dew, which is the most abundant in Palestine. The number of dewy nights is 200–250 per year, and the annual precipitation of dew sometimes exceeds the rainfall. The combination of rainfall and dew made possible the consistent cultivation of grain and fruit trees of various kinds.

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[8] On climatic changes in the Byzantine period—i.e, cooling and a consequent rise in humidity, which enabled the intensive cultivation known to us in desert margin areas, see A. S. Issar, *Water Shall Flow from the Rock: Hydrogeology and Climate in the Lands of the Bible*, Berlin, 1990, pp. 178–179. Issar estimates that precipitation was some 50% higher than today's. The climatic changes in the late Roman period had a dramatic effect throughout the Mediterranean basin. See N. Brown, "Approaching the Medieval Optimum 212 to 1000 AD," in *Water, Environment and Society in Times of Climatic Changes*, eds. A. S. Issar and N. Brown, Dordrecht, 1998, pp. 75–76. On 250 mm as the aridity border, see Orni and Efrat, *Geography of Israel*, p. 109.

[9] The archaeologist D. Gazit has counted some seventy large settlements with an area of more than 50 dunams in the Besor region to the east of Gaza. See D. Gazit, "Hevel HaBesor in the Byzantine Period: Man and Land," *Ariel* 100–101 (1994), p. 176.

[10] On the imperial estates in the Gerar region and the identification of the main settlements appearing on the Madaba map, see Y. Aharoni, "The Land of Gerar," *Israel Exploration Journal* 6 (1956), pp. 26–32.

We learn of the settlement of the region in the Byzantine period from the Madaba map, which depicts Palestine of the sixth century CE. The section of the map between Gaza and Elusa shows seven large villages and provincial towns (Fig. 5).[11] Two important roads crossed the region in the Byzantine period, one running southeast from Gaza to Beersheva and the other leading in a more southerly direction from Gaza to Elusa.[12] In Elusa the road forked: one branch ran southeast along Nahal Besor to 'Avdat, on the route of the "Spice Road" along which the Nabateans transported precious cargoes from the East, [13] while the other branch ran southwest via Rehovot-in-the-Negev and Nessana to Sinai. In the Byzantine period this road served Christian pilgrims bound for the monastery of St. Catherine in Sinai;[14] it was, for example, the route from Jerusalem to Sinai taken by the pilgrim known as Antoninus of Placentia and his companions in 560. When they arrived in Gaza, the company enjoyed excellent hospitality. We learn of this from Antoninus' account: "Gaza is a lovely and renowned city, with noble people distinguished by every kind of liberal accomplishment. They are welcoming to strangers."[15] Antoninus and his companions continued from Gaza to Elusa, "which is the beginning of the desert which stretches to Sinai."[16] It is no coincidence that Elusa is described in this way. Since the Byzantine period was more humid, the limit of the area in which a winter grain crop could be cultivated moved southward to the area of Elusa. This information, noted in passing by Antoninus of Placentia, supports the assumption

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[11] On the section of the Madaba map that depicts the area between Gaza and Elusa, see M. Avi-Yonah, *The Madaba Mosaic Map*, Jerusalem, 1954, pp. 71–72. On the flourishing of villages in the Gaza region in the Byzantine period, see J.-B. Humbert, "La région de Gaza—géographie et histoire," in *Gaza Méditerranéenne*, ed. J.-B. Humbert, Paris, 2000, p. 23.

[12] On the roads of the Negev and northern Sinai, see Figueras, *From Gaza to Pelusium*, pp. 5–14.

[13] On the date of the "Spice Road" from Petra to Gaza, see A. Negev, "The Date of the Petra–Gaza Road," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 98 (1966), pp. 89–98; B. Isaac, "Trade Routes to Arabia and the Roman Army," *Roman Frontier Studies* 12 (1979), pp. 889–901.

[14] On pilgrim routes from Beersheva and Gaza to Elusa, and from there via Nessana to southern Sinai, see P. Mayerson, "The Pilgrim Routes to Mount Sinai and the Armenians," *Israel Exploration Journal* 32 (1982), pp. 44–57.

[15] Antoninus, *Piacenza Pilgrim* 33; trans. J. Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims*, Jerusalem, 1977, p. 85.

[16] Ibid. 34 (p. 85).

that the western Negev in the period under discussion was a rich and fertile agricultural area.

## *The Monasteries*

The historical sources and the archaeological finds reveal a rich and detailed picture of some fifteen monasteries that were founded in the territory of the city of Gaza in the Byzantine period (fourth to seventh centuries CE). I have used the summary of D. Chitty (1966) and the more recent study of B. Bitton-Ashkelony and A. Kofsky (2000)[17] to prepare a list of the monasteries in the first of the circles noted above, in the chronological order of their foundation (the monasteries of the second and third circles appear in geographical order). A chronological order is preferable in my view to other options, such as the alphabetical order used in the list published by S. Vailhé in 1899–1900,[18] since the founders of the monasteries frequently stood in a teacher-pupil relationship, and many of them resided in an existing monastery before founding their own community.

## *The Inner Circle*

The inner circle, close to the city of Gaza, comprises ca. eight monastic centers, which are known to us mainly from the sources (Fig. 6). Their assumed location is based on a combination of historical, geographical and archaeological data. Their historical names are taken from the map of Palestine in the Roman period published by Y. Tsafrir, L. Di Segni and J. Green in 1994;[19] the Arabic names are from the map of Palestine published by the British mandatory authorities in 1945.

### 1. *The Monastery of Hilarion*

*Identification.* An eremitic monastery in the area of Deir el-Balah, founded in ca. 340.

*Historical background.* Hilarion was born in 291/2 in the village of

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[17] See above, note 2.

[18] S. Vailhé, "Répertoire alphabétique des monastères de Palestine," *Revue de l'orient chrétien* 4 (1899), pp. 512–542; *Revue de l'orient chrétien* 5 (1900), pp. 19–48, 272–292.

[19] Y. Tsafrir, L. Di Segni, and J. Green, *Tabula Imperii Romani Iudaea Palaestina: Maps and Gazetteer*, Jerusalem, 1994.

Thabatha southwest of Gaza and died in Cyprus in 371.[20] According to Jerome, he founded the first eremitic community in Palestine. After returning from Egypt, where he had learned the principles of Christianity from St. Antony, Hilarion settled in a hut on the seashore and lived there in seclusion for twenty two years. Later, during the reign of Constantius (337–361), Hilarion founded an hermitage there, and by the time he was sixty-three years old the monastery was large and attracted numerous visitors.[21] According to Jerome, Hilarion's hermitage was close to the sea and seven miles (10.3 km) from the port of Gaza, Maiumas.[22] A more precise description is provided by the ecclesiastical historian Sozomen, who places the hermitage 20 stadia (3.7 km) south of Hilarion's native village of Thabatha.[23] Thabatha is identified with Umm el-Tut, south of Nahal Besor (Wadi Ghazzeh).[24] If this identification, which is accepted by scholars, is correct, then the original cell of Hilarion was in the area of today's Deir el-Balah, about 15 km southwest of Gaza (map ref. 0885 0924). Such a location for Hilarion's monastery accords with Jerome's testimony that Hilarion's hermitage was between the sea and the swamps. Seasonal lakes form in Deir el-Balah each winter when the seasonal floods fail to breach the sandstone ridge and reach the sea.[25] It seems likely that the cell of Hilarion was located somewhere near Deir el-Balah on the ridge between the sea and the sand dunes.

*Archaeological data*. The hermitage of Hilarion was apparently composed of hermits' cells according to the Egyptian tradition of St. Antony.[26] The cells were small and built of perishable materials, such as mud bricks and palm branches, and their remains have thus not been preserved.

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[20] Chitty, *The Desert*, pp. 13–14; Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky, "Gazan Monasticism," pp. 17–25.

[21] Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky, "Gazan Monasticism," p. 22.

[22] On the location of the port of Gaza, see Tsafrir, Di Segni, and Green, *Tabula*, p. 175.

[23] On Sozomen, see Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, eds. J. Bidez and G. C. Hanson (GCS 50), Berlin, 1960, III, 14. Sozomen composed his work in about 420. See Figueras, *From Gaza to Pelusium*, p. 132.

[24] On the identification of the village of Thabatha, see Tsafrir, Di Segni, and Green, *Tabula*, p. 246.

[25] Izrael, "Region of Gaza," p. 285.

[26] This was the view of Vailhé, "Répertoire," pp. 539–540 (No. 55). On the eremitic character of Hilarion's monastery, see J. Binns, *Ascetics and Ambassadors of Christ: The Monasteries of Palestine, 314–631*, Oxford, 1994, pp. 154–155.

The Arabic name Deir el-Balah (monastery of the palms) may well preserve the memory of the monastery of Hilarion.[27] Guérin, who visited here in 1863, describes a small village on a hilltop.[28] Mortality in the village was high, he wrote, because of the harmful influence of the swamps (apparently the same swamps as those mentioned by Jerome). Local tradition has it that the village's mosque was built over the prayer hall of an ancient monastery. The mosque's structure incorporates two marble columns that, according to Guérin, may have originated in the monastery.

2. *The Monastery of Bethelea*

*Identification.* An eremitic center in the vicinity of Beit Lahia to the northeast of Gaza, founded in ca. 360.

*Historical background.* Testimony on the existence of an eremitic cluster near the village of Bethelea is sparse. Near the village, according to Sozomen, lived four anchorites (Salamines, Phuscon, Malachion, and Crispion), who were the principal disciples of Hilarion.[29] Sozomen also tells of a hermit named Ammonius who lived in seclusion 10 stadia (1.8 km) from the anchorites of Bethelea, near the village of Capharcobra in which he was born.[30]

*Archaeological data.* Bethelea is identified with Beit Lahia about 6 km northeast of Gaza (map ref. 1025 1069).[31] According to Guérin, the village is located "in a fertile valley surrounded by dunes."[32] The hermits probably lived on the ridge close to the village, though remains of the monastic cells have not yet been found.

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[27] For further information on Deir el-Balah, see Figueras, *From Gaza to Pelusium*, p. 180; B. Bagatti, *Antichi villaggi cristiani di Giudea e Neghev*, Jerusalem, 1983, pp. 177–178; C. R. Conder and H. H. Kitchener, *The Survey of Western Palestine, III: Judaea*, London, 1883, pp. 247–248.

[28] V. Guérin, *Description géographique, historique et archéologique de la Palestine, II: Judée*, Paris, 1869, pp. 223–248.

[29] Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky, "Gazan Monasticism," pp. 23, 26. Sozomen describes the living arrangements as φροντιστήριον, a place of meditation. See G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, Oxford, 1961, p. 1491.

[30] Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky, "Gazan Monasticism," p. 26.

[31] On Bethelea, see Tsafrir, Di Segni, and Green, *Tabula*, pp. 81–82; Figueras, *From Gaza to Pelusium*, pp. 167–168; Bagatti, *Villaggi*, pp. 148–149.

[32] Guérin, *Description*, p. 176. According to F. M. Abel, close to Bethelea are two ancient mounds containing potsherds of the Roman-Byzantine period and fragments of columns: F. M. Abel, "Les confines de la Palestine et de l'Egypte à l'âge des Ptolemées," *Revue Biblique* 49 (1940), p. 225.

3. *The Monastery of Silvanus in Nahal Besor*

*Identification.* A monastery near Horvat Gerarit on the north bank of Nahal Besor, founded in ca. 390.

*Historical background.* Silvanus, a native of Palestine, was the head of a small community of twelve monks at Scetis in Egypt. Following the incursion of barbarians into Egypt in 380 CE, Silvanus and his disciples moved to Sinai. After some years in Sinai they moved to the area of Gaza and settled along the Gerar River ("the torrent of Gerar"), which might be identified with Nahal Besor.[33] In his account of the monastery, Sozomen uses the term *synoekia* (συνοικία), meaning a community of people who live together, rather than the term *coenobium*, a communal monastery.[34] It thus seems likely that the monastery of Silvanus in Nahal Besor followed the model of the eremitic monasteries of Scetis. These were similar in their organization to the lauras of the Judaean desert, consisting of hermits' cells scattered along the watercourse, with a church and domestic buildings at their center serving the needs of the community.[35]

*Archaeological data.* The "torrent of Gerar" mentioned by Sozomen is probably the section of Nahal Besor in which the floodwaters have formed impressive cliffs. The name Gerar is preserved in the name Horvat Gerarit (Arabic: Khirbet Umm Jarrar), located nearby. The site is located about 10 km south of Gaza, close to the course of Nahal Besor (map ref. 0967 0918).The remains of a basilical church with a mosaic pavement were uncovered here in the past.[36] Today nothing remains of the church, but cisterns and heaps of ancient stones are discernible over a wide area, attesting that this was a large Byzantine village.

About 0.5 km west of Horvat Gerarit are the remains of another church with a polychrome mosaic pavement and the foundations of

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[33] On the wanderings of Silvanus from Scetis in Egypt to Sinai and from there to the Gaza region, see Chitty, *The Desert*, pp. 71–74; Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky, "Gazan Monasticism," pp. 26–28. On the "torrent of Gerar," see Tsafrir, Di Segni, and Green, T*abula*, p. 132.

[34] Sozomen, *HE* 4, 32. For the definition of the word συνοικία, see Lampe, *Lexicon*, p. 1335.

[35] On the laura monasteries of the Judaean desert, see Y. Hirschfeld, *The Judean Desert Monasteries in the Byzantine Period*, New Haven and London, 1992, pp. 18–33.

[36] On the church of Khirbet Umm Jarrar, which was uncovered in 1917, see A. Ovadiah, *Corpus of the Byzantine Churches in the Holy Land*, Bonn, 1970, pp. 128–129; Tsafrir, Di Segni, and Green, *Tabula*, p. 133; Bagatti, *Villaggi*, p. 175.

several adjacent structures.[37] The church and associated buildings are located at the end of a cliff 15 m high on the north bank of Nahal Besor (Fig. 7). The location of the site and its components (a church with adjacent structures) enable one to surmise, purely as a hypothesis, that this is the core of the eremitic monastery that Silvanus founded in the area. This suggestion was made by Guérin in the nineteenth century. According to him, the name of the site was Khirbet ez-Zettaouïeh, which is the diminutive of *zaouïeh*, meaning "monastery," in Arabic.[38]

The church near Horvat Gerarit was excavated in 1977 by J. Porath of the Israel Antiquities Authority.[39] During the excavation it became clear that the mosaic pavement belonged to a church, only part of which was exposed in the excavation (Fig. 8). The church was of the basilical type, with a nave and one or two aisles, though the southern aisle and part of the nave had been destroyed by floods. In addition, most of the walls of the church had been plundered for secondary use of the ancient stones.

The polychrome mosaic floor of the northern aisle was better preserved. It was decorated with geometric motifs and crosses. At the eastern end of the aisle, close to the bema, an inscription in a medallion 1 m in diameter was discovered. The inscription relates that the mosaic was laid in the days of Misael, Zecharias, and Alphaeus in the year 659 of the era of Gaza—i.e., 598. According to Porath, the inscription probably relates to renovation of the church rather than its foundation.[40]

To the west and east of the church were remains of walls and two well-preserved cisterns. Half of the western cistern, about 17 m from the church, had been washed away by floods, leaving it hanging from the cliff (Fig. 9). Near the cistern were the remains of walls; and in

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[37] J. Porath, "H. Gerarit," *Hadashot Arkheologiyot* 61–62 (1977), pp. 37–38 (Hebrew).

[38] Guérin, *Description*, pp. 275–262.

[39] Porath, "H. Gerarit." I am most grateful to J. Porath for making the results of his excavation available to me, and for permitting me to study the remains in the field.

[40] Ibid., p. 38. The inscription was read by V. Tzaferis of the Antiquities Authority. A new reading by L. Di Segni of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem is published in this volume. According to Di Segni, the absence from the inscription of a hegumen, (the abbot of a monastery) indicates that the church was not part of a monastic complex.

the section floor levels can be discerned beside it, demonstrating that the cistern was part of a structure. The second cistern is about 4 m east of the apse of the church, indicating that the church was part of a larger complex of buildings.

4. *The Monastery of Zeno*

*Identification.* An hermitage in Kefar Shearta south of Gaza, founded in ca. 440.

*Historical background.* Zeno, one of Silvanus' senior disciples, settled in Kefar Shearta, identified with Horvat Se'orah (Arabic: Khirbet Se'arta), about 2 km southeast of Horvat Gerarit (map ref. 0983 0906).[41] The *Plerophoriae* of John Rufus tells the story of Zeno, who died a year before the Council of Chalcedon, i.e. in 450/1. Since he settled in Kefar Shearta only toward the end of his life, it is likely that the hermitage that bore his name was founded no earlier than 440.[42]

Zeno is described as a wandering monk who lived an ascetic life in the desert, first in Egypt and later with Silvanus in Sinai and Nahal Gerar. When he arrived in Kefar Shearta he was already renowned as a holy man and received admirers who turned to him for spiritual guidance.[43] It may be assumed that Zeno's hermitage was within the area of Kefar Shearta.

*Archaeological data.* Horvat Se'orah is located in an area of low hills (60 m above sea level) north of Nahal Besor. This is a region of loess soil that is cultivated to this day for grain crops, mostly wheat and barley. To the north of the site runs an ancient local road in a generally east-west direction.

The site extends over two hills (Fig. 10).[44] On the eastern hill a large area of light-colored soil measuring ca. 110 x 140 m is discernible in the fall after ploughing. On the surface are scattered thousands of

[41] This identification, which seems unavoidable because of the name, was suggested in the late nineteenth century. See C. Clermont-Ganneau, *Archaeological Researches in Palestine during the Years 1873–1874*, II, London, 1896, p. 437. Compare Tsafrir, Di Segni, and Green, *Tabula*, p. 165; Bagatti, *Villaggi*, p. 175.

[42] *Plerophoriae* 8. This work was written in the early sixth century. See John Rufus, *Plerophoriae*, ed. F. Nau (PO 8), Paris, 1912.

[43] On Zeno and his way from Egypt via Sinai to Kefar Shearta near Gaza, see Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky, "Gazan Monasticism," pp. 29–30; Chitty, *The Desert*, p. 73.

[44] My survey at Horvat Se'orah was carried out on 20 September 2000 with the participation of Israel Vatkin and Dov Porotsky, surveyors.

potsherds and other objects, such as fragments of glass and of basalt grinding stones. It seems likely that this area of about 3.8 acres (15.4 dunams) represents the village of Kefar Shearta.

On the western hill, about 100 m from the eastern one, grows a tamarisk tree of great age with remains of an ancient building beside it (Fig. 11). Next to the structure is a round cistern 3.7 m in diameter (Fig. 12). This is the typical Byzantine cistern of the area: its walls are built of small fieldstones (10–20 cm) bonded by white lime mortar and coated with a thick layer (1–2 cm) of reddish hydraulic plaster. Its estimated capacity is 40–50 cubic meters. In addition to the Byzantine cistern, fragments of pottery and glass vessels of the Byzantine period, ashlars of the local sandstone, mosaic tesserae in black, red, and white, fragments of marble panels of varying thickness, and a fragment of a basin made from red granite were found. The poor preservation of the walls prevents reconstruction of the building's plan, but from the finds one may assume that a church stood here. Two additional cisterns were preserved in the saddle between the hills.

On the basis of these finds, it may be assumed that the structure on the western hill, which probably included a church, was a monastery. From its proximity to the site identified with Kefar Shearta one may conclude, again purely as a hypothesis, that this was the hermitage cell of Zeno, the holy man of the desert.

### 5. *The Monastery of Abba Isaiah*

*Identification*. A coenobium near Beth Dallatha southwest of Gaza, founded in ca. 440 CE.

*Historical background*. Abba Isaiah was one of the most important figures in the history of Gazan monasticism. He began his career as a monk in Egypt in a coenobium and subsequently became a hermit in the desert. From Egypt he migrated to Jerusalem and Beth Govrin in Palestine, eventually settling near Gaza in the village of Beth Dallatha.[45] According to John Rufus, Beth Dallatha was 4 miles (5.9 km) from Thabatha, mentioned above as the birthplace of Hilarion. Consequently, it has been suggested that Beth Dallatha should be

[45] On the progress of Abba Isaiah from Egypt to Jerusalem, Beth Govrin and Gaza, see Chitty, *The Desert*, pp. 73–74; Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky, "Gazan Monasticism", pp. 30–38.

identified with Khirbet ed-Damita, about 12 km southwest of Gaza (map ref. 0907 0920).[46]

The sources relate that Isaiah lived in the monastery near Beth Dallatha for forty to fifty years, until his death in 489. It thus appears that the monastery was founded in ca. 440. From the *Plerophoriae* it seems that the monastery was a coenobium.[47]

*Archaeological data.* According to Guérin, Khirbet ed-Damita is close to the tomb of Sheikh Mughazi, which may be identifed with the monastery of Abba Isaiah. Near the sheikh's tomb Guérin discerned an ancient marble column.[48] I possess no other archaeological data for this site.

6. *The Monastery of Peter the Iberian*

*Identification.* An eremitic monastery near Maiumas west of Gaza, founded as a laura in ca. 440 and later, in 492, rebuilt as a coenobium.

*Historical background.* The *Life of Peter the Iberian* tells of Peter and his friend John, who joined a small eremitic monastery near Maiumas, the port of Gaza. During this period the two maintained a close connection with Zeno in Kefar Shearta. After the Council of Chalcedon in 451, Peter left for Egypt and from there returned to the area of Ascalon, to a place called Peleia. After this Peter lived for three or four years at Migdal Thabatha, south of Gaza, then in a hut on the seashore near Azotos (Ashdod), and finally on the imperial estate of Eudocia at Jamnia (Yavne). During this period Peter refused to return to the old monastery near Maiumas.[49] He died at Jamnia in 491.

Theodore of Ascalon had joined the monastic community at Maiumas and was eventually appointed its head. After Peter's death at Jamnia, Theodore brought his remains for burial in the church of the monastery. In the following year the monastery was expanded and converted from a laura to a coenobium.[50] This process reflects the

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[46] Tsafrir, Di Segni, and Green, *Tabula*, p. 81.

[47] On the identification of the monastery of Abba Isaiah as a coenobium, see Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky, "Gazan Monasticism," p. 31.

[48] Guérin, *Description*, p. 252.

[49] On the career of Peter the Iberian, see Chitty, *The Desert*, pp. 103–104; Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky, "Gazan Monasticism," pp. 38–51. The *Life of Peter the Iberian* has survived only in Syriac, which has been translated into German: *Petrus der Iberer*, ed. R. Raabe, Leipzig, 1985.

[50] *V. Petri Ib.*, p. 144.

transition from eremitic to coenobitic monasteries that characterized Gazan monasticism in this period. The description of the conversion of Peter's monastery from a laura to a coenobium contains many architectural details of the monastery's structure. Among others, it mentions such elements as a wall and tower, a courtyard and well, a church, and a structure that served as a meeting place for the community (apparently a refectory). In addition, monks' cells and halls with columns, which are characteristic of coenobia, are mentioned.[51]

*Archaeological data.* It has been suggested that Peter's monastery should be identified with the tomb of Sheikh Radwan, about 3 km northwest of Gaza (map ref. 0185 1040).[52] The sheikh's tomb stands on a hilltop at an elevation of 65 m above sea level and its walls are constructed from ancient building stones and fragments of marble slabs in secondary use. In the nineteenth century the tomb was surrounded by ancient trees, which Guérin believed were remnants of the monastery's garden.[53]

### 7. *The Monastery of Severus*

*Identification.* Severus lived in a laura near Maiumas west of Gaza, founded in ca. 500.

*Historical background.* Severus was a disciple of Peter the Iberian. In the *Life of Severus* by Zacharias Rhetor, it is related that Severus, after he received a substantial inheritance, purchased a monastery, reorganized it, and built new cells.[54] This occurred after the conversion of the monastery of Peter the Iberian from a laura to a coenobium in 492, and consequently the monastery of Severus was founded around 500. Later, in 508 Severus left Palestine and in 512 he was appointed patriarch of Antioch. John Moschus, in the early seventh century, mentions a laura in the region of Gaza, which may well be the laura founded by Severus between Gaza and Maiumas.[55]

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[51] For an English translation, see Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky, "Gazan Monasticism," p. 46.

[52] Guérin, *Description*, pp. 221–222.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Zacharias Rhetor, *Vita Severi*, ed. M. A. Kugener (PO 2, 1), Paris, 1903. On Severus and his activities as a monk in the Gaza region, see Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky, "Gazan Monasticism," pp.47–51; Chitty, *The Desert*, p. 105.

[55] John Moschus, *Pratum Spirituale* 55, ed. J. P. Migne, PG 87.3, col. 2909. On Gaza Maiumas, see Bagatti, *Villaggi*, pp. 163–165.

*Archaeological data.* The exact location of the monastery is unknown.

8. *The Monastery of Seridus*

*Identification.* A coenobium surrounded by hermits' cells near Thabatha south of Wadi Ghazzeh, founded in ca. 520.

*Historical background.* The monastery at Thabatha named after Seridus was founded in the days of Justin I (518–527). Barsanuphius (known as the "Great Old Man") led the monastic community through his disciple Seridus, who headed the coenobium. The monastery thus functioned according to a formula that was typical of Gazan monasticism—a coenobium surrounded by hermits' cells. Acting with Barsanuphius and parallel to him was another monk, John (the "second Old Man"), who lived in an isolated cell near the monastery.[56]

Under Seridus the monastery was expanded; a neighboring plot was purchased with the community's funds and a new church, a hospice and an infirmary were erected on it. The monastery was located south of Nahal Besor (Wadi Ghazzeh), as we learn from the writings of Dorotheus, who lived in the monastery of Seridus. Dorotheus relates that the watercourse to the north of the monastery burst its banks and prevented one of the monks from reaching his destination in Ascalon.[57] Since Nahal Besor is the main watercourse in the area (and the only one that crosses both sandstone ridges on its way to the sea), it seems likely that this is the watercourse to which Dorotheus is referring.

*Archaeological data.* On this evidence, one may propose that the monastery of Seridus should be identified with the imposing remains recently exposed at Deir e-Nuserat, about 1 km south of Thabatha and about 2 km south of Nahal Besor (map ref. 0903 0952).[58] The site is located on a ridge (29 m above sea level) that separates the seashore from the cultivated area to its east (Fig. 13). The excavation uncovered remains of a large and splendid coenobium. Within the walls of the monastery was a courtyard surrounded by halls and numerous rooms. Among them may be identified a church with a crypt below, a bathhouse, and a hospice. The church had a polychrome mosaic pavement, and

[56] On the monastery of Seridus and its spiritual leaders, Barsanuphius and John, see Chitty, *The Desert*, pp. 132–134; Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky, "Gazan Monasticism," pp. 54–57.

[57] Dorotheus, *Instructions* I (Dorothée de Gaza, *Oeuvres spirituelles*, eds. L. Regrault and J. de Préville [SC 92], Paris, 1963, p. 178).

[58] See above, n. 3.

the original limestone facing was preserved on its walls. In terms of its size and splendor, the monastery uncovered at Deir e-Nuserat is reminiscent of the monastery of Martyrius at Ma'ale Adummim.[59]

9. *The Monastery of Dorotheus*

*Identification.* A coenobium between Gaza and Maiumas, founded in ca. 545.

*Historical background.* Dorotheus corresponded with Barsanuphius and John at the monastery of Seridus. A native of Antioch, he died in the eighties of the sixth century. He joined the monastery of Seridus and lived there for nine years, first serving as gatekeeper and supervisor of the hospice, and later founding an infirmary to which he transferred his library.[60]

After the deaths of Seridus and John in 543, Dorotheus settled in the area between Gaza and Maiumas. John Moschus calls the monastery "the coenobium of Abba Dorotheus" and notes that it is close to Gaza and Maiumas.[61] The remains of the monastery have yet to be discovered.

To sum up, the identification of eight monasteries in the close vicinity of Gaza, known to us mainly from the sources, enables us to point to two main characteristics. First, this is a dense group of monasteries; five of them are concentrated to the southwest of Gaza on both banks of Nahal Besor, and another three are northwest of Gaza, between the city and Maiumas on the coast. The average distance between monasteries is only about 3 km, a distance that could be walked in a few hours. This physical proximity undoubtedly contributed to the social cohesion of the monks and personal acquaintance between them.

Second, the monasteries of Gaza are located in the heart of what was a densely settled rural area. The names of several villages—Bethelea, Thabatha, Beth Dallatha, Kefar Shearta—are mentioned in the sources. The proximity of the monasteries to the villages is expressed in their names—e.g., the monastic center of Bethelea. Some, like the monastery of Zeno, were located within a village or on its margin. This conforms with the descriptions of Gazan monasticism in the sources,

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[59] Hirschfeld, *Judean Desert Monasteries,* pp. 42–45.

[60] On Dorotheus as a monk in the monastery of Seridus, see Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky, "Gazan Monasticism," pp. 57–61.

[61] *Pratum* 166, col. 3033. Vailhé ("Répertoire," No. 30) suggests that the monastery of Dorotheus should be located near Gaza.

which accord an important status to the holy man within rural society.[62] The propinquity of the monasteries to the villages expresses the involvement of the monks in the lives of the rural population, as well as in the religious and intellectual life of the nearby city of Gaza.

### *The Intermediate Circle*

The intermediate circle (see Fig. 1), at a radius of 15–25 km from Gaza, contains five monasteries that are known mainly from their archaeological remains; they are described in geographical order from north to south.

#### 1. *Khirbet Jemameh*

*Identification.* A coenobium dated to the sixth century.

*Location.* The monastery is west of Kibbutz Ruhama, about 20 km east of Gaza (map ref. 1208 1012). About 500 m southwest of the monastery is Khirbet Jemameh, which contains remains of a village of the Byzantine period. This is a fertile region of gentle loess hills that are intensively cultivated, mainly for field crops (wheat and barley) and orchards (Fig. 14). The village was within the territory of Gaza and was part of the city's agricultural hinterland.

*Archaeological data.* The monastery was discovered and excavated in 1957 by R. Gophna.[63] It is a typical coenobium, built as a well-defined complex around an inner courtyard (Fig. 15). The complex is not large, measuring only about 25 x 30 m (ca. 800 $m^2$). The walls were built of mud bricks on stone foundations and consequently are preserved to a maximum height of only 0.2 m above floor level.

The entrance of the monastery's church faces west. From the entrance, a wide corridor (2.5 m) leads to a spacious inner courtyard, paved with white mosaic. Below the center of the courtyard is a rectangular cistern (3 x 4.6 m) with a vaulted ceiling built of fieldstones and mortar (Fig. 16). Two additional cisterns were found outside the monastery. In the northern part of the courtyard was the entrance to a subterranean burial crypt (Fig. 17). The crypt comprises

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[62] On the role of the holy man in rural society in Late Antiquity, see P. Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1982.

[63] For a report on the excavations, see Gophna and Feig, "Kh. Jemameh." On the monastery's church, see Ovadiah, *Corpus*, p. 156–157.

a vertical shaft and a vaulted burial chamber containing two loculi. The excavation of the crypt revealed a number of skulls and six oil lamps dating from the end of the Byzantine period (late sixth to early seventh centuries).

The church is located to the east of the courtyard. It consists of a latitudinal prayer hall whose long sides are oriented north-south, with an apse facing the east. The mosaic pavement of the prayer hall is decorated with fine geometric and floral designs (Fig. 18). During the excavation it became clear that the apse was added at a late stage of the building's existence. In the excavators' view, the structure originally served a secular purpose, perhaps as a farmhouse, and was converted into a monastery only during the sixth century.[64]

To the north and west of the courtyard are the domestic wings of the monastery. The northern wing includes a large hall (3.5 x 9 m, internal measurements) which perhaps served as a refectory. Beside the hall was a small room, possibly a kitchen. The structure had an upper story, as attested by the staircase preserved near the church. In the northwestern corner of the complex were a room paved with mosaics and another room that functioned as a stable. To the south of the entrance corridor a large rectangular hall (width 5 m and estimated length 14.5 m) was partially exposed. From its dimensions one may assume that this was the dormitory in which the monks slept, as was the common practice in coenobia of the Byzantine period.[65]

The excavators discerned three stratigraphical phases of the structure: two secular phases, in which the structure was apparently a farmhouse, and a third phase, in which it functioned as a monastery. The pottery finds of the last phase date from the late sixth and early seventh centuries. In light of the total absence of finds from the early Arab period, the excavators assume that the monastery was destroyed during the Muslim conquest of 634.[66]

The monastic complex near Khirbet Jemameh reflects the association between Gazan monasticism and the local rural community. This assumption is supported by the monastery's location in an agricultural area that belonged to the nearby Byzantine village at Khirbet Jemameh,

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[64] Gophna and Feig, "Kh. Jemameh," pp. 106–107.

[65] For the custom of sleeping in dormitories, see Hirschfeld, *Judean Desert Monasteries*, pp. 94–96.

[66] Gophna and Feig, "Kh. Jemameh," p. 107.

and by the fact that its structure and installations are reminiscent of farmhouses.

2. *Tel Sera'*

*Identification.* A church or monastery of the fifth–sixth centuries.

*Location.* Tel Sera' (Arabic: Tell esh-Shari'a) is located on the north bank of Nahal Gerar, about 22 km southeast of Gaza (map ref. 1197 0889). The tel, whose summit is at an elevation of 168 m above sea level, rises to a height of about 15 m above its surroundings. In the nearby watercourse are several springs.

*Archaeological data.* The site was excavated in the years 1972–1979 under the direction of E. Oren.[67] In the center of the tel were discovered the remains of a large Byzantine structure, identified by the excavators as a church or monastery. To the north of the structure was a drainage system consisting of stone-built channels and a plastered collection pool. The pottery finds dated from the fifth to sixth centuries. Publication of the results of the excavation will undoubtedly clarify the question of whether the structure was a church or a monastery.

3. *Kissufim—the Monastery of St. Elias*

*Identification.* A church (according to an inscription) of the late sixth century.

*Location.* The site is located about 1 km south of Tell Jemmeh, in the fields of Kibbutz Kissufim, about 15 km south of Gaza (map ref. 0960 0892). Some 200 m northeast of the site winds the broad valley of Nahal Besor, and to the northwest is a well known in Arabic as Bir Abu Mandil. The site itself (Arabic name: Baikat Abu Radi) is located in the heart of a plowed field (Fig. 19), and nothing of it remains.

*Archaeological data.* The site was excavated in 1977 under the direction of R. Cohen.[68] The excavation revealed a richly decorated mosaic

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[67] E. Oren, "Sera', Tel," *New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, 4, Jerusalem, 1993, p 1335. According to Oren, the well-preserved remains of a bathhouse of the Byzantine period were discovered at the southern end of the tel. Bathhouses were discovered at several monasteries, among them the monastery of Martyrius at Ma'ale Adummim in the Judaean desert and the monastery of Seridus at Deir e-Nuseirat, described above. Consequently, the discovery of a bathhouse on the summit of the tel does not rule out the identification of the Byzantine structure in its center as a monastery.

[68] R. Cohen, "Kissufim," *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy*

pavement that was part of a basilical church. The eastern part of the church, including the apse, was totally destroyed in the early twentieth century, when a building was constructed on the site. No traces remain of other structures that may have been adjacent to the church. In the surviving part of the mosaic of the nave, opposite the church's entrance, was a dedicatory inscription dated 576, which mentions two people in whose time the mosaic pavement was laid. One of these was Misael, a bishop (*episkopos*), and the other was Theodore, who served as a deacon, monk, and abbot of a nearby monastery. Thus the inscription explicitly mentions a monastery named after St. Elias (the prophet Elijah). But was the church in which the inscription was found part of the monastery, or was the monastery located elsewhere? The excavator found it difficult to answer this question. On the other hand, L. Di Segni is convinced that the church was not part of a monastery, principally because of the scenes and figures depicted on the mosaic pavement. In that case, however, the monastery of St. Elias headed by Theodore must have been nearby, since according to the inscription he and his monks took care of the church and conducted services in it.[69] In any case, the inscription of the church at Kissufim testifies to the existence of another monastery in the region of Gaza, that of St. Elias.

4. *Magen—the Church of St. Kyrikos*

*Identification.* A church or monastery of the fifth–sixth centuries in the western Negev.

*Location.* The site is about 500 m northwest of Kibbutz Magen and some 22 km south of Gaza (map ref. 0929 0799). A deep well was found close to the site. About 200 m north of the site is a Muslim tomb known as Sheikh Nuran (Fig. 20). The Arabic word nuran (light) perhaps preserves the memory of the village of Lychnos ("light" in Greek), mentioned in the *Life of Hilarion.*[70] The sanctity of the site was

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*Land*, Jerusalem, 1993 (*NEAEHL*), 3, pp. 876–878. For the Arabic names of the site, see Bagatti, *Villaggi*, pp. 175–176.

[69] L. Di Segni, "Dated Greek Inscriptions from the Roman and Byzantine Periods," Ph.D. diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1997, vol. I, pp. 678–679. Di Segni raises the possibility that the monks who cared for the church at Kissufim came from the monastery of Zeno at Kefar Shearta.

[70] Bagatti, *Villaggi*, pp. 179–180.

apparently maintained by the local Muslim population until recent times.

*Archaeological data.* The church complex near Kibbutz Magen was excavated by V. Tzaferis in 1977.[71] The complex, in which a number of stages were discerned, existed from the mid-fourth century until its destruction in a fierce fire in the early seventh century. In addition to the central basilical church, a trapezoid church to its south and a chapel and a baptistery to its north were uncovered (Fig. 21). In the mosaic floor of the trapezoid church was a dedicatory inscription in honor of St. Kyrikos.

Outside the church were found remains of walls and fragments of mosaics and marble stones. The excavators assumed that there was a large village at the site and that the church and its dependencies served the needs of the villagers. However, it was my impression during a visit to the site that the remains of walls may well be part of a monastic complex. The church of St. Kyrikos is one of the most beautiful sites of the Negev and, alas, one of the most neglected.

5. *Shellal*

*Identification.* A church of the sixth century in the valley of Nahal Besor.

*Location.* The site is located on the bank of Nahal Besor, about 21 km south of Gaza (map ref. 1004 0783). The ancient road between Gaza and Elusa runs not far from the site.

*Archaeological data.* The richly decorated polychrome mosaic pavement of the church, which was discovered in 1917, is now in Canberra, Australia.[72] Near the church a cistern and remains of walls were revealed. According to the inscription discovered in the church, the mosaic was laid in 561/2. Because of the isolated location of the church, one may tentatively suggest that it may have been part of a monastic complex.

One can conclude, then, that the number of monasteries in the intermediate circle—i.e., the further periphery of the city of Gaza—is much smaller than in the inner circle. In fact, only two monasteries are

[71] V. Tzaferis, "An Early Christian Church Complex at Magen," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 258 (1985), pp. 1–31.

[72] For the church at Shellal, see Di Segni, "Inscriptions," pp. 689–690; Ovadiah, *Corpus*, p. 163; Bagatti, *Villaggi*, p. 180; A. D. Trendall, *The Shellal Mosaic*, Canberra, 1957, pp. 8–24.

identified with certainty: the monastery near Khirbet Jemameh and the monastery of St. Elias, about which we learn from the inscription in the church at Kissufim. In the case of the three other sites I have described, Tel Sera', Magen, and Shellal, it is not certain whether the remains are those of a monastic complex or a regular rural church.

In several ways the monastery uncovered near Khirbet Jemameh is typical of Gazan monasticism. It is a relatively small coenobium (800 $m^2$) located in an agricultural landscape of rolling hills. About 500 m from the monastery are the remains of the large Byzantine site of Khirbet Jemameh, after which the monastery is named. Only the wall foundations and mosaic pavements of the monastery were preserved. It was uncovered by chance during plowing, and we should assume that other monasteries still await discovery in the region of Gaza.

### *The Outer Circle*

The outer circle, comprising monasteries more than 25 km from the city of Gaza, contains five monastic sites known to us from excavations and archaeological surveys. Among these are a group of three monasteries (Horvat So'a, Tel Masos, and Tel 'Ira) that belonged to the sphere of Byzantine Beersheva and another two (Mizpe Shivta and 'Ein 'Avdat) in the central Negev. These monasteries are situated in an arid desert landscape and may thus be considered part of the general phenomenon of desert monasteries. However, the sources reveal close connections between the monks of the Negev and those of the Gaza region. Thus, for example, we learn of an exchange of letters between John, a monk of Beersheva, and the two "Old Men" of the monastery of Seridus, Barsanuphius and John.[73] As noted above, during his wanderings Hilarion reached the area of Elusa and proselytized there. According to John Moschus, there was a laura in the region of Elusa.[74] It thus seems that there was a considerable degree of influence and mutual relations between the monasteries of the Negev and Gazan monasticism.

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[73] On the exchange of letters between John of Beersheva and Barsanuphius and John of the monastery of Seridus, see Figueras, "Monks and Monasteries," p. 409; Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky, "Gazan Monasticism," pp. 98–99.

[74] *Pratum Spirituale* 164, col. 3032, mentions a monk named Victor who was a silent hermit (hesychast) in the laura of Elusa. See Figueras, "Monks and Monasteries," p. 404, note 7.

1. *Horvat So'a*

*Identification.* A coenobium of the fifth–sixth centuries.

*Location.* Horvat So'a (Arabic: Khirbet Sa'wa) is located on the summit of a steep hill (elevation 538 m above sea level) to the north of the road leading from Beersheva to Arad . The site is about 18 km east of Beersheva and some 60 km southeast of Gaza (map ref. 1487 0756). The monastic structure is at the southern end of the hill.

*Archaeological data.* The site was surveyed by Y. Govrin as part of the survey of the Nahal Yattir map.[75] This is a well-defined coenobium complex that includes an inner courtyard (Fig. 22). To the north of the courtyard are preserved a tower and a church, and to its south was a rectangular complex (25 x 38 m), apparently the monks' living quarters. The total area of the monastery was some 1, 200 $m^2$.

Within the site, to the north of the monastery, remains of walls from the early Roman period could be discerned, including a square tower (10 x 10 m) surrounded by a stone glacis. The builders of the monastery in the Byzantine period apparently reoccupied an abandoned site of the early Roman period, a phenomenon encountered at other sites, such as Masada and Hyrcania.[76]

2. *Tel 'Ira—the Monastery of St. Peter*

*Identification.* A coenobium of the fifth–sixth centuries.

*Location.* Tel 'Ira is located in the Beersheva valley, on the summit of a hill whose elevation is 514 m above sea level. The site is about 18 km east of Beersheva and some 55 km southeast of Gaza (map ref. 1487 0713). The monastery is at the eastern end of the hill.

*Archaeological data.* Tel 'Ira was excavated in the years 1979–1987 by I. Beit Arieh.[77] The monastery was founded in the Byzantine period over earlier remains, mostly of the Iron Age. The monastery's area

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[75] Y. Govrin, *Archaeological Survey of Israel, Map of Nahal Yattir*, Jerusalem, 1991, pp. 97–99. For further details, see Figueras, "Monks and Monasteries," p. 417.

[76] Judging by the square tower in the center of the site, it seems to me that it should be assigned to the group of fortified sites founded in Judaea in the Second Temple period, such as Tel Aroer, Arad, and Khirbet Qumran. On the occupation by monks of desert fortresses from the Second Temple period, see Y. Hirschfeld, *Judean Desert Monasteries*, pp. 47–55.

[77] I. Beit Arieh, *Tel 'Ira: A Stronghold in the Biblical Negev*, Tel Aviv, 1999, pp. 174–178. For further details of the monastery, see B. Cresson, "The Monastery," ibid., pp. 88–96; A. Ovadiah, "The Monastic Complex and its Mosaics," ibid., pp. 428–437.

is similar to that of the monastery near Khirbet Jemameh—i.e., ca. 800 $m^2$ (Fig. 23). In its eastern part is a large courtyard paved with limestone slabs, and in its center a cistern. The church complex to the east of the courtyard includes a chapel and six long rooms, arranged around an inner courtyard. The monastery was founded in the late fifth or early sixth century and existed until the Muslim conquest in the mid-seventh century. An inscription in the mosaic floor of the chapel relates that the place was dedicated to St. Peter. In the excavators' view, the site was densely settled in the Byzantine period and served as the administrative center of the surrounding area. If this is correct, the monastic complex was not isolated but was part of the nearby settlement.

3. *Tel Masos*

*Identification.* A coenobium of the sixth–seventh centuries.

*Location.* Tel Masos (Arabic: Khirbet el-Mashash) is located about 12 km east of Beersheva and some 55 km southeast of Gaza (map ref. 1465 0693). The site is on the north bank of Nahal Beersheva, and there are several wells in the vicinity.

*Archaeological data.* The monastery, which was built over the remains of an Iron Age fortress, was uncovered in excavations directed by A. Kempinski.[78] The monastery is rectangular in plan (20 x 35 m, about 700 $m^2$) and includes a small church and a crypt (Fig. 24). Around a central courtyard are the living quarters of the community. The complex apparently had an upper story, as attested by the remains of a staircase. On the plastered walls of the church were inscriptions containing verses from the Syriac New Testament. The excavators concluded from this that the monastery was founded by Nestorian monks, though this conclusion is controversial.[79] In size the monastery was similar to the preceding two.

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[78] A. Kempinski, "Masos, Tel," *NEAEHL*, 3, pp. 986–989. For further details of the monastery, see B. Bagatti, *Villaggi*, pp. 99–100; V. Fritz, "Tel Masos: The Iron Age I Settlement (Areas C, H), the Iron Age II Settlement (Area G) and the Byzantine Monastery (Area D)," *Tel Aviv* 2 (1975), pp. 110–113; 4 (1977), pp. 154–156.

[79] Figueras ("Monks and Monasteries," p. 445) rejects the Nestorian theory of the monastery at Tel Masos, which is based only on graffiti and not on real inscriptions.

4. *Mizpe Shivta*

*Identification.* An eremitic monastery of the sixth century.

*Location.* Mizpe Shivta (Arabic: Khirbet el-Mushreifeh) is located in the central Negev, about 6 km north of Shivta and some 65 km southeast of Gaza (map ref. 1126 0364). The site is at the end of a ridge (elevation 460 m above sea level) that bounds the Shivta Valley on the northwest (Fig. 25).

*Archaeological data.* Mizpe Shivta was excavated in 1979 by J. Baumgarten of the Israel Antiquities Authority.[80] The site includes a wall and gate, towers, and remains of walls scattered over a considerable area (ca. 80 dunams; Fig. 26). In my opinion, these remains belong to an earlier period (perhaps Nabatean?). From the Byzantine period, a church and a rectangular structure to its west have survived. In the cliffs at the margins of the site, monks' cells may be discerned among the remains of buildings. The monoapsidal church is quite simple and measures 6.6 x 18.2 m. Some 20 m to its west is a square structure (ca. 14 x 15 m) containing a large courtyard and four rooms. In the excavator's view, these are the remains of a hospice.

In the cliff to the east of the site is preserved a magnificent facade leading to a subterranean crypt (Figs. 27, 28). On the right-hand jamb are two inscriptions, one engraved and the other written in red ink. The latter inscription mentions St. George, to whom the monastery was apparently dedicated. The sixth-century pilgrim Antoninus of Placentia mentions the hospice of St. George, located 20 miles (29.6 km) from Elusa.[81] According to him, the place was fortified and inhabited by hermits; on this basis, Woolley and Lawrence in the early twentieth century proposed that it should be identified as a laura.[82] The site was abandoned at the beginning of the Muslim conquest.

5. *'Ein 'Avdat*

*Identification.* An eremitic site in the cliffs of 'Ein 'Avdat.

*Location.* Hermits' caves are located in the canyon of 'Ein 'Avdat, in Nahal Zin in the Negev. The site is about 4 km north of 'Avdat and some 80 km south of Gaza (map ref. 1274 0265).

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[80] J. Baumgarten, "Mizpe Shivta," *NEAEHL*, 3, pp. 1059–1061; Figueras, "Monks and Monasteries," pp. 421–423.

[81] Antoninus, *Piacenza Pilgrim* 35 (p. 87).

[82] C. L. Woolley and T. E. Lawrence, "The Wilderness of Zin," *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement* (1914), pp. 91–93.

*Archaeological data.* The monastery was surveyed in the 1970s by Z. Meshel and Y. Tsafrir.[83] It comprises a row of hermits' cave cells carved out high in the cliff. The cells are fairly spacious and their ceilings high (about 2.5 m). The central cave apparently served as a communal kitchen and storeroom. The caves are connected by a path that runs along a narrow rock shelf and overlooks the canyon.

## *Conclusion*

One of the features characterizing Palestinian monasticism in the Byzantine period is the existence of clusters of monasteries near the large cities. The largest cluster, which included the monasteries of the Judaean desert, surrounded Jerusalem; but there were clusters of monasteries around the cities of Beth Shean (Scythopolis), Caesarea, and Beth Govrin (Eleutheropolis). From this point of view the group of monasteries in the territory of the city of Gaza was not exceptional. The group numbered some 15 monasteries and was apparently the largest in Palestine after the monasteries of Jerusalem and the Judaean desert.

Gaza emerges from the sources and the archaeological finds as a rich and dynamic monastic center, in which the founders of the monasteries were acquainted with one another, often in a teacher-pupil relationship. The bond between the monks was strong, as we learn from the correspondence of Barsanuphius and John of the monastery of Seridus. The monasteries of Gaza were concentrated in a relatively small area, less than one day's walking distance from one another, enabling the monks to visit and maintain a close relationship with the others. In the Byzantine period this was one of the most fertile regions in Palestine, with a dense rural population. Consequently, Gazan monasticism was involved in the social and economic life of the local population. As we have seen, monastic sites were in most cases founded very close to villages. Unlike the monasteries of the Judaean desert and Sinai, which were relatively isolated from the local society, for the monasteries of Gaza their physical proximity to villages was an important factor in determining their character as rural monasteries. These monasteries are characterized by their relatively modest dimensions and a plan

[83] On the complex at 'Ein 'Avdat, see Z. Meshel and Y. Tsafrir, *Archaeological Survey in 'Ein 'Avdat*, Jerusalem, 1977, pp. 5–17 (Hebrew); Figueras, "Monks and Monasteries," p. 411.

that includes an inner courtyard, in the style of a manor house. It is clear from the sources that the accepted model of the monasteries of Gaza was of a central building surrounded by hermits' cells. This model was common at Scetis in Egypt, whence some of the monks of Gaza came, and is also known in the monasteries of the Jordan desert, such as the laura of Gerasimus. The central building surrounded by hermits' cells expresses a moderate approach, a kind of compromise between the cenobitic and eremitic tendencies, which was characteristic of Gazan monasticism.

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# HERESY AND ORTHODOXY: THE ANTI-CHALCEDONIAN HAGIOGRAPHY OF JOHN RUFUS

Jan-Eric Steppa

Toward the end of his life, when residing in Mahoz, the port city of Jamnia, Peter the Iberian related to his disciples his experiences while living in exile in Egypt during the patriarchate of Proterius. Having escaped the turbulent return of Juvenal, after the twenty-month rebellious anti-Chalcedonian regime in Palestine under the monk Theodosius that followed the council of Chalcedon in 451, Peter spent about twenty years in Egypt supporting and nurturing the underground anti-Chalcedonian movement.[1] At the beginning of that period, Peter established a friendship with an Alexandrian priest who was commonly recognized among the anti-Chalcedonians as zealously orthodox. In the end, however, the priest turned to the Proterian party and joined the patriarchal administration as minister of economic affairs. One day when Peter was hastening through the city to visit a certain holy man, he suddenly encountered the apostate priest. Although Peter immediately turned his face away, the priest recognized him and saluted him. Peter returned the salute, whereupon the priest asked: "Why do you avoid me? Am I not your friend? What sin have I committed that you turn yourself away from me?" "You know what you have done," Peter responded and went on his away. The following night, Peter had a vision of a great plain shining with light and celestial glory, where cohorts of angels glorified and exalted God and the Lord was in the midst. Peter immediately rushed forward to participate in the glorification, but on seeing him the Lord turned his face away in sorrow and indignation. Peter understood at once that the reason the Lord was rejecting him was that he had exchanged even a few words with the apostate priest. Tearfully prostrating himself, he begged for mercy, explaining that

[1] See John Rufus, *Vita Petri Iberi*, ed. with a German translation by R. Raabe, *Petrus der Iberer: Ein Charakterbild zur Kirchen- und Sittengeschichte des fünften Jahrhunderts*, Leipzig, 1895, pp. 51-77.

he had intended no wrong either of heart or of will but had acted in haste and confusion. Nevertheless, the Lord agreed to receive him only after all the saints had interceded for him.[2]

This story is known to us from the collection of anti-Chalcedonian anecdotes known as the *Plerophoriae*. Originally composed in Greek but preserved in Syriac with a few Coptic fragments, this work is undoubtedly one of the most telling textual witnesses as to the gulf that separated Christians in the aftermath of Chalcedon.[3] As a direct product of doctrinal controversy, the story embodies the obvious purpose of drawing a distinction between good and corrupt at a time when the Trinitarian and Christological teaching of the most holy and orthodox fathers was considered to be at stake. Its moral is clear and unambiguous: it clearly warns that failure to avoid any kind of association with heretics entails the loss of salvation however ardent a soldier for the true orthodox faith the transgressor may be. In that case, only the intercession of the angels and saints will save them from damnation.

From beginning to end, the *Plerophoriae* deals exclusively with controversy. Each story in the collection confirms a profound and universal cultural dichotomy, dividing the world into "my own" and "theirs." The text's manifest purpose is to maintain the barriers that keep the space of harmony and truth safe from intrusion from an outside world rife with danger and chaos. This is a general theme in the history of cultures, one that repeatedly finds expression in social, political, linguistic or ethical boundaries, real or imagined.[4] However, in the *Plerophoriae*, the boundary that separates *inside* from *outside* reaches far beyond the material world. In fact, the binary division of the realm of truth from that of falsity is set in the framework of the cosmological battle between God and the evil powers of the visible and invisible world. The "external" space is perceived as more or less completely under the domination of demons, persistently at war with the powers of the heavenly realm, whereas the "internal" space is seen as the last

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[2] John Rufus, *Plerophoriae* 76, ed. with a French translation by F. Nau, *Plérophories: témoignages et révélations contre le concile de Chalcédoine*, PO 8.1, Paris, 1912, pp. 130-132.

[3] For a comprehensive study of the *Plerophories*, see L. Perrone, "Dissenso dottrinale e propaganda visionaria: Le Pleroforie di Giovanni di Maiuma," *Augustinianum* 29 (1989), pp. 451-495.

[4] Cf. Y. Lotman, *Universe of Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*, London, 1990, pp. 131-132.

stronghold of true spiritual life and doctrinal purity. Within this space, attention is constantly focused on the spiritual guidance of holy men, embodying an intimate linkage between spiritual perfection through asceticism, renunciation and prayer, and the correct profession of the Trinitarian faith; on the outside, wickedness, impurity, and heresy prevail.

From the title of the *Plerophoriae* we learn that it was composed by John of Beth Rufina, priest of Antioch, disciple of Peter the Iberian and bishop of Maiuma. Of this person we know practically nothing beyond what is told in a few autobiographical notes in three extant hagiographic works about him, written in Greek at the turn of the sixth century and preserved in Syriac. Apart from the *Plerophoriae*, these works are the *Life of Peter the Iberian*, probably penned not long after the death of the protagonist in 491, and the *Commemoration of the Death of Theodosius*, describing the unhappy destiny of the monk leader Theodosius, who immediately after the council of Chalcedon replaced Juvenal for twenty months on the episcopal throne in Jerusalem.[5] However, the fragmentary information provided about the author of these texts does correspond to a figure described by Zacharias Scholasticus in his *Life of Severus*: the monk-priest John, "surnamed Rufus"—or Lazarus, as he also seems to have been called because of his grave expression and the physical asceticism to which he had subjected himself.[6]

When considered together, these sources provide a scant but surprisingly uniform picture of John of Beth Rufina or, as he is more commonly known, John Rufus.[7] We may conclude that he was born in the province of Arabia, probably around 450, that he had been a student of law in Beirut, and that he had embraced the monastic life before Peter the Fuller ordained him as a priest in Antioch around 475. Upon the return of Emperor Zeno, following the usurpation

[5] John Rufus, *Narratio de obitu Theodosii Hierosolymorum*, ed. with a Latin translation by E. W. Brooks, *Narratio de obitu Theodosii Hierosolymorum et Romani monachi*. CSCO, Script. Syri, 3.25 (1907), pp. 21-27.

[6] Zacharias Scholasticus, *Vita Severi*, ed. with a French translation by M.-A. Kugener, *Vie de Sévère*, PO 2.1, Paris 1907, pp. 86-87.

[7] The identity of all three—the author of the *Plerophoriae*, the author of the *Life of Peter the Iberian*, and the monk-priest mentioned by Zacharias Scholasticus—as John Rufus was first established by Eduard Schwartz in his study *Johannes Rufus: ein monophysitischer Schriftsteller*. Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil.-Hist. Klasse 3.16, Heidelberg, 1912, pp. 1-28.

of Basiliscus and the expulsion of Peter the Fuller in 477, he left for Palestine, where he subordinated himself to the spiritual authority of Peter the Iberian.[8] After Peter's death the leadership of his monastery at Maiuma passed to Theodore of Ascalon, whereas the altar in the monastery church was entrusted to the author of the *Life*.[9] In spite of John Rufus being mentioned in the title of the *Plerophoriae* as a bishop of Maiuma, there are no reports of him or any other bishop of Maiuma in the ecclesiastical records of the late fifth or early sixth century. There is, in fact, reason to suspect that the bishopric of Maiuma in the sixth century was united with that of the neighboring city of Anthedon.[10] Yet it is true that Peter the Iberian, who was appointed bishop of Maiuma during the anti-Chalcedonian revolt in Palestine, continued in the eyes of the anti-Chalcedonians to be the true bishop of Maiuma even after he was expelled from his bishopric in 453.[11] It is thus possible that John Rufus, after the death of Peter, was consecrated as bishop of Maiuma, thus sustaining the claim of independence from the Chalcedonian patriarchs of Jerusalem.

In the same way that one cannot separate the anti-Chalcedonian movement from the monastic tradition of the Roman East, there is no way to separate the anti-Chalcedonian literature from the hagiographic tradition. The ideological rhetoric of anti-Chalcedonian literature, as presented by such authors as John Rufus, Zacharias Scholasticus, and John of Ephesus, rests entirely on the notion of monastic life as the ultimate path to spiritual knowledge, and total confidence in the faith of the fathers. A reading of any extant text of these authors attests that the anti-Chalcedonian movement was deeply motivated by concerns fundamentally associated with early Byzantine monasticism. This point has been undisputed since 1912, when Eduard Schwartz in his pioneering study on John Rufus declared anti-Chalcedonianism to be essentially a "mönchreligion."[12] This conclusion was affirmed by Heinrich Bacht in 1953, who remarked that monasticism was not only an essential element of anti-Chalcedonianism but also the source of the fanatic conservatism that made the monks meddle in

[8] *Pleroph.* 22 (Nau, pp. 47-50); *V. Petri Ib.* 79-81.
[9] *V. Petri Ib.* 143-145.
[10] C. A. M. Glucker, *The City of Gaza in the Roman and Byzantine Periods*, Oxford, 1987, p. 25.
[11] *V. Petri Ib.*, p. 77.
[12] Schwartz, *Johannes Rufus*, p. 13.

matters in which they had no reason to be involved.[13] Even if many of Bacht's assessments are not entirely valid today, there is no doubt that the essential motivation and identity of the anti-Chalcedonian movement was based on the uncompromising attitude possible only in a monastic setting.

Recently, in the most fruitful contribution of the previous decade to anti-Chalcedonian literature, Bernard Flusin connects the writings of Zacharias Scholasticus and John Rufus to a specific Palestinian hagiographic tradition.[14] He remarks that anti-Chalcedonian hagiography has consistently been forced to the periphery in studies of early monastic literature in a way that has led to an "error of perspective,"[15] one general symptom being the tendency to regard the Chalcedonian hagiography of Cyril of Scythopolis as a mainstream representative of early Palestinian hagiography. According to Flusin, such a view presupposes the history of Palestinian hagiography to be the fruit of historical continuity. Yet, throughout his study Flusin makes it clear that such a presupposition does not correspond to our present knowledge about Palestinian hagiography during the fifth and sixth centuries. From Flusin's critical discussion, one gains the impression that the anti-Chalcedonian controversy in Palestine was more than a struggle about theological formulas and words. It was, perhaps above all, a struggle about history in which the combatants were armed with hagiography—a forceful weapon, for it could both reconstruct and rewrite history. In Palestine, Chalcedonians and anti-Chalcedonians represented two different ways of recording events. Each faction based its own ideological preferences on the past, while discrediting its opponents with accusations of innovation and change. However, in using hagiography as a method of reconstructing history, each faction created its own "facts" in order to identify the unbroken line between the ancient fathers in the past and the champions of orthodoxy in the present. By means of individual selecting and organization of "facts,"

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[13] H. Bacht, "Die Rolle des orientalischen Mönchtums in den kirchenpolitischen Auseinandersetzungen um Chalkedon (431-519)," in *Das Konzil von Chalkedon*, A. Grillmeier and H. Bacht (eds.), vol. 2, Würzburg, 1953, p. 292: "Ohne ihren Beitrag wäre die Bewegung des »Monophysitismus« wohl nie zu einer so gefährlichen Macht geworden." See pp. 243, 296-297.

[14] B. Flusin, "L'Hagiographie palestinienne et la réception du concile de chalcédoine," in *LEIMWN: Studies Presented to Lennart Rydén on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, J. O. Rosenqvist (ed.), Uppsala, 1996, pp. 25-47.

[15] Ibid., p. 26

each group created its own separate cultural identity.[16]

John Rufus, in his creation of culturally incontrovertible truths, is clearly dependent upon the rhetorical tradition of early monasticism. This is evident, above all, in his rhetorical use of the historically illusive figure of the holy man. In his writings, holy men appear in almost mythological guise to serve as instruments for the construction of his own world vision. The holy man represents an archetype of collective ideals of truth and correct behavior; he is endowed with all the attributes of a mythic character who embodies all cultural expectations of excellence and proper conduct, in a way that makes his greatness due solely to the predictability of his nature. We constantly meet holy men just as static and uniform in their wickedness in opposing their enemies as the holy men themselves are static and uniform in their closeness to God. John Rufus' intention, above all, is to demonstrate that God himself, through his uncompromising verdict, has condemned the Council of Chalcedon. The holy men, in their turn, serve no other hagiographic purpose than to be mediators of this divine verdict against the heretics.

One lucid example is found in another of the eighty-nine anecdotes of the *Plerophoriae*—namely, the story of how Romanus, the archimandrite of six hundred monks at Tekoa near Jerusalem, received full assurance regarding the heresy of Chalcedon. As soon as the transgression at Chalcedon and the apostasy of Juvenal had become known all over the East, Romanus was urged by his monks not to accept the council but to depart from the monastery in order to struggle for the faith. To ensure the condemnation of the council, he received confirmation from those who had accompanied Juvenal on his way to Chalcedon and who, before the council, had heard him say that those who accepted the *Tome* of Leo should be circumcised in the same way as the Jews. Still uncertain as to what to do, Romanus went into the Judaean desert to receive from God a final affirmation of the heresy of the Chalcedonian bishops. After ten days and ten nights he heard a voice from heaven saying: "Go and keep to the faith of the three hundred and eighteen in accordance with your baptism, and you will be saved." Romanus returned to his monastery and reported this auditory vision. But the holy monks felt dubious about the sufficiency of this vision: did not even those gathered at Chalcedon claim

[16] Ibid., pp. 46-47.

to have affirmed the faith of the three hundred and eighteen fathers of the council of Nicaea? Romanus left his monastery for a second time to seek the truth in the desert. Some days later God spoke again, instructing him to follow the faith received from Peter of Alexandria, Gregory Thaumaturgus, Julian of Rome, Athanasius of Alexandria, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, John Chrysostom, and Cyril of Alexandria. When Romanus returned to the monastery and reported what he had heard from God, the monks remarked that even the renegades claimed to rest their faith on the great doctors of the Church in order to deceive the simple-minded. Romanus returned to the desert a third time and submitted himself to a severe asceticism of solitude, prayer, and lamentation. Finally, he saw a great letter descend from heaven whereupon was written: "Those who were at Chalcedon are renegades. They have transgressed the faith. Woe betide them and may they be in anathema." This was the clear and unambiguous confirmation from God the monks at Tekoa had awaited. Romanus at once condemned Juvenal.[17]

Particularly worth noting in this story is the role ascribed to the holy man. Inspite of being an ascetic authority, Romanus appears very uncertain in his attitude toward the Council of Chalcedon. While some of his monks were urging him to condemn the council, he himself was in doubt about how to act. He feels fully confident only when, after some time, he receives clear instructions directly from heaven. The story presents an image of the holy man that is quite characteristic of the hagiography of John Rufus, as formed mainly in the *Plerophoriae*—i.e. an evident reduction in the importance of the holy man as a bearer of truth and an emphasis on the absolute initiative of God. Thus the story about Romanus is to be read not as a confirmation of the holiness and orthodoxy of the holy man, but rather as evidence that God has made his verdict known. The holy man becomes merely a messenger of this verdict, delivered, in John Rufus' works, by the actual protagonist—God himself.[18]

A similar story is one about the Alexandrine woman Agathoclea, who after the withdrawal of Emperor Basiliscus' anti-Chalcedonian *Encyclical* did not know how to act regarding the communion. She prayed to God for certainty, whereupon she received a vision of a

[17] *Pleroph.* 25.
[18] See ibid., 22

church with two altars. One of the altars was large but dark and bare, and in front of it a Chalcedonian bishop was celebrating the Eucharist. The other altar was small but adorned with gold and precious stones, and in front of it a little child was celebrating the Eucharist. She recognized the child as the Lord, and he said to her: "Receive communion from this altar." At once, she rejected communion with the Chalcedonians, and in her life as well as in her faith, she proved herself a model of orthodoxy.[19] The central character in this story is the blessed Agathoclea, but once again, it is God himself who appears as the main protagonist.

In this story we find yet another striking characteristic of the rhetorical strategies in John Rufus' hagiography. The story is built on a polarized choice between receiving communion at the Chalcedonian altar, cold and bare, or at the orthodox altar, shining with divine glory. The Chalcedonian altar is represented by a bishop opposed to the Lord, who in turn appears as a child with all the connotations of purity and sinlessness. The opposition between the divine and orthodox untaintedness on the one hand and the sinful attachment to institutionalized forms of power on the other is immediately recognizable. The story demonstrates the intimate correlation between heresy and attachment to the material world.

The same polarization is evident in the story about the Egyptian monk Abba Andrew, who in a vision saw a company of bishops stirring a blazing furnace into which they had thrown a child to be consumed by the flames. But when the furnace was opened three days later, the child came out unharmed. The Abba recognized the child as the Savior and asked who had thrown him into the fire. The child responded: "The bishops have crucified me for a second time and decided to deprive me of my glory." Abba Andrew then noticed at some distance an old man who had refused to participate in the wicked acts of the bishops. The Abba asked the child who that man was, and the Lord said: "It is Dioscorus, the patriarch of the Alexandrines who alone did not associate with them in their malicious intent." We are then told that this announced the orthodoxy of the Alexandrian bishop, who like Simeon of Cyrene, carried the cross of Christ unto death.[20] Once again, the argument is based on the polarization between Christ,

[19] Ibid., 86. See also 70-71, 73.
[20] Ibid., 14.

appearing as a child, and the bishops, men of wealth and power. The contrast is stressed even further through the representation of Dioscorus not as a church leader but as a humble old man set against the worldly bishops and their unlawful materialization of the mystery of the Incarnation.

These stories from the *Plerophoriae* draw attention to one of the main themes in John Rufus' hagiography—namely, the vision of the world as profoundly divided between orthodoxy on the one hand, represented by humility and purity, and heresy on the other, represented by wealth and power. Church leaders such as Juvenal, Proterius, and Basil of Seleucia, appear as archetypes of the corruptibility that ensued when faith was rejected in favor of ecclesiastical power. The notion of heresy in John Rufus' hagiography is thus intimately linked to a dualistic tension that clearly corresponds to the monastic division of the universe between ascetic ideals and the dangers of the saeculum.

Heresy and heretics often assume an important role in early hagiographic literature. From a general perspective, the purpose of stories about conflicts between heretics and holy men was to point out God's working in and through the lives of the protagonists. Sometimes the stories are intended to reveal the protagonist's sharp-wittedness and God-given powers of articulation. In the *Historia religiosa*, for instance, we learn how the great Aphrahat countered with divine words the arguments of the heretics and the syllogistic traps of the philosophers.[21] Athanasius further reports that Antony directed words of such divine inspiration against the Arians that people flocked around him to be cured from demons and diseases.[22] Sometimes heretics are rejected through miracles that serve as a sign of God's judgment upon those who struggle against truth. In the *Historia monachorum*, we find a story about Abba Copres who, having found himself unable to change the mind of a Manichaean priest, devised a test to determine whether Abba Copres or the Manichaean represented the truth. Each of them would walk through a fire, and the one who was unharmed by the flames would be proved to possess the true faith. When Abba Copres

[21] Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Historia religiosa* 8.2, ed. with a French translation by P. Canivet and A. Leroy-Molinghen, *Histoire des moines de Syria*, SC 234; 257, Paris, 1977-79, pp. 377-79.

[22] Athanasius of Alexandria, *Vita Antonii* 40, ed. with a French translation by G. J. M. Barterlink, *Vie d'Antoine*, SC 400, Paris, 1994, pp. 242-45.

stepped into the fire, the flames parted so that the fire did not harm him. The Manichaean on the other hand was severely burned and driven away in disgrace.[23]

The heretic in early hagiographic literature was characterized as a human representation of demonic powers, determined to ensnare, deceive, and turn minds away from the appropriate aims of life. Only an ascetic holy man, trained to withstand demonic conspiracies, was capable of winning the battles against heretics. The preservation of the orthodox faith was profoundly connected with the ascetic task of gaining a release from worldly concerns and impure thoughts. Withstanding external enemies and those within were simply different aspects of the same spiritual struggle. Heresy, as one of the forces of the material world, was believed to cause severe damage to the spiritual health of the ascetic. It was therefore constantly repeated that any form of contact with heretics was to be avoided, since such contact would be the equivalent to succumbing to the world of the material. Hagiographers sometimes considered the sin of worldly concerns to be directly inherent in the beliefs of the heretic. In the eyes of Athanasius, Arianism was blasphemous because of its alleged degradation of the Son of God into the realm of the created. As a result, the Arians were regarded as no better than pagans in their worship of created things.[24]

In early monastic culture, heresy was teaching without tradition. It was demonic imagination, the unavoidable result of the failure or refusal to embrace the principle of true discipleship under the ascetic fathers.[25] To depart from their faith was to leave the desert in search of worldly pleasures, power, or wealth. These were the temptations of the bishops, and many were those monks who on being ordained as bishops saw their strength ebb away.[26] It is well known that some, when urged to receive ordination, found it better to mutilate themselves rather than to leave the desert for worldly affairs. To others, the temptations of power and wealth were said to have been too great. Within the Eastern empire in the fifth century, many believed that it was through such men having fallen under the spell of the world and become easy targets for anti-Trinitarian views that heresy had been

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[23] *Historia monachorum in Aegypto* 10.30-2, ed. with a French translation by A. J. Festugière, Subsidia Hagiographica 53, Brussels, 1971.

[24] *V. Ant.* 88, pp. 360-63.

[25] Cf. P. Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority, and the Church in the Age of Jerome and Cassian*, Oxford, 1978, pp. 22-27.

[26] See, for instance, *Historia religiosa* 1.10, pp. 176-83.

established in the world at the Council of Chalcedon.

At the heart of the anti-Chalcedonian movement was the belief that the bishops at Chalcedon, by their condemnation of Dioscorus and approval of the diphysite teachings of Pope Leo, had proved themselves true disciples of Nestorius. The supposed connection between Nestorius and the Christological formula of Chalcedon formed the main argument of the anti-Chalcedonians against the Council, something that is obvious even from the Chalcedonian hagiography of Cyril of Scythopolis.[27] In John Rufus' *Plerophoriae* this conviction, that Chalcedon implied a rehabilitation of Nestorius, is marked in the opening story of the collection. Here we are told about the demoniacal spasms that seized Nestorius when he, in a sermon in the Church of Holy Mary, dared to deny the Blessed Mother her position as the *Theotokos*.[28] Three other stories in the *Plerophoriae* deal specifically with Nestorius. The first is an account of the sudden death of Nestorius during his exile in Thebais, as witnessed by a member of the Alexandrian aristocracy, who had heard him confirm his denial of Christ as God and the Holy Virgin as the *Theotokos*. To this story John has added a short note, taken from the *Historia Ecclesiastica* of Timothy Aelurus, that the dead body of Nestorius was three times rejected by the earth before it was at last immured.[29] In the second story, John Rufus tells about a deacon from Antioch named Basil who, prior to the council of Ephesus, was urged by God to go to Constantinople and oppose the blasphemies of Nestorius. Having arrived at Constantinople, he entered the church where Nestorius was preaching and reproached him for his unorthodox teaching. When he publicly protested against the indulgence of the Emperor Theodosius toward Nestorius, the imperial *magister* intervened, arrested Basil, and sentenced him to exile. But in the night the emperor was almost killed by a stone that fell on him. He then saw a stranger who told him that his sufferings were caused by his disobeying the Antiochean deacon. The very next day, the emperor visited Basil and asked him what he should do to please him; the holy man urged him to summon a council, in order to anathematize Nestorius.[30] The third story focuses on the holy woman Eliana, who prior to Ephesus was

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[27] See Cyril of Scythopolis, *Vita Euthymii*, ed. by E. Schwartz, *Kyrillos von Skythopolis*. Texte und Untersuchungen 49.2. Leipzig, 1939, p. 42.

[28] *Pleroph.* 1.

[29] Ibid., 33.

[30] Ibid., 35.

told by an angel about the future ordination of Nestorius as patriarch of Constantinople and was exhorted not to receive communion from him. The story concludes with a long extract from the *Historia Ecclesiastica* of Timothy Aelurus about Nestorius' exile in Thebais and his horrific death from a tongue-rotting disease.[31]

In several stories in the *Plerophoriae*, Nestorius appears indirectly as the mastermind of the Council of Chalcedon. We learn that the bishop Leontius of Ascalon was driven from his bishopric by the inhabitants of Ascalon because of his support of Nestorius after the latter had been condemned at the Council of Ephesus. In another story, Juvenal of Jerusalem is manifested as the one through whom Nestorius gained new life.[32] Several times the link between Chalcedon and Nestorius is established by the use of the term "Nestorians" as synonymous with Chalcedonians.[33] The connection between Nestorius and Chalcedon is even clearer in a homiletic passage in the text in which the decisions at Chalcedon are declared to have been the result of a severe inconsistency toward the condemnation of Nestorius at Ephesus. Here John Rufus argues that the bishops at Chalcedon transgressed not only the orthodox faith but also the canonical decree established at Nicaea, which prohibited the establishment of any confession or faith that did not accord with previously settled decrees. Thus the council of Chalcedon was not only unorthodox but also uncanonical.[34]

Yet John Rufus' concern was above all to attack Chalcedon because of its alleged rehabilitation of Nestorius, who in addition to the Father worshipped two sons. This asserted kinship between Chalcedon and Nestorius was more than rhetoric, since in fact it reflected a general belief among anti-Chalcedonians that Chalcedon had denied the hypostatic unity of the Word and therefore not only failed to acknowledge the full divinity of the Son but also divided the Son, as one hypostase of the godhead, into two sons. Against this, the anti-Chalcedonians stressed that the humanity of Christ was never to be separated as one independent property in relation to his divinity. Through the human body, the Word was made visible in such a way that the body partakes of the divine glory in the same way that the Word partakes of the

[31] Ibid,. 36.
[32] Ibid., 40.
[33] Ibid., 62 and 88. Martyrius, patriarch of Antioch in 458-69, is mentioned by John as "Nestorian and bishop" (p. 89).
[34] Ibid., 59

conditions of human existence. For Severus of Antioch it was evident that the Word of God hungered and was tired after a journey and subjected himself to other bodily weaknesses—except that he did not fall into sin—in order to manifest his humanity.[35] The same idea is clearly reflected in the *Plerophoriae*, through John Rufus' report of the words uttered by a certain holy man to Emperor Marcian:

> I was close to Christ and I went with him everywhere when he made signs, healed, and taught; when he was insulted and persecuted; when he was arrested, flogged, crucified, and crushed by pain; when he was buried, and resurrected; when he ascended to heaven and sat down on the right side of the Father. I was with him all the time, and him whom I have seen teach, heal, and raise the dead, I have also seen tired, crying, hungry, thirsty, and helping others in their suffering. I never saw two in him, one and another, but I saw the incarnated Word of God, always one and the same, performing different acts, in suffering as well as in glory, to be but one single nature.[36]

This passage perhaps best illustrates the essence of anti-Chalcedonianism. Without neglecting the full integrity of his humanity, the uniqueness of Christ is emphasized in rejection of the Nestorian and Chalcedonian concern to divide him into two independent constituents after the union.

Being primarily a hagiographer, John Rufus did not develop any sophisticated theological reflection in his works. In fact his hagiographic purpose was not to devise theological arguments for the superiority of orthodoxy but to provide tangible and down-to-earth evidence for God's verdict on Chalcedon as mediated through the words and deeds of holy men. Moreover, through a hagiographic discourse, appropriate behavioral patterns could be effectively demonstrated for anti-Chalcedonians in Palestine constantly confronted with the problem of maintaining orthodoxy while living in a region swarming with Chalcedonian heretics. From this perspective the essential message of John Rufus' works is evident: Be orthodox and do not associate with heretics in any way, since God has proclaimed his judgment upon them through the testimonies of our holy fathers.

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[35] Severus of Antioch, *Epistula ad Oecumenium* 1.183-5, ed. by E. W. Brooks, *A Collection of Letters of Severus of Antioch, from Numerous Syriac Manuscripts (Letters I-LXI)*, PO 12.2, Paris, 1919.

[36] *Pleroph.* 61.

In John Rufus' hagiography the focus is primarily on the principle of imitatio. Ascetic fathers were to be imitated, and so was their faith; for as true ascetics they loved the truth as it was taught in the orthodox churches and by the fathers of the holy councils. Hagiographic discourse nursed the interdependence of orthodoxy and asceticism, and in times of doctrinal controversy developed to its highest pitch. To be the true disciple of an ascetic master not only implied success in the struggles of asceticism but also faithfulness to the orthodox teaching and rejection of the heretics.[37] Nowhere in early hagiographic literature is this contiguity of asceticism with orthodoxy any clearer than in John Rufus' *Plerophoriae*. We find it most lucidly expressed in the notion of renunciation: Just as a monk must renounce the world and all association with impure humans and corruptible things, he must also renounce all company with those who rejected the orthodox truth.

The most common demonstration of this renunciation is withdrawal from any communion with heretics. John reports about the sister of Stephen, an archdeacon in Jerusalem, who on Saturdays used to participate in the vigils to the memories of the saints, especially in the churches dedicated to Stephen the Protomartyr and John the Baptist. After the council, she found it impossible to visit these churches to pray and communicate with Juvenal and the other transgressors. Since she was much troubled because of these evil circumstances, which had forced her to abstain from keeping company with the saints, the Protomartyr revealed himself to her in her cell and comforted her: "Where you are, we are too, and we will be with you."[38] John also tells the story of the Alexandrian scholastic Serapion, who during the patriarchate of Proterius was deeply grieved at being deprived of taking part in the Eucharist on the holy Paschal Day, since the persecuted priests of the faithful did not dare to appear to celebrate the holy sacrifice. In the night, at the hour when the Communion was celebrated, Serapion went out, weeping, and lifted his hands to the heavens in prayer. As he was ending his prayer, he suddenly found in his hand a piece of Christ's body.[39]

The ultimate virtue was avoidance of communion with the renegades. In fact, this virtue determined the final verdict at the throne

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[37] For the importance of avoiding heretics in the *Apophthegmata*, see Theodore of Pherme 4, Agathon 5, Sisoes 48, and Chomas 1, PG 65, col. 105, 109, 186, 436.

[38] *Pleroph.* 79.

[39] Ibid., 77.

of judgment. For one who during his life had associated with the Chalcedonian renegades there was no hope, regardless of the degree of his personal devotion in the ascetic life or loving tenderness toward others. In the monastery of Romanus at Eleutheropolis, many years after the death of Romanus, an old Pelusian monk named Timothy departed from this life, and as he was being prepared for burial suddenly woke up again. He assured the astonished monks that he really had been dead and had been led to the throne of the judgment. The reason he had escaped hell was simply that he had remained true to the orthodox faith and from childhood had stayed away from the Chalcedonian renegades.[40]

Even more striking is the notion of heresy as a contagious disease that could affect even the most holy and orthodox of God's servants—a dangerous kind of pollution that spread into the society of the orthodox through even the slightest contact. Like a dangerous epidemic, Chalcedonianism could be resisted only by isolation within the bounds of anti-Chalcedonianism. Terrible things would happen if the boundaries were crossed, deliberately or accidentally. A woman from Pamphylia who had settled on the Mount of Olives with her two sons once found a gathering of Chalcedonians in the Church of the Ascension where she had gone to pray. As she turned to escape from this place of impurity she found that the gates had been closed, so that she could not leave. Throughout the liturgy she hid behind a pillar until she could return to her cell. In the end she took ill and was on the point of departing from the world of the living when a loud voice told her sons to go and hear the accusations being brought against her—that she could hardly be regarded as righteous and as one of the orthodox flock when she had remained with a gathering of renegades in the Church of the Ascension, witnessing their perverted celebration of the holy mysteries.[41] This story served to warn anti-Chalcedonians against visiting the holy places in Palestine and Jerusalem. Given the cosmopolitain nature of the Christian population in Palestine, it is not surprising that the anti-Chalcedonians recognized the risk of exposing

[40] Ibid., 87.

[41] Ibid., 80. Cf. Mary Douglas' discussion on the sanctions that different cultures impose on persons who cross the red lines of society: "Physical crossing of the social barrier is treated as a dangerous pollution…. The pollutor becomes a doubly wicked object of reprobation, first because he crossed the line and second because he endangered others" (*Purity and Danger*, London, 1966, pp. 138-139).

themselves to heresy when praying and celebrating the Eucharist at the well-visited holy places in Jerusalem.[42]

The specific Palestinian situation is surely an important backdrop to John Rufus' evident awareness that the faith he shared with the other disciples and heirs of Peter the Iberian was that of a minority. The "current strength of the orthodox faith,"[43] as John portrays the situation in the Eastern empire at the time of writing the *Plerophoriae*—that is, during the patriarchate of Severus of Antioch 512-518—did not apply to the situation in Palestine. John therefore exhorts his readers as follows:

> To those who say: "The whole world is reflected in the churches. But you who are few in numbers, you are schismatics, even though you say that you are orthodox and filled with zeal for the truth"; to them the fathers have instructed you to answer in the following manner: "Bear in mind the thousands of men who went out from Egypt, and the manifold signs and manifestations they saw. But with the exception of two, they all proved to be rebels and transgressors, and they perished in the desert. Not only did they perish without attaining eternal bliss, but following their unfaithfulness they were also refused entry to the Promised Land. Moses, the greatest lawgiver and prophet of all, gave the commandments and said: 'You shall not follow the majority in doing wrong.'"[44]

Later in the text, the use of such biblical allusions as "Many shepherds have destroyed my vineyard, they have trampled down my portion" (Jer. 12:10) and "for one is better than a thousand" (Sir. 16:3), demonstrates a rigid isolationism that locates the truth exclusively within the marginalized community of believers, whereas every kind of evil is attributed to the majority.

The heavy emphasis on preserving purity and the danger of being tainted by heresy through the slightest association with heretics are among the most characteristic features of John Rufus' hagiography. The evident sectarianism of the *Plerophoriae* undoubtedly has its ideological foundation in the intimate connection between anti-Chalcedonianism and the monastic movement. Resting firmly on the heritage

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[42] J. Binns, *Ascetics and Ambassadors of Christ: The Monasteries of Palestine, 314-631*, Oxford, 1994, pp. 197-199; See also A. Kofsky, "Peter the Iberian: Pilgrimage, Monasticism and Ecclesiastical Politics in Byzantine Palestine," *Liber Annuus* 47 (1997), pp. 209–22; L. Perrone, "Christian Holy Places and Pilgrimage in an Age of Dogmatic Conflicts," *Proche Orient Chrétien* 48 (1998), pp. 5-37.

[43] *Pleroph.* 24.

[44] Ibid., 55.

of Eastern desert monasticism, the culture of John Rufus manifests itself as a counterculture zealously guarding the orthodox faith and the traditional monastic values from defilement by the perversity of the majority. But in the immediate background we must also recognize the particular situation in Palestine, where anti-Chalcedonianism was threatened by a solid alliance between the Chalcedonian patriarchs in Jerusalem, the continuously increasing numbers of Chalcedonian monks in the Judean desert, and Chalcedonian pilgrims at the holy places. The call for a total rejection of association with heretics, however, is also connected with the idea of orthodox purity as essentially implying freedom from compromise. Unquestionably, this in turn is linked to the political situation in the Eastern empire at the turn of the sixth century after the promotion of Emperor Zeno's *Henoticon* in 482. As a compromise, established in order to bring Chalcedonians and anti-Chalcedonians into line, it had raised ambivalent feelings among many anti-Chalcedonians for its failure to deliver an explicit condemnation of Chalcedon.

We may conclude that the propagandistic harangues of John Rufus must have been in response to genuine feelings of distress and hatred among the spiritual brothers in his community against those who were ready to compromise with the orthodox truth. This makes his hagiography of particular interest as a source for the doctrinal divergences in Palestine in the fifth and sixth centuries. It is worthy of study not because of its somewhat bizarre content but because it is a useful witness to the cultural construction of truth and falsity within a community under extreme pressure from the surrounding world. For the study of the cultural processes within sectarian Christian minorities, in late antiquity as well as today, the hagiographic works of John Rufus surely provide an abundance of material.

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# *IMITATIO MOSIS* AND PILGRIMAGE IN THE *LIFE OF PETER THE IBERIAN*

Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony

When John Rufus—disciple and companion of Peter the Iberian in his old age, and his successor as bishop of Maiuma near Gaza—composed the *Life of Peter the Iberian* at the end of the fifth century,[1] Greek hagiographic models were easily available.[2] Indeed, in many senses, the author followed a standard pattern of account, describing Peter's ancestry, his education, his character, central events in his life, his travels, his doctrines, his death, and his heirs. Peter was depicted as an enthusiastic pilgrim, a zealous monk, a dynamic bishop, a holy man, and an anti-Chalcedonian leader.[3] Likewise, the criteria of sanctity in this *Vita* are those common in hagiography: asceticism, the working of miracles, power of discernment (*diakrisis*), and freedom of speech (*parrêsia*).[4] John Rufus' goal, however, was not merely to write

[1] The *Vita Petri Iberi* was written in Greek and survived in Syriac. For the Syriac text with a German translation, see *Petrus der Iberer: Ein charakterbild zur kirchen- und sittengeschichte des fünften jahrhunderts*, R. Raabe (ed.), Leipzig, 1895 (hereinafter *V. Petri Ib.*). I am deeply indebted to Sebastian Brock for putting at my disposal D.J. Chitty's unpublished English translation of the *Vita Petri*. For a detailed summary of the *Vita* in French, see J. B. Chabot, "Pierre l'Ibérien, évêque Monophysite de Mayouma [Gaza] a la fin du v$^{e}$ siècle," *Revue de l'Orient Latin* 3 (1895), pp. 367-97. For a Georgian version of the Syriac *Life of Peter*, see D. M. Lang, "Peter the Iberian and his Biographers," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 2 (1951), pp. 158-68.

[2] On John Rufus' writings, see E. Schwartz, *Johannes Rufus, ein monophysitischer Schriftsteller*, Heidelberg, 1912; J.-E. Steppa, *John Rufus and the World Vision of Anti-Chalcedonian Culture*, Piscataway, 2002; idem, "Heresy and Orthodoxy: The Anti-Chalcedonian Hagiography of John Rufus," in this volume.

[3] A. Kofsky, "Peter the Iberian: Pilgrimage, Monasticism and Ecclesiastical Politics in Byzantine Palestine," *Liber Annuus* 47 (1997), pp. 209-22; C. B. Horn, "Beyond Theology: The Career of Peter the Iberian in the Christological Controversies of Fifth-Century Palestine," Ph.D. diss., The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C., 2001. For an overview of Peter's monastic activity in Palestine, see B. Bitton-Ashkelony and A. Kofsky, "Gazan Monasticism in the Fourth-Sixth Centuries: From Anchoritic to Cenobitic," *Proche Orient Chrétien* 50 (2000), pp. 38-47.

[4] See, for example, B. Flusin, *Miracle et histoire dans l'oeuvre de Cyrille de Scythopolis*, Paris, 1983. In analyzing this *Vita* I have been much influenced by P. Cox Miller,

an eloquent hagiographic treatise; rather, his narrative aimed to be a propagandist composition in hagiographic dress, merging the hero's life with the religious controversy that ensued after the Council of Chalcedon in 451 in the Eastern Empire.[5] Yet Rufus' commitment to anti-Chalcedonian propaganda—to which a few years later he devoted his composition the *Plerophoriae*—did not block his interest in history or in its details.[6] The text does in fact describe the life of Peter and his *politeia*, but all the while promotes his theological inclinations.[7]

Despite theological controversy being foregrounded in the *Vita*, its idiosyncracy resides in two particular features: the interpretation of Peter's activities throughout the *Vita* in light of the biblical Moses and the relatively detailed accounts of the hero's pilgrimages. These two peculiarities, especially the use of Moses as the icon of the *Vita*, served the religious orientation that guided the author—namely, the anti-Chalcedonian stance—and his general tendency to praise and laud Peter as "that minister of God and fellow in zeal of the great Moses,"[8] as one holding firmly the orthodoxy, i.e., the anti-Chalcedonian faith.

While spending his teenage years as a political hostage in the court of Theodosius II in Constantinople, Peter had embraced ascetic behaviour and striven to escape the palace and head for Jerusalem.[9] His objective in undertaking the journey to Jerusalem in the year 437/8 is described in the opening lines of his *Vita*—namely, the realization of *akseniutha* (Greek *xeniteia*):

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"Strategies of Representation in Collective Biography: Constructing the Subject as Holy," in T. Hägg and P. Rousseau (eds.), *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity*, Berkeley, 2000, pp. 209-54.

[5] For the christological controversies in that period in Palestine, see L. Perrone, *La chiesa di Palestina e le controversie cristologiche, Dal concilio di Efeso (431) al secondo concilio di Costantinopoli (553)*, Brescia, 1980, pp. 89-202.

[6] *Plerophoriae*, ed. with a French trans., F. Nau, *Plérophories: témoignages et révélations contre le concile de Chalcédoine*, PO 8.1, Paris, 1912. On the propagandist aspects of the *Plerophoriae*, see L. Perrone, "Dissenso dottrinale e propaganda visionaria: le *Pleroforie* di Giovanni di Maiuma," *Augustinianum* 29 (1989), pp. 451–95; Steppa, *John Rufus*, pp. 73-80.

[7] For the use of hagiography as a weapon in the Chalcedonian controversy in Palestine, see B. Flusin, "L'hagiographie palestinienne et la réception du concile de Chalcédoine," in J.-O. Rosenqvist (ed.), ΛΕΙΜΩΝ*: Studies Presented to Lennart Rydén on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, Uppsala, 1996, pp. 25-47.

[8] *V. Petri Ib.* 70-71.

[9] Ibid., 15-18.

> When he [Peter] had advanced in age and spiritual love, and was adding every day to the grace of divine fire, and was placing ascent in his heart… he longed to go far from the world and its vanity, and run to that first of virtues which is *akseniutha*.[10]

This desire was ardently shared by the monks flocking to the holy sites in Palestine from the fourth century on. The ideal of *xeniteia*, prevalent in monastic culture—a life of self-imposed exile, voluntary alienation and wandering, separation from family, and detachment from all social relationships—aims at spiritual progress. The very essence of *xeniteia* is the perception of the monk as stranger—in both a physical and a spiritual sense.[11] From the fourth century on an explicit affinity is noticeable in monastic culture between the phenomenon of pilgrimage and the realization of *xeniteia*. Of special interest are those instances in which holy sites and the Holy Land were chosen as the setting for achieving these ideals.[12] In the *Life of Peter the Iberian* the juxtaposition of monastic *politeia* with the ideal of *akseniutha* near the holy places in Palestine is wholly evident. In late antiquity, voluntary exile and wanderings had affected monastic life and aroused controversy among Church and ascetic leaders, as well as among ordinary monks.[13] However, in the *Life of Peter the Iberian* scarcely any ambivalence or reservations regarding the act of voluntary exile is discernible. On the contrary, the author represents

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[10] Ibid., 20. For the date of Peter's journey, see P. Devos, "Quand Pierre l'Ibère vint-il à Jérusalem," *Analecta Bollandiana* 86 (1968), p. 338.

[11] The classic study on the various meanings of ξενιτεία in Greek and Syriac literature is still A. Guillaumont, "Le dépaysement comme forme d'ascèse dans le monachisme ancien," in idem, *Aux origines de monachisme chrétien: Pour une phénoménologie du monachisme*, Spiritualité Orientale 30. Paris, 1979, pp. 89-116. See also, B. Bitton-Ashkelony, "Pilgrimage in Monastic Culture in Late Antiquity," in M. Stone, R. Ervine, and N. Stone (eds.), *The Armenians in Jerusalem and the Holy Land*, Leuven, 2002, pp. 1-17. For a thorough discussion of the phenomenon of wandering monks in its social, economic, and ecclesiastical contexts, see D. Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks: Spiritual Authority and Promotion of Monasticism in Late Antiquity*, Berkeley, 2002, pp. 19-82.

[12] On this affinity, see Bitton-Ashkelony, "Pilgrimage in Monastic Culture."

[13] Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks*; D. Brakke, "'Outside the Places, Within the Truth': Athanasius of Alexandria and the Localization of the Holy," in D. Frankfurter (ed.), *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt*, Leiden, 1998, pp. 445–81; S. Elm, "Athanasius of Alexandria's Letter to the Virgins: Who Was Its Intended Audience?" *Augustinianum* 33 (1993), pp. 171–83; G. E. Gould, "Moving On and Staying Put in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*," *Studia Patristica* 20 (1989), pp. 231-37.

it as the culmination of the hero's ambitions—to achieve the crown of *akseniutha*.[14]

Four threads depicting pilgrimage and the discovery of a holy tomb are interwoven in the *Life of Peter*: a description of Peter and his companion entering Jerusalem, the visit to Mount Nebo, the *inventio* of the tomb of Moses at Mount Nebo, and the dream journey to the sacred sites in Jerusalem and its environs.[15] Certainly, by the time Peter the Iberian and his entourage were overwhelmed by the vision of the glistening roofs of the churches of Jerusalem and "fell on their faces and advanced on their knees until they entered the city,"[16] pilgrimage to the Holy Land had already been rooted in Christian society for over a hundred years.[17] These four episodes, however, reflect the flourishing fashion of sacred mobility, the emergence of Christian religious landscape, and the existence of a well-defined route for pilgrims—the "Holy Route" (*rehta qadisha*)[18] was the term coined by John Rufus, an expression not used until then—and add important information on holy sites not otherwise known. Nevertheless, the author's aim in including these passages in the *Vita* was not to provide the reader with historical information about the route of fifth-century devotee pilgrims. What, then, was John Rufus' motive in choosing to portray Peter as an enthusiastic pilgrim realizing his *akseniutha* in the Holy Land? After all, in Rufus' account Peter was not simply following the fashion of aristocratic Christians to travel to the Holy Land, among them Melania

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[14] *V. Petri Ib*. 122.

[15] Ibid., 26-27, 82-85, 87-89, 98-100. For a French translation of these passages, see P. Maraval, *Récits des premiers pèlerins chrétiens au Proche-Orient (IV^e^-VII^e^ siècle)*, Paris, 1996, pp. 164-68. For an English translation of the visit to Mount Nebo and the dream journey, see J. Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims before the Crusades*, Jerusalem, 1977, pp. 57-58.

[16] *V. Petri Ib*. 26.

[17] The bibliography on pilgrimage in late antiquity is vast. I shall mention only a few studies: D. Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire AD 312-460*, Oxford, 1982; P. Maraval, *Lieux saints et pèlerinage d'Orient: Histoire et géographie des origines à la conquête arabe*, Paris, 1985; O. Limor, *Holy Land Travels: Christian Pilgrims in Late Antiquity*, Jerusalem, 1998 (Hebrew); L. Perrone, "Christian Holy Places and Pilgrimage in an Age of Dogmatic Conflicts: Popular Religion and Confessional Affiliation in Byzantine Palestine (Fifth to Seventh Centuries)," *Proche Orient Crétien* 48 (1998), pp. 5–37; D. Frankfurter (ed.), *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt*; G. Frank, *The Memory of the Eyes: Pilgrims to Living Saints in Christian Late Antiquity*, Berkeley, 2000; B. Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the Sacred: The Debate on Christian Pilgrimage in Late Antiquity* (forthcoming).

[18] *V. Petri Ib*. 99.

the Younger, whom he had met in Constantinople just before making his way to Jerusalem and who had imbued him with a burning desire to emulate her.[19] In other words, the accounts of pilgrimage in this *Vita* are not innocent. Can we identify the deliberate tactic of the author and unveil the purpose of these descriptions in the *Vita*?

The second pivotal motif in the *Life of Peter* is the *imitatio Mosis*. The biographer organized the *Vita* around a parade of allusions to and images of Moses, and pictured Peter as nothing less than "the Second Moses."[20] He intensified the biblical tone of the narrative by glossing stories about Peter's miracles and favouring those in which Peter acted like Moses. For instance, in describing the disastrous burning of shelters of dry reeds in the valley of Baar during the summer, we read that Peter "stood up before them all and stretched up his hands to heaven. And while his mouth was silent, in his heart he was crying, like Moses to God."[21] Commending orthodoxy was the deliberate purpose of recounting such miracles:[22] Thus, during the great drought in Madaba, Peter performed a miracle and an abundance of rain came down. Rufus recounted that all the people then came to embrace the saint:

> Calling him a second Elijah and Moses—the former as one who opened the heavens after three years' lack of rain, the latter as one who brought forth water from the rock to those endangered by thirst. It was the time also that increased the wonder: for it was a few days before Pentecost. So with love and faith they ran to him and listened to these teachings inspired by God, so that many gladly obeyed the preaching of the orthodox faith…and became our fellows and brothers, of one faith with us, and zealous for the completion of the Church.[23]

There was nothing new, of course, in John Rufus' tactic of representing a character in terms of a biblical figure such as a prophet.[24] His

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[19] Ibid., 29-30. For Melania's visit to Constantinople, see *V. Melan.* 53-56, ed. D. Gorce, *Vie de sainte Mélanie*, SC 90, Paris, 1962, pp. 230-39.

[20] *V. Petri Ib.* 90, 127. Rufus also presents Peter as a new Paul, Noah, and Elijah.

[21] Ibid., 92-93.

[22] On this aspect in Cyril of Scythopolis' *The Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, see *S.* H. Griffith, "The Signs and Wonders of Orthodoxy: Miracles and Monks' Lives in Sixth-Century Palestine," in J. C. Cavadini (ed.), *Miracles in Jewish and Christian Antiquity: Imagining Truth* (Notre Dame, 1999), pp. 139-68.

[23] Ibid., 90.

[24] On this tactic, see D. Satran, *Biblical Prophets in Byzantine Palestine: Reassessing the*

choice of Moses in a monastic context is neither surprising nor unique; Moses is a model of asceticism, fasting, humility, and perfection.[25] Yet, as we shall see, Rufus goes beyond those classical traits of Moses. It is noteworthy that the image of Moses in late antique pilgrimage accounts was rare in comparison with that of Abraham—the biblical prototype for a pilgrim monk in late antique hagiography, someone who was exiled from his land and birthplace and was characterized as having fully achieved the ideal of *xeniteia* in the Holy Land.[26] Apparently the author's goal was not only to conjure up a realization of the ideal of *akseniutha* in his hero and identify him with the figure of the perfect stranger seeking a new homeland. In bestowing approval on the hero's religious identity, Rufus was also striving to find a symbol of orthodoxy, an ultimate icon of a man of God holding the true faith. This aim explains the author's selection of Moses from the gallery of biblical figures who usually peopled the hagiographic compositions. The author was not interested in borrowing the image of philosopher from the multiple portrayals of Moses prevailing in the Hellenistic and Greco-Roman worlds. Rather, he focused on images of Moses as "the great legislator and prophet,"[27] the one who received the divine Law directly from God and possessed the divine truth, [28] the messenger and

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*Lives of the Prophets*, Leiden, 1995, pp. 97-105. For the application of Moses typology to Constantine in Eusebius' writings, see for instance, the *Vita Constantini* I. 12.1-2; II. 12 with A. Camerom and S. G. Hall, *Eusebius: Life of Constantine: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 192-93; M. Hollerich, "The Comparison of Moses and Constantine in Eusebius of Caesarea's *Life of Constantine*," *Studia Patristica* 19 (1989), pp. 80-95; A. Cameron, "Eusebius' *Vita Constantini* and the Construction of Constantine," in M. J. Edwards and S. Swain (eds.), *Portraits: Biographical Representation in the Greek and Latin Literature of Roman Empire*, Oxford, 1997, pp. 145-74.

[25] See, for example, Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Historia religiosa* II.8, 13; VI.8; XXVI.2.

[26] See, e.g., the case of the Cappadocian monk Theoginus, who arrived in Jerusalem in 455 and is described by Paul of Elusa as a pilgrim who wished to imitate Abraham. See *Acta S. Theognii* 10, ed. J. van den Gheyn, *Analecta Bollandiana* 10 (1891), pp. 82-83. See also S. Vailhé, "Saint Théognius, Evêque de Béthélie," *Echos d'Orient* 1 (1897/8), pp. 380-82. This passage is discussed in R. Wilken, *The Land Called Holy: Palestine in Christian History and Thought*, New Haven, 1992, p. 165. See also, E. Lanne, "La *xeniteia* d'Abraham dans l'oeuvre d'Irenée: Aux origines du thème monastique de la *peregrinatio*," *Irénikon* 47 (1974), pp. 163–87.

[27] *Plerophoriae* 55, p. 110. For theses images of Moses, see J. G. Gager, *Moses in Greco-Roman Paganism*, Nashville, 1972; D. T. Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, Assen-Minneapolis, 1993; A. C. Geljon, *Philonic Exegesis in Gregory of Nyssa's De Vita Moysis*, Brown, 2002.

[28] Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* I, 23-29, ed. O. Stählin, Berlin, 1960, pp.

shepherd, the most appropriate mediator between the two worlds, [29] the perfect pedagogue to lead the people toward God, [30] and an ideal bishop and model of monk-bishop.[31] All these images—already inherent in Christianity—served John Rufus' theological, ecclesiastical, and apologetic purposes very well and fitted the religious picture he was endeavouring to create. John Rufus—probably one of the earliest anti-Chalcedonian hagiographic authors—was not merely writing a chapter in the monastic history of fifth-century Palestine; he was, first and foremost, creating a literary space in which to promote the anti-Chalcedonian faith in its full historical setting during one of its turbulent phases. The tone of this stance is set in the introductory statement of the *Vita*, concerning Peter's name:

> His name at first was Nabarnugius. But when he was judged worthy of the holy habit of monks, then his name was changed to Peter, after the name of the chief of the Apostles. Those fathers who bestowed on him the holy habit were perhaps, as I think, moved by divine inspiration, because he was going to emulate in his conduct and character the boldness of his faith which had been given to him by God, for which reason also our Lord named him Peter—that is to say, the rock, and on this rock founded the Orthodox Church.[32]

One of the strategies of representation the author adopted is that of the hero's sacred journey. Peter's travels and pilgrimages are described not merely to construct his career and authority—as was usually the

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93-112; P. M. Guillaume, "Moïse," *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, Paris, 1980, cols. 1453-71. See also the collective volume *Moïse: L'homme de l'alliance*, Paris, 1955.

[29] Gregory of Nyssa, *In psalmorum inscriptiones* VII.14, ed. J. Reynard, SC 466, Paris, 2002, p. 208. On Moses as mediator, see S. J. Hafemann, "Moses in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha: A Survey," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 7 (1990), pp. 79-104.

[30] Clement of Alexandria, *Pedagogue* 1, 58, 60, ed. M. Marcovich, *Clementis Alexandrini: Paedagogus*, Leiden and Boston, 2002, pp. 36-38; Guillaume, "Moïse," cols. 1465-66.

[31] See, for example, Gregory of Nyssa, *Encomium on Basil*, ed. W. Jaeger, H. Langerbeck, and H. Dörrie, *Gregorii Nysseni Opera* X.127-129, Leiden, 1990; idem, *Vita Gregorii Thaumaturgi*, in *Gregorii Nysseni Opera* X.1.3-57; Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 2. On the ideal of ecclesiastical leadership and the comparison with Moses in the Cappadocian writings, see M. Harl, "Moïse figure de l'évêque dans l'éloge de Basile de Grégoire de Nysse (381)," in A. Spira (ed.), *The Biographical Works of Gregory of Nyssa*, Cambridge, MA, 1984, pp. 71-119; A. Sterk, "On Basil, Moses, and the Model Bishop: The Cappadocian Legacy of Leadership," *Church History* 67:2 (1998), pp. 227-53.

[32] *V. Petri Ib.* 4.

case in hagiographic literature[33]—but as journeys toward his religious identity—that is, his anti-Chalcedonian faith.[34] Thus the goal of Peter's *akseniutha*—the voluntary exile he imposed on himself, escaping from Constantinople and setting out for the holy city of Jerusalem—marked the first steps of a journey toward his new identity.

Rufus' impulse in writing a propagandist composition was strengthened by using the strategy of *imitatio Mosis*. By drawing a parallel between Moses and Peter, and in some cases even merging the two, Rufus established the authority and credibility needed to underpin the hero's anti-Chalcedonian position. This motif is first introduced at the beginning of Peter's journey to Jerusalem by evoking the image of Moses as the leader of the Exodus. From the outset Peter was named the Second Moses, and his departure from Constantinople was depicted as paralleling the Exodus from Egypt. Like the children of Israel, Peter too escaped from his country and set off for the Promised Land. According to Rufus, God saved Peter "With a mighty hand and stretched out arm, by signs and wonders, as He once snatched Israel from the tyranny of the Egyptians and brought them into the Promised Land" (Deut. 26: 8-9).[35] The author tells us that Peter and his friend John the Eunuch had with them on their journey to Palestine a copy of the Gospel of John in which was fixed a piece of the wood of the holy Cross, and the relics of martyrs, "who were their guardians and companions, carrying their precious bones in a little golden reliquary, just as the great Moses carried the Ark of God with the cherubim."[36] Rufus explicitly stated that like the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud that had gone before the Children of Israel in their travels in the desert (Exodus 14:19-20), the martyrs' relics protected Peter and his entourage, and brought them safely to Jerusalem;[37] and the author stressed here that the words of Moses: "As an eagle protects its nest and cherishes its young" (Deut. 32:11), fitted them.[38] Peter's "Exodus" reached its culmination and end with his entry into the holy city—Jerusalem.

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[33] On this function of the journey in hagiograhpic literature, see Flusin, *Miracle et histoire*, pp. 113-19, 145-48.

[34] For pilgrimage as a journey toward a new identity, see J. Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer: The Transformation of Art from the Pagan World to Christianity*, London, 1997, pp. 125-31.

[35] *V. Petri Ib.* 21.

[36] Ibid., 23.

[37] Ibid., 22.

[38] Ibid., 26.

### *Entering Jerusalem*

> When they were near Jerusalem, the holy city which they desired, and saw from a height opposite it at a distance of five stadia, like the fleshing of the sunrise, the lofty roofs of the holy churches, of the saving and worshipful cross of the holy Anastasis, and of the worshipful Ascension on the mountain opposite, they cried out aloud, fulfilling the prophetic words, "Look on Sion, the city of our salvation, your eyes shall see Jerusalem" (Isa. 33:20 LXX). And they raised glory and thanks with all their might to the Christ whom they loved, who had called them and brought them out and guided and preserved them; and casting themselves down on their faces, they ceased not worship from that height and, creeping on their knees, continually with their lips and their eyes greeting this Holy Land, to proclaim the love that was burning within them, until they were within the holy walls, and embraced the base of the precious cross, that is to say holy Golgotha, and the holy Anastasis, at once seeing and weeping and confessing and glorifying and exulting, as if now they had received Jesus whom they loved, and were dwelling with him.[39]

Peter and John set off for the Mount of Olives and were received by Melania the Younger, and in her monastery for men they launched upon their monastic career.[40] After describing Peter's activity in the monastic community of the Mount of Olives, Rufus reminds the readers of his promise to recount how Peter moved from Jerusalem and went to dwell in the region of Gaza, and "how he was counted meet for the priesthood, and finally the high-priesthood, by election of divine Grace."[41] But at this point he unexpectedly deviates from his chronological account of Peter's career and inserts into the *Vita* a lengthy and detailed traditional account of Helena's discovery of the Cross and the building of the church of the Anastasis:[42]

> Blessed Helena…Having first traced down and found by divine help the saving wood of the precious cross, she set it for worship and for healings of souls and bodies for all the world for the sake of which He

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[39] Ibid., 26-27.
[40] Ibid., 30-32.
[41] Ibid., 37.
[42] For the early traditions on the finding of the cross, see J. W. Drijvers, *Helena Augusta: The Mother of Constantine the Great and the Legend of Her Finding of the True Cross,* Leiden, 1991; S. Borgehammar, *How The Holy Cross Was Found: From Event to Medieval Legend,* Stockholm, 1991.

> had been crucified. After this she raised up to our Lord great and God-befitting houses, and beautiful sanctuaries, over the divine Sepulchre of our Lord, and in the holy Place of the Skull, worshipful Golgotha, which is the true Holy of Holies, and true altar which from of old was proclaimed and prefigured by the prophet Moses, of stones uncut and unworked, constituted by nature. For what other is there such, but this altar alone, as in truth the altar of the indivisible Christ, and receiving no cutting nor division, whereon the true Lamb of God was sacrificed and offered, who taketh away the sin of the world.[43]

Rufus' detour into Helena's exploit, carefully crafted, is important for several reasons. First, Rufus was depicting the Golgotha in terminology reminiscent of the anti-Chalcedonian doctrine, articulating his belief system and thus representing it as a place imbued with anti-Chalcedonian meanings. Second, Moses, the icon of the *Vita* is not simply the prefiguration of Jesus;[44] rather, the instruction he received from God concerning the building of the altar (Exodus 20:25) with stones "uncut and unworked" are a prefiguration of the Golgotha, the "Holy of Holies."[45] In other words, by rewriting Helena's well-known deeds in a new language—borrowed from the ancient Jewish Temple, "Holy of Holies," and from the biblical terminology of the rule given to Moses—Rufus was proclaiming the indivisibility of Christ and thereby "baptising" the Golgotha with the anti-Chalcedonian creed. And it is precisely in this "Holy of Holies" that we shall see Peter in action: Immediately after Helena's story, Rufus introduces into the *Vita* miracles "which by reason of his divine power [the Cross] came to pass before the blessed man [Peter] for the glory of God and the assurance of the hope of Christians, and support and confirmation of our faith."[46] One of these miracle stories recount that a rash broke out on the face of John the Eunuch, and Peter went with him at night to the church of the Anastasis, where they prayed all night in a quiet and hidden place at the northern end of the church. At the end of the praying John saw a hand clean his

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[43] *V. Petri Ib.* 37-38.

[44] See, for example, the sixteen instances in which the career of Jesus corresponded to that of Moses in Eusebius' *Demonstratio Evangelica* discessed by J. E. Bruns, "The "Agreement of Moses and Jesus" in the *Demonstratio Evangelica* of Eusebius," *Vigiliae Christianae* 31 (1977), pp. 117-25.

[45] Cf. Deut. 27:5-6; Joshua 8:31.

[46] *V. Petri Ib.* 38.

face and he was healed.[47] Bearing in mind that the *Vita* is above all a work of apologetics, we should not reduce this story of a healing miracle to the general aim of the author to portray Peter as a holy man and miracle worker. For scenes of miracles in the Anastasis were extremely rare at that time.[48] This miracle, remarkably *mis-en-scène*, is presented within the framework of the struggle over the orthodox faith and served as a warrant for the hero's doctrine. John Rufus himself maintains that he describes the miracles in order to "support and affirm our faith."[49] Moreover, Rufus was stressing the unbroken continuity between the glorious past and the individual present, between the discovery of the Cross by Helena to Peter, the bearer of the Cross.[50] We have been told that while Peter was still a child in the palace of Theodosius he had received a portion of the Cross and used to work miracles through it, [51] and he carried it with him during his travel to Palestine.[52] Establishing Peter's own line to the past, enable Rufus to place his anti-Chalcedonian hero in a wide and honored context, that of the history of Christian salvation gained and symbolised by the Cross.

At one critical point in the *Vita* Rufus portrays his hero on a journey to a vital site in the drama of Moses' life—Mount Nebo. This journey took place in the 480s, a few years after Peter's return from his political exile in Egypt, following the anti-Chalcedonian revolt in Palestine. During his exile Peter was engaged in ecclesiastical activity and involved in the consecration of Timothy, the anti-Chalcedonian bishop of Alexandria, and he was recognized as a militant anti-Chalcedonian leader.[53] Rufus recounts that upon his return Peter engaged in anti-Chalcedonian missionary activity throughout Palestine, traveling to Jerusalem, Gaza, Caesarea, and Arabia. Peter's journey to Arabia, then, took place after his reputation as an anti-Chalcedonian holy man was well established. The reason for this journey was apparently quite prosaic: he traveled to the city of Livias, known for its hot springs

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[47] Ibid., 40.

[48] Jerome alludes to miracles in the Anastasis, *Ep.* 46.8 (ed.), I. Hillerg, CSEL, Wien, 1996, pp. 338-9.

[49] *V. Petri Ib.* 38.

[50] For Peter as the bearer of the Cross, see ibid., 13.

[51] Ibid., 39.

[52] Ibid., 23.

[53] Ibid., 58-71. On the anti-Chalcedonian unrest in Egypt, see C. W. Griggs, *Early Egyptian Christianity: From its Origins to 451 CE*, Leiden, 1990, pp. 205-15; Kofsky, "Peter the Iberian."

and "named after holy Moses,"[54] seeking relief from his ailments.[55] The biographer divides this account into two stages: First, during the journey to Livias, he gives a detailed description of the pilgrimage to Mount Nebo; he then goes on to tell the story of discovering the tomb of Moses.

### *The Pilgrimage to Mount Nebo*

> The next day we made our way past Madaba and midway came to the holy mountain of Moses called Avarim or Pisgah, the place where God told him "Ascend and die." There is a great worshipful sanctuary in the name of the prophet, and many monasteries were built around it.[56] In joy at visiting the place with the old man [Peter], we raised prayers of thanksgiving to God, who had honoured us with the blessing and veneration of such a prophet. And when we came there after prayer and worship, the old man [Peter] led us to a small cell, about five cubits broad and long, and not well lit and he told us and said: "I remember when I was a boy and had newly come from the royal city [Constantinople], I arrived at this mountain for the sight[57] and for prayer, and hearing that one of the great saints of Scetis[58] was dwelling here in quiet and solitude, [59] he who had left Scetis with all the monks who were there when the invasion of the Mazices fell upon those monasteries.[60]

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[54] *V. Petri Ib.* 83. Antoninus also refers to these as Moses' springs and says that lepers are there cleansed. See *Itinerarium Antonini Placentini* 10 (ed.), C. Milani, Milano, 1977.

[55] *V. Petri Ib.* 84.

[56] On the church on Mt. Nebo, see Maraval, *Lieux saints*, pp. 282-83.

[57] For this pilgrim's goal, see, for example, Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Historia religiosa* IX.2. The visuality in pilgrims' accounts of the Holy Land is discussed in Frank, *The Memory of the Eyes*, pp. 102-33.

[58] On the monastic community in Scetis, see Chitty, *The Desert a City*, pp. 66-74; J.-C. Guy, "Le Centre monastique de Scété dans la littérature du V$^{e}$ siècle," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 30 (1974), pp. 129-47.

[59] *shelia* is the parallel term in Syriac to ἡσυχία. On the different meaning of ἡσυχία, see I. Hausherr, "L'hésychasme. Étude de spiritualité," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 22 (1956), pp. 5-40, 247-85 (=idem, *Hésychasme et Prière*, Orientalia Christiana Analecta 176, Rome, 1966, pp. 163-237); K. Ware, "Silence in Prayer: The Meaning of *Hesychia*," in B. Pennington (ed.), *One Yet Two Monastic Traditions East and West*, Kalamazoo, 1976, pp. 22-47.

[60] We know of three invasions of Scetis by the Mazices (tribes from the western desert of Egypt) during the fifth century: 408-9, 434, and 444. The monastic settlement in Scetis was destroyed by a fourth invasion in 570. See H. G. Evelyn-White, *The History of the Monasteries of Nitria and Scetis*, pp. 150-67.

> I persuaded the guardian of the mountain that I might be honoured with the blessing and sight of him. It was this very cell that you see, in which this blessed man was living for forty years, not going out of the door or across the threshold; he was abstemious and a prophet and filled with divine grace." Then three of us came [into the cell of the saint]: myself, my blessed John, [61] and another man, a monk of Cappadocia, who was traveling with us.[62]

In what follows, John Rufus describes at length Peter's intimate conversation with the holy recluse, thus providing the reader with a decisive clue for understanding the function of this account of pilgrimage in the *Vita*. Like Moses, who alone had penetrated to the interior of the cloud (Exodus 20:19-20), "I [Peter] turned round to him, he indicated to me with his hand that I should remain, while he left the others to go out….He foresaw in the Spirit and was making known the gift of the priesthood with which I was going to be honoured."[63] According to the author, this prophecy about Peter's ordination, reminiscent of God election of Moses at Mount Sinai, had been proclaimed on Mount Nebo when Peter was still a youth, immediately after escaping Constantinople. Rufus could find no better arena for Peter's being chosen as a priest and confirming his faith than "the holy Mountain of Moses."[64] Rufus then recounts, in the classic manner of *inventio* prevailing at the time, the discovering of Moses' tomb, hence providing for the first time the detailed and full testimony of this *inventio*.

Before discussing this *inventio* it is worth recalling that the enigmatic death of Moses and the riddle of his burial place ("but no one knows his burial place until this very day" [Deut. 34:6]) has aroused immense curiosity among Jewish and Christian writers; an important corpus of traditions was woven around it from the first century on.[65] Some have

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[61] John the Eunuch, companion and spiritual guide of Peter the Iberian, see *V. Petri Ib.* 21.

[62] Ibid., 85-86.

[63] Ibid., 86. On the use of the image of Moses on the mountain as an example of one who is prepared for leadership, see also Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 2.92, 20.2, 32.16-17; Sterk, "On Basil, Moses, and the Model Bishop," p. 241.

[64] *V. Petri Ib.* 85. For Peter's ordination, see ibid., 51.

[65] For these traditions, see S. E. Loewenstamm, "The Death of Moses," in G. W. E. Nickelsburg (ed.), *Studies on the Testament of Abraham*, Missoula, 1976, pp. 185-217; J. Goldin, "The Death of Moses: An Exercise in Midrashic Transposition," in J. H. Marks and R. M. Good (eds.), *Love and Death in the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of Marvin H. Pope*, Guilford, 1987, pp. 219-25. On the death of Moses in the Rabbinic Haggada, see W. K. Meeks, *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology*, Leiden, 1967, pp. 209-211.

declared that Moses never died;[66] others have imagined his ascent to heaven and disappearance in the clouds, rejecting the view that Moses had been bodily removed from the earth and transferred to heaven,[67] and stressing that only his soul was surrendered to God.[68] For Philo of Alexandria—who considered Moses to be a king, lawgiver, high priest, and prophet[69]—Moses "was buried with none present, surely by no mortal hands but by immortal powers."[70] Clement of Alexandria speaks of a "double Moses" to avoid using "body and soul": "Joshua, the son of Nun, saw a double Moses being taken away, one who went with the angels and the other who was deemed worthy to be buried in the ravines."[71]

The *Assumption of Moses*, most probably originating in Palestine and written in Hebrew or Aramaic in the first quarter of the first century,[72] featured Moses and Joshua in a dialogue on the occasion of Moses' impending death. It is conceivable that the *Assumption of Moses* ended with his death and burial, but the ending has not come down to us.[73] All we have are Joshua's words:

> What place will receive you or what will be the monument on your grave, or who, being human, will dare to carry your body from one place to another? For all who die when their time has come have a grave in the earth. But your grave extends from the East to the West, and from the North to the extreme South. The entire world is your grave.[74]

The Epistle of Jude (Jude 9), dating to the end of the first century,

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[66] *b Sotah* 13b.

[67] Josephus, *Ant.* 4.8, 48.

[68] For example, *Sifre on Deuteronomy* 326-27; *Aboth de Rabbi Nathan* 12 (ed.) S. Schechter, New York, 1967. For the various sources on Moses' dispute with the angel of death for his soul, see E. Glickler-Chazon, "Moses' Struggle for his Soul: A Prototype for the *Testament of Abraham*, the Greek *Apocalypse of Ezra*, and the *Apocalypse of Sedrach*," *The Second Century: A Journal of Early Christian Studies* 5 (1985/86), pp. 151-64.

[69] For the image of Moses as prophet, see Meeks, *The Prophet-King*, pp. 100-31.

[70] Philo, *De Vita Mosis* II, 291, Eng. trans. F. H. Colson, LCL, London, 1935, VI, p. 594.

[71] Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* VI 132.2; Origen, *In Jesu Nave* II.1, ed. A. Jaubert, SC 71, Paris, 1960, pp. 116-19.

[72] As convincingly argued by J. Tromp, *The Assumption of Moses: A Critical Edition with Commentary*, Leiden, 1993, esp. pp. 115-23.

[73] For a reconstruction of the lost ending of *The Assumption of Moses*, see Tromp, *The Assumption of Moses*, pp. 270-85.

[74] *The Assumption of Moses* 11:5, pp. 20-21. Cf. *Testament of Moses* 11:5-9, Eng. trans. J. Priest, "The Testament of Moses," in J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, New York, 1983, vol.1, pp. 933.

says that the archangel Michael contended with the devil and disputed with him over the body of Moses, [75] a tradition that probably goes back to the lost ending of the *Assumption of Moses*.[76] The same thread is apparent in the Armenian apocryphal tradition: "And Moses, the servant of God died, and they buried him [and the angel buried him (B)]."[77]

A new element permeated the tradition of the angelic burial—namely, the geographical location of this event. Such a tradition appears in *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* (Deut. 34:6): The ministering angels, Michael and Gabriel, prepared a golden bed inlaid with precious stones, and angels of wisdom laid Moses on the bed and by their word carried him four miles and buried him in the valley opposite Beit Pe'or.[78] Similarly, in the *Life of Moses* included in one cycle of the Armenian version of *Vitae Prophetarum*, the angel appears as the one responsible for taking Moses' soul on Mount Nebo.[79] Yet when Eusebius wrote his *Onomasticon* around the end of the third century he was not aware of any tradition pertaining to the tomb of Moses on Mount Nebo.[80] Neither did Epiphanius, who related to the spot in the fourth century, mention any tomb or church in this place.[81] Epiphanius was certain that no man knew Moses' sepulchre because he became totally spiritual.[82] Gregory of Nyssa exploited this notion in a mystical context, stressing that Moses did not leave any traces or memorial for the "earthly burden."[83]

Noteworthy in this context is the additional focus in fourth-century Christian discourse concerning the puzzling death of Moses—that is, his burial place. Jewish and Christian writers endeavoured to explain on the one hand why Moses' burial place was unknown and on the other

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[75] For a full discussion of this tradition, see Tromp, *The Assumption of Moses*, pp. 270-85.

[76] This is Tromp's conclusion, ibid., p. 271.

[77] Eng. trans., in M. Stone, *Selected Studies in Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha: With Special Reference to the Armenian Tradition*, Leiden, 1991, p. 54. I wish to thank Michael Stone for drawing my attention to the Armenian texts relating to Moses.

[78] See also, *Midrash Deuteronomy Rabbah* 11, 10.

[79] Stone, *Selected Studies in Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha*, p. 55.

[80] For this early dating of the *Onomasticon*, see D. E. Groh, "The *Onomasticon* of Eusebius and the Rise of Christian Palestine," *Studia Patristica* 18 (1983), pp. 23-31.

[81] Eusebius, *Onomasticon*, "Abarim," "Nebo," ed. E. Klostermann, Hildesheim, 1966, pp. 16, 136; Epiphanius, *Weights and Measures* 63, ed. J. E. Dean, *Epiphanius' Treatise on Weights and Measures: The Syriac Version*, Chicago, 1935, p. 71.

[82] Epiphanius, *Panarion* 69.6, ed. K. Holl, Berlin, 1980, p. 514.

[83] Gregory of Nyssa, *In psalmorum inscriptiones* VII.14, pp. 208-9.

where its precise location might be—questions that met the ongoing Christian propensity for sacred geography at that time.[84] Aphrahat, in the mid-fourth century, wrote that the Lord had said to Moses: "I shall bury you and hide you and no one shall know your tomb," explaining that the Lord thereby conferred a double favour on Moses: first, because his adversaries would not know the place, they would not scatter his bones; second, because the people of Israel would not know the place, they would not render his tomb into a cultic place and offer sacrifices there, given that they considered Moses to be a god (Exodus 7:1). And according to Aphrahat, no one to this day knows his tomb.[85] The same argument is preserved in the Armenian pseudepigrapha:

> Michael, the archangel, buried him and no man knew his tomb and his bones up to the present, for two reasons. First, because Moses was named God. Therefore he was buried secretly and unknown to me, lest they see their God dead. Second, lest men take his tomb and bones as an object of worship.[86]

This tradition crops up also in the medieval *Midrash Leqah Tov:* "And why is the burial place of Moses not known? So that Israel would not go and make there a sanctuary and sacrifice and offer incense there, and so that the nations of the world would not defile his grave with their idols and their abominations."[87] The second part of the midrash reflects a Jewish response to the Christian cult of saints and martyrs.

*Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* (Numbers 32:4, 38) identifies Mount Nebo as the burial ground of Moses, referring to the place mentioned in the biblical verse as the "burial place of Moses."[88] This geographical interest in the burial place of Moses is echoed in the Babylonian Talmud in the name of Rabbi Berechyah: "The wicked government once

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[84] For some of these legends, see M. Ish-Shalom, "The Cave of the Machpela and the Sepulchre of Moses: The Development of Aggadic Tradition," *Tarbitz* 41 (1971-1972), pp. 203-10 (Hebrew).

[85] Aphrahat, *Demonstratio* VIII, Patrologia Syriaca 1, ed. J. Parisot, cols. 377-80. Origen, too, was aware of this explanation, *Selecta in Num.*, PG 12, 578b.

[86] Stone, *Selected Studies in Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha*, p. 56.

[87] *Leqah Tov* 68a. This fear is also present in a legend about Adam, as shown in Ish-Shalom, "Cave of the Machpela and the Sepulchre of Moses," p. 203 note 6.

[88] The earlier *Targum Onqelos* has no tradition regarding Moses' burial place. See also, S. Crois, "Emperor Hadrian: The First of Palestine's Explorers," *Hashiloach* 39 (1920), pp. 421-33, 526-40 (Hebrew).

sent [a message] to the *gaṣtera*[89] of Beit-Pe'or: 'Show us where Moses is buried.'"[90] Egeria, who visited Palestine in the 380s, recounted one of the early testimonies about the tomb of Moses that she heard from the monks of Mount Nebo:

> Right on the summit of Mount Nebo, and inside, in the position of the pulpit, I saw a slightly raised place about the size of a normal tomb. I asked about it, and the holy men replied, "Holy Moses was buried here—by angels, since the Bible tells us 'No human being knows his burial.' And there is no doubt that it was angels who buried him, since the actual tomb where he was buried can be seen today. Our predecessors here pointed out this place to us, and now we point it out to you." They told us that this tradition came from their predecessors.[91]

There is nothing striking, of course, in this attempt to identify the tomb of a biblical figure in the eighties of the fourth century—an era awash with the cults of saints and relics.[92] Yet it is most likely that until mid-fourth century, Christians dealt with the enigma of Moses' burial place in a Jewish polemical context, as attested in Aphrahat's *Demonstratio*. But from Egeria's account clearly a new interest was rising, one that David Satran in another context called "the flavor of geographical exactitude."[93] The last layer of the legend of Moses' burial place at Mount Nebo is found in the *Life of Peter*, completing the tradition of Egeria with the account of the *inventio* of Moses' tomb. But unlike Egeria, who simply accepted the account of the monks of Mount Nebo without asking about the discovery of the precise location of Moses' burial, John Rufus was aware of the difficulty entailed in Deuteronomy 34:6. In no other composition does this story of the *inventio* of Moses' tomb fit so well as in the *Life of Peter the Iberian*, where the course of the hero's life is organized in accordance with the biblical figure of Moses and forged in his pattern. [94]

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[89] *Castra*, a military fortification or fortress. See also, Crois, "Emperor Hadrian," pp. 427-28.

[90] *b Sotah* 13b; *Sifre on Deuteronomy* 357.

[91] *Egeria's Travels* 12, Eng. trans., J. Wilkenson, *Egeria's Travels to the Holy Land*, Jerusalem, 1981, p. 107.

[92] P. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, Chicago, 1981; Satran, *Biblical Prophets in Byzantine Palestine*, pp. 105-10.

[93] Ibid., p. 105.

[94] Even Rufus' description of Peter's death is reminiscent of the angelic struggle over Moses' body. See, *V. Petri Ib.* 131.

*Discovering the Tomb of Moses*

We learned there from those who dwelt on the mountain how those who built the sanctuary had been assured that the body of holy Moses was set there, and above it this sanctuary was built.[95] And the table and the altar were established, and under the altar a vessel of oil and dust. Since the holy Scripture clearly says thus: Moses the servant of the Lord died in the land of Moab according to the word of the Lord, and they buried him in the land on the side of Baal-Pe'or, and no man knew his end to this day (Deut. 34:5-6). A shepherd from the village of Nebo, which is situated south of the mountain, was grazing his flock up to this place. When he came there he saw as in a vision a very large cave full of a great light and a sweet smell and splendor. Being astounded—for nothing like this had ever been seen in this place—and empowered with divine strength, he ventured to go down into the cave. There he saw a venerable old man, his face shining and full of grace, lying as it was on a brightening bed and flashing with glory and grace. He then understood that this was holy Moses. With fear and great joy he immediately ran to the village, hastening to make known the vision to the people there. Being made wise by God, he gathered small stones and raised up many piles in the place where he had seen the vision, lest when he came again he would not know the place.[96] And that is what occurred. When the villagers heard what had happened they ran in throngs to the place [of the vision] and searched for this cave. And this shepherd said, calling God as a witness, "In this place where these piles are set, I saw this vision, and went down into this cave and saw the holy prophet, therefore I put up these piles, so that even if the prophet was hidden again by God's command, yet these piles should make known the place. So when they and many other holy men were persuaded that

[95] It seems that this tradition was unknown in Egeria's time, otherwise she would not have failed to mention it, as she does in the case of the discovery of the tomb of Job (*Egeria's Travels*, 16:5-6, pp. 112-13). A different tradition, according to which the tomb of Moses is located in the Cave of the Machpela in Hebron, is mentioned in Ish-Shalom, "Cave."

[96] For the elusive nature of Moses' burial place, see also *Sifre Deuteronomy* 357, Eng. trans. R. Hammer, *Sifre—A Tannaitic Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy*, New Haven, 1986, pp. 381-82: "The imperial house of Caesar once sent two commissioners with orders, 'Go and find the sepulcher of Moses.' They climbed above and saw the bier below, but when they went down below, they saw it up above. They then split up, half of them going up and half going down, but those above saw the bier below, while those below saw it above. Hence scripture says: '*And no man knows his sepulcher* (*unto this day*).'" See also M. Ish-Shalom, "Midrash Eser Galuyot," *Sinai* 43 (1957), pp. 202-3 (Hebrew)**.** On the tradition connecting this search with Hadrian, see Crois, "Emperor Hadrian."

> the vision was true, all the local people ran as one man and brought the materials needed for building, and this sanctuary was built in the name of the great prophet lawgiver, openly and indubitably proclaiming to everyone his grace and his strength through signs, wonders and healing, which from that time have occurred continually in this place. For it is a common house of healing for souls and bodies, and a refuge to all those who come from all over to this place and are in sorrow of soul and held in diverse passions. So when we had prayed there and been supplied with the prayers of the great prophet, we arrived at the city aforementioned [Medaba].[97]

Rufus' account of this *inventio*, which occurred before Peter undertook the pilgrimage to Mount Nebo, prompts the question: What specific interest did John Rufus—the anti-Chalcedonian author of the *Vita*—find in this tradition? Why did he insert into his composition the story of the *inventio* of Moses' tomb? Rufus himself did not provide any hint in the *Vita*. One can surmise that by transmitting this *inventio*, Rufus was claiming an extension of the Palestinian network of holy places and thus enhancing Peter's authority as an anti-Chalcedonian leader. Theological controversies and the invention of saints' relics and martyrs' tombs went hand in hand in late antiquity. Bishops knew how to make capital out of such discoveries. It is worth recalling here that it was precisely during the synod of Diospolis in 415 that the news about the discovery of the tomb of Stephen reached the assembly dealing with the issue of Pelagius. As D. Hunt has observed, the discovery was a considerable political coup for John, the bishop of Jerusalem, and his church in those circumstances.[98] An *inventio*—a sort of visual rhetoric of sanctity—confirms ecclesiastical authority and reinforces religious positions. From this perspective Peter's patronage of the discovery of Moses' tomb in Rufus' account fits his general goal, to confirm the anti-Chalcedonian faith.

The fourth passage in the *Vita* dealing with pilgrimage is the story of the "simple and faultless monk," who tells his friends his dream of Peter the Iberian's pilgrimage to Jerusalem. This is recounted against the background of the disciples' amazement that Peter had not visited the holy sites in Jerusalem during his long stay near the city.

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[97] *V. Petri Ib.* 87-89.

[98] Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage*, pp. 214-20. See also J. W. Drijvers, "Promoting Jerusalem: Cyril and the True Cross," in J. W. Drijvers and J. W. Watt (eds.), *Portraits of Spiritual Authority: Religious Power in Early Christianity, Byzantium and the Christian Orient*, Leiden, 1999, pp. 79-95.

*Dream Journey*

After this, when the autumn had arrived, the blessed man [Peter] returned to his brethren in the plain. When he left, people were indignant and said: "How, when he [Peter] stayed all these days near Jerusalem, did the blessed not desire to enter the holy city, even by night, and worship at places of worship, and especially at holy Golgotha and the life-giving Sepulcher?" One day after his departure, one of the brotheren who was a perfect and very simple man said to them: "This night I saw a fearful vision. For it seemed to me that I was seeing Abba Peter the bishop, who said to me, 'Brother, can you give me a hand?' and in this vision he alone took me to the holy city, on the same night during which he was about to depart.[99] He entered first to the Martyrium of St. Stephen, whom he had met before.[100] Afterward, he went down to the cave and worshiped there his sarcophagus. Coming out of there he hastened to the holy Golgotha and the holy Sepulcher.[101] From there he went down to the church named after Pilate (Matt. 27:11-14), and from there to that of the Paralytic (John 5:2-15), and then to Gethsemane. Having made the circuit also of the holy places around it, he then went up to the Upper Room of the disciples (Mark 14:14-16; Luke 22:11-13), [102] and after that to the holy Ascension (Luke 24:50-51; Acts 1:9), [103] and from there to the house of Lazarus. He then went on the road leading from there until he arrived at holy Bethlehem. After praying there he turned to the tomb of Rachel (Gen. 35:19) and, having prayed there and in the

[99] For the literary sources related to the various places mentioned in this description, see Maraval, *Lieux saints*, pp. 251-73; Limor, *Holy Land Travels: Christian Pilgrims in Late Antiquity*.

[100] This may refer to a vision of Stephen the Protomartyr that Peter had had earlier.

[101] On Golgotha and the Holy Sepulchre, see J. E. Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places: The Myth of Jewish-Christian Origins*, Oxford, 1993, pp. 113-42; idem, "Golgotha: A Reconsideration of the Evidence for the Sites of Jesus' Crucifixion and Burial," *New Testament Studies* 44 (1998), pp. 180-203; J. Patrich, "The Church of the Holy Sepulchre: History and Architecture," in Y. Tsafrir and S. Safrai (eds.), *The History of Jerusalem: The Roman and Byzantine Period (70-638 CE)*, Jerusalem, 1999, pp. 353-81 (Hebrew).

[102] This is an important testimony for the Mount of Olives tradition of the Last Supper, before it was transferred to Mount Zion. Egeria's earlier testimony also supports this tradition (*Egeria's Travels* 35, 2-3). On the different names of the Eleona church, including "Church of the Disciples," see Limor, *Holy Land*, p. 94 note 237. On a different tradition, locating the Last Supper in the Valley of Jehoshaphat, see *Theodosius* 10, ed., P. Geyer, *Itinera Hierosolymitan*, CSEL 39, Vienna, 1898, p. 142.

[103] For the "holy Ascension," see also Cyril of Scythopolis, *Vita Euthymii*, 43, 37; *Vita Sabae*, 45. According to Rufus (*V. Petri Ib.* 30), the church was built under the patronage of Poemenia, probably during the 380s. On Poemenia's activity in Jeru-

> rest of the shrines and oratories on the way, he descended to Siloam (John 9:7);[104] from there, going up to holy Zion[105] and completing a holy course and worshiped the Lord in every place, he finally returned to the village Beit Tafsha. And I, in every place was supporting him. And the very next day after I had seen the vision, the father went on his way. All this occurred in order to persuade those who were indignant that the blessed one was in every holy place every day, or perhaps every hour, offering in spirit worship to the Lord. For it is written: 'Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutinity' (1 Cor. 2:15).[106]

This imaginative journey maps with great exactitude the actual network of holy sites—a journey that every Christian pilgrim might undertake at the end of the fifth century.[107] The author was here drawing the boundaries of the sacred space of Jerusalem, at the same time proclaiming the possession of this territory of grace—namely, that this network of holy places belonged to him too and not only to the Chalcedonians currently in possession of them.[108] Although Peter could not undertake this sacred journey, or was prevented from doing so, he did not renounce the holy places. This story did not reflect a change in Peter's stance vis–à-vis the holy places, neither did it imply a preference for a spiritual pilgrimage over a real one. In my view, Peter, not being able to enter the holy places at that time—a situation akin to that of Moses prevented from entering the Promised Land—resorted to a good solution to the shameful situation in which anti-Chalcedonians were barred from the holy places.[109] By

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salem, see Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage*, pp. 160-63. Melania the Younger built a small martyrion inside this church in 439, placing there Stephen's relics. See Gerontius, *Vita Melaniae* 57, 64, pp. 240, 258. According to Rufus (*V. Petri Ib.* 32-33), the relics of the Persian forty martyrs were also placed there.

[104] For the church of Siloam, see *V. Petri Ib.*, 55.

[105] On the inauguration of the local church on Mount Zion in the days of John II, the successor of Cyril of Jerusalem, see M. van Esbrock, "Une homélie sur l'église attribuée à Jean de Jérusalem," *Le Muséon* 86 (1973), pp. 286-87; idem, "Jean II de Jérusalem et les cultes de s. Étienne, de la sainte-Sion et de la croix," *Analecta Bollandiana* 102 (1984), pp. 107-12.

[106] *V. Petri Ib.* 98-100.

[107] See J. Wilkinson's map of Peter's visionary pilgrimage, *Jerusalem Pilgrims*, p. 41.

[108] See Kofsky, "Peter the Iberian"; Perrone, "Christian Holy Places and Pilgrimage in an Age of Dogmatic Conflicts."

[109] Ibid.

representing Peter and his entourage as "Hiérosolymites en exil"[110] Rufus was in fact stressing the unbreakable link of the anti-Chalcedonians to the holy places, a persistent claim in the *Vita.* Hence to worship in spirit was the way to overcome the political difficulties that faced Peter as an anti-Chalcedonian—a tool in the theological struggle between Chalcedonians and anti-Chalcedonians. John Rufus' attempt to circumvent the difficulties through use of the dream mode undoubtedly served to demonstrate the importance of the holy sites for the author and his idea that those able to see those sites, albeit in a vision, were the ones in possession of the true faith. Seeing is believing.[111] This perception shortly became popular among the monks of the Judean Desert.[112]

Certainly John Rufus did not present any profound or new aspects on the anti-Chalcedonian theology in this *Vita.*[113] Yet with the dual emphasis in the *Vita*—which combines the idea of sacred journey with the motif of *imitatio Mosis*—he has succeeded in providing symbols for constituting Peter's authority as "a glorious pillar of the orthodox faith"[114] and putting his portrayal at the service of the anti-Chalcedonian orthodoxy.

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[110] As coined by Flusin ("L'hagiographie palestinienne," p. 38).

[111] On the role of the sight of the holy in inspiring faith, see C. Hahn, "Seeing and Believing: The Construction of Sanctity in Early Medieval Saints' Shrines," *Speculum* 72 (1997), pp. 1079-106.

[112] Cyril of Scythopolis, *Vita Sabae* 152-57. See also, Wilken, *Land Called Holy*, pp. 166-70; Flusin, "L'hagiographie palestinienne," pp. 27-30.

[113] For the lack of any theological creativity in Rufus' works, see Steppa, *John Rufus*, pp. 147-62.

[114] *V. Petri Ib.* 13.

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# THE NECESSITY OF ADVICE: SPIRITUAL DIRECTION AS A SCHOOL OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE CORRESPONDENCE OF BARSANUPHIUS AND JOHN OF GAZA

Lorenzo Perrone

On re-reading the *Erotapokriseis* of Barsanuphius and John of Gaza, that unique example of early monastic literature, I have once again been struck by the wealth of historical and spiritual insights it provides. In it the historian of late antique society can catch fascinating glimpses of the social, political and even economic life of sixth-century Palestine, with its great variety of protagonists, from robber to patriarch and *dux*. Students of ancient Christianity, on the other hand, have continuously to measure themselves against a "landscape of the soul," whose characteristic features emerge from a monastic microcosm and its milieu. Such a landscape, potentially so much more vivid than the evocation of the pale features of the physical surroundings of sea and desert, is indeed the core of the correspondence. We may need to make ourselves more aware of its variety and be careful not to lull ourselves into seeing only its monotonous or repetitive side. This is the sense of the specific hermeneutics recommended to the reader by the anonymous collector of the letters (and sometimes also by their authors themselves), inasmuch as the answers the Old Men provide address the situations of many kinds of people: hesychasts, coenobites, clerics and laymen (both higher and lower).[1]

However, after going through the whole collection, one has to recognize that a consistent "message" does pervade the spiritual atmo-

[1] Οὐ γὰρ τὰ αὐτα τοῖς πᾶσιν ἁρμόττει διδάγματα (F. Neyt, P. de Angelis, and L. Regnault, eds. and trans., *Barsanuphe et Jean de Gaza. Correspondance*, vol. 1, SC 426, Paris, 1997, p. 160). I shall normally refer to this edition, using the abbreviation C plus the number of the letter. The SC edition comprises vols. 1-5 (SC 426, 427, 450, 451, 468, Paris, 1998-2002). In a previous essay I tried to apply myself the criterion suggested in the prologue by examining a selected portion of the correspondence. See L. Perrone, "Εἰς τὸν τῆς ἡσυχίας λιμένα: Le lettere a Giovanni di Beersheva nella corrispondenza di Barsanufio e Giovanni di Gaza," in *Mémorial Dom Jean Gribomont (1920-1986)*, Rome, 1988, pp. 463-486.

sphere of the correspondence, however much it is adapted to specific individuals in specific situations. For reasons of intellectual honesty, I should add that my approach to the correspondence, though hopefully well grounded and sufficiently objective, is not one of neutrality, since I am not at all insensitive to its provocative "message." As I shall try to show, I see the letters of the two Old Men of Gaza as essentially a "school of Christianity" and a remarkable embodiment of its religious values and ideals, as well as its possible limitations. On the other hand, I cannot help feeling myself to be a rather bad "pupil," though this is something I perhaps need to remember as the Old Men themselves did (in their case of course out of modesty), when they observed that they were talking about the virtues of the Fathers without possessing any of them.[2]

*Outer and Inner Life: The Arena of the Heart*

For contemporary readers, unless they have a feeling for *gurus*, it is perhaps difficult at first to sympathize with the psychological situation encountered in the correspondence. This may be especially the case when facing the extraordinary powers attributed to the holy man Barsanuphius right from the start, in the large group of letters addressed to John of Beersheva.[3] The Great Old Man is a seer, a prophet (as his companion, John, called with this specific designation), and a worker of miracles, and his beneficial powers can be transmitted to others through the *eulogiai*. Gifts from Barsanuphius' hands, in the form of bread he has blessed or pieces of his monastic garments, help the oppressed monks when they are physically ill or spiritually tested by the *logismoi*, the "thoughts."[4] Yet, despite this initial impressive display of charismatic authority, which surfaces again in the later letters on relatively few occasions, the principal sphere of action for the two Old

[2] To talk of the *Lives of the Fathers* implies condemning oneself: Οὐαί μοι, πῶς λαλῶ τὰς ἀρετὰς τῶν πατέρων, καὶ οὐδὲν ἐκτησάμην ἀπ᾽ αὐτῶν (C 689). According to C 469, self-condemnation should be a constant rule.

[3] C 1-54.

[4] According to C 752, *eulogiai* may even guide a "stranger" to the knowledge of truth. For an evaluation of this passage in the context of sixth-century Palestine, see L. Perrone, "Monasticism as a Factor of Religious Interaction in the Holy Land during the Byzantine Period," in *Sharing the Sacred: Religious Contacts and Conflicts in the Holy Land*, A. Kofsky and G. Stroumsa (eds.), Jerusalem, 1998, pp. 67-95, esp. p. 92.

Men of Gaza is of another kind. Barsanuphius and John are called upon to exert their charismatic role mainly for healing the passions of the soul, and for governing those passions through their spiritual direction.[5] In the two monks, therefore, we meet first and foremost teachers and doctors—indeed, doctors of the *psychê*, or rather of the "heart," the more usual term for the inner self in the language of the correspondence.[6]

There is enough evidence to support the claim that we have here a "school-situation," one in which Barsanuphius and (to a lesser extent) John the Prophet are dealing with pupils or disciples and engaging them in a lengthy and demanding program.[7] Within this "educational" framework, the message the letters are intended to convey to their addressees can be summarized as follows: their essential goal is to ensure salvation, which usually means to walk properly on the path leading to perfection. Such a path has to be learned from those who have already gone along it and have, to a greater or lesser extent, achieved the sought-after condition.

There is obviously nothing exceptional in this. Starting with the *Life of Antony*, all monastic sources in antiquity and later strive in their different ways to offer their readers the necessary advice, and suitable examples, to guarantee the achievement of this goal. Nevertheless, no other source (not even the finest analysis of monastic psychology worked out by the sharp mind of an Evagrius) presents us with a comparable picture of the actual ups and downs of a monk seeking the perfection that is demanded of him or, even more, of the spiritual problems and anxieties of laymen inspired by the same model of life. We are here given a very special vantage point from which to observe not only the

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[5] See F. Neyt, "A Form of Charismatic Authority," *Eastern Churches Review* 6 (1974), pp. 52-65.

[6] For occurrences of this word, see M. F. T. Lovato and L. Mortari, eds., *Barsanufio e Giovanni di Gaza: Epistolario*. Rome, 1991, p. 613 *s.v.;* and F. Neyt, "Précisions sur le vocabulaire de Barsanuphe et Jean de Gaza," *Studia Patristica* 12 (1975), pp. 247-253. The place given to the heart conforms to biblical and early Christian tradition, as shown for instance in P. Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*. New York, 1988, p. 34 ff.

[7] Referring especially to John, François Neyt considers the possibility that his teaching, apart from its Egyptian tradition or, more precisely, the writings of Pachomius, may be based upon "the urban *didaskaleia* or 'schools'," so that "it would be more suitable to speak of an 'authority of apprenticeship'" (Neyt, "A Form of Charismatic Authority," p. 57).

practices concerning introspection and examination of the conscience, commonly recommended by both ancient philosophers and monastic teachers,[8] but also the religious and ethical issues raised in the daily life of Christians.

A monk devoted to the perfect life well knew that a step-by-step itinerary was demanded of him: first as a novice, then as a progredient, and finally as a *teleios*, an accomplished monk—or, in the technical terms of monastic language, as coenobite, as semi-hesychast, and finally as hesychast or even recluse. In the specific framework of Gazan monasticism this institutional scheme can certainly be seen; yet in practice it breaks down, since individual situations reflect it only to a certain extent.[9] Through the mirror of the correspondence we find ourselves watching old monks, for instance, who sometimes deserve to be treated as novices again or even ask to be, though this of course is no longer possible.[10] The teacher responsible for a monk's education thus continually needs to intervene "psycho-therapeutically," and he is quite often unhappy with the results: "Don't you know what a headache the good teacher has to suffer because of his pupils, until they have gone through examination?"[11] This revealing remark by Barsanuphius in a letter to John of Beersheva is more than a random observation. It is surely a partly autobiographical complaint, as we may guess from the repeated exhortations of the two spiritual fathers throughout the correspondence. On replying to Abba Andrew, an experienced monk living as a hesychast, the Great Old Man does not conceal his frustration, observing that instead of behaving like a novice Abba Andrew should already have changed his status from pupil to master:

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[8] For a recent approach to this well-known topic, see R. Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation*, Oxford, 2000.

[9] A pattern of this kind is also attested to in the monasticism of the Judaean desert, though one should avoid a too uniform view of it. See L. Perrone "Monasticism in the Holy Land: From the beginnings to the Crusaders," *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 45 (1995), pp. 31-63. As correctly observed by B. Bitton-Ashkelony and A. Kofsky, "Gazan Monasticism in the Fourth-Sixth Centuries: From Anchoritic to Cenobitic," *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 50 (2000), pp. 14-62, historically Gazan monasticism evolves from anchoritic to cenobitic.

[10] See, for instance, Barsanuphius' reply to Abba Andrew (C 92).

[11] Ἢ οὐκ οἶδας οἵαν κεφαλαλγίαν ὑπομένει ὁ καλὸς διδάσκαλος ἀπὸ τῶν παιδίων ἕως οὗ εὐδοκιμήσωσι; (C 13). I prefer to render the text according to the translation of D. J. Chitty (*Barsanuphius and John: Questions and Answers*, PO 31/3, Paris, 1966, p. 469): "until they pass the test," instead of as: "jusqu'à ce qu'ils l'aient en honneur" (L. Regnault, P. Lemaire, and B. Outtier, trans., *Barsanuphe et Jean de Gaza: Correspondance*. Solesmes, 1972, p. 21).

> I wonder how it is that there are people who have spent many years in the schools and yet continue again and again to learn the alphabet or to spell, while they ought already to be perfect teachers.[12]

As these images suggest, the successful outcome of the pedagogical relationship between teacher and pupil, depending on the latter's response, is to guarantee the progress of instruction until full maturity, this meaning at its peak the passage from disciple to master. Taking Jesus as the true model of a teacher, Barsanuphius emphasizes the direction of movement towards a higher goal: "You have [in him] the good teacher who commands you to forget the things behind you and look forward to the things in front of you."[13]

More than by respecting an established pattern of progressive stages (though interesting examples of this are not lacking), [14] the itinerary of perfection within the correspondence develops according to one essential message continuously driven home: the "way" the pupil has to follow. To fully understand its meaning we should go back for a moment to the point of departure for the educational program, the "things behind." We have already seen that this is represented by the heart and its fight with *logismoi*. Whereas in the realm of monastic existence "outer" life is comparatively static, especially for those living in solitude, the inner life is constantly shifting and changing. This is because, as Barsanuphius so aptly remarks, "nothing is more quick than the mind."[15] The volatility of the mind has its most immediate but still innocent pathology in "distraction" (μετεωρισμός): when uncontrolled, it opens up the way to desire and passion.[16]

To protect oneself from such a risk, one has to be always on one's guard: the heart is an "arena," where we must expect to be challenged until our last breath. *Logismoi* are powerful enemies of the soul that

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[12] Θαυμάζω τινὰς ὄντας ἔτη πολλὰ ἐν τοῖς σχολείοις, καὶ πάλιν ἀλφαβητίζοντας καὶ συλλαβίζοντας, ὀφείλοντας εἶναι λοιπὸν τελείους διδασκάλους (C 98). Addressing a hesychast, Barsanuphius uses once more the same metaphor for the monastic itinerary of perfection: πρόσεχε οὖν σεαυτῷ, τοῦ μηκέτι χλευασθῆναι. Ἀφέντες γὰρ τὰ συλλάβεια, εἰς τὸν ἀλφάβητον ὑπεστρέψαμεν (C 138).

[13] Ἔχεις τὸν διδάσκαλον τὸν ἀγαθόν, νομοθετοῦντα ἐπιλαθέσθαι τῶν εἰς τὰ ὀπίσω καὶ ἐπεκτείνεσθαι εἰς τὰ ἔμπροσθεν (C 196). For Jesus as teacher, see also C 150.

[14] The drift of monastic existence towards *hesychia* as its highest goal is particularly evident in the career of John of Beersheva, despite the fact that he was already an *abbas* when he arrived at the coenobium of Seridus. See my article quoted above (n. 1).

[15] Οὐδὲν ὀξύτερον τοῦ νοῦ (C 264).

[16] C 660.

never retire in peace. Even the perfect cannot be wholly invulnerable to their attacks unless vigilance is maintained. In the words of John the Prophet: "To guard the heart means having the vigilant and clear mind of one who is at war."[17] The heart is thus itself a battlefield continuously requiring care and attention—προσοχή, according to the already traditional language of ancient spiritual exercises—in order to discriminate among "thoughts" and successfully pursue the ascetic way, without being distracted by individual will.[18]

Taking into account this "state of war," latent or open, within the heart, the first requisite implied by the relation with the teacher consists in breaking the circuit of exclusive interiority and opening it up to the observation and control of an external instance: the judgement of the spiritual father, who not only becomes an attentive observer of what is happening in another heart but is also engaged in a sort of merging with it. To cite a favourite word the Great Old Man uses with his *protégés*, the spiritual director regards himself as ὁμόψυχος, i.e. "one soul" with his son.[19] In a sense the intimacy of this relation is a patent compensation for what appears paradoxically to be a program of annihilation of the self. On the way to perfection there is one major obstacle caused by the inner dialectics of *logismoi* within the mind. This obstacle has a name that in the spirituality of the two Old Men of Gaza summarizes the dark side of human existence: the "personal" or, better rendered, the "selfish" will. If free will, in good Origenian-Alexandrian tradition, is a *conditio sine qua non* for an ascetic life, with the individual needing to feel the full weight of the

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[17] Τὸ τηρῆσαι τὴν καρδίαν ἐστὶ τὸ ἔχειν νηφάλιον τὸν νοῦν καὶ καθαρὸν τοῦ πολεμουμένου (C 166).

[18] The topic of *logismoi* in the correspondence has a tangible Evagrian matrix, as implicitly admitted by John the Prophet, who has no objection to Evagrius' "practical" writings being read (C 602), though the vocabulary of the *Erotapokriseis* appears to be relatively free from his direct influence (see F. Neyt, *Précisions sur le vocabulaire*, pp. 252-253). For concrete advice on dealing with emerging *logismoi*, see for instance C 124 and 448-449. On προσοχή as a recommended attitude in the spiritual exercises of ancient philosophy, see P. Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, Paris, 1981, pp. 63-66.

[19] See some examples in the letters to John of Beersheva (C 5, 7, 35). The term is employed also for friends. A man, after getting married, is worried about how to maintain the same relation with a friend ὁμόψυχος. Barsanuphius suggests as a criterion for knowing the actual disposition of the friend to examine the feelings in his own heart: ἐαν δὲ ἔμεινεν ἡ διάθεσίς σου, μάθε ὅτι καὶ ἡ αὐτοῦ. Τοῦτο οὖν ἔχε τὸ σημεῖον ὅτι κατὰ τὴν καρδίαν σου εὑρίσκεις πάντοτε, τοῦ θεοῦ εὐοδοῦντος (C 646).

responsibilities it brings, the spiritual ideal of Barsanuphius and John, not only for monks but also for the Christian laymen in touch with them, consists in the progressive renunciation of one's personal will. It is no exaggeration to say that precisely this "way" marks for them the essence of Christianity.

### *The Way of Christianity: The "Cutting Away" of the Will*

We should probably recognize in this ascetic doctrine a distinctive emphasis among the various representatives of early monastic tradition. If ἀποταγή (or ἀπόταξις), "renunciation," is indeed for all of them the first decisive step towards becoming a monk, this does not yet imply a "self-renunciation" of the most extreme kind, as is the case with the teaching of the two Old Men of Gaza and of their disciple Dorotheus, heroically exemplified hagiographically in the *Life of Dositheus*.[20] Anchoritic monasticism, though acutely conscious of the need to discern the *logismoi* and thus foster spiritual succour and guidance by mature *gerontes*, is less anxious about the danger of "personal will," than is coenobitism because of the cooperation expected from the monks in their common life, under the authority of an abbot.[21] But it seems to me that no other source of ancient monasticism so radically insists on the "cutting away" (ἐκκοπή) of the will (almost, one might say, a technical expression) as embodying the quintessence of the way to perfection. There are undoubtedly strong premises in the ascetic tradition of the *Apophthegmata*, and especially in the closest antecedents of Gazan monasticism itself. Already for Abba Isaiah, who was deeply rooted in the spirit of the Egyptian monastic tradition, to open his own heart to the fathers is an expression of humility, the basic virtue of monastic life, consisting in taking no account of oneself. The fruit of humility for Isaiah is therefore the "cutting away" of personal will,

[20] The importance of ἀποταγή, renunciation to the world, is stressed by A. Guillaumont, *Aux origines du monachisme chrétien. Pour une phénoménologie du monachisme*. Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1979, p. 222. We nevertheless observe a progression of ἀποταγή, e.g. in the way Dorotheus deals with his possessions (C 252). As for Dositheus, a young man serving in the infirmary of the coenobium of Seridus, whose spiritual guidance was assumed by Dorotheus, he is a hero of self-renunciation through obedience. For the text of the anonymous *Vita*, see L. Regnault and J. de Préville, eds., *Dorothée de Gaza: Oeuvres spirituelles*, SC 92, Paris, 1963.

[21] C 318, commenting upon Basil's *Asceticon*, takes this specificity of coenobitism into account and distinguishes it from the hesychastic life.

an indispensable condition for one wishing to be heard by God and be at peace with every man.[22] Yet in the *Asceticon* of Abbah Isaiah one has the impression that emphasis is being laid more on other, connected motifs, such as the restoration of man "according to nature" (κατὰ φύσιν)—albeit a "nature" that should conform to the model of Christ—and correspondingly on the characteristic theme of the ascension on the cross as the peak of monastic existence.[23]

The association between humility (ταπείνωσις or ταπεινοφροσύνη) and the "cutting away" of the will is repeatedly stressed throughout the correspondence. In the catalogue of virtues recommended by the two Old Men of Gaza, humility, which their disciples also see as the foremost, has a kind of "generative" role.[24] An exhortation by Barsanuphius presents the beneficial chain that is determined by virtue as being opposed to vice, inculcating the idea that humility gives rise to obedience and hence to the practice of the three "theological virtues": love, faith and hope.[25] In contrast to obedience, which stands at the beginning of this virtuous chain, disobedience is sometimes regarded as the cause of passions, [26] though in another instance "self-reliance" (παρρησία) is cited as the "mother of them."[27] It is clear that in the eyes of Barsanuphius and John self-reliance and disobedience go hand in hand as an expression of the same sinful attitude of the soul,

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[22] See *Asceticon*: Logos 2, 1-4 (L. Regnault and H. de Broc, eds., *Abbé Isaïe: Recueil ascétique*. 2nd ed., Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1976, p. 46) and L. Regnault, "Isaie de Scété," in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* 7, Paris, 1971, col. 2090. Cf. also J. Chryssavgis, "Abbah Isaiah of Scetis: Aspects of Spiritual Direction," *Studia Patristica* 35 (2001), pp. 30-40.

[23] See L. Perrone, "I Padri del monachesimo di Gaza (IV-VI sec.): la fedeltà allo spirito delle origini," *La chiesa nel tempo* 13 (1997), pp. 87-116, esp. pp. 95-99. An expanded version should appear under the title: *Monasticism in Gaza: A Chapter in the History of Byzantine Palestine*.

[24] Ἡ γὰρ ταπείνωσις, ὡς ἀεὶ διδάσκετε, τὰ πρωτεῖα φέρει τῶν ἀρετῶν (C 456).

[25] Κἀγώ σοι λέγω· κτήσασθαι ταπείνωσιν, ὑπακοήν, ἀγάπην, πίστιν, ἐλπίδα, καὶ ἀπολογοῦμαι τῷ φιλανθρώπῳ θεῷ ὑπὲρ πασῶν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν σου. Τοῦτο δὲ μάθε, ὅτι ἐὰν μὴ ταπεινωθῇς, οὐχ ὑπακούεις· καὶ ἐαν μὴ ὑπακούῃς, οὐκ ἀγαπᾷς, καὶ ἐὰν μὴ ἀγαπήσῃς, οὐ πιστεύεις, καὶ ἐαν μὴ πιστεύσῃς, οὐδε ἐλπίζεις (C 231). Barsanuphius' teaching assumes the rhetorical form of a *gradatio*, according to a stylistic figure frequently encountered in the correspondence.

[26] See Barsanuphius' answer on the origin of πάθη: τὴν ψυχὴν καὶ τὸ σῶμα ἀπαθῆ ἔκτισεν ὁ θεός· διὰ δὲ τῆς παρακοῆς ἐξέπεσον εἰς πάθη (C 236). Men are the sons of Adam, and by virtue of that the sons of his disobedience (C 348).

[27] For John the Prophet, παρρησία, given this negative meaning, is associated with ἀνθρωπαρέσκεια and κενοδοξία (C 261). See also C 458 uniting παρρησία with γέλως ἀπρεπής.

whereas obedience is the most immediate and most common means for the "cutting away" of the will. It is true that obedience is very painful and has to be learned, but as Barsanuphius briefly writes in praise of this virtue, it opens the path to heaven, assimilating one to the Son of God.[28]

Humility, especially as manifested through obedience, is therefore regarded as the "way of Christ." In one of the most characteristic expressions of this truly monastic spirit, Barsanuphius asserts that man should become like "a breadcrumb" if he wants to behave like Christ, who "acted with much meekness and goodness for the sake of human salvation."[29] As implied by the next occasion that led the Great Old Man to make such a pronouncement, what is at stake with the practice of humility is primarily the realization and preservation of a loving attitude towards one's neighbour. Humility, accordingly, becomes for Barsanuphius a condition for properly "living with men." To further inculcate this spiritual disposition, apart from the eloquent image of a breadcrumb, the correspondence has frequent recourse to a metaphor taken from a biblical passage often cited or alluded to, i.e. Abraham's profession of humility and awe before God when pleading for the salvation of the Sodomites: "I am dust and ash" (Gen. 18: 27).[30]

The emphasis placed on these words of the patriarch, himself a beloved paradigm of religious conduct, together with Job (also frequently praised in this context), means recognizing man's constitutional precariousness and nothingness, and consequently rejecting every claim for the self. Barsanuphius, after declaring humility thus conceived of as a rule for the novice, again explains its essential defini-

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[28] Κράτει δὲ τὴν ὑπακοήν, τὴν ἀναφέρουσαν εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν καὶ ὁμοίους τῷ Ὑιῷ τοῦ θεοῦ ποιοῦσαν τοὺς κτωμένους αὐτήν (C 251).

[29] Ἀλλ' ὅμως τὸ μὴ πλῆξαι τὸν τοῦ πλησίον λογισμόν, αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ὁδὸς τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τοῦ ἐν πολλῇ πραότητι καὶ ἐπιεικείᾳ ἐλθόντος εἰς σωτηρίαν τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Ἐὰν γὰρ μὴ γένηται ὡς ψιχὶν ὁ ἄνθρωπος, οἰκῆσαι μετὰ ἀνθρώπων οὐ δύναται (C 26).

[30] See C 48 (διὰ τί πλαγιάζεις ἐκ τῆς ὁδοῦ τῆς ταπεινώσεως τῆς λεγούσης· Ἐγὼ τίς εἰμι; γῆ εἰμι καὶ σποδός), 62, 71, 125, 348, 456, 469, 553, 604. The passage, already exploited by Philo as signifying man's inferiority before God, was retained by Christian authors like Basil of Caesarea as an eloquent manifestation of humility (*de fide* 1). For a preliminary examination of Barsanuphius' use and interpretation of the Bible, see L. Elia, *Uso e interpretazione della Sacra Scrittura negli scritti di Barsanufio di Gaza*. Diss. per la Licenza in Teologia e Scienze Patristiche, Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum. Rome 1996-1997.

tion to Andrew, a sick monk awaiting his approaching death: "Humility means to consider oneself as 'dust and ash,' in practice and not only in words, and to say: 'Who am I? Who esteems me? I have nothing to do with anybody'."[31] Without implying here an attack on charity, detachment from oneself as an existentially relevant being also means for Barsanuphius a mental break with human *consortium*, insofar as maintaining attachment may nourish a continuing feeling of having some importance.[32] As a consequence, the impact of such a spiritual attitude should be universally recognized. In one of the frequent summaries of his teachings that testify to his pedagogical commitment, Barsanuphius proposes three essential rules, the legacy of the Fathers both for monastic life in the desert and for life in the wider world: "to reproach oneself, to leave one's own will behind oneself, and to consider oneself the least of all creatures."[33]

Practicing humility, when regarded from a religious and anthropological perspective, betrays a deep feeling for the condition of man as a relative being, a creature resting on God alone as the ground and goal of his existence. It is also of course familiar to those philosophers of late antiquity who reflected on spiritual exercises; but in the Christian perspective of the two Old Men of Gaza it means more than that kind of feeling and practice, because it is intended as an *imitatio Christi*.[34] In fact, the fundamental justification for the recommended conduct is provided by the way Christ himself behaved in the world, a world he descended into to fulfill not his own will but that of his Father (John 6:38).[35] Despised and injured by men, who held him in no regard, Christ, after much suffering, finally ascended the cross and participated in the beatitude of divine rest, the celestial *hesychia* thus compensating (in the monastic *Weltanschauung*) for the hard struggle

[31] C 100.

[32] For humility as the rule of the novice, see C 93. A similar definition occurs in C 278: ταπείνωσίς ἐστι τὸ ἀψήφιστον ἐν παντὶ πράγματι καὶ τὸ κόψαι ἐν πᾶσι τὸ ἴδιον θέλημα καὶ τὸ φέρειν ἀταράχως τὰ ἔξωθεν ἐπερχόμενα.

[33] Εἶπον οἱ πατέρες ὅτι τρία κεφάλαιά εἰσι καὶ εἴ τις αὐτὰ φυλάττει, δύναται οἰκῆσαι καὶ ἀναμέσον τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ εἰς τὰς ἐρήμους καὶ ὅπου δ' ἂν ᾖ· τὸ μέμψασθαι ἑαυτὸν καὶ τὸ βαλεῖν ὀπίσω τὸ θέλημα καὶ τὸ ἔχειν ἑαυτὸν ὑποκάτω πάσης κτίσεως (C 69).

[34] Affinities with the spiritual exercises of late antique philosophy are more easily recognizable in the *Instructions* of Dorotheus of Gaza, as noted in Hadot, *Exercices spirituels*, pp. 63-66. Nevertheless, even for Pierre Hadot, Dorotheus' radical view of obedience totally transforms the philosophical practice of spiritual exercises (ibid., pp. 73-74).

[35] C 150.

on the way to perfection—a perfection attainable only provisionally within the horizons of this world.[36]

## *A Golden Rule:* "*Thy Will Be Done*"

As we just noted, the teaching of the two Old Men of Gaza concerning the "cutting away" of the will is presented as a rule that should govern every situation in life. Apart from its general formulation, what impresses the reader of the correspondence is the way this doctrine is imparted over and over again as the essential norm of conduct both for the monk dedicated to the perfect life and for the layman striving to be an authentic disciple of Christ. Barsanuphius and John the Prophet thereby promote a spiritual dynamism reminiscent of the radicalism of the Gospel's appeal to abandon everything and follow Jesus, an exhortation concretely implying a daily martyrdom until death.[37]

This model of discipleship is indeed evoked on several occasions. Relying on the somewhat enigmatic passage of Matthew 11:12 ("the kingdom of heaven has been coming violently, and the violent take it by force"), Barsanuphius advises the hesychast Andrew—who had asked how, given his own illness, he should behave toward the brother living with him—that he should "make violence on himself" by "cutting away" his own will in everything.[38] The Great Old Man, further specifying the overall dimensions this conduct should assume, points out in an answer to the monk Theodore that the "cutting away" of the will should have as its target the "natural will."[39] We have to do here with a theme taken over from the *Asceticon* of Isaiah of Gaza, though we can see only the opposition—κατὰ φύσιν ("according to nature"), παρὰ φύσιν ("against nature")—whereas Abba Isaiah introduced also

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[36] See, for instance, C 185, where this teaching is echoed by a monk asking the Great Old Man for advice. A definition of the "perfect humility" emphasizes the aspects of contempt and suffering: αὕτη ἐστὶ τελεία ταπεινοφροσύνη· Τὸ βαστάξαι ὕβρεις καὶ ὀνειδισμοὺς καὶ ὅσα ἔπαθεν ὁ διδάσκαλος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς (C 150).

[37] Note Barsanuphius' eloquent reply to Dorotheus' demand as to how to abandon his own will: τὸ ἀφεῖναι τὸ ἴδιον θέλημα, αἱματοχυσία ἐστί· τοῦτ' ἔστι τὸ φθάσαι τινὰ κοπιάσαι ἕως θανάτου καὶ ἀθετῆσαι τὸ θέλημα αὐτοῦ (C 254).

[38] Περὶ δὲ τοῦ πῶς παρελθεῖν μετὰ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ, ὁ θέλων ἀρέσαι τῷ θεῷ κόπτει τὸ θέλημα αὐτοῦ τῷ πλησίον βιαζόμενος ἑαυτόν (C 121).

[39] Πῶς δὲ ἀρνεῖται ἑαυτὸν ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ἀλλ' ἢ ἀφὼν τὰ θελήματα αὐτοῦ τὰ φυσικὰ καὶ αὐτῷ ἀκολουθῶν; (C 124).

a third element: "according to the nature of Jesus."[40] In any case, the meaning of the suggested contrast is evident: self-abnegation is a form of bypassing the needs and constraints of fallen human nature, also designated by the Pauline category "the flesh," so as to follow Jesus and live a life of the Spirit.

If the teaching of Jesus is best summarized for the two Old Men of Gaza in the third request of the Lord's prayer ("Thy will be done"),[41] the disciple of Christ should always try to act in conformity with the will of God instead of exercising his own will. Within the correspondence there is a perceptible anxiety concerning this exhortation, as illustrated especially by the letters to Dorotheus. One frequently comes across the question addressed to the two spiritual fathers: "How do I know that I am doing the will of God instead of my own?" This is indeed the crucial question, since the path to the perfect life can be compromised and lost if there is no clear perception of the will of God "here and now." An instance of this kind is the appeal to John by an anonymous hesychast:

> How do I know, Father, if I cut away my will when sitting in the cell or similarly when staying with the brethren? And what is the will of the flesh and the will of the demons concealed under the appearance of good? And what is the will of God?[42]

John's response has the didactic tone of catechetical instruction,[43] since it delivers very concise solutions to the problems the monk has raised. First, when sitting in one's cell, one should not give any rest to the flesh, because the "will of the flesh" (Eph. 2:3) aims precisely to enjoy pleasure, while the "will according to God" consists in "cutting away" the will of the flesh.[44] Second, when in the midst of men, one should behave as if one were already dead to them, an attitude of mind depending on the substantial humility already met with above. Third, the will of the demons consists in the claim of justice and self-compliance. Despite their condemnation of the "flesh" and

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[40] The influence of the *Asceticon* is commented in F. Neyt, "Citations isaïennes chez Barsanuphe et Jean de Gaza," *Le Muséon* 89 (1971), pp. 65-92.

[41] Ἡ λαμπροτάτη διδασκαλία τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν αὕτη ἐστί· Γενηθήτω τὸ θέλημά σου (C 40). One may note the importance of this teaching in many of the formulary prayers encountered in the correspondence (see, e.g., C 150 and *infra*, p. 146 n. 62).

[42] C 173.

[43] Another example of a summary definition is provided by C 380.

[44] Τὸ δὲ θέλημα τὸ κατὰ θεόν ἐστι τὸ κόψαι τὸ θέλημα τῆς σαρκὸς κατὰ τὸν ἀπόστολον (C 173). It is worth noting that Eph. 2:3 is quoted only here.

its pleasures, the two Old Men of Gaza generally do not lay special emphasis on this aspect. They seem more interested in the second and third points, as many other passages inculcating the "cutting away" of the will demonstrate.

When Dorotheus at the beginning of his monastic itinerary still hesitates about how to deal with his remaining possessions in order to make a perfect ἀποταγή, Barsanuphius exhorts him to acquire the spiritual attitude of one who no longer has any power over himself.[45] Uncompromisingly expressed also by John the Prophet (albeit in the connection with the problems raised by the obedience to be paid to the abbot), if one wants to be a monk, one no longer has any personal will at all.[46] Such a deprivation of the self is sometimes dubbed in the language typical of early monasticism: ἀψήφιστον, a word meaning that "one is not the object of a vote (of approbation)," i.e. one is not eager for recognition by others since he takes no account of himself.[47] Restating for a layman under his spiritual direction the lesson to be learned from the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, Barsanuphius insists that one should humiliate and reproach oneself instead of relying on either the natural impulse towards good or the good actions effectively done. On the one hand, feeling such natural impulses, one has to remember that one has no merit oneself, since nature is a gift from God and without him we can do no good.[48] On the other hand, even if one does good deeds and observes all the commandments, one should remember Jesus' words: "when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, 'We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!'" (Luke 17:10).[49] Thus a perennial sense of inadequacy permeates the life of those who spare no effort to accomplish the will of God.

The intimate connection between the "cutting away" of the will and faith in God, implicitly attested to in the statements so far recorded, becomes explicit in one of the most rewarding responses of the correspondence as far as our theme is concerned. In the words of John the Prophet initially addressed to Aelianus, who was to succeed Seridus

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[45] C 253.

[46] Ὁ θέλων μοναχὸς εἶναι, οὐκ ὀφείλει ὅλως θέλημα ἔχειν ἔν τινι πράγματι (C 288).

[47] This technical term occurs in C 94 (οὐκ ἀφοῦσί σε οἱ δαίμονες κρατῆσαι τὸ ἀψήφιστον καὶ ἀναπαῆναι), 138 (τὸ ἀψήφιστον κράτει), 278 (cf. n. 32 above).

[48] C 409. Moreover only through God's command do we really accomplish a good action. See also C 769: there is no reason to be proud of oneself when doing good—ἄνευ γὰρ τοῦ θεοῦ, οὐ δυνάμεθά τι ἀγαθὸν ποιῆσαι.

[49] C 410.

as abbot of the community, faith is identical to the "cutting away" of the will, which moreover implies a trusting disposition of the spirit before every event.[50] If John's statement to a certain extent recalls some of the traits more typical of stoic spirituality, one is amazed at the exegetical application of this doctrine by the Old Man. Relying on the above-mentioned identification with faith, he assumes the "cutting away" of the will to be a general category for judging the history of salvation. The Jews, inasmuch as they acted according to their own will, did not submit to the law of God, whereas true faith is equal to humility.[51]

### *The Necessity of Advice: The System of Spiritual Direction*

If a true disciple of Christ is dispossessed of his own will, [52] how should he conduct himself in the actual situations of life? In the correspondence the answer to this crucial question necessarily points to the system of personal relations resting upon spiritual direction: one should do nothing "without advice," which one should always seek from one's teachers and fathers. Responding to a pious layman, who was "concerned for his own soul," Barsanuphius says:

> If one thinks to do something good by oneself without asking the fathers, one is acting outside the law and doing nothing legitimate, whereas acting through a question, one fulfils the law and the prophets. To ask is a sign of humility and a man who does this is an imitator of Christ who humiliated himself going as far as becoming a servant. As a matter of fact, a man without advice is an enemy to himself, since it is written: "Do everything with advice" (Prov. 24:71 [LXX 31:4]). (...) It therefore is convenient to ask with more humility than to follow one's own will, since it is God who puts what is to be said in the mouth of one who is asked, because of the humility of heart and the rectitude of one who asks.[53]

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[50] Ἡ πίστις ἡ εἰς θεόν ἐστιν ἵνα ἐάν τις ἐκδώσῃ ἑαυτὸν τῷ θεῷ, μηκέτι ἔχῃ ἑαυτὸν ἐν ἰδίᾳ ἐξουσίᾳ, ἀλλ' ὑπὸ τὴν ἐκείνου ἐξουσίαν ῥίπτῃ ἑαυτόν, ἕως τῆς ἐσχάτης ἀναπνοῆς. Εἴ τι οὖν ἔρχεται ἐπάνω αὐτοῦ, ἐν εὐχαριστίᾳ δέχεται παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦτ' ἐστι τὸ ἐν παντὶ εὐχαριστεῖν (C 574).

[51] Ἐὰν γὰρ ὁ ἄνθρωπος παραιτήσηται τὰ ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπερχόμενα, παρακούει τοῦ θεοῦ, ζητῶν τὸ ἴδιον θέλημα στῆσαι· οὕτως γὰρ καὶ οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι ζητοῦντες τὸ ἴδιον θέλημα στῆσαι, οὐκ ἠδυνήθησαν ὑποταγῆναι τῷ νόμῳ τοῦ θεοῦ. Καὶ γὰρ ἡ πίστις ἐστὶν ἡ ταπείνωσις (ibid.).

[52] Ὁ μετὰ ἀληθείας Χριστῷ μαθητευόμενος ἐξουσίαν οὐδεμίαν ἔχει εἰς ἑαυτὸν πρὸς τὸ ποιεῖν ὅ τι δήποτε ἀφ' ἑαυτοῦ (C 308). The classic study on spiritual direction remains I. Hausherr, *Direction spirituelle en Orient autrefois*, Rome, 1955.

[53] Ἐάν τις ἀφ' ἑαυτοῦ ἐνθυμῆταί τι καλὸν ποιεῖν καὶ οὐ δι' ἐρωτήσεως Πατέ-

Spiritual direction as envisaged by the Great Old Man,[54] is a fulfillment of the whole ethical and religious message contained in the Bible—an accomplishment of the law and the prophets—and proposed by Christianity through the example of Jesus Christ. But to submit oneself to a spiritual master is not only a demonstration of humility following the *kenôsis* of Christ, since it paradoxically becomes the only legitimate behavior open to a man striving to do the will of God. In fact, behind this radicalization of the system of spiritual direction as the way of man there is also an "ontological justification," which comes to the fore in another of Barsanuphius's pronouncements, again based on Scripture: "There isn't anybody who does not need advice, except God who created Wisdom (Prov. 8:22)."[55] There is thus no room for self-sufficiency in man: he should never forget his condition as a creature. Realizing such dependence through confession and spiritual fatherhood, he comes to experience God's universal paternity. When man opens his heart with humility and rectitude to his spiritual director, he can be sure that God will answer through him.

As a consequence of this view, spiritual direction is not simply a practice determined first and foremost by the confession of sins but a religious and pedagogical experience that should command the whole life of man.[56] For this reason we can see in the rich collection of questions and answers in the correspondence of the two Old Men of Gaza

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ρων, οὗτος οὐκ ἐστιν εὔνομος καὶ εὐνόμως οὐδὲν ἐποίησεν· εἴ τις δὲ δι' ἐρωτήσεως ποιεῖ, οὗτος πληροῖ τὸν νόμον καὶ τοὺς προφήτας. Ταπεινώσεως γὰρ σημεῖον τὸ ἐρωτᾶν καὶ Χριστοῦ τοῦ ταπεινώσαντος ἑαυτὸν μέχρι καὶ δούλου μιμητὴς ὁ τοιοῦτος. Ἀνὴρ γὰρ ἀσύμβουλος ἑαυτοῦ πολέμιος· φησὶ γὰρ· μετὰ βουλῆς πάντα ποίει... Συμφέρον οὖν ἐστι ταπεινοτέρως ἐρωτᾶν, ἢ τῷ ἰδίῳ θελήματι ὁδεύειν· ὁ θεὸς γάρ ἐστιν ὁ ἐμβάλλων εἰς τὸ στόμα τοῦ ἐρωτωμένου τί εἴπῃ, διὰ τὴν ταπείνωσιν τῆς καρδίας καὶ εὐθύτητα τοῦ ἐρωτῶντος (C 693).

[54] See also John's general assertion regarding that which is contained in C 535: καὶ οὐδαμοῦ εὑρήσεις τὴν γραφὴν ἐπιτρέπουσάν τινι ἀφ' ἑαυτοῦ τι ποιεῖν.

[55] Καὶ γὰρ οὐδεὶς ὁ μὴ χρῄζων συμβούλου, εἰ μὴ μόνος ὁ θεὸς ὁ τὴν σοφίαν κτίσας (C 66). In this letter to Euthymius, Barsanuphius quotes as biblical support both Prov. 24:71 (LXX 31:4) and Sir. 32:19. Another scriptural foundation is provided by Deut. 32:7, attested to with a similar application also in Basil of Caesarea and the *Apophthegmata* (see, e.g., C 344).

[56] For a first approach to both perspectives in early Egyptian monasticism, see J.-C. Guy, "Aveu thérapeutique et aveu pédagogique dans l'ascèse des pères du désert (IV$^{e}$-V$^{e}$ s.)," in Groupe de la Boussière, *Pratiques de la confession. Des Pères du désert à Vatican II*, Paris, 1983, pp. 25-40. On the confession of sins in early monasticism, see the classic contribution of H. Dörries, "Die Beichte im ältesten Mönchtum," in idem, *Wort und Stunde*, vol. 1, Göttingen, 1966, pp. 225-250.

the extent to which they are engaged in asserting the validity of such a pattern, occasionally rejecting doubts concerning its efficacy. One can even single out a section of the correspondence that is of a somewhat "casuistic" nature, in which we are presented a true "breviary" for the *ars interrogandi* promoted by Barsanuphius and John.[57] Instead of examining its content in detail we may again concentrate on the way these criteria are called upon to implement the essential message of the correspondence so far traced.

First of all, if spiritual direction has to be regarded as a "school of Christianity," one should address oneself only to those who can effectively play the role of teachers, this role being reserved for monks who have reached a degree of perfection and are commonly recognized as fathers.[58] On the other hand, for either a monk or a layman to apply to one of these fathers means taking a very demanding step: one has to fully accept the spiritual father chosen and trust him like God himself.[59] Without this absolute belief, the challenge implied in the pedagogical relation between the disciple and his master will be missed: there is no chance of success for one who doubts his father's answers, since mistrust compromises their efficacy.[60] If God speaks through the mouth of the holy fathers there is no room for doubt or hesitation, even when the same fathers delivers apparently contradictory answers. For John, the diversity of responses depends on the changing disposition of the questioner, so that God correspondingly changes the answers.[61]

According to this view, spiritual direction is a system that does not admit of any possible failure or inadequacy. If, for instance, the course of events evolves in a way different from that indicated by the spiritual father, one has to pray directly to God in order to deal with the new situation, without betraying the principles that constitute the relation of spiritual fatherhood:[62] the "cutting away" of personal will

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[57] It is a large section made up largely of four groups of letters addressed to different monks (C361-372, 373, 374-378, 379-389), though one finds other interesting statements scattered throughout the correspondence.

[58] C 349.

[59] Ἐρωτᾶν δεῖ εἰς ὃν ἔχεις πίστιν καὶ ἔμαθες ὅτι δεῖ βαστάξαι λογισμοὺς καὶ πιστεῦσαι αὐτῷ ὡς τῷ θεῷ (C 361).

[60] C 362.

[61] C 363.

[62] Ὁ θεὸς τοῦδε, μὴ ἐάσῃς με πλανηθῆναι τοῦ θελήματός σου μηδὲ τῆς ἀποκρίσεως τοῦ δούλου σου, ἀλλὰ πληροφόρησόν με τί ποιήσω (C 364).

and through this the complete self-abandonment to God, who comes near to man through the person of the spiritual director. As more generally shown by the phenomenon of the "holy man" in late antiquity, here too we have to face a kind of "particularization" of God, since he is invoked to help in the name of "his servant", the spiritual father concerned.[63]

Despite these similarities, the perspective opened up by the correspondence is of a different kind. The circumstantial treatment of all the possible occurrences in the "breviary" we are dealing with does not aim at stressing the extraordinary power of the spiritual director as a "holy man," but rather at ensuring the overall application of what we have discovered to be the central teaching of Barsanuphius and John of Gaza. We have further proof of this in the meticulous criteria put forward by John when someone needs to take a decision and does not have the chance to ask his own spiritual father about it. In this event he should pray three times to God and ask him for direct inspiration, as a rule this being easily recognizable from the movement of the heart: it is no coincidence that John recommends articulating a threefold prayer of this kind preferably at the moment when Jesus was arrested, remembering how he himself had prayed three times before that. The model (τύπος) of Jesus is particularly revealing, since the Gospel scene (Matt. 26:39-46) emphasizes in the content of the prayer his abandonment of himself to the will of God, precisely the main teaching of the two Old Men.[64]

No wonder, then, that this system of spiritual direction is opposed by them to the ψευδώνυμος γνῶσις, "falsely called knowledge" (1 Tim. 6:20). The words of the Apostle are used here not, as is more customary, with reference to the danger of heresy, but for what is now perceived as a no less demonic temptation: the false knowledge of the state of things that one presumes to dispose of without asking the fathers. Even when their answer corresponds to our own previous "thought", we should consider this a trick of the demons and rely only on the advice of the spiritual father as the true mouth of God.[65]

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[63] For a similar recourse to the "holy man" and his God see, for instance, Cyril of Scythopolis, *Vita Sabae* 81 (ed. E. Schwartz, pp. 186-187).

[64] C 366.

[65] Ὁ γέρων γὰρ εἶπε τὴν ἀλήθειαν ὅτι ἀπὸ θεοῦ λαλεῖ. Καὶ αὐτὸς οὐ χλευάζεται ὅλως ὑπὸ τῶν δαιμόνων (C 373).

*Conclusion: The Freedom to Be for the Other*

Is there within this system of spiritual direction any room for that which is most precious to us today: a sense of personal freedom and independence? If the term παρρησία, "frankness of speech," to which New Testament attaches a positive meaning, is here the object of a negative evaluation insofar as it nourishes some form of self-reliance,[66] nevertheless in the vocabulary of the correspondence we find also the word ἐλευθερία, "freedom." John the Prophet provides us with a very interesting definition: "Freedom is the clearly manifested truth."[67] From the immediate context of this answer we can see that personal freedom is indeed encouraged when it is helpful to the practice of spiritual direction. Freedom concretely means that the heart of a person should be completely exposed to another, his spiritual director, who is called on to hear and to judge "thoughts" presented without any form of concealment.[68] In a sense, then, freedom is possible only when it means being before another, indeed being totally open to the other.

Our investigation may provisionally close on this note, taking it as a further general key to the spirit of the correspondence. In fact, even if it is again functional to the system of spiritual direction as practised by the two Old Men of Gaza, the idea of "being for the other" may conveniently sum up both the essential dynamics of the human and religious experience of this monasticism and its lasting significance as a "school of Christianity." At its core there is indeed a reciprocal "being for the other": a mutual relation uniting the spiritual father and his son, even beyond death. The one is therefore dependent upon the other, and if the disciple is eventually called upon to become a master, he will in his turn recreate the relation he experienced, by himself practicing spiritual direction.

It would be quite rewarding to follow how this essential feature is implemented in the correspondence, especially by considering the answers given by the two Old Men to pious laymen, for whom the religious values and ideals of Christianity were often severely challenged by the problems of secular life. Being different from monks

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[66] See above n. 27.

[67] Ἐλευθερία ἐστὶν ἡ φανερῶς λεγομένη ἀλήθεια (C 376).

[68] Ἐλευθερία ἐπὶ τῶν λογισμῶν ἐστι τὸ τὸν ἐρωτῶντα γυμνῶσαι τελείως τὸν λογισμὸν τῷ ἐρωτωμένῳ (C 375).

in their degree of perfection, Christian laymen are, for instance, still entitled to laugh without feeling too guilty about it.[69] Yet for them too the message of the beatitudes holds true in part. Replying to a zealous layman who had asked what he should do when faced with someone "insulting religion and blaspheming the holy faith," John the Prophet reminded him of the essence of that message: "You perfectly know that there is no correction through evil but rather through good"; one should speak with meekness and patience, and in a state of mind free from every agitation.[70] Gaza monasticism has long since vanished, yet in a "school of Christianity" of this kind there is, I think, still a great deal worth learning even today.

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[69] C 458.

[70] C 658.

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# LA FORMATION AU MONASTÈRE DE L'ABBÉ SÉRIDOS À GAZA

François Neyt

Gaza était célèbre dans l'antiquité romaine et son école de sophistes bien connue. Nous pensons apporter notre contribution à une meilleure connaissance de la formation chrétienne au V^e^ et VI^e^ siècle en précisant les grandes lignes de l'enseignement donné au monastère de l'abbé Séridos. Comme nous le verrons, cet enseignement ne concernait pas seulement des moines solitaires et cénobites. Il s'adressait aussi à d'éminentes personnalités ecclésiastiques et civiles, comme à des gens du commun. La profonde originalité de cette formation provenait d'abord de ceux qui étaient consultés. Ce sont deux solitaires célèbres, reclus, qui jouissaient d'un prestige et d'une autorité exceptionnels: Barsanuphe, venu d'Égypte, surnommé le Grand Vieillard et Jean le Prophète. L'objet de notre article concerne la formation donnée, ses sources et la manière dont il est reçu. Trois aspects seront développés: Le contexte général du monachisme à Gaza et les documents sur lesquels nous fondons notre analyse; la place des Saintes Écritures dans la formation; les citations et les exemples tirés de la Vie des Pères du désert.

Les origines du monachisme de Gaza sont rapportés par Saint-Jérôme et Saint-Épiphane. Saint Hilarion (291-371) naît près de Gaza une vingtaine d'années avant l'Édit de Constantin en 313. En Égypte, Antoine approche de la quarantaine, Pachôme et Macaire le Grand, fondateur de Scété, sont de la même génération qu'Hilarion. Tous sont nés dans la dernière décade du III^e^ siècle. Quant au lieu natal d'Hilarion, Thavatha, à huit kilomètres au sud-est de Gaza, c'est précisément l'endroit où l'abbé Séridos établira son monastère au V^e^ siècle.[1] L'historien Sozomène, dont la famille était originaire des environs de Gaza (Bethélia), sera influencé par Hilarion et par le

[1] Sur le monastère de Séridos, voir notre introduction dans F. Neyt, P. de Angelis-Noah et L. Regnault (eds.), *Barsanuphe et Jean de Gaza: Correspondance*, Sources chrétiennes 426 (Paris, 1997), p. 14 note 1.

monachisme. Il se souviendra des moines de Gaza et en particulier de l'abbé Silvain et de son groupe dans son *Histoire ecclésiastique* rédigée à Constantinople vers 440. Une certaine continuité apparaît ainsi dans la tradition monastique de la région.[2] Qu'il suffise ici de rappeler que la grande figure fondatrice du monachisme palestinien du désert de Juda est celle de Saint-Chariton, suivi d'Euthyme. Terre féconde pour le monachisme, elle est pétrie du souvenir d'Élie, d'Élisée, de Jean le Baptiste et de Jésus lui-même tenté au désert.[3] Pour revenir au monachisme de Gaza, deux étapes, nous semble-t-il, caractérisent son évolution: Gaza fut d'abord un lieu de passage avant de devenir une terre d'accueil pour les moines. Considérons de plus près ces deux aspects.

Le christianisme s'est propagé en Palestine à partir du IV^e^ siècle avec l'appui des empereurs chrétiens, l'afflux des pèlerins sur les lieux saints et l'apparition progressive des premiers monastères urbains. Des moines vivaient déjà dans la solitude des déserts de Juda et dans la région de Gaza. À partir du dernier quart du IV^e^ siècle surtout, des chrétiens visitent la Palestine et prolongent leur voyage jusqu'en Basse-Égypte, déjà célèbre à travers quelques grandes figures monastiques. Rufin se rend à Nitrie pour y rencontrer abba Macaire. Saint Jérôme lui-même fait le voyage d'Alexandrie et de Nitrie. Pallade, Evagre, Germain et Cassien témoignent combien ces dernières décennies constituent l'âge d'or de Nitrie et de Scété.[4] Less querelles origénistes (et le Synode d'Alexandrie en 400) font fuir trois cents moines de Nitrie. Ceux-ci se mettent en route vers Jérusalem, Scythopolis et Constantinople. Beaucoup passent forcément par Gaza. Les dévastations successives de Scété, à partir de 407, par des groupes Maziques, venus du désert de Lybie, accentuent encore le mouvement. Les moines égyptiens se replient de plus en plus vers la mer Rouge, la partie orientale du Sinaï et la Palestine.[5] Gaza est une étape importante dans l'essor du

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[2] Ibid., p. 15.

[3] Cyrille de Scythopolis a montré que Saint-Sabas et Saint-Théodore dépendent d'Euthyme. Lui-même avait passé ses premières années à la laure de Pharan où vivait Chariton. Voir SC 426, pp. 15-17. La laure de Saint-Chariton fut un monastère en activité jusqu'au XII^e^ siècle.

[4] D. J. Chitty, *Et le désert devint une cité*, traduit de l'anglais par les moines de Quévy. Spiritualité Orientale 31 (Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1980), pp. 105-117.

[5] Sur la date de ce départ d'Égypte, Chitty (*Et le désert devint une cité*) propose avec hésitation l'année 380. M. Van Parys pense à la crise origéniste autour de l'année 400. Voir, "Abba Silvain et ses disciples: Une famille monastique entre Scété et la Palestine à la fin du IV^e^ et dans la première moitié du V^e^ siècles," *Irénikon* 61 (1988), p. 318.

monachisme palestinien à l'aube du V^e siècle.

La région de Gaza, de Thavatha à Maiouma, le long de la mer, devint un carrefour culturel et spirituel où se retrouvèrent des chercheurs de Dieu venus du Nord et du Sud, souvent attirés par la visite des lieux saints à Jérusalem. L'abbé Silvain et ses onze disciples quittent Scété, s'installent quelque temps au Sinaï, et s'établissent finalement près de Gérara au Ouadi Ghazzeh.[6] Un autre moine célèbre fut Isaïe de Gaza. Selon la *Vie* écrite par Zacharie le Scolastique, Isaïe était moine égyptien, vivant dans un couvent de cénobites avant de se retirer dans la solitude en reclus. De Scété il gagna le sud de la Palestine où il mourut toujours reclus vers 491. Il avait écrit un ascéticon dans la plus pure tradition des Pères égyptiens.[7]

Sous les empereurs Justin et Justinien, les églises et les monastères de Palestine vont fleurir. Le monastère de l'abbé Séridos connaît une période de maturité avec les grandes figures de Barsanuphe, Jean le Prophète, Dorothée et Dosithée. La correspondance échangée reflète admirablement la maturité humaine et religieuse qui régnait dans ce monastère. À travers les questions posées et les réponses des sages de Gaza, nous avons comme un miroir vivant, quotidien, de la vie spirituelle d'un milieu donné. Nous y retrouvons aussi des éléments des grandes traditions antérieures qui ont nourri ce monachisme. Des influences venues d'Égypte et d'Asie mineure s'entrecroisent. Celles-ci vont contribuer à donner au monachisme palestinien sa physionomie propre.

Une question des plus intéressantes, relevée par dom Lucien Regnault, concerne la collation des apophtegmes à Gaza: «Devant la diffusion massive des apophtegmes en Palestine dès le V^e et le VI^e siècle, et la présence dans la collection alphabético-anonyme d'une soixantaine de pièces concernant des moines palestiniens d'origine ou d'adoption, on peut se demander si les deux grandes collections alphabético-anonyme et systématique n'auraient pas été constituées en Palestine.»[8] Quoi qu'il

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[6] Parmi eux se distingue Zénon le Prophète, un maître spirituel. Ce dernier aura à son tour un prince géorgien Nabarnugi comme disciple, mieux connu sous le nom de Pierre l'Ibère. Ce dernier mourut près de Gaza en 488. Zénon meurt en reclus en 451, l'année du Concile de Chalcédoine.

[7] Ed. Augoustinos monachos, Jérusalem, 1911; R. Draguet, *Les cinq recensions de l'Ascéticon syriaque d'abba Isaïe*, CSCO 293 (Louvain, 1968).

[8] L. Regnault, "Les Apophtegmes en Palestine aux V^e–VI^e siècles," *Irénikon* 54 (1981), pp. 320–30; idem, *Les Pères du désert à travers leurs Apophtegmes* (Solesmes, 1987), pp. 73–83; Van Parys, « Abba Silvain et ses disciples, » p. 315 s. C'est à la laure de

en soit, l'équilibre et la sagesse de l'enseignement des Pères de Gaza constitue incontestablement un sommet de la littérature monastique de Palestine. C'est principalement sur cette source que nous développerons l'argumentation de notre communication. Les autres documents ne sont pas à minimiser, à commencer par les *Didascalies* de Dorothée, leur disciple. Celui-ci fondera à son tour son propre monastère entre Gaza et Maïouma aux dires de Jean Moschus.

### *Les saintes écritures et la formation*

La formation monastique des Pères de Gaza se fonde essentiellement sur la Parole de Dieu. Elle a un statut particulier que nous préciserons d'abord avant de nous arrêter aux trois sens principaux que nous découvrons dans l'interprétation de la Parole de Dieu. Un extrait de la lettre 49 de Barsanuphe adressée à Jean de Beersheba, higoumène d'une communauté qui souhaite devenir un solitaire:

> Frère Jean, qu'est-ce que cela? Je ne comprends pas, car j'ai tout mis par écrit de l'alpha à l'omega (de A à Z), de l'état de débutant à celui de la perfection, du commencement de la route à son terme, du dépouillement du vieil homme avec ses convoitises jusqu'à revêtir l'homme nouveau «celui qui est créé selon Dieu» (Ep. 4, 24), de la condition d'étranger par rapport à la terre sensible à celle de citoyen des cieux et d'héritier de la terre spirituelle des promesses. Rumine les lettres et sois sauvé. Car tu as en elles, si tu le comprends bien, l'Ancien et le Nouveau Testament et les ayant dans l'esprit, tu n'as pas besoin d'un autre livre. Secoue l'oubli et dégage-toi des ténèbres, afin que ton cœur soit en paix avec tes sens, et toutes ces choses arriveront pour toi.

Le statut de la Parole est lié à tout un contexte de vie, de mode de communication et de formation. Il est essentiellement oral et non visuel. Les consultants interrogeaient les Anciens pour recevoir une Parole de vie, c'est-à-dire une parole qu'ils mettaient en pratique et les faisaient vivre. Cette perspective est essentielle. Barsanuphe est celui qui est reconnu comme celui qui transmet la Parole divine. Aussi les mots sacrés et ceux qui jaillissent de la bouche de Barsanuphe sont en quelque sorte mis sur le même pied. Dans la tradition apophtegmatique, l'immense respect et la crainte révérencielle des

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Saint-Sabas qu'ont été faites les premières traductions géorgiennes des *Apophtegmes* au VIII[e] siècle et sans doute aussi les premières traductions arabes.

Saintes Écritures conduisaient les moines à citer le moins possible la Parole sacrée. Ce n'est pas une méconnaissance des Écritures; au contraire, tenus en haute estime, les textes sont récités à haute voix, mémorisés, ruminés dans le silence. La Parole de Dieu est toujours sous-jacente mais plus rarement explicitée. Chez Barsanuphe, les citations sont nombreuses et il s'estime en quelque sorte comme celui qui la transmet de façon existentielle à ses consultants. Sa propre parole devient une explicitation des Écritures et forcément un appel exigeant à lui obéir. Cette vision est parfaitement en accord avec la tradition où les Écritures et les dits des Pères sont souvent rapprochés. Abba Poemen dira à propos des larmes et de la compassion: «Pleurer est la voie que les Écritures et nos Pères nous ont enseigné». Retenons donc que la Parole est entendue plus que lue. Son statut est existentiel, conduisant le consultant sur le chemin de la sainteté. Elle est par conséquent redoutable et nul n'interroge sans volonté de renaître et de transformer sa vie.

La liste des citations explicites ou implicites des Saintes Écritures commentées par Barsanuphe est impressionnante. Sa connaissance est vaste, la plupart des livres de l'Ancien et du Nouveau Testament sont mentionnés de façon inégale. Outre l'usage fréquent des Psaumes, le Grand Vieillard se réfère souvent aux livres sapientiaux: Job, les Proverbes, Quohélet, le Siracide; le Cantique des Cantiques et le Livre de la Sagesse sont moins cités. Le prophète Isaïe est mainte fois nommé suivi par Jérémie, Ezéchiel et les autres prophètes. Le Nouveau Testament occupe la place centrale, les citations foisonnent: le Sermon sur la montagne, les textes johanniques, les épîtres pauliniennes telles l'Épître aux Romains, les deux Lettres aux Corinthiens et surtout l'Épître aux Hébreux. La perspective du royaume à venir explique une partie de ces emplois. L'Épître de Saint-Jacques nous rappelle, si besoin en est, combien l'actualisation de la Parole dans la vie subjective du consultant est toujours présente. Trois interprétations principales ressortent. Les figures bibliques sont des références de vie, les commentaires allégoriques, et les interprétations éthiques donnent le climat général de la correspondance. Ces méthodes d'interprétations exégétiques ne sont pas nouvelles. Elles étaient pratiquées durant les premiers siècles de la vie de l'Église. Les moines n'ont rien apporté d'original dans la méthode. L'intérêt réside dans la manière de s'approprier ces textes, de les mettre en relation avec les questions morale set religieuses dans la vie de tous les jours pour les solitaires, cénobites, hommes d'Église ou laïcs.

Les moines aimaient chercher le modèle de leur pratique de vie dans celle des grandes figures de la Bible. Dans sa biographie d'Antoine, Saint-Athanase suggère que ce dernier hérite des dons de Moïse, Samuel, Élie, Élisée, Job.[9] Dans la collection systématique des *Apophtegmes* ce procédé scripturaire revient souvent: Noé est la figure de la pauvreté, Job celle de la peine, Daniel celle du discernement. Ce sont pour abba Poemen les signes d'une vie solitaire.[10] Cette typologie apparaît au cours de la correspondance. Dans une lettre à Jean de Beersheba qui avait beaucoup circulé en Égypte et qui était revenu découragé de toutes les tribulations rencontrées, Barsanuphe écrit:

> Considérons en esprit tous les saints depuis le commencement et voyons ce qu'ils ont enduré…As-tu donc été vendu comme le chaste Joseph…Es-tu descendu deux fois dans la fosse (allusion à Gn. 37, 24 et 40, 15), ou bien as-tu été maltraité comme Moïse de l'enfance à la vieillesse ? Qu'as-tu donc enduré, paresseux ? As-tu été poursuivi à mort et jalousé comme David par Saül et par son propre fils, avant de pleurer la mort de celui-ci ? ou bien as-tu été, comme Jonas, jeté à la mer…Souviens-toi de l'endurance de Job et de ceux qui l'ont suivi…Souviens-toi des périls que Paul a affrontés…Je te suis étranger. Souviens-toi de celui qui t'écrit.[11]

Chacune des figures de l'Ancien et du Nouveau Testament apporte une lumière nouvelle éclairant le mystère de Jésus-Christ, source de tout modèle tant pour Barsanuphe que pour ses prédécesseurs. Job évoque souvent l'endurance, [12] Joseph la chasteté et le labeur, [13] Moïse la douceur, [14] Josué le courage dans les combats, les Juges la conduite dans les affaires, David et Salomon la soumission des ennemis, les Israélites la tranquillité de la terre. On pourrait aussi mentionner Abraham, Jonas et les figures du Nouveau Testament. Il serait trop long d'énumérer chacune d'entre elles: le paralytique fait référence au pardon des péchés à travers la guérison du corps, Pierre est sauvé des flots agités, Paul sort des tribulations etc.[15] Cette lecture des Écritures

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[9] Saint-Athanase, *Vie d'Antoine*, SC 400, pp. 48-50. Les comparaisons vont même jusqu'à des détails: Moïse et Antoine avaient conservé une bonne vue et une bonne dentition et personne ne connaît le lieu où ils ont été enterrés.

[10] *Les Apophtegmes des Pères*, SC 387, chap. I, n° 23, pp. 114-115.

[11] *Lettre* 31, SC 426, pp. 222-227.

[12] Voir aussi *Lettres* 33; 47.18; 74.17; 90.49; 99.9; 118.21; 194.5; 202.5.

[13] Pour la figure de Joseph, voir SC 426, p. 87 note 4.

[14] Ibid., note 5.

[15] Voir notre commentaire, SC 426, pp. 87-88 et les notes.

est centrée sur le Christ mort et ressuscité. L'enseignement des Pères de Gaza vise l'unification de la personne entièrement tournée vers un seul objectif: l'éveil à soi-même dans un combat quotidien pour que la grâce du Christ soit première, dans l'attente de son retour.[16]

L'allégorie fait partie de la lecture habituelle des moines d'Égypte. Le grand maître de ce type d'interprétation est incontestablement Origène. L'allégorie ne correspond plus à l'exégèse moderne qui s'est développé autour du contexte littéraire et du sens historico-critique; elle favorise une lecture plurielle des textes et soutient une dimension éthique. Car la présentation d'une réalité pour en évoquer une autre stimule l'esprit et la foi, elle peut aussi ouvrir les portes à des connaissances initiatiques, voire même ésotériques. Les commentaires platoniciens de certains moines origénistes, sur la prédestination des âmes et l'apocatastase, au monastère même de l'abbé Séridos, ont montré que le danger n'est pas vain. Quoi qu'il en soit, l'interprétation qu'en donne Barsanuphe va dans le sens d'une conversion intérieure, interprétant les écrits bibliques dans une perspective subjective et souvent individuelle. Tout devient sujet à interprétation nouvelle dans un sens mystique, intérieur, thérapeutique avec sa part d'imagination ou d'excès. La prière de Moïse contre Amalech dans le combat des Hébreux est devenu un commentaire célèbre, connu dans les monastères.[17] Dans sa méditation sur la lettre *eta*, Barsanuphe énumère les passions, semences d'Amalech.[18] Ailleurs, il parle du pharaon spirituel englouti.[19] Ou encore, le cœur du moine est «le sanctuaire de l'autel de l'homme intérieur, où sont offertes à Dieu des victimes spirituelles, où sont présentés l'or éprouvé, l'encens et la myrrhe, où est immolé le veau gras, et répandu le sang précieux de l'Agneau immaculé.»[20]

Les Pères de Gaza lisent l'Écriture comme une Parole «utile à lâme». Comme les moines d'Égypte, ils restent attachés à la tradition judéo-chrétienne hellénistique, accueillant ce qui est dit (plutôt que lu) comme une parole de vie efficace et dynamique. Elle vient de l'Esprit saint lui-même et est destinée à être mise en pratique. Il faudrait développer ici l'importance d'une cohérence de vie, le danger de la consultation,

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[16] L'heure de la grande présentation, celle du Jugement où Barsanuphe intercédera pour les siens. Voir Introduction, p. 92 *sq*. et lettres 117 et 187.

[17] Voir *Correspondance*, Introduction, SC 426, p. 86 et note 1; Origène, *Homélies sur l'Exode*, SC 16 (1947), pp. 11-12.

[18] *Lettre* 137b, 46-49; voir aussi *Lettre* 167.

[19] *Lettres* 182 et 209 (Ex. 14, 16-28).

[20] *Lettre* 201, 7-11, d'autres références, *Correspondance*, SC 426, p. 82 note 1.

l'obéissance quasi indispensable à mettre en pratique le conseil reçu et à réduire l'écart entre la vie et la parole. Les exemples sont nombreux. Les interpellations, les adjonctions à l'impératif, les citations bibliques foisonnent: Soyez rusés comme des serpents et candides comme des colombes (Mt. 10, 16); celui qui tiendra jusqu'à la fin, celui-là sera sauvé (Mt. 10, 22); venez à moi, vous tous qui peinez (Mt. 11, 28-30); toi qui enseignes autrui, tu ne t'enseignes pas toi-même (Rm. 2, 21).

Concluons brièvement cette partie. Nous pouvons distinguer trois principaux types d'interprétation scripturaire qui se recouvrent: les figures bibliques, les allégories et l'éthique. Car les figures bibliques peuvent être allégoriques et contribuer à un apport éthique. Les allégories peuvent être en partie typologiques et contenir un message moral. La lecture éthique des Écritures peut devenir allégorique ou figuratif. Dans cette perspective sapientielle, la figure du Christ mort et ressuscité demeure toujours centrale et la vie du moine est tendue vers l'avant, dans une attente ardente du retour du Christ.

### *Les citations et les exemples tirés de la vie des pères du désert*

Dans les citations patristiques, les paroles des Pères du désert occupent une place centrale. Cette tradition les pénètre à ce point que les citations implicites et les citations anonymes sont nombreuses à côté des citations explicites. Les exemples tirés des Vies des Pères, des écrits isaïens complètent cette perspective fondamentale de la formation. Parmi les autres citations, les *Kephalaia Gnostica* d'Evagre nous font entrer dans les querelles christologiques de l'époque.

Plusieurs grandes figures monastiques de Basse-Égypte sont explicitement nommées: abba Antoine, Arsène, Isaïe, Jean Colobos, Joseph de Panepho, Théodore de Phermé, Macaire, Nistherôs, Poemen, Sisoès et amma Sarra. Certaines questions et réponses sont déjà devenues célèbres. Barsanuphe ne fait que prolonger une tradition vivante. À un soldat voulant faire pénitence, le Grand Vieillard de Gaza rapporte la parole d'Antoine, reprise par Poemen: «s'attendre à la tentation jusqu'au dernier souffle.»[21] Au jeune Dorothée, Barsanuphe rappelle cette autre parole d'Antoine: «Par l'humilité, tous les pièges de l'ennemi

[21] *Lettre* 492, 8 et *Apoph.* Alph. Antoine 4; Alph. Poemen 125 (pour les références aux lettres et aux apophtegmes, voir *Correspondance*, SC 450, p. 70 *sq*.

sont rompus.»[22] Une autre expression deviendra un lieu commun dans la formation monastique: «Interroge ton Père et il te l'apprendra, tes Anciens et ils te le diront (Dt. 32, 7).» Jean le Prophète mentionne cette expression à travers «les divines Écritures et les Pères.»[23] Si Élie est un idéal et un modèle pour Antoine, en particulier ce passage: «Le Seigneur est vivant devant qui je me tiens aujourd'hui,» Barsanuphe développe la même idée et son enseignement revient souvent sur le thème d'une conversion quotidienne.[24]

Quatre citations d'Arsène le Grand et plusieurs allusions indubitables soulignent la connivence profonde qui relie Barsanuphe à son prédécesseur. C'est à la fois l'interrogation célèbre: «Arsène, pourquoi es-tu sorti du monde?»[25] la science au sens du discernement spirituel, l'ascèse, la fuite du monde et les larmes. Joseph de Panepho, qui avait été en relation avec Lot et le jeune Poemen, invite à laisser entrer en soi les passions, à lutter avec elles pour en ressortir éprouvé.[26] Une autre filière de transmission spirituelle passe par abba Isaac, le prêtre des Cellules qui fut dans sa jeunesse disciple d'abba Cronios et de Théodore de Phermé. Il s'agit de prêcher par l'exemple et non par l'autorité. Poemen s'y réfère et les Pères de Gaza reprennent le flambeau.[27] De Macaire le Grand, nous trouvons un texte célèbre sur la prière adressée à Jésus et répétée maintes fois: «Seigneur Jésus-Christ, aie pitié de moi» et «Fils de Dieu, viens à mon aide.»[28] Les mentions à abba Nisterôs le Cénobite invite le correspondant à garder la sérénité et l'équanimité: Mon âne et moi, nous sommes un.[29] Les citations d'abba Poemen, plus explicites dans les réponses de Jean le Prophète, soulignent l'importance de ce maître dans la tradition apophtegmatique. Les sujets abordés par Jean le Prophète concernent le combat spirituel et le corps (Alph. Poemen 38 repris pas Barsanuphe, Alph. Poemen 48 et 123), l'acédie (Poemen 149) et la place du silence et de

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[22] *Cf. Apoph.* Antoine 7. Dorothée s'en souviendra dans son enseignement quand il deviendra higoumène d'une communauté.

[23] *Lettres* 344, 8-9; 535, 9-11; Alph. Antoine 37.

[24] *Vie d'Antoine*, p. 50 (*cf.* 3 Rois 18, 15 et 17, 1); *Correspondance*, SC 450, p. 71.

[25] *Apoph.* Arsène 40 et *Lettre* 256, 80 adressée à Dorothée.

[26] *Apoph.* Joseph de Panepho 3 et *Lettre* 432.

[27] *Apoph.* Isaac 2; ibid., Poemen 174 et *Lettre* 123.

[28] *Apoph.* Macaire 19 et *Lettre* 140, 3; voir aussi *Vie de Dosithée*, SC 92, § 10 et *Correspondance*, SC 450, p. 77 et note 3.

[29] *Lettre* 291, 4sv. Un autre Nisterôs se présente comme le témoin de la vie et de l'enseignement d'abba Arsène, invitant le moine à un examen de conscience matin et soir. Dorothée de Gaza s'en souviendra dans ses *Didascalies*.

la parole (Poemen 55 citant abba Alonios, et P. 147). Les citations de Barsanuphe, toutes implicites, même si abba Poemen est cité nommément, révèlent d'autres accents spirituels: la conversion intérieure, les larmes et la componction, l'attente du jugement final, ne pas s'estimer soi-même, se garder du péché.[30] Amma Sarra est citée nommément par Barsanuphe à propos de la pureté de cœur.[31] Enfin, abba Sisoès, le disciple d'Antoine est mentionné deux fois.[32] Nous n'entrerons pas dans l'analyse fouillée des paroles implicites et anonymes. Celles-ci, avec les références scripturaires, constituent réellement l'étoffe même de la formation. Qu'il nous suffise d'énumérer les Pères les plus fameux mentionnés par les Pères de Gaza comme fondements de la tradition monastique: abba Agathon, Alonios, Amoun, Bessarion, Daniel, Moïse, Pierre le Pionite, Sisoès et Silvain. Leur enseignement se cache souvent sous la formule «les Pères disent».[33] Les citations anonymes enrichissent aussi notre connaissance de la formation et apportent incontestablement des données nouvelles. Outre les principes de vie monastique qui sont ainsi soulignés et mis en valeur, certaines paroles nous paraissent inédites ou encore attribuées à un moine précis alors que l'ensemble de la littérature apophtegmatique a oublié celui qui l'a prononcé. Ainsi, nous avons repéré une sentence attribuée à abba Macaire.[34]

Dans la *Vie d'Antoine*, il est recommandé de «se souvenir des actions des Saints pour que l'âme se règle sur leur zèle au souvenir des commandements.»[35] Les paroles et les Vies des Pères sont étroitement associées dans l'enseignement de Barsanuphe et de Jean le Prophète. Les figures bibliques ont déjà été mentionnées. Les exemples les plus marquants des *Vitae* de la *Correspondance* sont tirés de la *Vie d'Antoine*, [36] de celle d'Hilarion, [37] de Malchus, [38] de quelques souvenirs de l'*Histoire*

[30] *Correspondance*, SC 450, p. 82 *sq*.

[31] *Lettre* 237, 34-35 et Alph. amma Sarra 5.

[32] À propos du fait de chercher le Seigneur et de ne pas vouloir connaître le lieu où il réside (*Lettre* 125, 36-43 et Apoph. Sisoès 40 [38]). L'autre citation de Jean renvoie aussi à la quête de Dieu (*Lettre* 385 et Apoph. Sisoès 12).

[33] *Correspondance*, SC 450, pp. 87-96.

[34] *Lettre* 549, 9-11.

[35] *Vie d'Antoine* 55.

[36] Nous avons déjà évoqué la figure d'Élie reprise librement par Barsanuphe (*Lettre* 508, 11): «Si tu veux tenir pour règle la parole dite par Élie "aujourd'hui" (3 Rois 18, 15), tu seras dégagé de tout souci.»

[37] L'emprunt à la *Vie d'Hilarion* par Saint-Jérôme concerne la distribution des biens aux pauvres (*Lettre* 618, 13-16).

[38] Il s'agit de ne pas se laisser tromper par Satan (*Lettre* 69, 18-20).

*lausiaque* de Pallade et d'une allusion à l'*Historia monachorum*[39] par Jean le Prophète. Nous trouvons aussi une réflexion faite par Jean le Prophète à propos de la Vie des Vieillards sur la pratique d'un moine qui récitait «cent prières, un autre tant, devons-nous aussi avoir une mesure ou ne pas en avoir?»[40] Cette tradition nous est connue de Macaire d'Alexandrie.[41] Elle est liée à la prière continuelle et sans doute à la prière de Jésus.

Le corpus isaïen composé d'apophtegmes et de discours ascétiques est généralement attribué à Isaïe de Gaza. Nous avons rappelé plus haut que de nombreux moines égyptiens étaient venus s'établir dans la région, Isaïe était l'un d'eux. Il vivait en reclus dans une laure qu'il dirigeait par l'intermédiaire de son disciple Pierre. Ce dernier assumait les relations avec les nombreux visiteurs qui venaient consulter abba Isaïe. Ce dernier mourut un 11 août entre 488 et 491. René Draguet a montré de façon lumineuse les liens entre abba Isaïe et le milieu monastique de Scété. Le *Logos* VI relève les relations d'Isaïe avec plusieurs sages de Scété tels Jean (Colobos ?), Anoub, Poemen, Paphnuce, Amoun, Pierre Pionite, Lot, Agathon, Pistos. L'essentiel ici est de souligner les relations étroites entre les écrits isaïens et les milieux de Scété d'un côté, et de l'autre, les nombreuses citations *ad sensum* et *ad verbum* qui unissent les écrits isaïens de l'enseignement des Pères de Gaza au monastère de l'abbé Séridos.

Dans la première lettre adressée à Dorothée, il est question de la manière de distribuer ses biens. La référence à abba Isaïe est explicite. L'*Histoire lausiaque* rapporte en effet un épisode illustrant la manière dont Isaïe distribuait ses biens.[42] Plus tard, Dorothée interroge à nouveau le même Jean le Prophète sur l'accueil des hôtes. À nouveau la référence à abba Isaïe et aussi à Jean Colobos se manifeste: «Fais-le prier et lorsqu'il est assis, dis-lui: Comment vas-tu et ne va pas au-delà de cette parole-là.»[43] D'autres mentions se réfèrent au pardon des péchés, [44] d'autres préceptes concernent la nourriture et la boisson.[45]

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[39] Dans la lettre 752, 9-12, Saint Apollonios est insulté par Philémon, joueur de flûte. L'attitude de ce dernier amène Philémon à se convertir et à accompagner Appolonios jusqu'au martyre.

[40] *Lettre* 143, 2-3.

[41] Ce dernier offrait chaque jour cent prières et Evagre fit de même, voir Pallade, *Histoire lausiaque*, chap. 38; *Correspondance*, SC 450, p. 109.

[42] Pallade, *Histoire lausiaque*, chap. 14; *Correspondance*, SC 450, p. 114, note 1.

[43] *Logos* X d'Isaïe et *Correspondance*, SC 450, p. 115.

[44] *Lettre* 240 4-5 et *Logos* V d'Isaïe.

[45] *Lettre* 528 2-9 et *Logos* XII.

Une dernière note souligne que le moine se force pour Dieu jusqu'à la mort. Comme nous le découvrons, les écrits isaïens renvoient à des réalités essentielles de la vie monastique et constituent un chaînon important pour la formation monastique à Gaza, reliant explicitement le monastère de l'abbé Séridos aux moines de Scété en partie à travers la figure d'abba Isaïe.

Dans cet article, nous ne nous arrêterons pas sur les citations concernant les écrits de Saint-Basile.[46] Celles-ci sont commentées par Jean le Prophète et non par Barsanuphe; nous n'évoquerons pas non plus une citation de Saint-Jean Chrysostome sur la présence de Judas à la dernière cène commentée par Jean le Prophète.[47] Les citations des *Kephalaia Gnostica* rapportées par un moine origéniste renvoient à une figure emblématique du monachisme primitif, Evagre le Pontique.[48] Ces lettres constituent un témoignage précieux du climat qui régnait à l'époque, c'est-à-dire pensons-nous, vers 540 avant l'édit de Justinien en 543. La réponse du vieux moine Kyriakos au jeune Cyrille de Scythopolis datant de quelques années plus tard révèle un durcissement des positions.

La position de Barsanuphe face aux moines origénistes est empreinte de sérénité et de discernement (distinguant l'enseignement pratique de ce qui est utile à l'âme des spéculations gnostiques). La réponse du moine Kyriakos témoigne d'une position dure et sans nuances. Il faut rappeler brièvement les jalons importants de cette seconde controverse christologique connue surtout à travers les écrits de Cyrille de Scythopolis.[49] Les germes du conflit se situent entre la fondation de la Nouvelle Laure par Saint-Sabas (507) et les premiers incidents (514) où quatre moines, Nonnus et d'autres sont exilés à Pedias (la plaine côtière). Vers 519-520, ces mêmes moines retournent à la Nouvelle Laure et la paix semble à nouveau recouvrir les diverses approches christologiques et spirituelles. Après la mort de Saint-Sabas, un nou-

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[46] Voir notre commentaire SC 450, pp. 117-120. Il s'agit d'une citation textuelle de la deuxième des *Règles morales* II, 3 (prendre sa croix et suivre le Christ); *Lettres* 257 et 359 à Dorothée et Mt. 10, 37-38 et 16, 24-25. On retrouve aussi l'image du corps «les moines du coenobium sont les membres les uns des autres» dans deux lettres de Jean le Prophète *Lettres* 289, 12 et 305, 15. Dans la lettre 319, 2 un point de l'*Asceticon* concerne le détachement des choses présentes pour devenir disciple du Seigneur. Ici encore, c'est Jean le Prophète qui répond.

[47] *Correspondance*, SC 450, p.120.

[48] *Lettres* 600-606. L'identité de ce moine n'est pas claire. En tout cas, Dorothée de Gaza a lu les *Kephalaia Gnostica* et les cite dans ses *Didascalies*.

[49] *Correspondance*, SC 450, pp. 121-126.

vel incident éclate en 532 La figure de Léonce de Byzance s'y révèle favorable aux origénistes. Après l'édit de Justinien en 543, les positions se durcissent, et après le Concile de Constantinople en 553, les tensions demeurent vives. Après huit mois, le Patriarche de Jérusalem fait chasser militairement les moines origénistes de la Nouvelle Laure et y installe des moines orthodoxes, antiorigénistes, parmi lesquels le jeune Cyrille de Scythopolis. Les lettres recueillies à Gaza sont des documents précieux attestant de la lecture des *Kephalaia Gnostica* au monastère de l'abbé Séridos dans les années 540. Au-delà des questions sur la préexistence de l'âme et de l'apocatastase, le mouvement origéniste nous échappe dans sa signification profonde.[50]

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[50] La spiritualité monastique y joue un rôle non négligeable que nous ne pouvons préciser. Voir la livre récent de Daniël Hombergen sur la christologie de Cyrille de Scythopolis, *The Second Origenist Controversy: Cyril of Scythopolis' Monastic Biographies as Historical Sources for Sixth-Century Origenism*, Studia Anselmiana 132 (Rome, 2001).

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# MOINES ET LAÏCS DANS LA RÉGION DE GAZA AU VI$^{E}$ SIÈCLE

Lucien Regnault

Par le Nouveau Testament et les écrits patristiques les plus anciens, nous savons que, dès le début de l'Église, des chrétiens fervents—hommes ou femmes—renonçaient volontairement et définitivement au mariage pour mieux suivre le Christ. Les femmes étaient appelées ordinairement «vierges», mais les hommes étaient désignés par différents termes: «ascètes», «apotactiques», «zélés», etc. et aussi, quoique plus rarement, par le mot «moines». Ce dernier fait n'a été reconnu qu'il y a un demi-siècle grâce aux nouveaux documents trouvés par les archéologues. Le terme de «moine» apparaît déjà dans deux apocryphes du IIe siècle découverts en 1945 à Nag Hamadi en Haute-Égypte, l'Évangile de Thomas et le Dialogue du Sauveur. D'après ces textes, il est clair que le sens primitif du mot est non pas «seuls» au sens de solitaires dans le désert, mais «seuls» au sens de célibataires, sans femme. Antoine Guillaumont a montré que le mot connotait aussi, dès le III$^{e}$ siècle, l'idée d'une vie unifiée dans la recherche de Dieu, idée déjà exprimée par Saint-Paul dans la première Épître aux Corinthiens: alors que le chrétien marié est divisé, partagé entre le souci de plaire à Dieu et le souci de plaire à son conjoint, celui qui reste célibataire est tout occupé des choses divines.

Durant les trois premiers siècles, ascètes et vierges vivent au sein des familles et des communautés chrétiennes sans éprouver le besoin de s'en écarter. Ils mènent une vie d'ascèse et de prière, se rendant souvent dans les églises et s'abstenant seulement des distractions mondaines. La plupart ne se croient pas tenus de renoncer à leurs biens; ils vivent de leurs revenus ou de leur travail. C'est de ces milieux ascétiques que sont issus les moines d'Égypte qui vont devenir les Pères du désert.

Celui qui est ordinairement considéré comme l'initiateur de cet exode au désert est un jeune homme de la vallée du Nil nommé Antoine qui, ayant entendu à l'église de son village lire la parole du Christ au jeune homme riche: «Va, vends tout ce que tu as et puis viens et suis-moi », quitte aussitôt la maison familiale pour aller vivre parmi les ascètes du voisinage. Puis, avide d'une plus grande solitude, il va s'enfermer dans un tombeau non loin de son village, et ensuite

à l'est du Nil, dans un fortin abandonné. Bientôt, d'autres moines le rejoignent ou l'imitent ailleurs. Dans le Delta, non loin d'Alexandrie, Amoun, marié contre son gré, quitte son épouse et va s'établir au désert de Nitrie. Plus au sud, Macaire se retire au désert de Scété. Ce qui aurait d'apparaître comme une désertion, une excentricité, voire une aberration et un scandale, est bientôt admiré et exalté comme le comble de la sainteté, la réalisation parfaite de l'idéal évangélique. Mais il faudra pour cela tout le prestige et l'autorité du biographe d'Antoine, Saint-Athanase, archevêque d'Alexandrie. Et ce mouvement d'exode au désert est d'abord caractéristique du monachisme égyptien. Partout ailleurs il y a des moines mais le plus souvent ils habitent non loin des agglomérations. Des évêques comme Saint-Augustin Hippone ou Saint-Basile en Cappadoce, les prennent volontiers comme collaborateurs pour leur tâche pastorale. Saint-Athanase lui-même choisit parfois des moines pour les associer à son apostolat. Mais il reconnaît la légitimité et l'excellence de la vocation érémétique et s'en fait le héraut dans ses écrits: «Ces hommes agissent cachés, veulent rester cachés, mais le Seigneur les montre à tous comme des flambeaux». Cette vie cachée des Pères du désert est pour lui le meilleur argument en faveur de la vérité du christianisme face au paganisme et en faveur de la divinité du Christ contre les Ariens.

«Séparé de tous et uni à tous». La définition du moine donnée par Evagre exprime bien que, si les ermites du désert et les chrétiens ou ascètes vivant dans les villes et les villages forment apparemment deux mondes distincts et séparés, ils n'en sont pas moins en communion parfaite dans le Christ. Ils ont habituellement peu de rapports visibles entre eux. Certains anachorètes fuient farouchement la société des laïcs qui veulent les aborder, ainsi Arsène. Mais la plupart sont plus accueillants. La *Vie d'Antoine* nous montre non seulement des moines mais aussi les laïcs venant s'édifier auprès du saint ermite et solliciter non seulement une guérison miraculeuse mais aussi des instructions salutaires pour la conduite de leur vie. Les moines qui habitaient dans le désert proche de la vallée du Nil et dont nous parle l'*Histoire des moines en Égypte* avaient évidemment des rapports plus fréquents avec leurs voisins. Mais les Palestiniens, eux, sauvegardaient jalousement leur clôture.

Par ailleurs, il convient de noter que les moines du désert ne se considèrent pas du tout comme l'élite des chrétiens. Dans toutes les collections d'*Apophtegmes*, nous trouvons des textes significatifs où les plus grands parmi les Pères du désert, Antoine, Macaire, Paphnuce

apprennent par révélation que telle femme ou tel homme mariés les surpasse en sainteté.

Gaza est une ville très ancienne qui doit sa célébrité et sa renommée à la situation exceptionnelle qu'elle occupe entre la Syrie et l'Égypte, aux confins de la Méditerranée et du monde oriental. De là aussi les vicissitudes de son histoire. Dans l'Antiquité, c'était surtout un carrefour commercial important avec son port Maiouma. De tout temps, elle a fait l'objet de la convoitise des différents peuples qui l'entouraient. Sa population cosmopolite, adonnée surtout au négoce, semble être restée très attachée au paganisme, malgré la proximité de Jérusalem.

Comme en Égypte, c'est seulement après les persécutions du III^e siècle que les chrétiens augmentent en nombre et en influence. Plusieurs églises y sont construites dont des fouilles récentes ont révélé des vestiges et une succession d'évêques zélés assurent le développement d'une chrétienté florissante. Parallèlement le monachisme s'implante également à proportion, à partir surtout d'éléments étrangers venus d'Égypte, de Syrie et même d'Occident. Si proche de l'Égypte, la région de Gaza était vouée à devenir une terre privilégiée du monachisme.

Originaire de la région de Gaza, Saint-Hilarion revint s'y établir vers 307 après être allé se former auprès de Saint-Antoine, et son biographe Saint-Jérôme nous dit que son exemple suscita bientôt dans tout le pays une floraison de monastères. Au siècle suivant les fondations se multiplièrent. Dans les alentours de Thawata, lieu de naissance de Saint-Hilarion, s'établirent plusieurs monastères que nous connaissons et désignons par les noms de leur fondateur, celui de l'abbé Silvain, celui de l'abbé Isaïe et celui de Pierre l'Ibère. Le plus célèbre a été fondé à la fin du V^e siècle par l'abbé Séridos qui en devint le premier supérieur. C'était un monastère cénobitique, mais selon une tradition à peu près constante en Palestine, les moines parvenus à un certain degré de perfection pouvaient y mener une vie plus solitaire. On les nommait *kelliotes* ou *hésychastes*. Ainsi se rejoignaient et s'unissaient les diverses formes de vie monastique apparues en Égypte et ailleurs depuis la fin du III^e siècle. On retrouve là non seulement l'inspiration première d'Antoine et celle de Pachôme, mais aussi l'idéal cappadocien de Basile, résolument cénobitique. On voit que sur le plan monastique comme sur les autres plans, la région de Gaza est vraiment un carrefour où confluent divers courants issus d'Égypte, de Syrie, de Grèce et d'Asie Mineure. On y sent également l'influence de Cassien qui avait été traduit en grec dès le V^e siècle. La convergent aussi, dès cette époque, les différents courants doctrinaux qui ont donné naissance

aux hérésies arienne, monophysite et nestorienne.

Au monastère de l'abbé Séridos demeuraient deux grands vieillards, Barsanuphe et Jean, qui vivaient dans une réclusion totale, ne sortant jamais de leur cellule et exerçant cependant un rayonnement extraordinaire par les lettres qu'ils échangeaient non seulement avec les moines du monastère mais avec d'autres moines, comme avec des laïcs et même avec des évêques de la région. Alors que les Pères du désert n'ont prononcé que de brèves sentences, Barsanuphe et Jean ont laissé une abondante correspondance—environ 850 lettres ou billets—d'autant plus précieuse qu'elle est unique par son caractère dans toute la littérature patristique.

«Qui vous écoute m'écoute»: depuis vingt siècles que le Christ a prononcé cette sentence, des millions de chrétiens se sont adressés à des hommes de Dieu, représentants du Christ, pour obtenir des paroles de conseil, d'encouragement, de réconfort ou de consolation et de tout ce flot de confidences ainsi échangées, il ne reste presque rien, si ce n'est le peu que nous révèlent quelques documents autobiographiques. Dans la correspondance des reclus de Gaza, nous avons par écrit ce qui habituellement était exprimé oralement. Et nous avons à la fois les demandes et les réponses. Souvent, les demandes sont seulement résumées, mais parfois elles sont reproduites intégralement. Il y a bien dans la littérature patristique d'autres lettres adressées par des moines à des laïcs, par exemple d'Isidore de Péluse, de Nil d'Anayre, d'Evagre, de Basile ou de Jérôme, mais elles sont en général très apprêtées, pleines de rhétorique, alors que celles de Barsanuphe et de Jean sont toutes simples, directes et dépouillées de tout artifice. Barsanuphe dictait les lettres à Séridos qui lui servait de secrétaire et qui écrivait mot pour mot ce que disait son maître. A Séridos qui exprimait sa crainte de ne pas transcrire ponctuellement tout ce qui était prononcé, Barsanuphe répondait:

> Va, écris sans crainte, quand bien même je te dicterais des milliers de mots, l'Esprit de Dieu ne permettra pas que tu écrives une seule lettre de plus ou de moins, même involontairement, mais il guidera ta main pour que tu les écrives dans l'ordre (*Lettre* 1).

Le lecteur ne saurait s'y tromper. Il est tout de suite frappé par le caractère spontané et familier du discours. On retrouve constamment le langage parlé, direct, vivant, incisif et simple. Le style et le ton des *Lettres* varient selon les sujets traités et les personnes auxquelles s'adressent les réponses. Mais les Vieillards s'expriment toujours avec la même spontanéité et la même simplicité.

Les documents que nous possédons sur la vie dans les monastères palestiniens à cette époque montrent qu'en général les moines ne sont pas aussi séparés du monde qu'en Égypte. Les œuvres de Zosime et de Dorothée témoignent que les moines recevaient de nombreux laïcs dans leurs hôtelleries. Nous savons que Dorothée s'entretenait volontiers avec les hôtes. Il est vrai qu'en Palestine les monastères n'étaient pas très éloignés des villes. Au monastère de Séridos, de nombreux chrétiens du voisinage venaient consulter les moines pour résoudre leurs problèmes matériels ou spirituels. Et c'était évidemment les grands vieillards Barsanuphe et Jean qu'ils interrogeaient de préférence par l'intermédiaire de l'abbé Séridos. On ne sait ce qu'il convient d'admirer le plus, de la confiance que témoignaient ces laïcs à l'égard des saints reclus invisibles ou de la patience avec laquelle ceux-ci accueillaient les requêtes les plus variées et parfois les plus bizarres, y répondant toujours avec sagacité et bonhomie.

Pour certains correspondants, nous n'avons qu'une seule lettre, mais pour d'autres, nous avons toute une série, attestant que plusieurs laïcs comme la plupart des moines qui consultaient Barsanuphe et Jean les considéraient vraiment comme leur directeur de conscience ou leur conseiller spirituel, même si les questions posées sont parfois très matérielles et terre à terre. Il est impossible d'énumérer toutes les questions posées et les sujets traités. On peut seulement en donner un aperçu en distinguant le côté matériel et humain et le côté spirituel et religieux.

Il est normal que les saints reclus de Gaza s'intéressent surtout à la vie spirituelle des moines qui se mettent sous leur direction, mais la plupart des lecteurs de leur correspondance sont d'abord frappés par l'attention et l'intérêt qu'ils portent à la vie concrète et ordinaire des personnes qui les interrogent, qu'elles soient dans la vie monastique ou dans le monde. Ils se gardent bien de se montrer comme des êtres d'exception au-dessus du commun des mortels, si bien que les laïcs n'hésitent pas à leur soumettre les petits problèmes parfois d'ordre très matériel de leur vie quotidienne. L'un interroge sur la vente d'un terrain (*Lettre* 648), un autre veut savoir s'il doit garder un mauvais esclave (*Lettres* 693, 694), le propriétaire d'une bête malade se demande s'il peut recourir au sorcier ou faire des incantations sur l'animal (*Lettres* 753, 754). Comment fixer un prix raisonnable dans un contrat d'achat ou de vente (*Lettre* 756)? Peut-on recourir aux tribunaux (*Lettres* 670, 725, 748)? Les païens et les juifs sont nombreux à Gaza. Le chrétien convié à déjeuner pour la fête d'un païen ou d'un juif,

peut-il accepter l'invitation (*Lettre* 775)? Peut-on acheter quelque chose à un marchand païen (*Lettre* 777)? Un viticulteur chrétien demande s'il peut presser le vin d'un juif dans son pressoir? Jean répond qu'il faut imiter Dieu qui fait pleuvoir sur les justes et les pécheurs (*Lettre* 686). Un autre voit ses champs ravagés par les sauterelles, qu'il jette de l'eau bénite pour les chasser même au risque de mécontenter les voisins (*Lettre* 684). Avec les hérétiques, il ne faut pas discuter de peur de se laisser prendre par leurs erreurs (*Lettres* 694, 696). Beaucoup de questions portent sur les sujets de conversation avec les amis. Il faut éviter absolument les propos qui provoquent le trouble (*Lettre* 495), flattent la vanité (*Lettre* 454), ou encore le simple bavardage (*Lettre* 471). Avant d'entamer la conversation, il convient d'invoquer le nom de Dieu (*Lettre* 705). Si l'entretien dévie sur des futilités, il faut s'efforcer de le ramener sur un sujet utile en parlant par exemple de la vie des Pères (*Lettres* 469, 689).

Il est rare que les interrogations portent sur des questions théoriques, par exemple sur la liberté (*Lettre* 482). Comment la concilier avec l'impossibilité de ne rien faire sans Dieu (*Lettre* 763)? Que faut-il entendre par volonté de Dieu et par permission? Quelle est la différence (*Lettre* 466)? Comment le Christ a-t-il pu permettre que Judas participe à l'eucharistie (*Lettre* 464)? Ces questions-là sont posées par Elien, encore laïc, mais qui devait se faire moine et succéder à l'abbé Séridos comme supérieur du monastère. Dorothée et d'autres laïcs qui ne sont pas nommés ont également le désir de devenir moines; ils interrogent les vieillards avant de prendre la décision d'abandonner tous leurs biens (*Lettres* 252, 617, 618), voire même leur femme et leurs enfants. C'était le cas d'Elien (*Lettre* 691). Barsanuphe conseille à un autre de ne quitter sa femme qu'avec son accord (*Lettre* 662).

Un certain nombre de requêtes sollicitent une guérison corporelle soit pour le demandeur lui-même (*Lettre* 643), soit pour un enfant malade (*Lettres* 637, 645, 784). Un professeur de philosophie obtient de Jean la guérison d'un de ses fils, mais non la guérison du second (*Lettre* 778). Un récit très émouvant est inséré dans le recueil, racontant la mort de celui-ci après une vision des saints vieillards.

Même dans les lettres isolées envoyées à Barsanuphe et à Jean, on trouve des préoccupations spirituelles, mais celles-ci apparaissent surtout dans les séries de lettres échangées avec le même consultant où l'on voit que les destinataires vivaient vraiment sous la conduite de leur Père spirituel. Ainsi les lettres 463-482, 620-628, 653-661 et 667-678, 693-722, 746-760 et surtout 399-449. Après une première lettre qui

est une confession des fautes passées et une demande de pardon, se succèdent ensuite les questions les plus variées auxquelles Barsanuphe répond souvent par des exhortations à l'humilité (*Lettres* 402, 406, 410-412, 420-421, 424, 426). Bien des interrogations portent sur la prière continuelle (*Lettres* 425, 428, 441) et sur la psalmodie (*Lettres* 423, 427, 443, 445), sur l'invocation constante du nom de Dieu (*Lettres* 424, 425, 427, 430). Et les mêmes sujets se retrouvent dans les séries de lettres adressées à d'autres correspondants. On peut dire que tout se rapporte au combat spirituel et à la prière. Quelques lettres traitent des relations avec les moines, ce qu'il convient de faire quand on reçoit la visite de Pères (*Lettres* 456, 457) et qu'on mange avec eux (*Lettre* 714). On voit que les chrétiens faisaient fréquemment le signe de la Croix (*Lettres* 436, 437, 715, 716). Parfois, la réponse de Barsanuphe n'est qu'une belle prière d'abandon entre les mains du Seigneur:

> Seigneur, je suis entre tes mains; tu sais, toi, ce qui me convient, dirige-moi selon ta volonté et ne me laisse pas m'égarer dans l'usage d'une chose; car les choses sont à toi et tu en es le maître comme de nous; dispose de tout en maître, afin que cela se fasse dans ta crainte. Car la gloire t'appartient dans les siècles (*Lettre* 440).

Au même correspondant, Barsanuphe donne trois formules de prière courte: «Lorsque tu veux prier pour plusieurs choses importantes, puisque Dieu sait ce dont nous avons besoin, prie en disant: «Seigneur Maître, Jésus-Christ, conduis-moi selon ta volonté ». Si c'est à propos de passions, dis: «Guéris-moi selon ta volonté». Si c'est à propos de tentations, dis: «Tu sais, toi, ce qui me convient; viens en aide à ma faiblesse et donne, selon ta volonté, une issue à la tentation.» (*Lettre* 438). Une prière plus longue ne doit pas s'en tenir nécessairement aux mêmes paroles, mais bien à leur sens (*Lettre* 439).

Irénée Hausherr a noté qu'on pourrait faire tout un traité de la prière d'après la correspondance de Barsanuphe et de Jean. La prière parfaite, sans distraction, suppose la mort à tout le créé, la purification de toutes les passions, mais, contrairement à ce qu'on pourrait penser, elle n'est pas réservée aux moines. En associant la prière du cœur et la prière des lèvres, même les laïcs peuvent se maintenir unis à Dieu au milieu même des occupations extérieures, les rencontres et les conversations (*Lettres* 454, 661, 693). Il faut s'y exercer progressivement. Comme des gens qui apprennent à nager, il faut reprendre pied fréquemment en recourant à la prière vocale pour ne pas se laisser engloutir dans cet océan de la pensée de Dieu (*Lettre* 431). L'essentiel,

c'est de s'entretenir toujours dans l'humilité, en demeurant constamment devant Dieu comme des malades ayant besoin du médecin (*Lettre* 424). Il faut aussi toujours demeurer dans l'action de gr,ces, qu'on soit moine ou chrétien dans le monde: deux longues lettres sur ce sujet sont adressées respectivement à un solitaire et à un laïc (*Lettres* 70, 404). En fait, l'idéal spirituel proposé par les deux reclus de Gaza est vraiment le même pour tous les chrétiens, moines ou non-moines. Il n'y a guère que certaines pratiques d'ascèse qui sont réservées aux moines, par exemple l'abstention des bains. A un laïc malade qui se faisait scrupule de se baigner comme le médecin le lui avait prescrit, Barsanuphe répond carrément qu'il n'est pas défendu aux gens du monde de se baigner quand la nécessité l'exige (*Lettres* 770-771). «Soyons donc vigilants sur les points où nous devons l'être, c'est-à-dire le cœur et la langue, afin de ne juger ni mépriser personne.» (*Lettre* 770). Barsanuphe et Jean ramènent toujours leurs correspondants à l'essentiel qui est la pureté du cœur et la charité.

La correspondance des deux reclus de Gaza rassemblée probablement par un moine du monastère de Séridos peu après leur mort a été constamment copiée en grec puis traduite en géorgien et en arabe dans les monastères palestiniens. Plus tard, elle a été surtout lue, copiée et appréciée par les moines du mont Athos et c'est un moine athonite Nicodème l'Hagiorite qui a publié la première édition imprimée à Venise en 1816, rééditée par Schoinas à Volos en 1960. A la fin du XVIII$^{e}$ siècle parut une traduction moldave puis une autre en slavon. La première édition russe complète a été publiée à Optino en 1852. Dostoïevsky qui fréquenta le monastère d'Optino y connut certainement l'ouvrage. Il y rencontra le staretz Ambroise décrit dans *Les Frères Karamazov* sous le nom de Zosime, mais ce n'est sans doute pas un hasard s'il mentionne aussi un staretz défunt du nom de Barsanuphe. On peut dire que, depuis le VI$^{e}$ siècle, le double portrait de Barsanuphe et de Jean tel qu'il apparaît dans leur Correspondance présente de façon exemplaire et impérissable le parfait staretz dont la sagesse et la bonté gagnent tous les cœurs et dont le rayonnement s'étend largement hors des cloîtres parmi les laïcs. C'est la gloire de l'Orient chrétien mais aussi l'une des célébrités de Gaza.

# BARSANUPHIUS AND JOHN OF GAZA AND THE ORIGENIST CONTROVERSY

Daniël Hombergen, o.c.s.o.

The Origenist controversy—that is, the conflict that raged over Origen from the third to the sixth centuries[1]—is usually divided into two main phases: the first controversy at the end of the fourth century and the second in the mid-sixth century.[2] The second is the one that interests us here.[3] It troubled the Palestinian monastic world and led to successive condemnations: first in 543, with an edict of Emperor Justinian against Origen ending with nine *anathemata*[4] and, ten years later, with fifteen *anathemata* against those who were considered followers of Origen, a condemnation traditionally attributed to the Fifth Ecumenical Council held in Constantinople in 553.[5]

Apart from these documents, our most important source for the second Origenist controversy is the hagiographic works of the Palestin-

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[1] For some general surveys, see A. d'Alès, "Origénisme," *Dictionnaire Apologétique de la Foi Catholique*, 3 (1916), pp. 1228-1258; G. Fritz, "Origénisme," *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, 11/2 (1932), 1565-1588; A. Guillaumont, *Les 'Kephalaia Gnostica' d'Évagre le Pontique et l'histoire de l'origénisme chez les Grecs et chez les Syriens*, Patristica Sorbonensia 5, Paris, 1962, pp. 47-170; H. Crouzel, "Origenismo," *Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane* 2 (1984), 2533-2538; idem, "Origene e l'Origenismo. Le condanne di Origene," in *L'Origenismo. Apologie e polemiche intorno a Origene* (*XIV incontro di studiosi dell'Antiquità cristiana, 9-11 Maggio 1985*), *Augustinianum* 26 (1986), pp. 295-303; M. Simonetti, "La controversia Origeniana. Caratteri e significato," in *L'Origenismo* (*op. cit.*), pp. 7-31; R. Williams, "Origenes/ Origenismus," *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* 25 (1995), pp. 414-417, 420.

[2] Other divisions are also possible, such as the six moments distinguished by H. Crouzel (see the references to Crouzel in the preceding footnote).

[3] For the second Origenist controversy, see (in addition to the surveys mentioned in n. 1, above) F. Diekamp, *Die origenistischen Streitigkeiten im sechsten Jahrhundert und das fünfte allgemeine Concil*, Münster, 1899; L. Duchesne, *L'Église au VI^e siècle*, Paris, 1925, pp. 156-218.

[4] Iustinianus Imperator, *Edictum contra Origenem* (= *Epistula ad Mennam*), ed. E. Schwartz, *Collectio sabbaitica contra Acephalos et Origenistas destinata*, *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* III, Berlin, 1940, pp. 213-214 (for the whole edict: 189-214).

[5] Concilium Oecumenicum Constantinopolitanum II (an. 553), *Canones XV contra Origenem sive Origenistas*, ed. J. Straub, *Concilium universale Constantinopolitanum sub Iustiniano habitum*, *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum*, IV/1, Berlin, 1971, pp. 248-249. In 1899 Franz Diekamp arrived at the conclusion that the fifteen *anathemata* were enunciated not by the fifth ecumenical council itself but by a pre-synod held in Constantinople shortly before the official opening of that Council; see Diekamp, *Die origenistischen Streitigkeiten*,

ian monk Cyril of Scythopolis (c. 525-559),[6] particularly his Lives of Sabas and of Cyriacus.[7] Until recently this author had a high reputation for historical reliability, but as I have demonstrated elsewhere, his testimony is seriously defective.[8] The sixth-century "Origenists" of Palestine elude our perception to a large extent. They were certainly not a homogeneous group of heretics, all of them distorting Origen's thought to propagandize a radicalized pantheism or, more particularly, to proclaim the doctrines of the pre-existence of souls and a final restoration of all rational beings including Satan.[9] Instead of being a mere difference of opinion over *doctrine*, the second Origenist controversy was also a clash of different concepts of the spiritual life. There was an underlying conflict on the spiritual and the intellectual levels concerning the integration of the Hellenistic philosophical legacy within the monastic tradition.[10] The disagreement focused mainly on

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pp. 131-132, 137. This thesis has since been generally accepted. The fifteen *anathemata* contain many passages parallel with a letter of Justinian to the bishops assembled in the capital, in which he orders the condemnation of certain Origenist monks (in Palestine): Iustinianus Imperator, *Epistula ad synodum de Origene*, ed. F. Diekamp, *Die origenistischen Streitigkeiten*, pp. 90-97 (right col.).

[6] Ed. E. Schwartz, *Kyrillos von Skythopolis*, Texte und Untersuchungen 49/2, Leipzig, 1939. Modern translations: A. J. Festugière, *Les moines d'Orient* III/1-3. *Les moines de Palestine*, Paris, 1962-63; R. Baldelli and L. Mortari, *Cirillo di Scitopoli: Storie monastiche del deserto di Gerusalemme*, Praglia, 1990 (introduced by L. Perrone); R. Price, *Cyril of Scythopolis: The Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, Cistercian Studies 114, Kalamazoo, 1991 (introduced by J. Binns).

[7] A crucial passage is Cyril's account of the controversy in the final chapters of the *Vita Sabae*; see chap. 83-90 (ed. Schwartz), pp. 188,28-200,17. Other important passages are interwoven with the rest of this *Life*; see ibid., chap. 19, pp. 103,8-105,2; chap. 36, pp. 122, 19-125,25; chap. 72, pp. 174,23-176,20; chap. 74, pp. 178, 9-179,14. Another text of primary importance is an account of Cyril's meeting with Abba Cyriacus; see *Vita Cyriaci* 11-15, pp. 229,7-231,26.

[8] D. Hombergen, *The Second Origenist Controversy. A New Perspective on Cyril of Scythopolis' Monastic Biographies as Historical Sources for Sixth-Century Origenism*, Studia Anselmiana 132, Rome, 2001.

[9] Scholars, anxious to absolve Origen (and Evagrius) from the charge of heresy, pointed to the sixth-century Origenist monks of Palestine as the ones who distorted the speculations of their inspirers and thus became responsible for the condemnation of the latter. That this picture is a simplification of what was going on in the controversy becomes clear especially from the discrepancy between Cyril's portrait of the theologian Leontius of Byzantium as a leader of the Origenists, and what we may learn from the writings of this author himself. Actually, Leontius does not subscribe to the doctrines of pre-existence and apocatastasis; see esp. B. Daley, "The Origenism of Leontius of Byzantium," *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 27 (1976), pp. 333-369. I propose to resolve the problem of Leontius' "Origenism" by introducing a distinction between the doctrinal and the spiritual levels; see Hombergen, *The Second Origenist Controversy*, pp. 131-254.

[10] The integration of Greek philosophy into the monastic tradition started right from

ascetic practice as a way of spiritual progress, but, especially in the last decade before the Council of 553, there were also obfuscating political implications.[11]

Cyril of Scythopolis' testimony reflects the situation in Jerusalem and in the Judaean desert shortly after the Council and the final condemnation of Origenism. His intention was to give the whole history of the conflict from the early fifth century on,[12] but his *Lives* were written between 557 and 559 and should be read in the light of the *post-conciliar* situation. This becomes especialy clear when he relates his meeting with Abba Cyriacus,[13] whom he visited as a young monk in 544.[14] Faced with Cyril's question of what to think about the Origenist doctrines of pre-existence and restoration, the old Abba starts a fulminating tirade in which he recites a brief series of charges that are a perfect summary of the 553 *anathemata*.[15] Cyril, writing the account afterward when he was backed by the recent condemnation, put the speech into Cyriacus' mouth as an anachronism. The hermit replies

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the beginning of that tradition in the fourth-century Egyptian desert. See ibid., pp. 332-338.

[11] The strong political implications of the second Origenist controversy are to be explained by the total integration of a highly institutionalized Palestinian monasticism within the framework of early Byzantine theocracy. For this integration, see Hombergen, *The Second Origenist Controversy*, pp. 338-342. Particularly interesting is the close connection between the controversy over Origenism and that over the "Three Chapters"—that is, over three authors (Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret of Cyrrhus, and Ibas of Edessa) who were charged with Nestorianism and condemned by the Council of 553. This affair, which had far-reaching consequences for the whole Christian world, was the real issue of the fifth ecumenical council. The second Origenist controversy was only a local question of secondary importance, which Justinian tried to resolve in view of his politics concerning the 'Three Chapters." See Hombergen, *The Second Origenist Controversy*, pp. 176-206, 292-322.

[12] See the references in n. 7, above. The most important events are: the foundation of the New Laura (507), the discovery of the first four Origenists in the New Laura and their expulsion (514), the comeback of this group (520), the discovery of Leontius of Byzantium's "Origenism" on a mission in Constantinople (531), Sabas' death followed by the prevalence of the Origenists (532), Justinian's edict against Origen (543), the turbulent events preceding the Council (543-553) and, finally, the expulsion of the Origenists from their stronghold, the New Laura, and the repopulation of this monastery by 120 orthodox monks (555). Cyril, one of these monks, claims this event to be the final victory of his anti-Origenist party.

[13] *Vita Cyriaci* 11-15 (Schwartz), pp. 229,7-231,26.

[14] For the date of the meeting, see Hombergen, *The Second Origenist Controversy*, p. 256 with n.2.

[15] *Vita Cyriaci* 11-15 (Schwartz), p. 230,3-20. For an analysis of Cyriacus' charges and their connection with other sources, see Hombergen, *The Second Origenist Controversy*, pp. 256-287.

"in a few words,"[16] reciting a series of well-known theological charges. His rejection of Origenism seems very easy: it is stereotyped, rigid, and without refinements.

In this context let us look at another sixth-century source dealing with the same subject. In the epistolary of Barsanuphius and John of Gaza[17] letters 600-607 are dedicated to the problem of Origenism.[18] The text, written about fifteen years before Cyril's *Lives*, not only reflects the atmosphere in the Gaza environment; it also leads us back to the period just before the first condemnation by Justinian's Edict of 543.[19] The general setting is similar to that of Cyril's meeting with Cyriacus: a monk questions Barsanuphius and John about what to think of the Origenist doctrines of pre-existence and restoration and receives a negative answer. Here, however, we can sense the inner conflict of the questioner much more than we do in Cyril's account. The monk's confusion is caused particularly by the fact that certain Fathers do accept the Origenist doctrines and are yet known as "good monks" (καλοὶ μοναχοί) who "give heed to themselves" (προσέχοντες ἑαυτοῖς).[20] Here Origenism appears as a delicate problem, one that cannot be resolved simply by reciting a list of standard accusations.

The Gaza epistolary is separated from Cyril's testimony by the two condemnations that mark the culmination of the second Origenist controversy: Justinian's Edict of 543 and the fifteen *anathemata* attributed to the Council of 553. The main difference between these two condemnations is the following: while the charges of 543 appear to a long extent to be a repetition of the accusations brought against

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[16] ἐν ὀλίγαις λέξεσι, *Vita Cyriaci* 12 (Schwartz), p. 230,2.

[17] *Barsanuphe et Jean de Gaza: Correspondance*, ed. P. de Angelis-Noah, F. Neyt, and L. Regnault, 4 vols., Sources chrétiennes 426-427, 450-451, Paris, 1997-2001. Before this critical edition the standard text was that of S. Schoinas, Νικοδήμου Ἁγιορείτου· Βίβλος Βαρσανουφίου καὶ Ἰωάννου, Volos, 1960 (repr. Thessaloniki, 1974).

[18] *Epistulae* 600-607, SC 451 (2001), pp. 804-842 (= ed. Schoinas, pp. 283-292).

[19] For the dating of letters 600-607, see De Angelis-Noah and Neyt, SC 426, introduction, p. 33. For the ancient monastic tradition of Gaza, see the recent survey of B. Bitton-Ashkelony and A. Kofsky, "Gazan Monasticism in the Fourth-Sixth Centuries: from Anchoritic to Cenobitic," *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 50 (2000), pp. 14-62.

[20] *Ep.* 603, SC 451 (2001), p. 814,2-4. The expression "to give heed to oneself" (προσ-έχειν ἑαυτῷ) belongs to the technical vocabulary of the monastic tradition and refers to the attitude of vigilance with regard to the inner self (comparable to the old Greek maxim: γνῶθι σεαυτόν). Origenists who "keep watch on themselves" are good monks who lead an exemplary spiritual life, which explains the young monk's confusion. See Hombergen, *The Second Origenist Controversy*, p. 285 with n.160.

Origen around 400, [21] those of 553 seem to be the result of a more direct examination (and interpretation) of contemporary Origenist speculations. This "Origenism" reflects not so much the thought of Origen himself[22] as the influence of the *Kephalaia gnostica* of Evagrius Ponticus, that is, Evagrius' "chapters" on the various stages of spiritual knowledge. This was demonstrated by Antoine Guillaumont forty years ago.[23] However, if to get a picture of sixth-century Origenism we restricted ourselves to the successive condemnations, we might be left with the impression that the conflict was primarily about Origen and that Evagrius was somehow introduced in the final stage as a secondary figure. The latter is not even mentioned in the later documents, those of 553, [24] and Cyril of Scythopolis, relating the history from his viewpoint after the Council, mentions him only three times in passing, always in second place after Origen, and in an exclusively negative connotation.[25]

From the epistolary of Barsanuphius and John, which is a *direct* testimony of the Origenist controversy in its earlier stage, before the Edict of 543, Evagrius already appears as the main inspirer of the so-called "Origenists," and he seems to be more important than Origen himself. In the first letter (600) the monk who puts the question begins as follows: "I don't know how, Father, but I fell upon the books of Origen and Didymus, upon the *Kephalaia* of Evagrius and upon the writings of his disciples."[26] The monk's difficulty is about pre-existence and restoration, and his soul is in distress, having fallen into doubt (διψυχία) concerning the truth of these speculations. After referring to

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[21] A. Guillaumont, *Les 'Kephalaia Gnostica' d'Évagre le Pontique*, pp. 142-143; J. Dechow, *Dogma and Mysticism in Early Christianity: Epiphanius of Cyprus and the Legacy of Origen*, Macon, 1988, pp. 449-453; De Angelis-Noah and Neyt, SC 450 (2000), p. 125.

[22] See, e.g., A. J. Festugière, *Les moines d'Orient I: Culture ou sainteté. Introduction au monachisme oriental*, Paris, 1961, pp. 85-87.

[23] A. Guillaumont, "Évagre et les anathématismes antiorigénistes de 553", *Studia Patristica* 3/1 (Texte und Untersuchungen 78), Berlin, 1961, pp. 219-226; idem, *Les 'Kephalaia gnostica'*, pp. 143-159.

[24] Neither in Justinian's letter to the pre-synod (see above, n.5) nor in the fifteen *anathemata* of 553 does Evagrius' name explicitly appear.

[25] *Vita Sabae* 36 (Schwartz), p. 124,28; chap. 90, p. 199,5; *Vita Cyriaci* 13, p. 230,13.

[26] Οὐκ οἶδα Πάτερ πῶς ἐνέπεσα εἰς τὰ βιβλία Ὠριγένους καὶ Διδύμου, καὶ εἰς τὰ Γνωστικὰ Εὐαγρίου καὶ εἰς τὰ τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ, Ep. 600, SC 451, p. 804,2-4. The "books of Origen and Didymus" are mentioned in one breath and remain unidentified, but the "Kephalaia of Evagrius" is explicitly referred to (with a repetition of the preposition εἰς) and is followed by "his disciples"—that is, Evagrius' disciples (the personal pronoun αὐτοῦ refers to Evagrius).

a lost work of Origen, he returns to Evagrius' *Kephalaia gnostica*, from which he gives two explicit quotations.[27] In another letter (602), after negative answers from both Barsanuphius and John concerning the Origenist speculations, the questioner asks the latter: "So we should not even read Evagrius?"[28] In this early discussion Evagrius already appears as by far the most important figure; moreover, the next letter (603) is dedicated to the *Kephalaia gnostica.*

In response to his question to Abba John as to whether or not to read Evagrius, the monk receives a remarkable answer: "Such doctrines you should not accept, but read from him, if you wish, what contributes to the benefit of the soul, according to the parable in the Gospel about the dragnet, where it is said: 'They took the good [fish] from the net, but the bad ones they threw away (Matt. 13:48).' You should do the same."[29] This advice to make selective use of Evagrius should not be taken in the usual sense, as based upon his major divisions of the spiritual life—as if one should reject all his works concerned with *gnostikè* (spiritual knowledge) and read only those concerned with *praktikè* (ascetic practice).[30] The "fish" retained in the parable from the Gospel are not intended to symbolize singular writings, but rather the singular *chapters* of which these writings consist. Abba John does not randomly quote a phrase from Matthew; he is referring implicitly to the prologue to Evagrius' *Chapters on Prayer*, where the 153 small chapters of that treatise are introduced as the 153 fish in the dragnet of the Apostles in John 21:11.[31] So what Abba John says is: Take from Evagrius' *chapters* those that are useful for the soul. This could be read as including the *Kephalaia gnostica*, the writing that is explicitly under

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[27] Ep. 600, SC 451, p. 806,25-34 (with ref. to Evagrius, *Keph. gnost.* II, 64 and II, 69).

[28] Οὐκ ὀφείλομεν οὖν ἀναγινώσκειν καὶ τὰ τοῦ Εὐαγρίου; Ep. 602, p. 812, 1-2.

[29] Τὰ μὲν δόγματα τὰ τοιαῦτα, μὴ δέχου, ἀναγίνωσκε δὲ αὐτοῦ, εἰ θέλεις, τὰ πρὸς ὠφέλειαν ψυχῆς, κατὰ τὴν παραβολὴν τὴν τῷ Εὐαγγελίῳ περὶ τῆς σαγήνης, ὡς γέγραπται ὅτι 'Τὰ μὲν καλὰ εἰς ἀγγεῖα ἔβαβον, τὰ δὲ σαπρὰ ἔξω ἔρριψαν.' Οὕτω καὶ σὺ ποίησον, Ep. 602, p. 812, 3-8.

[30] For Evagrius' major divisions of the spiritual life, *praktikè* and knowledge, see J. Driscoll, *The 'Ad Monachos' of Evagrius Ponticus. Its Structure and a Select Commentary*, Studia Anselmiana 104, Rome, 1991, pp. 11-12. Though Driscoll agrees with the distinction between Evagrius' ascetic works and his theoretical or speculative writings, which are more concerned with knowledge, he also warns against pushing this division too strongly. See ibid., pp. 33-35.

[31] Evagrius, *De oratione*, Prol., PG 79, 1165a, 10-13.

discussion. The anti-Origenist Abba John proves to be familiar with Evagrius' *Chapters on Prayer*—that is, Evagrius' most important writing concerned with mystical doctrine.[32] Here we do not find a rigid division between *praktikè* and knowledge, and Abba John's position is much more moderate than that of Abba Cyriacus as represented by Cyril of Scythopolis writing after the Council of 553.

In the next letter (603) Barsanuphius shows himself more reserved concerning Evagrius' *Kephalaia gnostica*, and especially concerning the desire for the stage of knowledge. But he too refrains from passing final judgement. "Some brethren, considering themselves *gnostics* (γνωστικοί), do accept them [the *Kephalaia gnostica*], while they did not ask God whether they were true. Thus, God has left them to their own knowledge (γνῶσις) in this respect. However, it is neither up to me nor to you to search into these things, but for us is it the right time to examine our passions, to bewail and to mourn."[33] Space precludes an exhaustive analysis of Barsanuphius' position, but these lines summarize the main point of what he said in the first letter (600). In earthly life, a monk should not strive for spiritual knowledge, which is only a reward in heaven, instead, he should dedicate himself exclusively to the ascetic practice: "Here the labor, there the reward."[34] This reveals a conception of the spiritual life which strongly opposes that of Evagrius. When Evagrius divides the spiritual life into *praktikè* and *knowledge*, the first stage is a preparation for the second, which is a goal to be reached *during this lifetime*. Once the monk has purified his heart and reached the state of passionlessness (ἀπάθεια) he becomes a *gnostic* (γνωστικός), that is, a contemplative.[35] For Evagrius, γνῶσις is a *result* of the ascetic practice and belongs to the spiritual progress

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[32] See A. and C. Guillaumont, "Évagre le Pontique", *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* 4 (1960), 1737, and also Driscoll, *The 'Ad Monachos' of Evagrius Ponticus*, pp. 33-34.

[33] τινὲς ἀδελφοί, ὡς γνωστικοί, δέχονται αὐτὰ καὶ οὐκ ἐδεήθησαν τοῦ Θεοῦ εἰ ἀληθῆ εἰσι. Καὶ ἀφῆκεν αὐτοὺς ὁ Θεὸς περὶ τούτου ἐν τῇ ἰδίᾳ αὐτῶν γνώσει. Ἀλλ' ὅμως οὔτε ἐμόν ἐστιν οὔτε σὸν ταῦτα ζητεῖν, ἀλλ' ὁ καιρὸς ἡμῶν ἐστιν ἐρευνᾶν τὰ πάθη ἡμῶν, τοῦ κλαῦσαι καὶ πενθῆσαι, Ep. 603, p. 814, 10-15.

[34] ὧδε ἔργασις, ἐκεῖ μισθός, Ep. 600, p. 810, 90.

[35] Only those who are impassible (οι ἀπαθεῖς) are capable of spiritual knowledge, Evagrius, *Gnosticus* 45, SC 356, p. 178. For ἀπάθεια as a goal of *praktikè* and a prerequisite for *knowledge*, see esp. G. Bunge, *Evagrios Pontikos: Briefe aus der Wüste*, Sophia. Quellen Östlicher Theologie 24, Trier, 1986, p. 123; P. Géhin, *Évagre le Pontique: Scholies aux Proverbes*, SC 340, p. 42; Driscoll, *The 'Ad Monachos' of Evagrius Ponticus*, pp. 11-12.

a monk should make on earth.[36] For Barsanuphius, however, it is only a *reward* bestowed after death, and monastic vices such as pride, presumption, and vainglory are narrowly connected with a monk's pretension that he could become a *gnostic* during his lifetime.[37]

Antoine Guillaumont claimed at this point that Barsanuphius represents the original "pure tradition of the desert," while Evagrius' striving for spiritual knowledge is rather alien to it.[38] However, recent scholarship has readjusted that picture of Evagrius as a sort of intellectual outsider in a desert full of simplistic monks: he actually represents the mainstream of the complex movement that is nowadays known as fourth-century Egyptian monasticism.[39]

Against this background it would be interesting to re-examine more profoundly the Gaza epistolary with respect to the Origenist crisis. The evidence points to the existence of an dissension (beyond the mere doctrinal issues) regarding the conception of spiritual progress, one that particularly focused on the *legitimacy* of striving for γνῶσις in the Evagrian sense. However, the dissension was not yet marked by the extreme polarization that emerges from the writings of Cyril of Scythopolis as a result of all the political intrigues in the final decade of the controversy. In Gaza, *before* the official condemnations, Origenists could still be recognized as good monks and anti-Origenists could be found reading even the "mystical" works of Evagrius and drawing spiritual profit from them. In the Gaza epistolary we may find important additional outlines of a monastic conflict that has strong relevance for the present-day's tensions regarding a widespread desire for spiritual experience.

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[36] This Evagrian spirituality is well reflected in a passage of Leontius of Byzantium, dated to the same time as the text of our epistolary—that is, just before the Edict of 543. See Leontius Byzantinus, *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos*, PG 86/1, 1285, a6-b1. The crucial phrase in this passage is a quotation of *Keph. gnost.* IV, 50, where Evagrius observes: "There is only one desire that is good and eternal: the desire that strives for true knowledge (ἀληθὴς γνῶσις)". For an analysis of the Evagrian influence in the whole passage, see Hombergen, *The Second Origenist Controversy*, pp. 208-222. As noted earlier, Cyril of Scythopolis presents Leontius as a leader of the Origenists; see above, n.9.

[37] See esp. Barsanuphius' extensive answers in Ep. 600 and Ep. 604.

[38] Guillaumont, *Les 'Képhalaia gnostica' d'Évagre le Pontique*, pp. 126-128. See also pp. 52-55.

[39] For the *status quaestionis* with regard to Evagrius' position in the fourth-century Egyptian desert, see my surveys in Hombergen, *The Second Origenist Controversy*, pp. 209-210; 332-338.

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# WHAT HAPPENED TO THE MONOPHYSITE MONASTICISM OF GAZA?

Aryeh Kofsky

In the second half of the fifth century the region of Gaza became the center of anti-Chalcedonian resistance in Palestine, led by the famous figures of Gazan monasticism. Peter the Iberian and his circle and Abba Isaiah of Egypt led this resistance, supported primarily, it seems, by a network of Monophysite monasticism that had developed in the region. The story is relatively well known from the works of John Rufus, the disciple and biographer of Peter the Iberian, and Zacharias the Rhetor.[1] Although sparsely recorded in the sources, Chalcedonian monasticism presumably coexisted in the region alongside its anti-Chalcedonian counterpart, though it may have maintained a low profile during the period of Monophysite monastic ascendancy. While there are indications that anti-Chalcedonian monasticism in the region enjoyed considerable popular support among town dwellers—for example in Maiuma, Gaza, Ascalon, and Azotus[2]—there is no explicit evidence for a wide popular support among the rural population. In fact, it may be that this population was more inclined to support the hegemonic Chalcedonian camp or was perhaps simply disinterested in the Christological polemics of the time.

Following the death of Peter the Iberian and Abba Isaiah (491), [3] Gazan anti-Chalcedonian monasticism was led by the followers recruited by Peter the Iberian from the Beirut circle of law students. Prominent in this circle was the famous Severus of Antioch, who became first a leader of anti-Chalcedonian Gazan and Palestinian monasticism, and consequently an outstanding leader of this camp in the empire. Zacharias, in his biography of his friend Severus, describes the successful efforts of Nephalius to oust anti-Chalcedonian monks from

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[1] For this phase in the history of monasticism in the Gaza region see, B. Bitton-Ashkelony and A. Kofsky, "Gazan Monasticism in the Fourth-Sixth Centuries: From Anchoritic to Cenobitic," *Proche Orient Chrétien* 50 (2000), pp. 14-62 and bibliography cited there.

[2] Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky, "Gazan Monasticism," p. 41.

[3] P. Devos, "Quand Pierre l'ibère vint-il à Jérusalem?" *Analecta Bollandiana* 86 (1968), p. 350.

their monasteries in the region and supplant them with Chalcedonians, a move that disturbed the atmosphere of coexistence between Monophysites and Chalcedonians in the region.[4] But his success was short-lived and the situation was reversed through Severus' intimate relationship with Emperor Anastasius.[5] The last available report of anti-Chalcedonian monasticism in the Gaza region seems to describe the time just before the ordination of Severus as patriarch of Antioch. We may assume that the hegemony of anti-Chalcedonian monasticism continued in the region until at least 518, when the Chalcedonian Emperor Justin ascended the throne following the death of Anastasius. The changing politico-ecclesiastical climate under Justin and his nephew Justinian led to expulsion of anti-Chalcedonian bishops and monks from Syria (525-531),[6] and Palestinian anti-Chalcedonian abbots and monks were expelled to Egypt.[7] It may be that this also spelled out the end of the monophysite monastic stronghold that had been formed in the southern coastal plain around Peter the Iberian and the members of his circle. The last and only notice regarding the fate of Peter the Iberian's leading monastery near Maiuma is the short note in passing by John of Ephesus: "…a great convent called that of father Peter the Iberian… was expelled with the rest, and came to the territory of Alexandria…."[8]

Our sources for the monasticism in the region in the period that follows derive primarily from two sources: first, the circle of Barsanuphius, John, and Seridus at Thabatha and their disciples who edited and transmitted the rich correspondence of Barsanuphius and John; and second, the circle of their disciple Dorotheus and his disciples, who transmitted his *Instructions* and letters and produced the *Life of Dositheus*.[9] This monastic circle appears to have adopted a Chalcedonian stance.

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[4] *Vita Severi*, 100-103, ed. M. A. Kugener (PO 2, 1, Paris 1903); L. Perrone, *La chiesa di Palestina e le controversie cristologiche: Dal concilio di Efeso (431) al secondo concilio di Costantinopoli (553)*, Brescia, 1980, pp. 148-151.

[5] *Vita Sev.* 103-111; Perrone, *La chiesa di Palestina*, pp. 151-153.

[6] Ps. Zacharias, *HE* VIII. 5.

[7] Severus, *Sixth Book of Letters* I.55, ed. E. W. Brooks, Oxford, 1902, p. 183.

[8] John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints* (John of Hephaestopolis), ed. and trans. E.W. Brooks, PO 18, Paris, 1924, p. 527.

[9] For a critical edition of the first 124 letters with English translation, see D. J. Chitty, *Barsanuphius and John, Questions and Answers*, PO 31/3, 1966. A new critical edition with French translation is F. Neyt, P. de Angelis-Noah, and L. Regnault, *Barsanuphe et Jean de Gaza, Correspondance*, SC 426-427, 450-451, 468, Paris, 1997-2002, henceforth *Questions and Answers*. For the Greek text, see also the edi-

Barsanuphius, John, and Seridus were active roughly between the third and fifth decades of the sixth century, and Dorotheus' activity continued in the second half of the sixth century. Thus hardly any time elapsed between the hegemony of the Beirut circle and the rise of Seridus' monastery.

At this point the question arises as to what could have happened to that tight anti-Chalcedonian monastic network. Were monasteries destroyed or abandoned? Were monks expelled—as implied by Severus and John of Ephesus—and supplanted by Chalcedonians? Did they perhaps accept Chalcedon, adapting to the new imperial ecclesiastical policy? Or did they go underground, adopting an outward Chalcedonian veneer.

Lacking virtually any evidence apart from the legacy of Seridus' monastery and Dorotheus' circle, we can only try and make deductions from the available sources. I would like to propose here the experimental speculative hypothesis that Barsanuphius and John, and perhaps even Dorotheus, were in fact something of crypto-Monophysites. Naturally, had their leanings been obvious, there would have been no need for any such speculation. We may also pose this issue in a negative way—namely, what substantive proof do we have for their supposed Chalcedonian stance? The answer to this question might prove inconclusive, but I would like to consider here possible positive arguments supporting this suggestion.

Thabatha, the birthplace of Hilarion, had already established certain anti-Chalcedonian connections in the previous generation. It is one of the recorded places where Peter the Iberian had established himself with his entourage at the invitation of a wealthy inhabitant of the town.[10] We may thus deduce that an anti-Chalcedonian following existed among the population of the place prior to the establishment of Seridus' monastery.

The monastic legacy of Abba Isaiah—primarily in his *Asceticon*[11]—is

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tion of Nicodemus Hagiorites, Venice, 1816 (2nd rev. ed. corrected by S. N. Schoinas [Volos 1960]). For an earlier edition of the French translation, see *Barsanuphe et Jean de Gaza, Correspondance*, Recueil complet traduit du grec et du géorgien par les moins de Solesmes. Solesmes, 1993$^2$. For the works of Dorotheus and the anonymous vita of his disciple Dositheus see L. Regnault and J. de Préville, *Dorothée de Gaza. Oeuvres spirituelles*, SC 92. Paris, 1963.

[10] *Vita Petri Iberi* 101 (ed. R. Raabe, Leipzig, 1895).

[11] For the Greek edition, see Augoustinos Monachos (ed.), Jerusalem, 1911 (2nd ed., S. N. Schoinas, [Volos 1962]). For various versions of the Syriac text, see R.

central to the monastic teachings of Barsanuphius and John, as was amply demonstrated by François Neyt.[12] It can be argued, however, that the *Asceticon* lacks any explicit Monophysite content and could hence be easily adopted by Chalcedonians as well as later by Nestorians.[13] Nevertheless it would seem that in the short interval following his death the image of Abba Isaiah as a prominent anti-Chalcedonian figure would have obstructed such an easy adoption of his authority—unless, of course, we reject the attribution of the *Asceticon* to Abba Isaiah of Gaza.[14] Abba Isaiah's influence continued to the next generation; it is evident in the writings of Zosimas, who may be broadly associated with the Gaza monastic circle in its Chalcedonian phase and whose work influenced Dorotheus; it is also evident in the writings of the latter. Both these writers, however, in contrast to Barsanuphius and John, seem already hesitant to mention Isaiah by name; they merely quote or paraphrase him anonymously.[15]

Although the *Asceticon* of Abba Isaiah deals primarily with issues of monastic guidance and spirituality, it also includes discussion of a theorizing nature that supplies something of an ideological framework for his monastic teachings. One such discussion involves his concept of nature and counter-nature as a tool for understanding our existential predicament in the state of counter-nature and the ideal of restoring the original human nature of Adam in paradise through the imitation of Christ, who had overcome the state of counter-nature. In Abba Isaiah's articulation of this concept there is a distinct absence of the two natures terminology, and its Monophysite implications were noted

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Draguet, *Les cinq recensions de l'Ascéticon syriaque d'abba Isaïe I–IV*, CSCO 289–90; 293–94. Louvain, 1968. For the Coptic fragments, see A. Guillaumont, *L'Ascéticon Copte de l'abbé Isaïe*, Cairo, 1956. For an enlarged French translation of the text, see L. Regnault and H. de-Broque, *Abbé Isaïe, Recueil ascétique*, Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1985[3].

[12] F. Neyt, "Citations 'Isaïennes' chez Barsanuphe et Jean de Gaza," *Le Muséon* 84 (1971), pp. 65-92.

[13] D.J. Chitty, "Abba Isaiah," *Journal of Theological Studies* 22 (1971), p. 70; A. Guillaumont, "Une notice syriaque inédite sur la vie de l'abbé Isaie," *Analecta Bollandiana* 67 (1949), p. 360.

[14] René Draguet contested the accepted attribution of the *Asceticon* to Abba Isaiah and attempted to attribute most of the text to another, earlier Isaiah, who is mentioned in the *Apophthegmata*. This is, in fact, the central claim of his study (R. Draguet, "Introduction au problème," CSCO 293, 1968); however, his claims are refuted by Regnault and Chitty. See L. Regnault, "Isaïe de Scété ou de Gaza? Notes critiques en marge d'une Introduction au porblème isaïen," *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique* 46 (1970), pp. 33-34; Chitty, "Abba Isaiah."

[15] See Regnault, "Isaïe de Scété ou de Gaza?"

by Hermann Keller.[16] The Monophysite implications of this concept become clear, as does Abba Isaiah's avoidance of the two natures terminology. A diphysite doctrine would render meaningless the central Christian dogma according to Abba Isaiah and empty ascetic life of its purpose. Now this concept of nature and counter-nature and its terminology—shown to be based on Monophysite assumptions—was adopted by Barsanuphius, albeit without elaboration in the existing correspondence,[17] and was further adapted by Dorotheus to his special emphasis on obedience in his theology of monastic life.[18] The overall impression is that this monastic circle proudly regarded itself as heir to the monastic legacy of Abba Isaiah, despite his anti-Chalcedonian background.

The correspondence of Barsanuphius and John generally reflects the legacy of Abba Isaiah also regarding their negative attitude to theology.[19] The principle is that dabbling in theology can only confuse the believer and introduce heretical thoughts into his mind. The study of theological issues should therefore be exclusively reserved for the experienced and perfect ascetic. This position is in fact compatible with the anti-intellectual tendency of Barsanuphius and John, who essentially objected to the study not only of non-Christian literature but all Christian literature as well, excluding the *Apophthegmata* and the Scriptures. Even independent study of the Scriptures was considered likely to inject dangerous heresy into the hearts of believers unfamiliar with its spiritual interpretation.[20] Thus the clear tendency of Barsanu-

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[16] On Abba Isaiah's concept of nature and counter-nature see A. Kofsky, "Aspects of Sin in the Monastic School Gaza," in *Transformations of the Inner Self in Ancient Religions*, J. Assmann and G. G. Stroumsa (eds.), Leiden, 1999, pp. 421-437. For its Monophysite implications see H. Keller, "L'abbé Isaïe," *Irénikon* 16 (1939), p. 125. For a theological profile of Abba Isaiah, see L. Perrone, *La chiesa di Palestina*, pp. 286-295.

[17] *Questions and Answers* 245.

[18] Kofsky, "Aspects of Sin," pp. 435-436.

[19] See Abba Isaiah, *Asceticon* 26, 18. This tendency was in fact expressed already by Zeno, an older contemporary of Isaiah in the region of Gaza (*Apophthegmata*, alph. Zeno 4).

[20] *Questions and Answers* 469. A layman asked if it was beneficial to tell many stories from the Bible and the lives of the ascetics. He was answered that the great virtue was silence, but due to our weakness one may talk about that which invigorates the soul, namely, the *Apophthegmata*, whereas Scripture may be dangerous for the unenlightened in their spiritual interpretation of it. See also *Questions and Answers* 697. This was apparently also the stance of Abba Isaiah. See *Asceticon* 30, 4, in statements ascribed to Poimen, one of the prominent figures of the *Apophthegmata*. Thus alongside a certain intellectual openness Abba Isaiah also expresses an anti-intellectual tendency (*Asceticon* 1, 6). On the danger inherent in the study of Scripture, see also *Apoph.* alph.

phius and John, at least regarding laymen and ordinary monks, was to perpetuate happy ignorance. It seems, however, that this attitude to theology reflects not merely a negative approach motivated by fear of doubt and heresy; it may also indicate a quietist monastic tendency eschewing any judgment of the other.[21] This tendency is reflected in the position that one should not be hasty even in the condemnation of heretics.[22]

From the consultation with Barsanuphius and John regarding the Origenist controversy of the sixth century we can glean something of their essential attitude to theology. While condemning Origenist concepts Barsanuphius had hardly addressed them, nor had he elaborated his objections beyond ultimately rejecting them and reiterating the necessity to focus on the study of the *Apophthegmata*.[23] He emphasized, though, that it was not important whether these views had been right or wrong, and that all, including Barsanuphius himself, should not be preoccupied with them; what was important was to concentrate on examining their emotions (ἐρευνᾶν τὰ πάθη), weeping, and feeling compunction (κλαῦσαι καὶ πενθῆσαι).[24] The crux of Barsanuphius' stance was that preoccupation with these matters caused only harm and confusion. Even the saints did not have a full understanding of the divine mysteries. His general approach to theology is summed up in his instruction to focus on the struggle against the passions, for which we would all have to account on the Day of Judgment, whereas we would not be examined concerning these matters of theology, whether we had studied them or not.[25] We may say, then, that Barsanuphius'

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Amoun 3; D. Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism*, Oxford, 1993, pp. 154-157. For anti-intellectual bias in the *Apophthegmata* see P. Rousseau, "The Spiritual Authority of the Monk-Bishop: Eastern Elements in Some Western Hagiography of the Fourth and Fifth Centuries," *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 22 (1971), p. 385; Despite the overall anti-intellectual trend, certain relations between Barsanuphius and John's circle and intellectual circles have continued, reflected in the correspondence with anonymous teachers of philosophy, though not on philosophical issues (*Questions and Answers* 664-666, 778), and in the arrival at the monastery of educated monks such as Dorotheus.

[21] On this monastic virtue in the *Apophthegmata* see G. Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*, Oxford, 1993, pp. 123-132.

[22] *Questions and Answers* 699.

[23] Ibid., 600.

[24] Ibid., 603. On the monastic ideal of compunction (πένθος), see I. Hausherr, *Penthos: The Doctrine of Compunction in the Christian East*, Kalamazoo, 1982.

[25] *Questions and Answers* 604.

principal attitude to theological issues is negative. He regards theology as inessential to the ideal Christian way of monastic life, focused as it is on the continual process of self-examination and repentance. Moreover, dabbling in theology distracts the mind, sets obstacles, and invites demonic machinations. Yet at the same time it appears that Barsanuphius himself was well versed in the important writings of the Church Fathers and in mainstream theological issues. The positions of Barsanuphius and John were generally orthodox, although it seems that their essential attitude to theology generated a tolerant stance toward those holding non-orthodox theological views. In fact, as far as I can tell, the Council of Chalcedon is never mentioned in the correspondence, a fact that seems true also of the writings of Dorotheus, though this fact by itself does not amount to much. The Council of Nicaea—mentioned once in the correspondence—is, according to John, the foundation of the Christian faith.[26] But here too it is questionable whether a hidden Monophysite stance can be discerned in this outwardly general and orthodox statement. I would suggest that the outwardly tolerant and quietist attitude of Barsanuphius and John—who avoided theological controversy, in contrast to the zealous involvement of many monks and monastic leaders in the Christological polemics and ecclesiastical power struggles of the day—may in this case also stem from their peculiar position as crypto-Monophysites.[27]

Two letters in the correspondence reflect the reality of religious persecution.[28] One is seemingly addressed to John by Monophysite laymen fearing persecution following a forthcoming ordination of certain clergymen who had opposed the ecclesiastical position of the emperor. They sought John's advice regarding the best course of action in face of the anticipated persecution.[29] If identification of the petitioners as Monophysites is valid, it may further enhance the impression of a neutral stance—possibly even crypto-Monophysite sentiments—on the part of the two Old Men. This impression can be seen as further strengthened by Barsanuphius' correspondence with Peter, the

[26] Ibid., 701.

[27] For further discussion of Barsanuphius and John's attitude to theology, see A. Kofsky, "The Byzantine Holy Person: The Case of Barsanuphius and John of Gaza," in *Saints and Role Models in Judaism and Christianity*, M. Poorthuis and J. Schwartz (eds.), Leiden, 2004.

[28] *Questions and Answers* 702, 786.

[29] Ibid., 786.

Patriarch of Jerusalem (524-552), who during much of the time span covered by the correspondence may have entertained Monophysite leanings—at least until 536, when he was forced to cut his ties with the Monophysites and denounce them.[30] This is virtually all I have been able thus far to squeeze out of the monastic sources of Gaza in support of my experimental hypothesis.

But our story is not yet quite ended. Sophronius in the seventh century and Theodore of Studios (759-826) at the beginning of the ninth might offer some further assistance with the question under discussion here. The catalogue of heretics and heresies in the synodical epistle of Sophronius lists both Peter the Iberian and his associate (συνόμιλος) Isaiah among Monophysite leaders. They are followed by Severus of Antioch and a series of Monophysite personalities including a certain Dorotheus.[31] Further down, Sophronius offers a list of heresies among which he seems to lump together a few appellations assigned to various Monophysite factions: Eutychians, Acephaloi, Barsanuphians, Isaiahns, Agnoetae, [32] and Jacobites.[33] For the limited purpose addressed here it is of interest to know exactly who the Monophysites Isaiah, Barsanuphius, and Dorotheus were that Sophronius had in mind. The first mention of Isaiah seems quite clearly to refer to Abba Isaiah of Gaza, the famous companion of Peter the Iberian, though it might allude to a different Monophysite Isaiah.[34] But is Abba Isaiah also the eponym of the group that Sophronius called Isaiahns? And is Sophronius' Dorotheus to be identified with the protagonist of Gazan monasticism or with some other Dorotheus? And what about Barsanuphius? According to the sixth century heresiograph Liberatus, the appellation Isaiahns was given to a splinter group of followers of

[30] Perrone, *La Chiesa di palestina*, pp.195-201.

[31] *Epistula Synodica*, PG 87, 3192B-C.

[32] On the identity of the Agnoetae see P. Schaff, "Agnoetae," in *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, Boston, 1877, vol. 1, p. 62.

[33] *Ep. Syn.*, PG 87, 3193C.

[34] The Eutychian bishop Isaiah of Hermopolis in the 470s, mentioned by Zacharias Rhetor, is a possible candidate (*Historia Ecclesiastica* 4, 12, ed. E.W. Brooks, CSCO 83, Louvain, 1919). Another possible candidate is an Isaiah who, according to Liberatus, has contended for the patriarchate of Alexandria following the death of Peter Mongus (477-490). See Liberatus, *Breviarium causae Nestorianorum et Eutychianorum*, 18, PL 68, 1029A. And the Monophysite "pseudo-bishop" Isaiah, whose maneuvers are recounted in detail by Severus, may also be considered. See Severus, *Sixth Book of Letters* II.3, pp. 231-257.

a certain Monophysite Isaiah, who contended for the patriarchate of Alexandria in succession to Peter Mongus.[35] But I would suggest that it might as well refer to Abba Isaiah of Gaza. Similarly, the title Barsanuphians may refer to a certain eponymous bishop who may have headed a Monophysite splinter group whose appellation later derived from him, as is claimed by Timotheus Presbyter[36] and by the eleventh century Coptic historian Mawhub b. Mufarrij of Alexandria (c. 1025-1100). These Barsanuphians may have been a splinter group that developed among the Acephaloi adversaries of Peter Mongus and the *Henoticon* of Emperor Zeno (482) in the time of Damian, the Coptic patriarch of Alexandria (578-607). Centered at Fustat at the beginning of the ninth century they reunited with the Coptic church under Patriarch Mark II of Alexandria (799-819).[37] But again, I would suggest that Sophronius' Barsanuphians may allude to Barsanuphius of Gaza rather than to the obscure Barsanuphius of the time of Patriarch Damian. The appearance of the two titles—i.e., Barsanuphians and Isaiahns— consecutively in Sophronius' list may further hint to a possible connection between them in Sophronius' mind, [38] though admittedly if the title Barsanuphians alludes to the above Egyptian group, then the title Isaiahns may equally refer to the other obscure Monophysite Egyptian faction. The name Dorotheus appears in Sophronius' list in a sequence of sixth-century Egyptian Monophysite figures. Hence a possible candidate for his identification may be the Dorotheus mentioned by Theophanes as a Monophysite bishop who was unlawfully ordained by the Theodosian faction in Alexandria—namely, the opponents of the party of Julian of Halicarnassus.[39] A less likely candidate is Dorotheus of Thessalonica (515-520). We should not entirely rule out, however, a possible identification of Sophronius' Dorotheus with Dorotheus of Gaza, especially if the guiding principle in Sophronius' list was chronological rather than geographical, which indeed seems to be the case. In fact, the Egyptian Dorotheus of Theophanes and Dorotheus of Gaza were practically contemporaries.

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[35] Liberatus, *Brev.* 18, PL 68, 1029B; Timotheus Presbyter, *De Receptione Haereticorum* 14, PG 86, I, 45.

[36] *De Recept. Haeret.* 13.

[37] *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria* (erroneously attributed to Severus b. al-Muqaffa' [d. after 987]), ed. B. Evetts, PO 1 (1907), 474-475; PO 10 (1917), 410-415.

[38] This sequence appears, however, also in Timotheus Presbyter, ibid.

[39] Theophanes, *Chronicle*, AM 6057 (564/5 C.E.).

A charge was brought against Theodore of Studios (759-826) by a certain Pamphilus "from the East" for admitting the heretics Isaiah, Barsanuphius, and Dorotheus as orthodox. He fervently defended himself by distinguishing three orthodox leaders with the names Isaiah, Barsanuphius, and Dorotheus, to whom he added a fourth, a Dositheus, from their heretical namesakes anathematized by Sophronius.[40] He repeated this defense in a testament to his disciples that was later quoted as an introduction to the manuscripts of Dorotheus.[41] The persons mentioned were apparently held in high esteem in Byzantine monastic circles and were especially venerated by Theodore. The above Barsanuphius and Dorotheus were undoubtedly the two familiar monastic leaders who had bequeathed their writings to the Byzantine monastic tradition. Theodore's Isaiah, however, was obviously not the Monophysite holy man Abba Isaiah of Gaza but most likely the Isaiah of the *Apophthegmata*, apparently identified by him with Isaiah of the *Asceticon*, as distinct from Isaiah of Gaza, regardless of the possibility of their being one and the same.[42] But the fact that there was such an attack on these three figures clearly indicates that Theodore's Isaiah was identified by some with Abba Isaiah of Gaza—or perhaps with some other obscure Monophysite Isaiah—and that Barsanuphius and Dorotheus of Gaza were also considered among certain circles to be Monophysite heretics, or were at least regarded with suspicion. This identification was based on—or at least supported at that time by—Sophronius' above-mentioned catalogue of heretics and heresies.[43] In other words, Sophronius' Barsanuphius and Dorotheus, and probably his Isaiah as well, were now understood to be the historical monastic leaders of Gaza. Is it possible that we may have here a certain notion regarding our protagonists that goes back to Sophronius himself and perhaps even to their own time? Theodore claimed that this question

[40] *Ep.* 34 (to Pope Leo III [795-816]), PG 99, 1028A-B; Regnault and de Préville, *Dorothée de Gaza*, pp.107-109.

[41] PG 99 1816B; Regnault and de Préville, *Dorothée de Gaza*, pp. 91-92; 107-109. See also Neyt, Introduction, 24-25. Here Theodore added to the list two persons, Mark and Hesychius, the latter probably to be identified as Hesychius of Jerusalem (d. after 451), who may have sympathized with the anti-Chalcedonians (John Rufus, *Plerophoriae* 10) and was accused posthumously of Monophysite leanings, see B. Baldwin, "Hesychios of Jerusalem," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, Oxford, 1991, Vol. 2, p. 925.

[42] Regnault, "Isaïe de Scété ou de Gaza?"

[43] PG 99 1028A-B; PG 99, 1816B.

was investigated by Patriarch Tarasius of Constantinople (784-806) and other authorities and that the three in question were proven orthodox, and in fact had had three heretical namesakes. Who these three namesakes were we are not told. Theodore further declared that he had found nothing impious in their teachings.[44] But this, admittedly, is exactly the reason for their admission. We have seen earlier how Abba Isaiah's writings could be adopted by the monastic tradition and παιδεία of both Chalcedonians and Nestorians; and this could have been even more easily achieved by Barsanuphius and Dorotheus, who were apparently regarded by most Byzantine ecclesiastics as Chalcedonians.

To sum up this short foray into speculative history, I would suggest that what took place in the monastic circle of Barsanuphius, John, Seridus, and Dorotheus— and perhaps in other Monophysite monastic centers in the Gaza region—as a reaction to the changing political ecclesiastical climate in the empire and in the region, was a transformation into a kind of crypto-monophysitism, adopting a Chalcedonian or neo-Chalcedonian veneer, and retreating to a monastic life of quietist piety and theological tolerance. These monastic circles continued to cherish the monastic legacy of Abba Isaiah, which was virtually free of any distinct traces of monophysitism, despite his reputation as a Monophysite holy man. The success of their dissimulating tactics can be seen in their reception into mainline Byzantine monastic orthodoxy. But the memory, or suspicion, of their Monophysite sympathies or crypto-monophysitism persevered into the ninth century. I am well aware that my tentative exercise in reconstruction leans heavily on circumstantial evidence and interpretive speculations that may be easily demolished. But I hope that cumulatively it may offer at least some plausibility for the scenario I have proposed.

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[44] PG 99, 1816B.

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# SOPHISTS AND PRIESTS IN LATE ANTIQUE GAZA ACCORDING TO CHORICIUS THE RHETOR

Yakov Ashkenazi

The character of the Christian schools in Palestine has been studied and discussed. In his erudite study, G. Downey drew a comprehensive picture of intellectual life in Christian Palestine, and his contribution to the study of education in late antiquity is unique.[1] Gaza, however, is known not only for its intellectual atmosphere but also for the great Christian teachers of the region in the late fifth century, such as Abba Isaiah, Barsanuphius and John, Dorotheus, Severus of Antioch, and Zacharias Rhetor. However, from the writings of the sophists of Gaza in the sixth century, it is clear that the ascetic fathers of the Gaza district took a negligible part in the secular life of the city. As described in the writings of the sophists from the school of that coastal city—Procopius, Choricius, Aeneas, and others—Gaza was a Hellenistic city with a secular environment.[2] The existence of a large ascetic community in the environs of the city raises the question: What kind of relationship existed between the flourishing secular society of Gaza and its Church hierarchy?

Looking closely at the writings of Choricius, [3] the head of the school of Gaza in the first half of the sixth century, there are very few references to religious life in the city. They can be found in some of Choricius' orations, such as those dedicated to the deeds of Bishop Marcian (c. 520-540) and those he delivered at the funerals of his teacher Procopius and of Mary, the bishop's mother. In these orations, Choricius praises his subjects for their good character and for their contribution to the city's life. Yet some understatements in Choricius'

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[1] G. Downey, "The Christian Schools of Palestine: A Chapter of Literary History," *Harvard Library Bulletin* 12 (1958), pp. 297-319.

[2] See F. M. Abel, "Gaza au VIe siècle d'après le rhéteur Chorikios," *Revue Biblique* 40 (1931), pp. 5-31; G. Downey, *Gaza in the Early Sixth Century*, Norman, 1963; R. Van Dam, "From Paganism to Christianity in Late Antique Gaza," *Viato*r 16 (1985), pp. 1-20; Y. Ashkenazi "Paganism in Gaza in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries," *Cathedra* 60 (1991), pp. 106-115 (Hebrew).

[3] Choricius Gazaeus, *Opera*, R. Foerster and E. Richtsteig, eds., Stuttgart, 1929 (references to the works of Choricius are to this edition).

words are enlightening with regard to his attitude to Christianity. Reading Choricius, we notice his delicate and prudent treatment of Christianity and Church matters. On the one hand he praises his subjects for their religious piety; on the other hand he speaks openly about the need of priests for a classical education. He describes the marvellous churches that the bishop dedicated to his city, yet he says not a word about the liturgy and rituals in these churches. He praises the bishop and his mother for their Christian devotion, but he avoids explicit Christian terms in his orations. In the writings of Choricius, we can find some cautious words relating to Christian belief, Christian worship, and Christian administration and hierarchy. The purpose of this study is to examine these words and to treat them as manifestations of the attitude of the sophists toward the Church and religious life in the city of Gaza.

In his second oration to Marcian, bishop of Gaza, Choricius says:

> Having given you birth, this city did not allow you to be brought up in strange arms, but having taken you up as a newborn baby and having raised you to the age when you were able to be educated, she brought you to the "poetic gates" and from there, when you had been filled with the Muses, she handed you over to the leader of the worshippers of Hermes; there, among those practicing the same art, you took first place for a number of speeches and for your way of life. Insofar as I could, I too have harvested from the same field.[4]

The term "poetic gates" (ποιητικάς θύρας), taken from Plato's *Phaedrus*, is a synonym for the school of grammar.[5] The "leader of the worshippers of Hermes" seems to be the head of the school of rhetoric of Gaza, who in the years when Marcian obtained his education there was the famous Procopius of Gaza.[6] Choricius, praising the bishop for his wisdom and for his rhetorical competence, notes that both those qualities were very evident when he himself was a student of the same school. The qualities of a bishop, according to Choricius, derive from his educational background. A bishop must be a person with a classical education and a venerable citizen of the city.

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[4] Choricius, *Laud. Marc.* II, 7, pp. 29-30; Eng. trans. F. K Listas, "Choricius of Gaza: An Approach to His Work," Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1981, pp. 135-136.

[5] Plato, *Phaedrus: Platonis Opera* (I. Burnet, ed.), vol. II, Oxford, 1960, 245A.

[6] Listas, "Choricius of Gaza." p. 246, n. 15.

Peter Brown points out that ecclesiastical power in the West was in the hands of the bishop, while in the East, it was in the hands of the monk.[7] Therefore, a combination of ecclesiastical rank and holy-man charisma is to be found in most of the bishoprics in the Holy Land, due to the vast numbers of monks that were appointed to the office.[8] The qualities a bishop must have are well described by Basil, bishop of Caesarea in Capadocia, in the second half of the fourth century. Basil says that a bishop must be first in his diocese, a good theologian, a father to the young and a colleague to those of the same age, a protector of the people, and a supplier of their needs.[9] Basil does not refer to the bishop's education. It is important to note that Basil himself received a proper classical education during his days in Athens, and even earlier in the school of Libanius in Constantinople.[10] In one of his orations, Gregory of Nazianzus, a close friend of Basil, and a fellow student from the days in Athens, says: "two ways are familiar to us: the first and more precious leading us to our sacred buildings and the masters there, the second and the one of less account, to our secular teachers."[11] Basil was in fact educated to be a teacher of rhetoric but became a bishop. When he speaks about Greek *paideia* to the young students, [12] he tells them to be cautious in their study. He does not prevent them from learning the classics but never says anything in favor of the classics as a requirement for the clergyman.[13] As H. Marrou commented, the great fathers of the late fourth century received their education in classical schools and knew all about the

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[7] P. Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," *Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971), pp. 95-96.

[8] See appendixes A and B in Y. Ashkenazi, "The Patriarchate of Jerusalem: Its Organization and Its Place in Christian Society in Byzantine Palestine," Ph.D. diss., University of Haifa, 1999, pp. 311-321 (Hebrew).

[9] Basil used these words in his funeral oration to Musonios, bishop of Neocaesarea in Capadocia. See Basil, *Epistulae* 28.2 (Y. Courtonne, *Saint Basile: Lettres*, vol. I, Paris, 1957, p. 68).

[10] See P. Rousseau, *Basil of Casarea*, Oxford, 1994. pp. 36-60.

[11] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orations*, 43.21 (PG 36, p. 524). Eng. trans. L. P. McCauley, *Funeral Orations by Saint Gregory Nazianzen and Saint Ambrose*. Fathers of the Church 22, New York, 1953, p.45.

[12] Basil, *Homiliae* 22 (PG 31, cols. 564-589).

[13] I. Karayannopoulos, "St. Basil's Social Activity: Principles and Praxis," in P.J. Fedwick (ed.), *Basil of Caesarea: Christian, Humanist, Ascetic*. A Sixteen-Hundredth Anniversary Symposium, vol. I, Toronto, 1981, pp. 380-383. See also H. I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, trans. G. Lamb, London, 1956, pp. 322.

[14] Marrou, *A History of Education*, pp. 328-329.

dangers of classical learning.[14]

It is hard to find Christian educational institutions that prepared Church officials for their office. Young monks, after entering a monastery were taught to read and write by older monks, [15] and Basil says that youngsters should be taught names, verses of proverbs and stories from the Bible.[16] In a few cases monasteries opened their gates to παῖδες βιωτικοί (children of the world, in the words of Basil), [17] but very few took advantage of that opportunity.[18] Church schools developed in the West from the sixth century onward;[19] in the East, however, the educational system underwent very few changes in the transformation from paganism to Christianity.[20]

In Gaza, as in other cities in the East, the local clergy were educated together with laymen.[21] Nevertheless, it is clear that in Palestine, where a vast number of monastic centers had developed since the fourth century, the clergy received their education in churches and monasteries. One of these important monastic centers was located in the suburbs of Gaza. Yet Choricius mentions neither monasteries nor monks in his writings. Other sophists from Gaza also disregard the monks of the area, who were, in the late fifth and early sixth century, very much involved in Christological debates and eccle-siastical activities. It is interesting though to note the relations between the monk Abba Isaiah and the rhetor Aeneas of Gaza, as reflected in the *Vita* of the monk. According to the *Vita*, Aeneas consulted with Abba Isaiah on his understanding of Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus.[22] Yet no monk is mentioned by Aeneas, or by any other sophist from Gaza. When Choricius mentions the family of Bishop Marcian, he notes that the brothers of the bishop held high office in the city and

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[15] *Pachomian Koinonia*, vol. II (Pachomian Chronicles and rules), trans. A. Veilleux, Kalamazoo, 1981, precepts 139-140, p. 166.

[16] Basil, *Regulae fusius Tractatae* 15 (PG 31, cols. 935-936).

[17] Basil, *Regulae brevius tractatae* 292 (PG 31, col. 1288).

[18] Marrou, *A History of Education*, pp. 332-333.

[19] Ibid. pp. 334-336.

[20] Downey, "The Christian Schools of Palestine," p. 297.

[21] Downey, "The Christian Schools of Palestine," p. 325.

[22] Zacharias Scholasticus, *Vita Isaiae Monachi* (ed. E.W. Brooks), Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium. Scriptores Syri. III, vol. XXV (1907), p. 12 in the Syriac version, p. 8 in the Latin translation. On Isaiah see also B. Bitton-Ashkelony and A. Kofsky, "Gazan Monasticism in the Fourth-Sixth Centuries," *Proche Orient Chrétien* 50 (2000), pp. 30-38.

that one of them, Anastasius, was a bishop in the city of Eleutheropolis.[23] It is clear, however, that Marcian was not a "holy man" before he was ordained as bishop. He did not come from the desert and did not practice asceticism; he came from an upper-class family. Choricius describes the bishop in his boyhood milieu as "surrounded by virtuous men" (ἀγαθοῖς ἀνδράσι κυκλοὺμενος)[24] and notes that he received a proper classical education in the schools of the city, the same education that every professional acquired. It is worthwhile now to explore the character of the educational system in the school of Gaza and to find out how Christian education merged with classical education.

In a speech delivered at Procopius' funeral, Choricius mentioned, in addition to the "poetic gates", the "palaestra of Hermes" (Ἑρμοῦ παλαίστραν)[25]—a reference to the school of rhetoric.[26] Like other cities in the Greco-Roman world, Gaza apparently provided education for its citizens as part of the municipal services.[27] Yet from Choricius' orations, it seems that in Gaza the place of the school in the city's life was much more significant than in other cities. For in Gaza a substantial number of the students from the school of rhetoric held office in the city's civil and religious life.[28] Choricius provides us with very little information on Christian learning in the schools of Gaza. He speaks generally about combining the study of the Scriptures with rhetoric, as a requirement for a churchman, but he says nothing

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[23] Y. Tsafrir, L. Di Segni, and J. Green, *Tabula Imperii Romani: Iudaea Palaestina*, Jerusalem, 1994, pp. 118-119.

[24] Choricius, *Laud. Marc.* II, 11, p. 31.

[25] Choricius, *In funer. Proc.* 5, p. 111.

[26] Isidore of Pelusium writes about the παλαιστήριον μοναχικά, the monastic palaestra, as a metaphor for the struggle of the monk (Isidorus Pelusiota, *epistularum libri quinque*, I, 262, PG 78, col. 340b).

[27] For rhetoric schools in Athens and Alexandria as part of the municipal services, see F. R. Trombley, *Hellenic Religion and Christianization, c. 370-529*, Leiden, 1993-1994, II, p. 2. For schools in the cities of Palestine, see Downey, "The Christian Schools of Palestine," p. 319; J. Geiger, "Greek Intellectuals from Ascalon," *Cathedra* 60 (1991), pp. 5-16 (Hebrew); P. Mayerson, "The City of Elusa in the Literary Sources of the Fourth-Sixth Centuries," *Israel Exploration Journal* 33 (1983), pp. 247-253.

[28] Apart from bishops such as Marcian there were lawyers such as Zacharias, the brother of Procopius, who served in the civil administration of the city; Aeneas, who became the defensor of the city; and Nestorius, who was a scholasticus from Gaza and served on the city council. For these and others, see Y. Dan, "The Legal Profession in Palestine during the Byzantine period," *Israel Law Review* 17 (1982), pp. 286-288. For the uniquness of Gaza among the cities of the East in late antiquity, see Abel, "Gaza au VIe siècle d'après le rhéteur Chorikios," p. 5.

about the content of this study. It seems however, that Christian education in the schools of Gaza did not include training for the priesthood. Where, then, did the clergy receive their training?

In his second oration to Marcian, Choricius says that the bishop learned religious matters (πρὸς ἀκρόσιν θείων ὤδινες ἀκουσμάτων) by studying in the school of a teacher who was blessed by this kind of education; he was the leader of the priests (ἱρωσύνης γάρ εἶχεν ἡγεμονίαν) and loved him as a son, for he was his mother's brother.[29] According to one opinion, the brother of Marcian's mother was Aeneas, the well-known sophist, who was the bishop of Gaza before Marcian.[30] There is no mention of Aeneas in the episcopal list of Gaza; yet if this was the same man, it is an example of the special relationship between the city's rhetorical school and the Church.[31] It seems that Christian education was part of the program of Gaza's academy. This may be deduced from Choricius' words regarding his teacher, Procopius. He notes that Procopius was very skillful in the Holy Scriptures[32]—a fact that is apparent from his biblical commentaries[33]—and adds that had Procopius not worn civil garments, one could have mistaken him for a priest (πλὴν τοῦ σχήματος μόνου πάντα ἦν ἱερεὺς).[34] Procopius, as far as we know, was not a monk, and as Choricius notes, he was not a priest. Therefore, we may assume that he gained his Christian knowledge in the school of Gaza.

Elsewhere in the funeral oration dedicated to Procopius, Chori-

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[29] Choricius, *Laud. Marc.* II, 8, p. 30.

[30] Listas, "Choricius of Gaza," pp. 246-247 note 17. On Aeneas of Gaza, see E. Legier, "Essai de biographie d'Enée de Gaza," *Oriens Christianus* 17 (1907), pp. 349-369.

[31] For the bishops of Gaza in the episcopal list of Byzantine Palestine, see G. Fedalto, *Hierarchia Ecclesiastica Orientalis*: Series episcoporum ecclesiarum christianarum orientalium, II, Rome, 1988, pp. 1021-1022.

[32] Choricius, *Or. fun. In Proc.* 21, p. 117, lines 12-16: Choricius says that listening to his oration, one might think that Procopius never touched the holy books (συγγραμάτων). Choricius is using here the Platonic term σύγγραμμα to describe the Christian Scriptures. Again, he avoids using traditional Christian terms such as τα βίβλια.

[33] Procopius wrote some commentaries on the prophets, but the only text that has come down to us is that on Isaiah. G. Kennedy thinks that Procopius was a pagan and that his religious works were written only in his last days, after his conversion to Christianity. See G, Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric under Christian Emperors*, Princeton, 1983, p. 171.

[34] *Or. Fun. In Proc.* 21, p. 117, lines 18-19.

[35] Ibid. 50, p. 127.

cius says that after Procopius' death, the management of the school passed into the hands of Bishop Marcian.[35] We have no information on Marcian's management nor any idea for how long he held this position. He may have filled the office only until a "full professor" received the title, or his position may have been a permanent one. In any case, the fact that a bishop headed the rhetorical school, even for a short time, is quite exceptional. Moreover, this phenomenon may reflect not merely an administrative reality but also an educational reality, demonstrating the scholarly cooperation of sophists and clergy in the local academy. The biblical commentaries of Procopius, along with his classical writings; the possibility that Aeneas of Gaza was a bishop; the occupation of the chair of the school by Bishop Marcian; the two orations by Choricius glorifying the deeds of the bishop—all lead to the conclusion that in Gaza, sophists and priests shared the same education, and that the school of rhetoric had a close relationship with the Church hierarchy and was perhaps run by the same management.

From a careful reading of Choricius' orations, we can infer that the status of the Church in Gaza was quite like that of the Church in many other cities in Palestine. The bishop was one of the seniors of the city, and some of the other priests obviously enjoyed a similar status. In his orations, Choricius emphasizes the obligation of the bishop to his city. He informs us on the deeds of the bishop: building churches, walls, stoas and bathhouses;[36] defending the citizens from being exploited by soldiers;[37] operating social welfare for the benefit of the poor;[38] and sailing to the capital as a diplomatic delegate for the sake of his city.[39] All these activities reveal the bishop as a dominant personality in the city,[40] a fact corroborated also by inscriptions from various cities in Palestine, studied recently by Leah Di Segni.[41]

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[36] Choricius, *Laud. Marc.* I, 8, pp. 4-5; I, 53 p. 16. On the churches of Gaza, see Abel, "Gaza au VIe siècle d'après le rhéteur Chorikios."

[37] Choricius, *Laud Marc.* II, 24, p. 34.

[38] Ibid., I, 78 p. 22.

[39] Choricius, *In funer. Mariam* 21, p. 105.

[40] A. Rabinowitz, "Choricius of Gaza on Eretz-Israel," in M. Schwabe and J. Gutmann (eds.), *J. Levi Memorial Volume*, Jerusalem, 1949, p. 178; Listas, "Choricius of Gaza," p. 69; Y. Dan, *The City in Eretz-Israel during the Late Roman and Byzantine Periods*, Jerusalem, 1984, pp. 90-91 (Hebrew).

[41] L. Di Segni, "Dated Greek Inscriptions from Palestine from the Roman and Byzantine Periods," Ph.D. diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1997.

Choricius describes Marcian as master of the festivals: it is he who organizes feasts and distributes the food to participants. Choricius says that the city nurtured Marcian and now he is repaying his city.[42] We may assume that the dominant status of the bishop reflects the status of the Church hierarchy of the city. In his funerary oration on Mary, the mother of the bishop, Choricius claims that the office of priesthood is "the highest of all offices" τῳ καλλίστῳ τῶν ὄντων, ἱερωσύνἰ.[43] These words may merely reflect Choricius' respect for the people attending the funeral of Mary;[44] but it should also be noted that the priests did gain a high status in the city, as the civil law instructed.[45]

According to the Church fathers, the roll of the bishop as a leader of the Church is to protect and lead the members of the community. Basil the Great describes the ideal προεστῶτες, the leaders of the Christian community,[46] as "distinguished vessels of election."[47] In the hagiographic literature, the bishop is a holy man, leading an ascetic life even while in office.[48] He cures the sick,[49] sells priestly garments and gives the money to the poor,[50] and releases prisoners.[51] It is clear, then, that the bishop was a shield against poverty. However, as Brown notes, the social role of the bishop was not necessarily to protect the poor but rather to prevent a "middling" citizen from becoming one.[52]

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[42] Choricius, *Laud. Marc.* I, 14-15.

[43] Choricius, *In funer. Mariam* 7, pp. 101-102.

[44] Listas, "Choricius of Gaza," p. 294, note 12.

[45] For the legislation, see Ashkenazi, "The Patriarchate of Jerusalem," p. 24.

[46] The term προεστώς is a participle of the verb προηγέομαι and is usually used to describe a bishop or a priest, sometimes an ascetic leader. See G.W.H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, Oxford, 1961, p. 1148. In Basil's writings, and particularly in his two *asceticon*s, the term is used to describe the duties of the Christian leader toward his comunity. See P. J. Fedwick, *The Church and the Charisma of Leadership in Basil of Caesarea*, Toronto, 1979, p. 47, n. 44

[47] Basil of Caesarea, *Epistolae*, 161.1, in *Saint Basil: The Letters*, vol. II, Eng. trans. R. J. Deferrari (Loeb Classical Library), Cambridge, Mass., 1928, pp. 410-412.

[48] See, e.g., the description of Peter the Iberian as bishop of Maiumas in John Rufus, *Vita Petri Iberi* (ed R. Raabe), Leipzig, 1985, pp. 50-53; and the story of Zosimus of Sinai, who continued his seclusion afer his appointment as bishop, in John Moschus, *Pratum Spirituale* 123 (PG 87.3, col. 2935).

[49] As did Basil and John of Choziba, bishop of Caesarea Maritima. See Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* (ed J. Bidez, Berlin, 1960) 6, 34, p. 291, and Evagrius Scholasticus, *Historia ecclesiastica* (ed. J. Bidez and L. Parmentier, London, 1898), 4, 7.

[50] As did Cyril of Jerusalem (Sozomen, *HE* 4, 25, pp. 181-182).

[51] As did Theognius, bishop of Bethelea near Gaza. See Paul of Elusa, *Vita Sancti Theogenii*, ed. J. Van den Gheyn, *Analecta Bollandiana* 10 (1891), pp. 101-103.

[52] P. Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire*, Hanover, New Hampshire, 2002, pp. 59-60.

The bishop and his clergy were part of this middle class in most of the cities of the later empire, [53] and as part of this class they served the needs of a much larger portion of the city's population and not only the poor.[54]

The hagiographic literature treats the bishop as a holy man. Even though the civil role of the bishop is well drawn by hagiographers, their main interest is to enlighten the reader by concentrating on the miracles and monastic habits of the monk-bishop.[55] Holiness and miracles are not included in Choricius' depiction of the bishop. In his orations, he points mainly to the secular role of the bishop. This attitude sheds light on the "head of the Church" in the city as an active participant in the civil administration, rather than on the priesthood as a separate and competing hierarchy.[56]

As we review the role of the bishop and his clergy in a secular society, we may look at the attitude of the secular society toward Christian life in Gaza, as reflected in the writings of Choricius. A notable example of Choricius' attitude toward Christianity is to be found in his words of praise to Bishop Marcian for building the church dedicated to Stephen the Proto-martyr.[57] Choricius indicates that his reason for delivering this oration is the honor he feels for the martyr—to whom he does not refer by name—who suffered and died for his faith. In fact, Choricius does not mention any martyrs or saints by name in his writings. This avoidance may derive from rhetorical considerations;[58] yet even if this was the true reason for his avoiding any kind of direct reference to Christian names or terms, [59] despite his good knowledge

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[53] Ibid. 50.

[54] Ibid. 46.

[55] For further details on the "monk-bishop," see P. Rousseau, "The Spiritual Authority of the Monk Bishop," *Journal of Theological Studies* 22 (1971), pp. 380-419. See also P. Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, Oxford, 1996, p. 113.

[56] See Dan, *The City in Eretz-Israel*, pp. 90-102.

[57] Choricius, *Laud. Marc.* II, 27; Choricius uses neither the name Stephen nor the term πρωτο-μάρτυρος. We realize it from the phrase πρῶτῳ τὸν ὑπὲρ εὐσεβείας τολμῆσαντι βίον (the first who had the courage [to offer] his life for the sake of the faith).

[58] Rabinowitz, "Choricius of Gaza on Eretz-Israel," p. 175.

[59] Choricius never refers to a church as an ἐκκλεσία or to a bishop as ἐπισκόπος. He prefers rhetorical terms such as Ναός—common for Jewish or pagan temples but rarely used by early Christian writers to describe a church. See Lampe, *Patrisic Greek Lexicon*, pp. 897-898.

of the Scriptures,[60] it is nevertheless conspicuous.[61] Even if Choricius deliberately avoided Christian terms, nothing in his writings indicates that he was not a devout Christian. Photius notes that Choricius was an upholder of the true religion and respected the rites and holy places of the Christians, although he introduced Greek myths and heathen stories into his writings, sometimes even when discussing sacred things.[62] It seems that Photius is defending Choricius as a Christian (against suspicion of paganism), but not necessarily as an upholder of the orthodox doctrine. It is interesting, though, to find out what sort of Christian devotion Choricius and his fellow teachers and students adopted, considering the diversity of Christian beliefs in Gaza during the first half of the sixth century.

Addressing his teacher, Procopius, Choricius tells us that he was "trained well in reference to the doctrines of piety (τά δόγματα τῆς εὐσεβείας) as well as to those arguments that attempt to contradict them (τά τούτοις ἀντιλέγειν ἐπιχειροῦντα), how to carefully study the former and successfully criticize the latter."[63] Nor do we know for sure either what "the doctrines of piety" were nor what the arguments were that attempted to contradict them. Perhaps the doctrines of piety were those of the Christian faith and the contradictions referred to paganism. However, because Choricius describes Procopius' piety, his knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, and his faith, we may assume that Choricius is referring to the orthodox faith and Christian heresies, respectively. The question should therefore be, what kind of orthodox faith did Procopius advocate? Was it the Chalcedonian orthodoxy or the Monophysite orthodoxy? It is a complicated issue. An indirect testimony from a sophist as to the strength of the Monophysites in Gaza can be found in the writings of Procopius, who headed the school of Gaza at the end of the fifth century. Procopius wrote a panegyric

[60] Even when Choricius tells the story of the Cana miracle (John 2:1-12), he does not use the names of Jesus and Mary. See Choricius, *Laud. Marc.* I, 58, pp. 17-18.

[61] Procopius of Caesarea, in describing the rebuilding of Hagia Sophia by Justinian, praises the emperor for his contribution to the beauty of the city, but like Choricius, he uses no Christian terms in his description. See G. Downey, "Paganism and Christianity in Procopius," *Church History* 18 (1949), p. 102; this may also support Downey's opinion that Procopius of Caesarea spent his schooldays in Gaza. See Downey, "The Christian Schools of Palestine," p. 301.

[62] Photius, *Bibliothèque*, ed. and trans. René Henry, Paris, 1959-1991, p.32.

[63] Choricius, *In funer. Procop.* 21.

dedicated to the Monophysite emperor Anastasius.[64] The fact that such an oration was delivered in a city as important as Gaza at a time when the devoted Chalcedonian patriarch Elias ruled the see of Jerusalem may show that Gaza was a stronghold of Monophysitism.

The dominance of Monophysites such as Peter the Iberian, John Rufus, Abba Isaiah, and Zachariah Scholasticus in the Gaza area at the end of the fifth century and beginning of the sixth[65] led some scholars to raise the idea of cooperation between Monophysites and sophists, based on a common identity.[66] Derwas Chitty says that "Abba Isaiah's contact with Aeneas the sophist of Gaza suggests a close relationship between our highly educated monastic circles and the more secular literary school of Gaza, flourishing at this time."[67] Lorenzo Perrone speaks about the "openness" that characterized the Christian communities, monastic and secular, in the late fifth and early sixth centuries in the Gaza district.[68] If the monastic circles near Gaza were mostly Monophysite, as noted above, it may be of interest to learn what kind of "openness" developed between them and the secular sophists of the town? Was it merely intellectual pursuits that brought them together, as in the case of Aeneas and Abba Isaiah, or were their relations based on common theological ideas? Due to the lack of direct sources, it seems this question will remain unanswered.

Another aspect of the relations between priests and sophists in Gaza was their attitude toward the secular environment of the city. In one of his famous orations Choricius defends "those who perform life in the theater." Choricius needed to deliver such a speech because of a local regulation that banned the participation of rhetors in theatrical

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[64] Procopius Gazaei, *Panegyricus*, PG 87, cols. 2186ff.

[65] The tolerant religious policy of Emperor Anastasius is known from other places in the empire and from several incidents of collision between Christians and pagans. See D. J. Constantelos, "Paganism and the State in the Age of Justinian" *The Catholic Historical Review* 50 (1964-65), p. 373.

[66] B. Rosen, "An Apostate Jewess from Tyre: The Abbess of a Monophysite Monastery South of Caesarea," *Cathedra* 61 (1991), pp. 58-59 (Hebrew).

[67] D. J. Chitty, *The Desert a City*, Oxford, 1966, p. 105.

[68] L. Perrone, "Monasticism as a Factor of Religious Interaction in the Holy Land during the Byzantine Period," in A. Kofsky and G. G. Stroumsa (eds.), *Sharing the Sacred: Religious Contacts and Conflicts in the Holy Land, First-Fifteenth Centuries C.E.*, Jerusalem, 1998, pp. 67-96. Alongside this openness, we can find a strong anti-intellectual tendency in the letters of Barsanuphius and John, two monks who where situated near Gaza in the first half of the sixth century. See B. Bitton-Ashkelony, A. Kofsky, "Gazan Monasticism in the Fourth-Sixth Centuries, p. 32, note. 88.

events.[69] In this oration, Choricius adduces some examples of cities in which rhetors and teachers take part in theatrical events.[70] In addition, in his oration in memory of his teacher, Procopius, Choricius recounts that Procopius used to go to the theater with his "τὰς οἰκείας γονὰς"[71] to attract young people to the love of speech and to impress the intellectuals (λογάδα). It seems, then, that the theater of Gaza was not only a place of popular entertainment but also one where sophists delivered their orations. Possibly the Church's objection to theatrical events was limited to performances that included manifestations of admiration for the ancient gods—an admiration that Choricius himself did not abandon.[72]

One of the letters sent to Barsanuphius and John, the well-known monks of the Gaza district in the early sixth century, contains an appeal by the local bishop to the elders. The bishop asks them what to say to the ἄρχων of the city, who is trying to introduce pagan spectacles into the theater in contravention of canon and civil law.[73] We may assume that the people of Gaza, and especially the sophists, continued to attend theatrical events that included forbidden acts such as the archon tried to introduce. However, the acts included also orations delivered by the sophists for the pleasure of the audience, among whom one might find the bishop and clergy of the city.

## *Conclusion*

From the writings of Choricius we can gather that the Church in Gaza was an integral part of the city's life. The classical school of Gaza provided the clergy's educational needs, while the Church sponsored

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[69] Choricius, *Apologia Mimorum*, p. 104.

[70] Ibid., p. 106.

[71] Choricius, *In funer. Procop.* 9. The word γονή can be translated as offspring, race, or generation. See H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, and H. Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford, 1983, p. 356. Listas ("Choricius of Gaza," pp. 7-9, 301, note 15) prefers translating it as works, but there is no reference to such a meaning in classical or patristic literature. I therefore propose to translate it as children. Choricius may be referring to Procopius' own children (τὰς οἰκείας γονὰς) or to his students.

[72] On the attitude of the Church toward the theater, see V. Cottas, *Le téâtre a Byzance*, Paris, 1931; Y. Ashkenazi, "The Palestine Church and Leisure Culture in Late Antiquity," in A. Segal (ed.), *Aspects of Theater and Culture in the Graeco-Roman World*, Haifa, 1994, pp. 95-102 (Hebrew).

[73] Barsanuphius and John, *Questions and Answers* 836.

educational services in the city[74] and occasionally, perhaps, even ran the school.

In other academic centers of the empire the relationship between sophists and priests, at the beginning of the sixth century, was quite tense.[75] In Berytos, for example, the local bishop ordered the burning of philosophy books and the arrest of students from the local law school, on a charge of exercising pagan rites.[76] In Constantinople, the sophists were persecuted in the time of Justinian, as they were in other centers of the empire.[77] But in Gaza, Choricius describes a reality in which sophists and priests, Hellenistic heritage and Christian devotion, Christian worship and pagan festivals, and perhaps even Chalcedonians and anti-Chalcedonians, existed alongside each other in a harmony.

Gaza is a unique example of a flourishing coastal city with a well-rooted Hellenistic heritage. Despite the Christianization of the city at the beginning of the fifth century, the city had not lost its vitality. On the contrary, Gaza became a cosmopolitan city with a famous intellectual center and an eminent monastic community in its suburbs. The combination between the Hellenistic heritage of the city, which is so well described in the writings of its sophists, and the cosmopolitan monastic community in the area, turned the sixth century into a flourishing time in the annals of Gaza.

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[74] See R. A. Kaster, *Guardian of Language: The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity*, Berkeley, 1988, p. 79.

[75] G. Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric under Christian Emperors*, Princeton, 1983, pp. 177-179.

[76] Zacharias Scholasticus, *Vita Severi*, M. A. Kugener (ed.), *Patrologia Orientalis* II, 1, 1903, pp. 66-69.

[77] For Constantinople, see John Malalas, *Chronographia*, L. Dindorf (ed.), *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae*, Bonn, 1831, p. 449. See also Constantelos, "Paganism and the State," p. 375. For Athens, see Malalas *Chronographia*, p. 451; G. Downey, "Justinian's View of Christianity and Greek Classics," *Anglican Theological Review* 11 (1958), pp. 12-13.

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# THE *EKPHRASIS EIKONOS* OF PROCOPIUS OF GAZA: THE DEPICTION OF MYTHOLOGICAL THEMES IN PALESTINE AND ARABIA DURING THE FIFTH AND SIXTH CENTURIES

Rina Talgam

This study explores the preservation of classical culture in Byzantine Palestine and Arabia through the *Ekphrasis Eikonos* of Procopius of Gaza. To gain a further insight into the way themes derived from pagan mythology were rendered in Byzantine secular art, Procopius' *ekphrasis* is compared with the archeological evidence from the region.

Such a comparison however is faced with many difficulties.[1] Not only has the mural painting described by Procopius not been preserved, but our knowledge of the archeology of Gaza in general is very scant and his testimony therefore cannot be checked against its immediate environment. To date, only a single mosaic, that of a synagogue, has been uncovered in the city.[2] The depiction of King David there is based on the rendering of Orpheus enchanting animals with his lyre playing. But this represents the transformation of a mythological scene into a Jewish one, rather than the depiction of a pagan theme.[3] Moreover, the panel bearing the figure of David-Orpheus is only part of a larger composition, the rest of which is lost to us.

Another methodological problem to be taken into account when attempting to make inferences about the painting, from Procopius' description, stems from the nature of an *ekphrasis*.[4] Although Procopius states in his *ekphrasis* that he is drawing a verbal picture, his description

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[1] I am grateful to Prof. L. I. Levine for his comments on this paper. If faults remain, they are my own.

[2] A. Ovadiah, "Excavations in the Area of the Ancient Synagogue at Gaza (Preliminary Report)," *Israel Exploration Journal* 19 (1969), pp. 193-98.

[3] On this category, see K. Weitzmann, "The Survival of Mythological Representations in Early Christian and Byzantine Art and their Impact on Christian Iconography," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 14 (1960), pp. 43-68.

[4] D. Carrier, "*Ekphrasis* and Interpretation: Two Modes of Art History Writing," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 27 (1987), pp. 20-31; L. James and R. Webb, "To Understand Ultimate Things and Enter Secret Places: *Ekphrasis* and Art in Byzantium,"

is the interpretation and elaboration of a scholar. Different people understand and describe a painting in different ways.

Having carefully studied the *Ekphrasis Eikonos*, Paul Friedländer has proposed a convincing reconstruction of the painting (Figs. 1, 2).[5] But in relating to his reconstruction, it should be borne in mind that it is a tentative one; conscious of his inability to reconstruct the style of the original painting, Friedländer commissioned various artists to draw his reconstruction.

## *The Painting Described by Procopius in the* Ekphrasis Eikonos

This essay opens with a presentation of Friedländer's proposed reconstruction, which is followed by an appreciation of both the painting and the observations made by Procopius. As described at length by Procopius, the painting illustrates the two main episodes in the Euripidean tragedy *Hippolytus*.

The first (Fig. 1) takes place within the palace. At the center of a hypostyle hall, Theseus, king of Athens, is shown lying on his bed. That he is asleep is indicated by his relaxed posture, as well as by the figure of Hypnos leaning on his bed. Two of the servants (the boy bearing the fan and the boy in charge of the hounds), taking advantage of their master's sleep, have abandoned their duties. A third boy, fearing the king's wrath if he should wake up and notice his servants' misbehavior, tries to arouse the fan bearer. Close to the king's bed sits his wife, Phaedra. She is restless, tormented by her hopeless and tragic love for her stepson, Hippolytus. An Eros figure, hovering above her, holds a torch and points toward a painting of Hippolytus hunting a lion, signifying Phaedra's uncontrollable desire. An old nursemaid, reading the thoughts of her mistress, is persuading her to write a letter to Hippolytus expressing her love, while another Eros figure standing with legs crossed, is helpfully handing Phaedra a quill and ink. Two maid servants observe the scene; one appears to be explaining to the other what is ailing the queen by pointing to the painting of Hippolytus. A third girl is bringing a box containing Phaedra's jewels.

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*Art History* 14 (1991), pp. 1-17; J. Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer: The Transformation of Art from the Pagan World to Christianity*, Cambridge, 1995, pp. 21-48.

[5] P. Friedländer, *Spätantiker Gemäldezyklus in Gaza: des Prokopios von Gaza* ΕΚΦΡΑΣΙΣ ΕΙΚΟΝΟΣ, Rome, 1938.

The architectonic background includes a wall with niches, fluted columns with golden capitals, and an entablature decorated with four narrative panels featuring themes from the Iliad. From right to left the panels present: Hippolytus hunting a lion, Theseus killing the Minotaur, Ariadne giving Theseus the ball of threads, and Ariadne gazing at Theseus, who is standing among the rescued young Athenians. On the cornice are perched a peacock and a pair of doves. Tall trees appear in the background.

The second scene (Fig. 2) is set in the mountains. Hippolytus accompanied by Daphne and their servants were out horse riding when the old nursemaid, Phaedra's messenger, appeared. Hippolytus, disgusted by the contents of the letter, has thrown it to the ground, and the broken tablet reveals to all Phaedra's attempt at seduction. Daphne too appears to be shocked by the queen's behavior. The old nursemaid has become the victim of the hunt. She kneels, bleeding, trying to protect herself from a cruel servant who is beating her with a club and the attack of two savage dogs. A bald falconer tries to stop this vicious assault. In the background, on the slopes of the mountain, bucolic scenes are rendered, peopled by shepherds, peasants, and hunters who witness the drama. Four panels in the upper part of the painting feature scenes from the *Iliad*. The two on the left depict Priam and Antenor on a mission to Agamemnon; the two on the right, respectively, the combat between Menelaos and the triumphant Paris over Helen, and Paris leading Helen to Troy. In the top part of the painting, above the panels, is the statuesque figure of its patron standing in a harbor filled with boats.

The Gaza painting is a free interpretation of *Hippolytus Stephanephorus* by Euripides, in which Phaedra tries to overcome her passion and it is the nursemaid rather than she herself who approaches Hippolytus. A major departure from Euripides is the depiction of Theseus asleep in the palace; in the classical text it is mentioned at least twice that he is away on a state visit to Troezen (lines 281, 660). The originality of this feature explains Procopius' reasons for making particular reference to it. Theseus, portrayed in classical art and literature as a model of the Athenian ethos, is depicted in Gaza not as a majestic king and glorious hero, but as a weary old man betrayed not only by his young wife but also by his servants. Another major modification is the brutal punishment meted out to the old nursemaid; in the Euripidean tragedy she returns from the mission unharmed.

A comparison of the Gazan painting to Roman depictions of the

tragedy reveals that such punishment as that inflicted on the nursemaid was entirely alien to the visual tradition of the scene.[6] Friedländer and Doro Levi[7] mention a very damaged Pompeian fresco depicting a warrior menacing with his sword a woman who has fallen to her knees, but it is not clear whether it refers to our myth. If it does, it should be borne in mind that the woman in question is considered to be Phaedra herself (and not her nursemaid), in a presentation inspired by the version of the myth written by Seneca the younger, in which Phaedra is more lustful and shameless than in the *Hippolytus Stephanephorus*.

It should be mentioned that although Procopius shows no sympathy for the old nursemaid, he condemns her brutal punishment. Another peculiar feature is the rendering of Daphne in the role of Hippolytus' female companion in the hunting scene. Her appearance in this context comes as a complete surprise to anyone familiar with the myth. Neither Daphne nor Hippolytus is known to have had a spouse. Was this the artist's way of confronting the figures of Phaedra and the old nursemaid with a completely different model of femininity? Or was Procopius' identification of that figure as Daphne based merely on a misunderstanding on his part? Daphne and Hippolytus represent the Artemisian ideal of virginity, which probably explains her appearance here as the female counterpart of Hippolytus. However, we should recall that it was Atalante and not Daphne who devoted herself to the hunt. Atalante may have been considered less appropriate in the current context because, despite her rejection of marriage, she did not escape the "gifts of Aphrodite."[8] The figure of the bald falconer seems to be another innovation of the Byzantine artists.

The motif of the love letter is an Ovidian addition (*Heroides* 4). However, the popularity in Roman art of the letter's delivery by the nursemaid explains its appearance in Gaza. The figure of Eros leaning over Phaedra's thighs, which appears on some sarcophagi,[9] has been replaced by an Eros offering Phaedra the writing materials.

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[6] P. Linant de Bellefonds, "Hippolytus I," in *Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae* [*LIMC*], Zurich and Munich, 1990, vol. 5, pp. 445-64.

[7] D. Levi, *Antioch Mosaic Pavements,* Princeton, 1947, p. 74.

[8] On Roman hunt sarcophagi the hunter on horseback is often accompanied by Virtus; D. E. E. Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture*, New Haven and London, 1992, pp. 390-92.

[9] H. Sichtermann and G. Koch, *Griechische Mythen auf Römischen Sarkophagen*, Tübingen, 1975, pp. 33-34, pl. 56.

The comprehensive composition of the painting described by Procopius stands in sharp contrast to the compact renditions of the myth appearing on eastern Mediterranean mosaic floors.[10] The latter usually depict the two protagonists, Phaedra and Hippolytus, with the nursemaid or Eros forming the link between them. The compositions on Roman sarcophagi are more expansive than those of the mosaics, often including in addition a group of maidservants attempting to assuage Phaedra's love-sickness, and companions of Hippolytus appearing along with him.[11] The theme is invariably divided into two successive episodes: Phaedra's love-sickness, and Hippolytus leaving for the hunt. The painter in Gaza, in addition to rendering these usual scenes, includes in them elaborate indoor and outdoor settings, and genre elements. Such as the midday heat, which increase the picture's authenticity. The artist has also added the mythological panels in the upper part of the painting, which shed light on the drama. The choice of themes in the panels is sophisticated and well calculated: while also hinting at the fact that Theseus betrayed Ariadne, the panels above the first scene remind the viewer of Theseus' glorious past. The brave young Theseus above contrasts sharply with the weary old man reclining below.

The composition of the lion hunt of Hippolytus, which has no parallel and seems to be an innovation of the Gaza painter,[12] makes it clear with whom Phaedra is now in love. The meaning and intention behind the Trojan myths, presented in the panels above the second episode, remain somewhat elusive, but they are not completely detached from the scene below. The two on the left, depicting the Trojan delegation to the Greeks, are a free interpretation of *Iliad* VII, 345-404. In the Homeric text, Idaios was asked to bring the Trojans' proposal to Agamemnon, while in the painting the envoys are two elders, Antenor and Priam.[13] There is no Greek or Roman visual prototype for this

[10] Levi, *Antioch*, pp. 71-74; C. Kondoleon, *Domestic and Divine: Roman Mosaics in the House of Dionysos*, Ithaca and London, 1995, pp. 40-50.

[11] Sichtermann and Koch, *Griechische Mythen*, pp. 33-36, pls. 55-66, cat. nos. 26-30.

[12] On lion-hunt sarcophagi the hunter is depicted on horseback. Such hunting scenes most probably derive from mythological models, although, in a complex process of transformation, the boar has become a lion. See Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture*, pp. 390-92.

[13] In the last book of the *Iliad* Priam is described as riding in a chariot on his way to Achilles, from whom he requests the release of his son Hektor's body.

episode in the *Iliad*, and it seems to be yet another innovation of the Byzantine painter. Procopius suggests a reason why the artist chose this scene by saying that the Trojan king and his faithful friend, with their gray hair and bent backs, signify a combination of bad luck and old age; we may thus regard them in a sense as paralleling the old nursemaid. Like her, they bring a fatal message—in this case that of young Paris, who refuses to give up Helen.

One of the two panels on the right depicts the combat between Menelaos and Paris to determine to whom Helen should belong; in the other panel Paris leads Helen to Troy. Menelaos was close to defeating Paris when Aphrodite intervened to rescue her protégé (*Iliad* III, 324-82). The composition of this panel parallels the scene below. However, in subject matter the figures relate to each other dialectically. Paris, ready for the combat and accepting its terms, is therefore armed, in sharp contrast to the nursemaid, a defenseless old woman. The unfair game played by Aphrodite contrasts with the noble behavior of the falconer. The Gaza painter has created a broad cycle of pictures with thematic links. The companion pictures installed above the main one are carefully balanced. The genre elements incorporated in the main episodes also have iconographic value, a topic to which we now will return.

Despite the deviations from the classical traditions and the innovations noted above, the painting in Gaza maintains the spirit of classical art. Its first episode embodies thought. The moral dilemma facing the main characters causes the spectators (those incorporated in the painting and witnessing the drama, as well as those viewing the painting) to be mentally involved. Procopius to emphasize this, addresses himself directly to Phaedra. The division of the scenes reflects the classical separation of ἔθος (a person's "character" as formed by inheritance, habit, and self-discipline) in the first episode from πάθος (spontaneous reaction to experiences in the external world) in the second, as exemplified in the pediments of the temple of Zeus at Olympia.[14] However, rather than being based on a classical model, the way in which the suffering of the old nursemaid is rendered, with her garment slipping from her body, seems to be based on the depiction of aged figures in the sculpture of Hellenistic "social realism."[15]

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[14] J. J. Pollitt, *Art and Experience in Classical Greece*, Cambridge, 1972, pp. 43-54; 143-56.

[15] J. J. Pollitt, *Art in the Hellenistic Age*, Cambridge, 1986, p. 143, fig. 154.

The painting in Gaza expresses the philhellenic mindset of a scholar. Despite the considerable deviations, it reflects the vitality of the classical tradition. The artist does not mechanically duplicate well-known myths from the repertoire of late antiquity, and the morphological transformations and additions are not the result of misunderstanding or ignorance. Instead, the painter seems to have enjoyed an artistic freedom that enabled him to make changes in the visual tradition, to reinterpret the classical texts in a way that would attract and touch the hearts of a new audience. Nevertheless, the substructure of this creative, rich, and inspiring painting maintains the classical spirit. By its unambiguous rendering of the plot, the artist has created a painting that could be enjoyed by those not familiar with the legend. For example, the figure of Eros pointing to a panel featuring Hippolytus makes clear with whom Phaedra is in love, while her proximity to the king's bed clarifies that she is his wife; and the failure of the nursemaid's mission is apparent from her chastisement. Yet the mythological panels above the second episode and many other details find their mark with the classically educated viewer.

I shall try now to convey some impression of the painting's style. Some of the features mentioned by Procopius give the impression of a classicist painting: the rendering of the architecture creates an illusion of depth; the coloristic treatment of the draping garments imparts a translucent effect to them; the faces of the protagonists and their gestures and body language are expressive; the story is rendered as a continuous narrative, with the old nursemaid appearing in the two successive episodes; and movement in time and space is indicated by the setting: an architectural background in the first episode and a landscape in the second. From Procopius' description, one gains the impression of a fairly realistic setting. The composition of the second episode seems a remote version of "mythological landscapes" in which mythological figures are reduced in scale and set in a vast panorama.[16] The servant partly hidden behind a column in the first episode hints at the artist's attempt o create action within an architectural setting. This feature also has Roman antecedents.[17]

The difficulties entailed in analyzing the stylistic aspects of the painting stem not only from Procopius having paid attention mainly

[16] On mythological landscape in Roman painting, see R. Ling, *Roman Painting*, Cambridge, 1991, pp. 108-19.

[17] Ibid., pp. 126-41.

to the iconography, but also from our scant knowledge of mural painting in Byzantine Palestine and Arabia—as a result of its poor state of preservation. But perhaps we can gain some impression of Byzantine wall paintings from Umayyad murals, especially those preserved at Qusayr ʿAmra.[18]

Also worthy of note is the inclusion of the patron as part of the painting. In the floor mosaics in churches of our region, the appearance of the donor, either as an integral part of the portrayal or in a separate panel, was a common phenomenon.[19] His inclusion in the Gaza painting is thus not surprising. From Procopius it can be inferred that the patron was a leading figures in the Gaza municipality, the organizer of horse races in the circus, and a contributor to the construction of public works.[20] The list of his qualities and virtues is a long one. Procopius mentions not only his handsome appearance, illustrious lineage, imperial esteem, and activities for the benefit of his subjects, but also finds it appropriate to comment that "from God he learned piety." In other words, his activities in the field of secular culture in no way contradict his being a faithful Christian.

From the description of the painting itself, let us now proceed to the interpreter.[21]

### *Procopius as Art Critic and Interpreter*

Procopius' description of the picture is not a dry, academic one; it shows an interest in the state of mind of the figures involved in the tragedy, and his rendering of them reflects an empathic personality with a true understanding of human nature. Rather than adopting a patronizing attitude to the protagonists, he maintains an ambivalent stance, which is essential when observing a tragedy. He condemns Phaedra but also addresses her as a close friend and frees her from

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[18] M. Almagro, L. Caballeco, J. Zozaya, and A. Almagro, *Qusayr ʿAmraResidencia y Bãnos omeyas en el deserto de Jordania*, Madrid, 1975.

[19] M. Piccirillo, *The Mosaics of Jordan*, Amman, 1993, pp. 174, 178-79, 190-91, 234-35, 236-39, 276-81, 296.

[20] On the municipal administration in Gaza, see Y. Dan, *The City in Eretz-Israel during the Late Roman and Byzantine Periods*, Jerusalem, 1984, pp. 80-85 (Hebrew).

[21] For a general discussion on the nature of *ekphrasis*, see J. Heffernan, *The Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery*, Chicago, 1993; D. P. Fowler, "Narrate and Describe: The Problem of *Ekphrasis*," *Journal of Roman Studies* 81 (1991), pp. 25-35.

some of her guilt by blaming the irresistible Eros. As noted by Jas Elsner, *ekphrasis* is always concerned with the *phantasia* the writer envisioned upon seeing the work of art.[22] He appreciates Hippolytus for his modesty but is also aware that Hippolytus has an audience for his reaction and that his rejection of Phaedra's proposal is thus partially motivated a desire to gain society's acclaim for his purity. In a region and period in which Hippolytus could have signified the moral concept of a monk, it is rather surprising that he is not conceived of as a holy person but remains a protagonist in a Greek tragedy. Procopius' greatest sympathy seems to lie with the falconer, who tries to save the old nursemaid and reprimands the servant for his brutality. Nevertheless, his approach reveals the moral values of his own time. He condemns Phaedra for being attracted by physical beauty and ignoring the beauty of the soul; he also comments that Phaidra's husband is not seen to be lying with her, since moral people sleep together only at night.

Procopius directs the viewer's attention to many minute details and their connotations. He points out that the various animals incorporated in the painting should be regarded as essential to the depiction of the tragedy; they are not objects but living creatures with emotions. And the way in which Procopius refers to the animals' feelings alludes to the various kinds of love experienced by human beings. Regarding the pair of doves on the cornice, he comments that the male seems to be more enamored than the female, the object of his love. The dog, trying to get hold of the frightened bitch (the mother of small pups), exemplifies male assertiveness, which achieves its desires by force. The peacock, aware of his beauty, seems to model narcissistic love. In the second episode the feelings of the animals echo those of the human protagonist. The reactions of the horses parallel those of their riders, and the hunting dogs participate in the servant's cruel attack. The ram, frightened by the barking dogs, flees to find shelter in the forest, while on the mountain peak a pair of goats, a young male and the old leader of the flock, are locked in combat, illustrating the universal contest between young and old. In his attitude toward the human and animal figures incorporated in the painting, Procopius reveals his profound humanity.

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[22] Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer*, p. 27. For the meaning of this term, see R. Brilliant, *Visual Narratives, Storytelling in Etruscan and Roman Art*, Ithaca and London, 1984, pp. 76-78; J. J. Pollitt, *The Art of Ancient Greece, Sources and Documents*, Cambridge, 1965, pp. 5, 223-4.

He also draws attention to the erotic appeal of the painting which in no way detracts from its drama. He notes that Phaidra's transparent garments reveal her seductive body, that Hippolytus' naked chest attracts not only Phaedra but also one of her handmaidens, and he notes that the lecherous peasant woman is partially exposing her breasts. On the other hand, he notes that nakedness can also fail to arouse desire: such is the case with the partial nudity of Theseus and the exposed breast of the old nursemaid in the second episode.

Procopius assumes the role of a professional critic by offering his own opinion of the work. He considers the painting a masterpiece and praises the artist for choosing to depict Theseus not as a superhero but as an ordinary man exhausted by the midday heat. He is also amazed by the painter's talent to cause the viewer to forget that this is but virtual reality.

Procopius' *ekphrasis* reveals his great rhetorical talent. The description is clear, logical, and well balanced, but it nevertheless creates an impression of liveliness and spontaneity, and his enthusiasm adds to the reader's enjoyment of the painter's mastery. Procopius' genius is also reflected in his approach to those to whom the *ekphrasis* is addressed. In its opening sentences he declares his full confidence in their ability to appreciate the subtle ties of the composition. And later, when dealing with the scenes from the *Iliad*, he puts the spectator less familiar with the Homeric texts at ease by saying "If I remember well the epic," although from his description of the panels it is obvious that he is very well acquainted with it. His *ekphrasis* describing a masterpiece is in fact itself a masterpiece. It maintains the spirit of the Second Sophistic, resembling most the writing of Philostratus (who wrote in the mid-third century C.E.).[23]

However, Procopius fails to provide modern scholars with some basic information: the size of the painting, details of the building it adorns, some data about the artist, and above all, when the painting was executed.[24] Nevertheless, a dating to his own time, the sixth century, seems very probable. The painting seems to have been in a

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[23] On the virtues of Philostratus' *ekphrasis*, see Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer*, pp. 15-48, and for additional bibliography on this item, notes 2-7 there.

[24] These omissions should not weaken the authenticity of Procopius' description. Maguire also claims that Procopius had observed an actual work of art; see H. Maguire, *Rhetoric, Nature and Magic in Byzantine Art*, Aldershot, 1998, pp. 119-120. On the debates concerning the reliability of the *Imagines* of Philostratus the Elder; see N. Bryson, "Philostratus and the Imaginary Museum," in S. Goldhill and R. Osborne (eds.) *Art and Text in Ancient Greek Culture*, Cambridge, 1994, pp. 255-83.

good state of preservation and is not presented as an antique art object. The prominent role given to the falconer also attests to a dating in the fifth or sixth century.

### *Comparison of the Gaza Painting with Other Byzantine Depictions in Palestine and Arabia*

In this section, the painting from Gaza is compared with mosaic pavements of the region. Since many of the mosaics feature more than one mythological scene, I shall, for the sake of convenience, group them by subject. However, in those cases where the choice of mythological themes indicates a particular iconographic program, I will try to consider the entire floor as a whole. An exception to this procedure are the mosaics of the Nile Festival Building at Sepphoris, where the wealth of mythological themes in the building calls for a separate discussion.

#### I. *Depictions of Phaedra and Hippolytus*

Renderings of the Euripidean tragedy *Hippolytus* have been preserved in a mosaic found in 1913 at Sheikh Zuweid (between El 'Arish and Rafah), which is exhibited in Ismailia, [25] and in a mosaic discovered in the hall of Hippolytos in Madaba by Father Michele Piccirillo in 1982 (Fig. 3).[26] The date of the Sheikh Zuweid mosaic (Fig. 4) is controversial. Levi, [27] Asher Ovadiah, [28] and Laszlo Török[29] have suggested the fourth century, but according to stylistic criteria, the mosaic more probably belongs to the fifth century or beginning of the sixth. There seems to be a consensus that the Madaba mosaic should be dated to the first half of the sixth century.[30] Both mosaics

[25] J. Clédat, "Fouilles à Cheikh Zouède," *Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Egypte* 15 (1915), pp. 15-48; M.-T. Olszewski, "Mauvais œil et protection contre l'envie dans la mosaïque de Cheikh Zouède au Sinaï (IVe–Ve siècle)," in *La Mosaïque Gréco-Romaine VIII* , D. Paunier and C. Schmidt (eds.), Lausanne, 2001, pp. 276-289.

[26] Piccirillo, *Mosaics*, pp. 23-26, 51-63, 66.

[27] Levi, *Antioch*, p. 72.

[28] A. Ovadiah, S. Mucznik, and C. Gomez Silva, "A New Look at the Mosaic Floor from Sheikh Zuweid in Ismailiya Museum," *Qadmoniot* 24.3-4/95-96 (1991), pp. 122-26 (Hebrew); R. and A. Ovadiah, *Hellenistic, Roman and Early Byzantine Mosaic Pavements in Israel*, Rome, 1987, pp. 51-53.

[29] L. Török, *The Hunting Centaur*, Budapest, 1998, pp. 24, 51-52.

[30] H. Buschhausen, "La sala dell'Ippolito, presso la chiesa della Vergine Maria,"

depict the meeting between Hippolytus and the elderly nursemaid, the deliverer of Phaedra's amorous proposal. But in the Sheikh Zuweid mosaic, and probably also the Madaba one, it is clear that Hippolytus, leaving for the hunt, is as yet unaware of the contents of the letter. The composition in the two mosaics is not identical (e.g., in Sheikh Zuweid, Phaedra sits alone within an aedicula), but both resemble the way in which the theme was portrayed on Roman sarcophagi. The figure of the falconer appearing at the center of the Madaba panel is an exception to the rule. As noted above, this is an innovation introduced by the Byzantine artists in both Madaba and Gaza, and it demonstrates the popularity of falconry in the fifth and sixth centuries, when it was regarded as part of a nobleman's education.[31] A falconer appears in one of the panels of a sixth-century mosaic from Argos (Greece).[32]

In contrast to the abbreviated depiction of the tragedy in the two above-mentioned mosaic floors, the painting described by Procopius has a comprehensive and sophisticated composition. The question arises whether the differences derive from differences in the education level of the Gaza artist who had received an upper-class classical education, or are due to differences in the artistic media. Both probably affected the nature of the composition. However, it should be noted that the innovations introduced in the painting described by Procopius are more original than the minor modifications of classical tradition seen in these mosaic floors.

## II. *Depictions of the Dionysiac* θίασος

Renderings of the Dionysiac θίασος seem to have enjoyed great popularity in Byzantine secular mosaic floors in the eastern Mediterranean. In addition to the central panel in the Sheikh Zuweid mosaic, they appear at Madaba (twice),[33] Gerasa,[34] Sarrîn in Syria,[35] the House

in *I Mosaici di Giordania*, M. Piccirillo (ed.), Rome, 1986, pp. 117-27; K. M. D. Dunbabin, *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World*, Cambridge, 1999, p. 199.

[31] G. Akerström-Hougen, *The Calendar and Hunting Mosaics of the Villa of the Falconer in Argos*, Stockholm, 1974, pp. 97-99.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Piccirillo, *Mosaics*, pp. 69-70, 76-77.

[34] I. Z'ubi, P. L. Gatier, M. Piccirillo, and J. Seigne, "Note sur une mosaïque à scène bachique dans un palais d'époque byzantine à Jérash," *Liber Annuus* 44 (1994), pp. 539-46.

[35] J. Balty, *La mosaïque de Sarrîn (Osrhoène)*, Paris, 1990, pp. 32-47.

of the Falconer at Argos in Greece, and probably in the mosaic at Erez, near Gaza.[36]

The secular mosaics at Madaba (dated to the sixth century) demonstrate that Christian piety was in full harmony with the appreciation of classical art. Two of the mosaics at the site contain depictions of a Dionysiac θίασος. In one of them (Fig. 5) the Bacchic scene occupies the central panel of the floor. The panel is only partly preserved, the surviving figures being a Bacchante (ΒΑΝΧΗ) performing a dance and next to her a naked satyr (ΣΑΤΥΡΟΣ). A third figure, probably Ariadne, documented at the end of the nineteenth century, has been destroyed. A subsidiary panel of that floor is decorated with two rams and two peacocks facing each other on either side of an amphora from which sprout two vine branches. The motifs and composition of the secondary panel, which also appear often in the repertoire of church floor mosaics in the vicinity of Madaba, reflect the close contacts between the Christian and classical realms.

The second Dionysiac mosaic at Madaba (Fig. 6) portrays a Bacchic procession, of which have survived the figure of Pan playing a syrinx, a figure wearing a long tunic and holding a bell, the bare legs of a third figure, and the four paws of a beast, probably a panther, indicating a high probability that the figure of Dionysus was once a part of the procession. The θίασος at Sarrîn is composed of Dionysus, Pan, and several satyrs and maenads, some of whom bear ritual objects such as a serpent and a torch, a maenad with a whip and a bell, and a dancing Silenos.

The rendering at Sheikh Zuweid (Fig. 7) is more comprehensive and renders a fairly comprehensive triumphal procession, including Dionysus seated in a cart drawn by a pair of centaurs, old Silenos riding a donkey with a wineskin on his shoulder, satyrs wearing νεβρίς, dancing maenads, a drunken Herakles, Pan, and panthers. However, notably missing are the λίκνον and the *cista mystica*—the primary symbols of the Dionysiac mysteries; the triumph has been transformed into a portrayal of the god's intoxication. Dionysus holds in his right hand an amphora from which a small panther drinks.

That the entire scene is labeled ΤΕΛΕΤΗ, whose common meaning is an initiation into the mysteries, is puzzling. There are two reason-

[36] L. Y. Rahmani, "The Erez Mosaic Pavement," *Israel Exploration Journal* 25 (1975), pp. 21-27.

able explanations for this: (1) the term had acquired a more general, more neutral meaning;[37] (2) the term had continued to exist since the iconography of initiation persisted, but it did not imply that the cultic interest remained.

As pointed out by David Parrish, the θίασος and its ritual objects became a conventional element of Dionysiac imagery and should not necessarily be regarded as evidence of the vitality of paganism.[38] On the other hand, it is significant that this attitude did not differ markedly from that in the second and third centuries. In many of the late Roman floor mosaics, the Dionysiac imagery became a symbol of hospitality and conviviality, while fewer mosaics conveyed a religious meaning.[39] These depictions of merrymaking could also have derived from the popular musical and dance performances that followed the meal.[40] In the Villa of the Falconer in Argos the location and orientation of the dancing satyrs and maenads in the open part of the room in front of the *stibadium* suggest this possibility.[41] In all likelihood, the Dionysiac θίασος in its new context depicts the mime of a mythical choral group. Choricius of Gaza (a pupil of Procopius) attests that the performance of mime was customary at private banquets in the houses of the rich.[42] The inscriptions incorporated alongside the mythological scenes at Sheikh Zuweid clarify the artists' intention to produce pleasant art: "Friend, observe here with pleasure the charming things which art has placed in the mosaic ..... You are one who is proud of enjoyable art."[43] The Dionysiac θίασος in art was an allegory of well-being and joy, which explains why it remained one of the most frequently illustrated pagan themes in early Byzantine art. On the other hand, in contrast to the

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[37] H. S. Versnel, "teletē," in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* [*OCD*], Oxford, 1996, p. 1480.

[38] D. Parrish, "A Mythological Theme in the Decoration of Late Roman Dining Rooms: Dionysos and His Circle," *Revue Archéologique* (1995-Fascicule 2), pp. 307-32.

[39] K. M. D. Dunbabin, *The Mosaics of Roman North Africa*, Oxford, 1978, pp. 173-87.

[40] Nonnus, *Dionysiaca* XVIII, 99ff., trans. W. H. D. Rouse, LCL, London, 1940; Sidonius Apollinaris, *Epistulae* IX, 13, verses 62-67, trans. W. B. Anderson, LCL, Cambridge, Mass., 1984; Parrish, "A Mythological Theme," p. 330.

[41] Parrish, "A Mythological Theme," pp. 308-10.

[42] Choricius of Gaza, XXXII, 53, R. Foerster and E. Richtsteig, eds., *Choricii Gazaei*, Leipzig, 1929, pp. 344-380; Dan, *The City*, p. 154, n. 200.

[43] A. Ovadiah, "Allegorical Images in Greek Laudatory Inscriptions," *Liber Annuus* 47 (1977), pp. 441ff.

Roman mosaics of the region,[44] not a single scene from the biography of the god is presented in the Byzantine mosaics.

III. *Mythological Figures Signifying Natural Growth and Abundance*

Let us now return to the themes in the depiction of Phaedra and Hippolytus in Madaba (see Fig. 3). An attached panel renders the myth of Aphrodite and Adonis. In the classical literature the two stories are interrelated, hence, apparently, the artist's choice to depict them alongside each other.[45] Moreover, the story of Aphrodite and Adonis shows that even the powers of the goddess of love could not prevent her lover from meeting his fate. Procopius, in his prologue to the *Ekphrasis Eikonos*, mentions the goddess and her lover as being among the victims of Eros.

The Madaba artist chose to depict a generic episode of "amorous conversation" rather than the more popular scene—the farewell of Adonis leaving for the hunt.[46] Aphrodite and Adonis are seated on a throne and close by are six Erotes and the three Charites (Graces), who are being approached by a peasant girl with a basket containing fruit and a partridge labeled ΑΓΡΟΙΚΙΣ. The appearance of ΑΓΡΟΙΚΙΣ (reminiscent of the figure of an initiate) points to the allegoric way in which the scene should be interpreted. Aphrodite and Adonis with their entourage symbolize the mystery of natural growth and the joy of nature. Moreover, the red flowers in the overturned basket and scattered on the ground call to mind the popular "Festival of Roses," mentioned in various documents,[47] which was celebrated throughout the Roman world in the spring (usually in May).[48] In the sixth century, both Johannes of Gaza and Choricius wrote poems for the "Day of Roses."[49] This festival probably corresponds to the *Rosalia*, though

[44] Z. Weiss and R. Talgam, "The Dionysiac Mosaic Floor of Sepphoris," in *VI Colloquio Internacional sobre Mosaico antiguo, Palencia-Mérida, Octubre 1990*, Guadalajara, 1994, pp. 231-37.

[45] The death of Adonis is attributed to the revenge of Artemis (Euripides, *Hippolytus* 1416-1439).

[46] An antecedent to this episode in the Roman mosaics of the eastern Mediterranean is to be found in the Atrium House at Antioch; see Levi, *Antioch*, pp. 24-25.

[47] C. R. Phillips, "Rosalia," *OCD*, pp. 1335-36.

[48] M. R. Salzman, *On Roman Time*, Berkeley, 1990, pp. 97-99; D. Parrish, "Two Mosaics from Roman Tunisia: An African Variation of the Season Theme," *American Journal of Archaeology* 83 (1979), pp. 279-85.

[49] C. A. M. Glucker, *The City of Gaza in the Roman and Byzantine Periods*, B.A.R. International Series 325, Oxford, 1987, pp. 52, 54.

with certain modifications. The myth of Aphrodite and Adonis seems to have been inseparable from the *Rosalia*. The festivals dedicated to Adonis were celebrated in the spring, and one legend tells how Aphrodite pricked her foot on a thorn and her blood colored the flowers dedicated to her lover.[50] The figure of Eros gently touching the goddess' foot probably alludes to this minor event.

The Erotes in the role of mischievous boys add a humorous touch to the scene and enhance the joy of the reunion. One of them has overturned the basket of flowers—a mischievous role often reserved for the hare in mosaics of our region.[51] Aphrodite gently taps the buttocks of a second Eros with her slipper—a gesture originally depicting her threatening Pan,[52] a third Eros climbs a tree (possibly reminiscent of the birth of young Adonis from a tree), while a fourth manages to escape.

Aphrodite, half-naked, holds a flower in her left hand, while Adonis, richly garbed, grasps a spear. There is nothing tragic in the myth's rendition. The viewer gains the impression that it has been transformed into a genre scene, with Aphrodite and Adonis in the role of estate owners, the gifts of the earth under the beneficent sign of the Seasons—thus recalling Roman mosaics from North Africa, which illustrate the life of leisure on the great estates. The most lavish of these mosaics are the one depicting the estate of Julius of Carthage and the one from the baths of Sidi Ghrib.[53] Mongi Ennaïfer has noted that the lady of the estate in these mosaics is depicted in a manner appropriate for Aphrodite.[54] In the Byzantine depiction from Madaba, we observe the opposite process: the goddess, apart from her seminudity, has taken on the appearance of a *matrona*.

The comprehensive use of inscriptions identifying the figures should not necessarily be regarded as a sign of waning knowledge of the classics; such labeling is already evident in the Roman mosaics of our region.

The third panel in the Hall of Hippolytus is decorated with a diagonal grid of florets filled with flowers and plants alternating with aquatic

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[50] H. J. Rose, *A Handbook of Greek Mythology*, New York, 1959, p. 125, n. 95.

[51] M. Avi-Yonah, "Mosaic Pavements at El-Hammam, Beisan," *Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine* 5 (1935), pp. 11-30.

[52] Pollitt, *Art*, p. 131, fig. 138.

[53] M. Blanchard-Lemée et al., *Mosaics of Roman Africa: Floor Mosaics from Tunisia*, New York, 1996, pp. 169-72, figs. 116, 120-21.

[54] Ibid.

birds. Inhabited acanthus scrolls border the three panels. Similar decorations adorn church mosaics in the region, indicating that they were probably executed by the same artists. The four scrolls in the corners bear personifications of the Seasons represented as Tyche. The mural crowns on the heads of figures other than Tyche had already made their appearance in late antiquity.[55]

Piccirillo suggests that the addition of the two sea monsters, beyond the border of the panels, relates to Hippolytus' tragic end.[56] However, we should also bear in mind that the mosaic retains the cosmological composition characterizing some of the church mosaics in the region, in which the inhabited scrolls are surrounded by an aquatic frieze, the popular motif of the ox and lion in confrontation or reconciliation having been transformed into sea monsters.

The prominent role given to the figure of the falconer in the panel depicting Phaedra and Hippolytus emphasizes the hunt, thus serving to link the mythological theme with the hunting scenes incorporated in the acanthus scrolls. The artist and patron of the Hall of Hippolytus tried to integrate the mythological stories within themes and compositions derived from church mosaics, not merely mechanically by combining them, but also by introducing certain changes in the subject matter.

The Hall of Hippolytus also includes personifications of city goddesses, identified by the inscriptions as Madaba, Rome, and Gregoria. All three hold cruciform scepters, emphasizing the Christian aspect. Madaba and Gregoria wear mural crowns, while the Tyche Rome appears with a Phrygian hat, probably a corrupted form of the helmet, which was one of her attributes. Madaba and Rome each carry a cornucopia, Gregoria a basket. Rina Avner-Levy points to the similarity between the personification of the Seasons and of the Tychai in the mosaic, which finds expression not only in the mural crowns of the Seasons but also in the contents of the cornucopiae and basket. She claims that the Seasons have merged with the figure of Tyche.[57] The patron and artist of the Hall of Hippolytus might also have intended to associate them with the Charites (bestowing upon men charm, grace, and beauty), who are depicted on the panel below.

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[55] R. Avner-Levy, "A Note on the Iconography of the Personification in the 'Hippolytus Mosaic' at Madaba, Jordan," *Liber Annuus* 46 (1996), pp. 363-74.

[56] Piccirillo, *Mosaics*, p. 25.

[57] Avner-Levy, "A Note on the Iconography," pp. 363-74.

The figure of Gregoria remains enigmatic, despite the attempts at identification made by Helmut Buschhausen[58] and more recently by Avner-Levy.[59] The latter suggests that Gregoria may have been a local philanthropist who donated the Hippolytus Hall mosaic. Katherine Dunbabin attributes the presence of Rome, which by that time had long lost its political pre-eminence, to the policy of Emperor Justinian to reintegrate the West into the empire.[60] Avner-Levy suggests that the figure represents the "New Rome"—i.e., Constantinople.

The popularity of Tyche in the Byzantine period is additionally attested by her appearance in a mosaic adorning the center of a public piazza in Beth Shean (Scythopolis)[61] and on a marble medallion installed in the wall of the Church of St. Bacchus at Horvat Tinshemet, near Shoam.[62]

Aphrodite and Adonis as figures signifying growth and abundance in nature call to mind the portrayal of Dionysus and Aphrodite in a mosaic discovered in a private structure in Gerasa (Fig. 8), dated to the sixth century.[63] The images are only partly preserved, but the accompanying inscriptions make possible their identification. The composition is organized in two registers. The central figure in the upper one is that of Dionysus. To his left, Pan is holding a pedum, and there is another figure with Pan's flute lying at his feet. To Dionysus' right are a maenad and a satyr. In the lower register, below the figure of Dionysus, appears Cypris (i.e., Aphrodite); in the left-hand corner is a figure identified as ΑΓΡΟΙΚΙΣ (a female farmer), and in the right-hand corner is another figure labeled ΦΙΛΑΝΘΕΟ[Ι] (lover of flowers).

The rendering of Aphrodite and Dionysus as gods of nature should be regarded as an extension of the personification of natural forces (e.g., Ge, Thalassa) in church mosaics. An acanthus scroll inhabited with hunting scenes frames the mythological panel.

The agricultural aspects of Dionysus already appear in Hellenistic and Roman art.[64] What marks a change is that the god is no lon-

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[58] Buschhausen, "La sala dell'Ippolito," pp. 117-28.

[59] Avner-Levy, "A Note on the Iconography," pp. 363-74.

[60] Dunbabin, *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World*, p. 199.

[61] Y. Tsafrir and G. Foerster, "Urbanism at Scythopolis-Bet Shean in the Fourth to the Seventh Centuries," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 51 (1997), fig. 42.

[62] U. Dahari, "The Church of St. Bacchus and the Location of Betomelgezis," in *The Madaba Map Centenary 1897-1997*, M. Piccirillo and E. Alliata (eds.), Jerusalem, 1999, p. 248.

[63] Z'ubi, Gatier, Piccirillo, and Seigne, "Note sur une mosaïque," pp. 539-546.

[64] R. Merkelbach, *Die Hirten des Dionysos*, Stuttgart, 1988, pp. 7-14.

ger depicted as surrounded by the Seasons in a representation that might evoke a cosmological significance. The Gerasa mosaic features a common Dionysiac θίασος, and the reference to vegetation has been achieved by the presence of ΑΓΡΟΙΚΙΣ and ΦΙΛΑΝΘΕΟ[Ι] (flanking Aphrodite). This is a far cry from Dionysus at the height of his powers.[65]

## IV. *Representation of Greek Heroes*

The lower register of the second Dionysiac mosaic from Madaba (see Fig. 6) portrays a naked Achilles playing a lyre, a naked Patrokles grasping a spear, and, presumably, Briseis (ΕΥΒΡΕ[ΙΣΕΙΣ]. She lifts the hem of her dress with her left hand while handing Achilles a flower with her right. Two winged Erotes, carrying a wreath, hover over her head.[66] This depiction corresponds to the episode in Book I of the Iliad, in which the two heralds sent by Agamemnon take Briseis from Achilles. A comparison of the Madaba mosaic with Roman depictions reveals that the scene in the former has been reduced to the very basics and little has survived of the classical models.[67] The heralds have been omitted and the fateful farewell seems to have been transformed into a genre scene in which the artist emphasizes the romantic and sentimental qualities inherent in the situation, rather than the tragic ones. The artistic means used to convey the psychological state of the characters are derisive. Briseis' gesture and the motif of the flower have been taken from the farewell of Aphrodite and Adonis. The nudity of Achilles and Patrocles is startling and rare. On the other hand, the figure of Achilles playing a lyre to comfort himself appears already in Roman depictions of the scene

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[65] I have omitted from my discussion the Seasons mosaic from Caesarea Maritima, which probably included the figure of Pegasus, the Karpoi and the Seasons, due to reservations about its dating to the sixth century. Marie Spiro was probably misled by the preliminary assumption of the excavators concerning the stratigraphic evidence. Both the style and the technique of the work differ completely from mosaics of the fifth and sixth centuries. A date in the second quarter of the fourth century seems more appropriate. See M. Spiro, "Pegasos and the Seasons in a Pavement from Caesarea Maritima," in *IL 60: Essays Honoring Irving Lavin on His Sixtieth Birthday*, M. Aronberg Lavin (ed.), New York, 1990, pp. 31-44.

[66] Piccirillo, *Mosaics*, pp. 76-77.

[67] K. Weitzmann, "Illustrations of Euripides and Homer in the Mosaics of Antioch," in *Antioch-on-the Orontes, III; The Excavations of 1937-1939*, R. Stillwell (ed.), Princeton, 1941, pp. 233-47.

and in representations of later antiquity—e.g., the miniature of the Ambrosian *Iliad* (Alexandria[?], second half of fifth century) and the Doria bronze bucket (Egypt or Palestine, fifth century).[68] Achilles and Briseis, playing the lyre together, appear on a Byzantine silver jug now located in Jerusalem (probably of Palestinian origin).[69] Bowersock raises the possibility that the scene in the Madaba mosaic reflects the popular mime performance in the Near East, which took place despite its censure by pagan and Christian intellectuals.[70]

The absence of programmatic links between the mythological panels incorporated in several of the above-mentioned Byzantine mosaic floors should not be regarded as a sign of degeneration. Even early Roman painting shows no clear evidence of a widespread interest in creating profound and meaningful links between the various themes represented.

Another mosaic in Madaba features Herakles fighting the Nemean lion (Fig. 9).[71] A fifth-century bronze statue (Roman or Syrian) of Herakles wrestling the Nemean lion attests that in a private context his figure still retained the apotropaic function of protecting property.[72] Christian admiration of Herakles in the sixth century is well attested in the verses of Dioscorus of Aphrodito.[73] The Twelve Labours of Herakles, as well as Pan and Diomedes, decorated a monumental clock in the market of Gaza, which was also described by Procopius.[74]

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[68] Levi, *Antioch*, pp. 46-49; C. Delvoye, "La légende d'Achille au Bas-Empire," *L'Antiquité classique* 53 (1984), pp. 184-99; A. Kossatz-Deissmann, "Briseis," *LIMC* 3 (1986), pp. 157-67; K. Weitzmann (ed.), *Age of Spirituality, Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century. Catalogue of the Exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 19 November, 1977 through 12 February, 1978*, New York, 1979, pp. 216-20; A. Carandini, *La secchia Doria: una "Storia di Achille" tardo-antica*, Studi Miscellanei 9, Rome, 1965.

[69] M. Hengel, *Achilleus in Jerusalem*, Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften Philosophisch-historische Klasse, Heidelberg, 1982, pp. 9-57.

[70] G. B. Bowersock, "The Rich Harvest of Near Eastern Mosaics," *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 11 (1998), pp. 692-99.

[71] Piccirillo, *Mosaics*, p. 80.

[72] S. B. Matheson, "Herakles and the Nemean Lion," in *Antioch: The Lost Ancient City*, C. Kondoleon (ed.), Princeton, 2000, pp. 204-05.

[73] G. W. Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity*, Ann Arbor, 1990, pp. 66-67.

[74] H. Diels, *Über die von Prokop beschriebene Kunstuhr von Gaza, mit einem Anhang enthaltend Text und Übersetzung der* ΕΚΦΡΑΣΙΣ ΟΡΟΛΟΓΙΟΥ *des Prokopius von Gaza (Abh. Kngl. Pr. Ak. Wiss., 7)*, Berlin, 1917; P. Chuvin, *A Chronicle of the Last Pagans*, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1990, pp. 115-18; J. Geiger, "Aspects of Palestinian Paganism in Late Antiquity," in *Sharing the Sacred: Religious Contacts and Conflicts in the Holy Land*, A. Kofsky and G. G. Stroumsa (eds.), Jerusalem, 1998, p. 13.

The depiction of the entire cycle of the *athloi* as a purely decorative theme is new.[75]

The last mosaic to be discussed in this category is that depicting Odysseus and the Sirens, and possibly also Scylla, in the House of Leontis at Beth Shean, dated to the fifth century (Fig. 10). The building belonged to a rich Jew and also housed a synagogue.[76] The mosaics installed in the complex attest that the Jewish population took part in the trend to render in secular contexts themes derived from pagan mythology.[77] In all likelihood Odysseus appears twice: in the upper right corner of the panel and again at its center. In the first case, he is bound to the mast of his ship in order to protect himself from falling into the fatal trap awaiting sailors enchanted by the magic song of the Sirens; in the second he is probably fighting Scylla.[78] The simultaneous depiction of two successive episodes of a story within a single seascape setting has Roman antecedents. Both the demonic Sirens and the monstrous Scylla were poetic representations of the dangers that lay in wait for sailors. In the Talmudic literature, the Siren was seen as a symbol of the temptations of this world. The adjacent inscription, in which the patron of the building seeks the assistance of God, suggests that the myth should indeed be understood in this allegorical way. However, this interpretation does not contradict the great empathy of the Jewish patron toward the Greek hero. The accompanying inscription probably led the artist to depict the Siren at some distance from Odysseus (tied to the mast) and not in close proximity to him, as one would expect. It should be noted that at that time the story of Odysseus and the Sirens had been adopted in both its literary and pictorial forms by the Christians. The episode was often given an allegorical

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[75] The Herakles cycle is carved on an ornamental pilaster flanking the central apse in the Severan Baslica at Leptis Magna. Despite the ornamental vine scrolls in which the scenes are located, the purpose is not purely decorative but intended to present Herakles as one of the patron gods of Leptis Magna; see Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture*, p. 343. Sarcophagi depicting the Twelve Labours were commissioned in large numbers during the second and third centuries; ibid., pp. 305-306.

[76] N. Zori, "The House of Kyrios Leontis at Beth Shean," *Israel Exploration Journal* 16 (1966), pp. 123-34; L. Roussin, "The Beit Leontis Mosaic: an Eschatological Interpretation," *Journal of Jewish Art* 8 (1981), pp. 6-19.

[77] The knowledge of classical literature is recorded in Jewish sources. See S. Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine*, New York, 1950, pp. 100-114.

[78] M. O. Jentel, "Une Scylla méconnue sur une mosaïque de Beth Shean?" in ἀγαθός δαίμων *Mythes et Cultes études d'iconographie en l'honneur de Lilly Kahil*, Bulletin de correspondance hellénique Suppl. 38, Athens, 2000, pp. 241-248.

interpretation by the Church fathers, the ship being seen as a symbol of the Church, the mast standing for the cross, and Odysseus representing the faithful Christian.[79] Another panel in the floor features a personification of the Nile, a nilometer, a schematic depiction of Alexandria, and other Nilotic motifs.

## V. *The Mosaics of the Nile Festival Building at Sepphoris*

A group of mythological mosaics in the Nile Festival Building at Sepphoris, in Lower Galilee, was excavated from 1991 to 1994 by Zeev Weiss and Ehud Netzer.[80] The city of Sepphoris is frequently mentioned in rabbinical literature and is known to have had a predominantly Jewish population living alongside a Christian community. The mosaics of the Nile Festival Building are dated to the beginning of the fifth century. One of the mosaic panels depicts a centaur in the role of a servant, but in contrast to his Roman counterparts he does not carry a κάνθαρος, a λίκνον, or a θύρσος. Balanced on his raised arms he holds a tray bearing the inscription ΘΕΟΣ ΒΟΗΤΟΣ—a common address to God used by Jews and Christians alike.[81] The savage mythological creature has been tamed, domesticated, and subjected to the monotheistic faith.[82]

The tray-bearing centaur can possibly be associated with banqueting customs—i.e., a servant or entertainer dressing up as a centaur.[83] The

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[79] G. Foerster, "Allegorical and Symbolic Motifs with Christian Significance from Mosaic Pavements of Sixth-Century Palestinian Synagogues," in *Christian Archaeology in the Holy Land: New Discoveries*, G. C. Bottini, L. Di Segni, and E. Alliata (eds.), Jerusalem, 1990, pp. 545-59.

[80] Z. Weiss and E. Netzer, "Two Excavation Seasons at Sepphoris," *Qadmoniot* 95–96 (1991), pp. 113–121 (Hebrew); idem, "The Hebrew University Excavations at Sepphoris," *Qadmoniot* 113 (1997), pp. 2–21 (Hebrew); E. Netzer and Z. Weiss, "Byzantine Mosaics at Sepphoris: New Finds," *The Israel Museum Journal* 10 (1992), pp. 75–80; idem, "New Evidence for Late Roman and Byzantine Sepphoris," in *The Roman and Byzantine Near East: Recent Archaeological Research*, Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary Series 14, John H. Humphrey (ed.), Ann Arbor, 1995, pp. 162–76; idem, *Zippori*, Jerusalem, 1994, pp. 46–54.

[81] E. Testa, *Cafarnao*, Jerusalem, 1972, p. 4: nos. 73, 74, 75; J. Patrich and L. Di Segni, "New Greek Inscriptions from the Monastery of Theoctistus in the Judean Desert," *Eretz-Israel* 19 (1987), pp. 272–81 (Hebrew); Zori, "The House of Kyrios," pp. 132–133.

[82] The replacement of the wild and violent centaurs by more cultivated creatures started in the fourth century B.C.E. with the famous painting of a centaur family by Zeuxis and their depiction as a harmless chariot team in the Dionysiac θίασος on Roman sarcophagi and mosaics. See R. R. R. Smith, *Hellenistic Sculpture*, London, 1991, pp. 131-32; Nonnus, *Dionysiaca* 14, 49 distinguishes three sorts of centaurs, the first being a gentle tribe.

semi-bestial figure carrying the monotheistic inscription in the Sepphoris mosaic brings to mind the figures of the centaur and Pan enchanted by Orpheus' music, in a Christian funerary chapel in Jerusalem.[84] The appearance of these figures marks a change in the conventional iconography of this popular Orphic theme. The association of the figures of Pan and the centaur with the Dionysiac θίασος is probably one reason for their inclusion in the Christian-Orphic scene. Their subjection to the Christianized Orpheus reflects the acknowledgment that renewed life in the hereafter would be found not in the Dionysiac mystery cult but in the new faith. The presence of Orpheus in the Christian chapel is another example of the transformation of a pagan figure to convey a new religious message.

Two of the panels in the Nile Festival Building at Sepphoris feature mythological hunters. One of them portrays an Amazon mounted on a horse, with her male companion hunting a lion and a panther with the help of a hunting dog. Only in late antiquity did hunting Amazons become popular, replacing the traditional theme of the *Amazonomachia.* The mosaic at Sepphoris differs from these depictions in having a male hunter present. This rare combination brings to mind the strange association of Hippolytus and Daphne that was noted in the Gaza painting. In both cases the inspiration for these combinations should probably be sought in other famous pairs of male and female hunters, such as Atalante and Meleager or Dido and Aeneas, in the art of late antiquity. The close resemblance of those three couples sometimes makes their conclusive identification difficult.[85] The second mosaic panel at Sepphoris portrays two male hunters whose nudity suggests

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[83] On theatrical episodes performed at private banquets and the interaction between private entertainments and artistic representation, see C. Kondoleon, "Signs of Privilege and Pleasure: Roman Domestic Mosaics," in *Roman Art in the Private Sphere*, E. K. Gazda (ed.), Ann Arbor, 1994, pp. 105-06.

[84] I. J. Jessnick, *The Image of Orpheus in Roman Mosaics*, B.A.R. International Series 671, Oxford, 1997, p. 141. Jessnick dates the mosaic to the first half of the sixth century and attributes it to Christians. However, Ovadiah and Mucznik claim that the mosaic originally belonged to pagans and only in a later phase became part of a Christian funerary chapel. See A. Ovadiah and S. Mucznik, "The Jerusalem Orpheus—a Pagan or a Christian Figure?" in *Jerusalem in the Second Temple Period—Abraham Schalit Memorial Volume*, A. Oppenheimer, U. Rappaport, and M. Stern (eds.), Jerusalem, 1980, pp. 415–33 (Hebrew). I tend to agree with Jessnick.

[85] Witness the depiction of the resting pair at Sarrîn, identified by Balty as Meleager and Atalante and by others as Dido and Aeneas. See J. Balty, *La Mosaïque de Sarrîn (Osrhoène)*, Paris, 1990, pp. 54-57; Dunbabin, *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World*, p. 184, n. 51.

that this is yet another depiction of a myth. The presence of a dead boar below them indicates that they should probably be identified as Meleager and one of the hunters who participated in the killing of the Kalydonian boar.

Another mosaic floor at Sepphoris depicts a group of Amazons arranged in two superimposed horizontal strips (Fig. 11). In the upper register two Amazons, or an Amazon and her male companion, are seated in the shade of a παραπέτασμα, while their horses are tethered to two flanking trees. In the lower register, Amazons are shown in dancing postures. The cultic war dance of the Amazons around the statue of Artemis at Ephesus has been reduced to an after-dinner entertainment;[86] the cavorting Amazons are no longer performing a cultic dance but are entertaining the seated couple. Dancing and mime were customary activities at private banquets in late antiquity, as reflected in various literary sources and in banquet scenes depicted in mosaics.[87] The dancing Amazons at Sepphoris probably represent the mime of a mythical choral group, as presumably does the Dionysiac θίασος at Argos, Madaba, and Sheikh Zuweid.

The Nile Festival mosaic is the most extravagant one at Sepphoris. The upper part of the mosaic field depicts personifications of Egypt and the Nile accompanied by several putti and a nilometer. The area below features the arrival of Semasia (a young woman on a galloping horse, signifying the festival celebrating the rise of the river to a height that ensures a successful harvest) at Alexandria.[88] The lowermost and right sections of the mosaic are reserved for scenes of animal combat that contrast with the idyllic depictions of the Nile's fauna in the upper portion. This representation of the festival celebrating the inundation shows that the creators (artists/patrons) were well acquainted with this festival and its Hellenistic and Roman iconography. Although the mosaic reflects a pagan ritual, the figures of the god of the Nile

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[86] Callimachus, *Hymnus in Dianam* 237-49, trans. A. W. Mair, LCL, London, 1921; K. Dowden, *Death and the Maiden: Girls' Initiation Rites in Greek Mythology*, London and New York, 1989, p. 62.

[87] J. Rossiter, "Convivium and Villa in Late Antiquity," in *Dining in Classical Context*, W. J. Slater (ed.), Ann Arbor, 1990, p. 203, n. 25; Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 2.1.7, 3.14.4, 7.1. 16; Ambrose, *Epistulae* 27.13, trans. M. M. Beyenka, Washington, 1954; Ammianus Marcellinus 14.6.20, trans. J. O. Rolfe, LCL, London, 1950. For mosaics depicting musicians and dancers in the context of banquet scenes, see C. Kondoleon, *Antioch: the Lost Ancient City*, Princeton, 2000, pp. 184-86; Blanchard-Lemée et al., *Mosaics of Roman Africa*, p. 74.

[88] P. G. P. Meyboom, *The Nile Mosaic of Palestrina*, Leiden, 1996, pp. 72-73.

and his consort should be regarded as merely personifications of the fertility of the land and its abundant yield.

## *Conclusions*

This study has traced the manner in which mythological scenes were addressed in Byzantine art in our region, by examining the themes and images considered worthy of depiction and the alterations made to render them more acceptable to Christian and probably Jewish culture. Three sites formed the focal point of the discussion: Gaza—a famous center for classical education and literature; Madaba—a Christian city in Arabia typified by numerous churches; and Sepphoris in Lower Galilee—a city characterized by a mixed population. The painting and mosaic floors under discussion here, all dated to the fifth and sixth centuries, reveal the wide spectrum of ways in which the Byzantine artists treated themes derived from pagan mythology, ranging from a sophisticated and sublime composition maintaining the classical spirit at its acme and attesting an elite intellectual culture (the Gaza painting), through the simple reproduction of popular mythological scenes (at Sheikh Zuweid), to mosaics that reveal a degeneration of the classical content (the dancing Amazons at Sepphoris and Achilles at Madaba).

The conspicuous role of the mime and after-dinner entertainment in some of the depictions has been noted, as has the popularity of the *mimus* in the houses of the rich—also well attested in the literature relating to the region. The dancing Amazons at Sepphoris and the Dionysiac θίασος at Madaba play the role of a parodic after-dinner chorus of singers and dancers. In addition, it was pointed out that scenes derived from Greek tragedies, especially those of Euripides, continued to appear without major changes. Another cognate feature is the humorous aspect introduced by the rendition of some of the mythological figures, e.g. the centaur in the role of a servant carrying the inscribed tray in Sepphoris and the mischievous Erotes at Madaba. The centaur and Amazons have been domesticated.

Another characteristic noted is the appearance of Dionysus and Aphrodite in Gerasa and the Hall of Hippolytus in Madaba as figures signifying growth and abundance in nature but lacking the majesty and cosmological attributes of deities. A work like the *Dionysiaca* of Nonnus, in which Dionysus is rendered as a soteriological and mighty god, to

date lacks any equivalent in the visual art of Palestine and Arabia. The mosaics at Gerasa and in the Hall of Hippolytus at Madaba constitute a broader context for the depiction of the forces of nature, in the form of classical personifications, in church or synagogue mosaic floors.

Although the mosaic in the Hall of Hippolytus at Madaba reflects the pagan festival of the *Rosalia* and the Nilotic mosaic at Sepphoris refers to the *Semasia*, they show a total lack of religious concern. These festivals became folkloristic elements and were therefore not problematic. None of these depictions is indicative of the existence of pagan enclaves within a Christian and Jewish society.[89]

The Christian or Jewish elements incorporated in some cases, e.g., the small seven-branched *menorah* in the House of Leontis at Beth Shean, the cruciform scepters in the hands of the city goddesses at Madaba, or the monotheistic inscription on the tray carried by the centaur, do not attest to a true combination of iconographical elements but remain allusions to the new context in which they appear.

The common repertoire of decorative motifs ornamenting both secular and religious floors indicates the great likelihood that the same artists executed these mosaics. The stylistic differences among the various mosaics testify that themes borrowed from classical mythology reappeared constantly throughout the Byzantine period, although it is reasonable to assume that they increased in number during periods of classicism.

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[89] For a different approach, see Geiger, "Aspects of Palestinian Paganism," pp. 3-16.

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