

Egyptian and Syrian Asceticism in Late Antiquity: A Comparative Study of the Ascetic Idea in the Late Roman Empire during the Fourth and Fifth Centuries

by Jeffrey Conrad

The Roman Empire between the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. experienced the development of a new form of Christian piety--the rise of asceticism. Two models or disciplines of the ascetic life arose during this time period, coenobitic and anchoritic asceticism. While both were manifestations of withdrawing from society, these two disciplines differed in the way in which the ascetics lived: coenobites lived communally whereas anchorites lived in solitude.¹ Anchorites practiced the ascetic discipline of fasting, prayer and meditation while living in solitude, scattered throughout the deserts of Egypt and in the steppe-lands and mountains of Syria. This expression of the monastic ideal rapidly spread from the homeland of its founder, St. Antony, to many Roman provinces, such as Palestine, Asia Minor, and Syria. There were men living as anchorites in Western Europe, but the dominant expression of withdrawing from society in that region of the Empire was coenobitic. Both Egyptian and Syrian asceticism in the fourth century developed out of earlier ascetic traditions in their respective locations. While the anchoritic life was equally as common in both provinces, the expression of the ascetic discipline, the *askhisi*, differed between the two: Egyptian asceticism was considerably more mild than the discipline practiced by the anchorites in Syria. This was due to Egypt's severe deserts and harsh climatic conditions, forcing the ascetic to remain in his cell, where he practiced the central tenets of the *askhisi*: fasting, prayer and meditation.² Syrian asceticism, in contrast, was less hindered by that province's geography and climate, which was milder and more varied. The Syrians also developed a much more rigorous body renouncing tendency than in Egypt. While many differences existed between Egyptian and Syrian asceticism, there is one fascinating similarity between the two: asceticism in both provinces was an out-growth of martyrdom, filling the vacuum created by the adoption of Christianity by the Emperors of the Late Roman Empire.

The ascetic ideal that made Egyptian Christianity renowned throughout the Roman Empire by the end of the fourth century, and served as the prototype of Christian asceticism in the West, developed out of earlier ascetic traditions within the Roman province of Egypt. In fact, hermits could be found in Egypt prior to the anchoritic life of St. Antony. Upon hearing the gospel of Matthew, "if you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven," Antony was convinced to sell his parents' estate, recently bequeathed to him upon their death, place his sister into a convent, and settle among the hermits already living on the outskirts of his village.³ These hermits, many of whom had been living in isolation for dozens of years, provided the training which Antony was to master, and further add to, eventually

becoming one of the most venerated and renowned ascetics empire-wide, both in his lifetime and in the centuries to follow. It is difficult to ascertain exactly when the ascetic a[skhsi], or discipline, first took root in Egypt. In some respects, the prototype of Christian asceticism reached back to the dawn of Christianity, to John the Baptist and to Christ's example of seeking out a solitary place for prayer in the mountains and wilderness. Furthermore, some of the pre-Antonian ascetics undoubtedly came to the desert as refugees, fleeing the great persecutions of the third century, and ended up staying, providing examples of ascetic life which others were to follow.⁴

Although a prior ascetic tradition existed in Christianity, Egypt was a region prone to asceticism. Men in Egypt were driven to the desert by a crisis in human relations, where tensions of living in the "world" had proved unbearable, as ascetic literature such as the *Apophthegmata Patrum* overwhelmingly demonstrates. For example, when Abba Matoes was asked by a brother for advice on how to control his tongue and condemnations towards others in his community, he was advised accordingly:

If you cannot contain yourself, flee into solitude. . . . It is not through virtue that I live in solitude, but through weakness; those who live in the midst of men are the strong ones.⁵

The overwhelming popularity among Egyptians to take up the a[skhsi], based on this "crisis in human relations," is explained by the tense and uneasy relationships between members of Egyptian villages. These villages were made up of peasants who were self-sufficient in mind, possessing an air of total disengagement from their neighbors: however, neither of these ideals were possible for them to carry out. Instead, villagers were forced, out of necessity, to cooperate; life in the desert village was difficult, and survival required cooperation among its members as a whole, not only conforming with the annual demands of Imperial taxation, but also cooperation in order to control the precious water of the Nile: to withdraw, *ajnacwvrhsi*", was a natural reflex reaction.⁶ The idea of escape was very real to the Egyptians, based on their autarkic way of thinking. Therefore, Egypt was a predisposed hot-bed for asceticism, built into the minds of the men who lived along the Nile.⁷

By the fourth century, what once was an obscure and rare tradition among Christians in Egypt, the ascetic life suddenly became extremely characteristic of that province; its reputation quickly spread throughout the empire, rapidly changing the face of the Christian church as well as the province of Egypt, so that "by A.D. 400, Egypt was a land of hermits and monks."⁸ It was in this atmosphere that Athanasius' *Vita Antonii* became a fourth century "best seller," not only in Egypt but as far away as Rome, Asia Minor, and Syria: "Antony was the first great manifesto of the ascetic ideal--a classic of the spiritual life which was exerting its influence over the Christian world within a very few years of its writing."⁹ St. Antony's long periods of solitude, withdrawing "to the tombs, situated some distance from the village," followed by twenty years inside a deserted Roman fortress, set the supreme example of the anchorite; he was so revered by contemporaries and future ascetics alike that "even his death had become something imitable."¹⁰ Antony lived out his hermitic life in the deserts of Lower Egypt, while another contemporary ascetic named Pachomius was establishing his interpretation of the a[skhsi] known as

coenobitic, or communal monasticism, in Upper Egypt. Both forms of asceticism were to have very long futures in their respective areas. But in Egypt at least, in contrast to Syrian asceticism, both anchorites and coenobites were dependent, relying on other humans in one way or another. Surviving in the harsh Egyptian desert conditions, Egyptian ascetics lived out their existence in a cell, whether in solitude, far removed from others, or alone within a community, as in coenobitic monasteries modeled after Pachomius in Upper Egypt.¹¹ It is the locus and significance of the cell that needs clarification.

The cell of the Egyptian ascetic defined him both in space and time, and was common to both communal and solitary ascetics. As mentioned earlier, two manifestations of asceticism arose in Egypt in the course of the third and fourth centuries, divided roughly between Upper and Lower Egypt: in the former, the coenobitic tradition founded by Pachomius (A.D. 290 - 347) at Tabennisi in the Thebaid was most common, and in the latter, the anchoritic custom of Antony.¹² The region around Nitria and Scetis, about forty miles to the south, could be classified as a subset of Lower Egyptian anchoritic asceticism.¹³ This region is more or less characteristic of groups of ascetics, where several hermits lived together, often as disciples of an older and experienced ascetic known as an Abba. The cell in all three regions provided shelter and protection, not only from the elements, but from wild animals roaming the desert. It took many forms, ranging from ancient tombs lying deserted in the middle of the desert, to caves, in which the ascetic often competed with the animal kingdom for solitude.¹⁴ But a cell need not have been a pre-existing or natural structure; often a hermit would construct his cell out of materials available in the desert, such as lean-tos made of local Nile thrushes and wood from small desert trees, as well as recycling stone from ancient structures lying vacant in the desert. Furthermore, there is evidence that ascetics sometimes pooled their efforts, hastily constructing a cell in a matter of a single day, using mud-brick, the quintessential building material for the coenobitic monasteries founded by Pachomius in the Thebaid.¹⁵ But regardless of how they were built, or from what medium the cells took their shape, the cell was first and foremost the primary locus of the ascetic, defining the ascetic's utter rejection of the human world--the world defined by civilization and, subsequently, a world characterized by sin; the Egyptian ascetic, whether anchoritic, coenobitic or living with a few hermits harmoniously, (as in the region around Nitria and Scetis), was committed to his cell.

The cell was the place where almost all daily activities were played out, and where the ascetic disciplined himself in the art of obedience: work, fasting, prayer, and meditation. The work of the Egyptian ascetic varied depending on his geographical location in Egypt. In Lower Egypt, for example, simple, monotonous work was most common, including "working with his hands, weaving palm leaves" into baskets, ropes, and palm-mats.¹⁶ In the regions around Nitria and Scetis, hermits worked with flax to make linen, apart from the normal ascetic tradition of rope-making.¹⁷ But, evidence for ascetics working as seasonal laborers, regardless of their particular interpretation of a[skhsi], is not uncommon.¹⁸

For it was the custom. . . among . . . almost all the Egyptian monks, to hire themselves out at harvest time as harvesters, each one among them earning eighty measures of corn, more or less, and would offer the greater part of it to the poor.¹⁹

Work was not thought of in this desert world as a way to subsist, nor to occupy what might seem as endless, lonely hours of the day; it always had at its heart, as with all of the ascetics' activities, a religious significance. The monk squatting in his cell, weaving baskets, or making rope, was actually very busy, both outwardly and inwardly, disciplining himself in the art of obedience, which was one of the most important aspects of the a[skhsi]. Obedience was considered enough to make an ascetic "super-human." For example, there was once a disciple of St. Antony's called Paul who came to him shortly after he caught his wife "in the very act of adultery." Falling to his knees he begged Antony to let him live with him because he wanted to be saved.

Antony said to him, 'You can be saved if you have obedience; whatever I tell you, that is what you will do.' Paul replied, 'I shall do everything you command.' . . . Antony said to him 'Stand on this spot and pray while I go [into the cell] and fetch some work for you to do.' . . . The latter remained motionless on that spot for the whole week, roasting in the sun.²⁰

Later, Paul brought Antony a jar of honey, who told Paul to break the jar and pour the honey out. Antony then commanded him to "gather up the honey with a spoon without collecting any dirt with it."²¹ He also taught Paul how to weave baskets,

and some days later ordered him to undo them all. He unstitched his cloak and ordered Paul to sew it up again. Again he unstitched it and again Paul sewed it up. And the disciple acquired such absolute obedience that God gave him the grace to drive out demons. Indeed, those demons which Antony was unable to exorcise he sent to Paul, who drove them out instantly.²²

This apophthegma relating a part of Paul's life demonstrates what obedience could offer an ascetic; the idea that he could exorcise demons that were unexorcisable by Antony would have been extremely meaningful to contemporaries reading his life. Antony was always remembered as the supreme ascetic, who had accomplished the goals ascetics set out to conquer--to appear "as from some inmost shrine, initiate into the mysteries and God-Borne;" he had achieved the gospel vocation of becoming tevleio" -- 'perfect.'²³ Thus, through obedience, all ascetics had the ability to attain perfection, returning to the fuvsin, or natural state of man: the recovery of Adam's condition before the fall.

The fall of man from the state of tevleio" was widely accepted in the ancient Christian world as being the result of Adam and Eve's temptation by Satan in the Garden of Eden. But in Egypt at least, in comparison to the Latin derivative of the ascetic tradition in the West, the greatest sin committed by Adam and Eve was not sexual desire, as in Western monasticism, but greed;²⁴ it was the ravenous devouring of the apple that established the greatest sin to be overcome by the Egyptian ascetics." It was the lust for physical food that led them to disobey god's command not to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge."²⁵

Thus, one of the primary weapons with which to battle the ultimate sin, keeping man from the state of tevlēio", was fasting. Indeed, fasting had an earlier tradition, found in different religions spread throughout varying geographical regions of the ancient Mediterranean world, but the ascetics of Egypt defined a radically new meaning and physical manifestation of the fast during the course of the fourth century. This element of the askhēsi" not only provided one of the most fundamental links by which to regain the natural state of mankind, but also has built within it a dramatic eschatological significance. The Mediterranean world in general was always on the brink of famine--it created a state of urgency that always resided at the forefront of most people's minds in the Roman Empire. Ironically, Egypt had served for centuries as the Roman provincial Mediterranean "bread basket," providing a great majority of the grain Empire-wide. But, for the peasants and many other inhabitants, the grain never adequately fed them.²⁶ Therefore, considering the ever present fear of starvation that existed in Late Antiquity, the daily intake of food with which the ascetics of Egypt subsisted is shocking. For example, it was not uncommon for some monks to exist for years on the Eucharist alone, or to subsist on a daily ration of a single fig, or a small piece of dry bread every other day.²⁷ This self inflicted form of bodily mortification served not only as the key in regaining the tevlēio", but also functioned as an eschatological manifestation, similar to fleeing into the desert, and living among the tombs, all of which were reserved in antiquity for the dead: the approach of the end-time could be clearly felt by witnessing these ascetics of the Egyptian desert, whose lifestyle with such a drastic food intake, in a world already on the brink of starvation, was the antithesis of the state of the living world.²⁸

Another central tenet of the ascetic askhēsi" was prayer. Since the time of Christ, prayer had played a central role in communicating with God: "And [Christ] told them a parable, to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart" . . . "rejoice always, pray constantly, and give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."²⁹ In this sense, prayer was nothing phenomenal in the daily lives of the desert fathers. Yet, for most Christians, praying did not in daily practice take up a good portion of their days and nights. But the Egyptian ascetics held prayer as a central tenet of their day-to-day activities--it was at the heart of ascetic life in the desert. To pray ceaselessly becomes defined as the central attribute of the desert ascetics as one reads the voluminous evidence contained in *Apophthegmata* and *Vitae Patrum*: in fact, prayer was synonymous with being an ascetic. A rather humorous example of this comes from the *Patrologia Latina*. One day, some monks came to see Abba Lucius, saying,

"We do not work with our hands; we obey Paul's command and pray without ceasing". The old man said "Do you not eat or sleep?" They said "Yes." He said "who prays for you while you are asleep? . . . Excuse me brothers but you do not practice what you claim."

Abba Lucius began to explain how he was able to both work and pray without ceasing. He would collect some palm-leaves and weave them, saying "have mercy upon me O God. . . do away with mine offenses." The inquiring monks agreed that this indeed was prayer, and Abba Lucius continued:

When I have worked and prayed in my heart all day, I make about sixteen pence. Two of these I put outside my door and with the rest I buy food. And he who finds the two coins outside the door of my cell prays for me while I eat and sleep. And so by the help of God I pray without ceasing.³⁰

Praying ceaselessly was common among all Christians who withdrew from society, whether living communally or in solitude. But prayer was more complicated than simply communicating with God--it also involved meditation.

Combined with the central tenet of prayer, was the practice of hJsuciva, or meditation. The importance of this tenet was stressed by Abba Palamon, who advised the young Pachomius not to become a monk because the a[skhsi] was too difficult for most men. He said that he fasted daily, and "by the Grace of God I eat nothing but bread and salt." . . . And "I keep vigil . . . always spending half the night and often the whole night in prayer and meditation."³¹ While prayer was most often done alone, the hJsuciva was practiced with the intent of seeking the advice of an Abba. Sitting in his cell, the lonely ascetic would meditate, paying close attention to the thoughts that ran through his mind. Many times his streams of consciousness, or logismoiv, would be puzzling, and often disturbing. Every so often, the ascetic would go to an Abba, to help him analyze his thoughts.

What shall I do. . . my [thoughts] blind my reason with. . . illicit pleasure. . . . Abba Moses said "You have not withdrawn your mind from these images, and for that reason you are undergoing this. Give yourself over to vigils, prayer and fast and soon you will be rid of them."³²

The Abba's advice, as simple as it may appear, was the right answer, for years later, after following Abba Moses's advice, the disciple was himself "deemed worthy of power over demons; we have more fear of flies than he had of demons."³³ The sources are peppered with ascetics grappling with demons, who were always tempting the men living in the desert. These temptations often arose during meditation, and the Abba was able to pick apart the logismoiv as either stemming from personal streams, demonic or heavenly forces.³⁴

Thus, ascetics, whether living in solitude or communally, were never truly independent--all were at least spiritually, if not physically, living with an elder: the Abba, who possessed the gift of diavkrisi, or discernment. This spiritual father of the desert acted as a teacher of the a[skhsi], playing the role of spiritual advisor to a select group of disciples, who found in him not only enlightenment, but also guidance. The Abba was respected, having proved himself in the discipline by spending many years in solitude, fasting, praying, and meditating, eventually being deemed worthy of discernment.

Evagrius lived in a cell, in isolation for fifteen years, eating only a pound of bread and a pint of oil in the space of three months, praying ceaselessly so that within fifteen years he had so purified his mind that he was deemed worthy of the gift of . . . discernment.³⁵

Discernment, as illustrated in the previous paragraph, was the ability to accurately sift through the logismoiv of young ascetics. In order to understand which thoughts were good and which were strewn from Satan Himself, the ascetic would periodically seek advice from this elder ascetic, whose long life and years of experience had taught him how to sift through the thoughts of others, providing a clear picture of their significance. Meditation was the vehicle by which to cleanse the soul with the help of the Abba; it allowed the ascetic's heart to become purified of all of the wretchedness that commonly plagued a novice ascetic sitting for years in solitude. Temptations, such as fornication and greed, and walking out on the ascetic life were common, and represented sins that kept the ascetic from gaining perfection. With help and guidance from the Abba in purifying these thoughts, freeing them of the temptations that the desert so commonly played on the ascetics, the ascetic became unhindered in his relationship to God--he himself had become an Abba, and had mastered the thea[skhsi].

Traveling North-east from Egypt, and across the Judean desert of Palestine, we arrive at the province of Syria, lying in the heart of the Eastern Roman Empire. Syria was, like Egypt, a hot-bed of ascetic activity; both Syrian and Egyptian asceticism developed out of earlier ascetic traditions, yet, the ascetics in Syria developed a more rigorous expression of the ascetic ideal than the ascetics in Egypt. Also, the tradition in Syria was indigenous to that province, and always remained characteristically Syrian.³⁶ The association between asceticism and Christianity was centuries old in Syria, reaching back to radical ascetic trends within some Jewish sectarian groups pre-existing Christianity.³⁷ Syrian asceticism was deeply rooted in the Encratite movement of the second and third centuries A.D., in which abstinence played a synonymous part in the religious lives of many in that province.³⁸ Christian sectarians such as the Marcionites and Manicheans, for example, evolved in Syria and continued to play a role in Syrian Christianity up through the third century; in fact, both early Manicheism and the ideals of permanent celibacy, promoted very early among Syrian Christians, may have grown on the same receptive soil.³⁹ Even when Orthodoxy eventually triumphed after the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D., baptism involved sexual abstinence by the baptized Christians in Syria, which was irrefutably an element of Marcionite theology that had remained in Syria up to the fourth century.⁴⁰ Syrian asceticism was thus a natural outcome of the "ascetic explosion" of the fourth century, and its Encratite tradition played a valuable role in the development and reworking of Syrian asceticism in the fourth and fifth centuries A.D.

The province's previous history of radical Christian exposition was not the only factor leading to Syria's exceptionally radical expression of the ascetic life. The natural geographic terrain and climatic conditions, as in the Roman province of Egypt, greatly affected the manifestation of Syria's characteristic breed of asceticism. But unlike Egypt, the geographic and climatic conditions in Syria were considerably more mild. The difference between settled land and desert wilderness was not as greatly differentiated in Syria as it was in Egypt, where life was directed towards the hard reality of survival; the extreme heat and lack of annual rainfall severely limited the Egyptian ascetic to his cell, where manual labor and prayer were carried out in one place, whether in solitude or in common. The deserts in Syria on the other hand were not true deserts; the geographical terrain varied greatly from steppe-lands to mountainous regions, where semi-annual rain-

showers ensured that water was always near the surface.⁴¹ Theodoret of Cyrrhus commented on the terrain in his own territory as "including many high mountains, some wholly bare and some covered with unproductive vegetation."⁴² The natural geographic conditions of the Syrian wilderness, as opposed to desert, marked the difference between the two provinces. It permitted the Syrians to live the a[skhsi] in ways unheard of in Egypt, such as roaming the wilderness unconfined to cells, living in cities as beggars, as well as disciplining their bodies in provocative and fascinating ways. Egypt was truly the cradle of ascetic theory and practice, which reached its pinnacle there, but the saints that minted the ideal of a truly angelic life were Syrian.

One of the most striking qualities of Syrian asceticism, in contrast to other manifestations of asceticism, was the aspiration to the angelic life; asceticism was the "higher life," envisioned as an imitation on earth of the heavenly life of the angels. It was in imitation of them that many embraced the ascetic life, as immortal and bodiless creatures, who could escape all bonds that might prevent the mind from soaring into heaven and gazing at the ineffable beauty of God.⁴³ Originating from the Encratite movement of the second and third centuries A.D., the Christian observers venerating the Syrian ascetics did so because they believed that the Holy Spirit could elevate these spiritual "athletes" above the normal constraints of human nature.⁴⁴ As angels in the flesh, the Syrian ascetics were in a sense not human: "Whosoever adopts the likeness of angels, let him be a stranger to men."⁴⁵ Aspiring to an immaterial and bodiless state, the human body was regarded with severe pessimism and apathy: "ever mourning, we grieve our human nature."⁴⁶ This negative regard of the human flesh was at the center of aspiring to a life of perpetual self mortification. Syrian ascetics were not concerned with human perfection as were Egyptian ascetics because in Egypt, human perfection was limited by man's natural physical state. For the Syrian ascetics, the desire was the transcendence of perfection, unconfined by man's nature, through divine grace. Impassability, ajpaqei'a, was freedom from man's nature, normally inseparable from life on earth, emulating the bodiless beings;⁴⁷ their practices of pushing the human body to its limit and beyond in effect surpassed human limitations and came as close to living the angelic life here on earth. These men of the Syrian desert were often spoken of in question: "Tell me, by the truth that has converted the human race to itself, are you a man or a bodiless being?"⁴⁸--that is, are you human?

The geographical conditions in Egypt hindered her ascetics, but the lack of such stark conditions between settled and uninhabited land was one reason the Syrian form of ascetic life took on a more rigorous bodily renouncing tendency in this area, where survival was not at the forefront of the human condition. The Syrians went beyond mere survival and were able to experiment, allowing them to develop the ascetic life in marked contrast to Egypt. We find in Syria ascetics who pushed the natural constraints of the human body to the limit. Self mortification is the most characteristic element in the lives of these "angelic" ascetics. This practice was relatively mild and had a different meaning in Egypt, and the occasional ascetics who practiced rigorous disciplines of the body, such as the wearing of chains, perpetual wandering, or living exposed to the elements without a cell, were disapproved of in Egypt.⁴⁹ An Egyptian Abba named Pambo made it quite clear when he said that voluntary pain and suffering had no significance at all.⁵⁰

Although evidence of excessive mortification can be found in Egypt, it nonetheless was an exception rather than the rule, and was usually practiced most often in terms of food deprivation, or for the atonement of sins.⁵¹ In contrast to the generally mild forms of self mortification in Egypt, the Syrian ascetics excelled at it--it was at the heart of their outward expression as angels in the flesh; they were consumed with self-inflicted pain and the rigorous exercise of the body.

A person in whom Grace abounds loves righteousness and so rejects the fear of death. The soul of such a person finds many reasons why one should endure afflictions because of the fear of God. Those things which are harmful to the body and consequently cause pain are considered as nothing when compared with what is awaited.⁵²

Self-inflicted pain and suffering was executed while performing many of the same tenets of the askhisi" common to both Syrian and Egyptian ascetics, such as fasting, praying and meditating, but in Syria, it was a constant practice. The wearing of chains around the neck, loins and other parts of the body was one of the most common forms of unending bodily mortification, serving as a constant reminder of the ascetic's rejection of the human body. Often the devices were hidden from view, concealed beneath a hair shirt, or tunic made from animal skins. For example, Theodoret of Cyrrhus was unaware of James of Cyrrhestica's rigorous discipline, and became quite startled as he tried to comfort the ascetic suffering from a serious malady. In an attempt to console the ailing man, Theodoret

tried gently to rub his back. It was then that I perceived the great load of iron that bound his waist and his neck; and other chains, two in front and two behind, in the shape of an X. And beneath his clothing his arms bore other bonds of this kind round his elbows.⁵³

Other common forms of bodily mortification included suspension from ropes in order to prevent the ascetic from lying down and sleeping comfortably.⁵⁴ Others perpetually bore open flesh-wounds, while some ascetics would enclose themselves in a skin sack, with an opening only for the nose and mouth.⁵⁵ The Syrian ascetics living in the wilderness demonstrate to what lengths Christian piety could go. But rigid, self-inflicted pain and suffering was not limited to the uncivilized steppe-lands and mountains.

Whereas the Egyptian ascetics were tied to their cells, both for protection from the excruciating desert heat and bitter cold nights, as well as remained in the desert, the Syrian ascetics most often preferred to live in a manner unconcerned by weather, and often could be found practicing the ascetic life in the cities and villages as "holy fools." Their ascetic "chapels" took on a wide range of forms, from holes in the ground, or sealed within wooden containers, often smaller in length than the ascetic who inhabited it, to living their entire lives wandering the mountains and wilderness, exposed to all weather extremes.⁵⁶ There were also ascetics who chose to live the angelic life out-of-doors in the cities of Syria, such as Antioch, Damascus and Apamea. Their way of life, as visible eccentrics, living an other-worldly life in the midst of civilized cities, earned them the name "holy fools." These ascetics found biblical motivations for their vocations: "Let no one deceive himself. If any one among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him

become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God."⁵⁷ The "holy fool" is always defined by his relationship to a particular community, leaving the ascetic life of the deserts and wilderness to play the fool in the wider community of the cities of the Eastern Empire, "aiming at the mortification of one's social being," by living in society, yet not of society itself, as the ascetics in the desert were in the world, yet not of it.⁵⁸ These city dwelling ascetics lived out their lives as beggars and prostitutes, cross dressers and perched high upon columns erected in the middle of cities within the Eastern Empire. St. Daniel the Stylite, for example, was not original in his endeavor, but took up the Stylite life after meeting St. Simeon face-to-face atop his Antiochine column.⁵⁹ Simeon the Stylite was the prototype of the Stylites' expression of asceticism, living thirty years perched on a column erected in the middle of Antioch. Simeon urged Daniel to climb up the ladder perched against the column, and "kissed him with a holy kiss and said 'stand firm and play the man . . . you must mount onto a pillar and take up my mode of life and be supported by the angels.'"⁶⁰ It was in Constantinople in A.D. 460 that Daniel, clad in Simeon's animal skin tunic, climbed his column and spent the next thirty-three years completely exposed to the elements, until his death at the age of eighty-four.⁶¹ The city holy man was a stranger, standing removed from the interconnectiveness of society as a man in question of his humanness. This quality, combined with living a "super-human" life, gave these holy men, unintentionally, power within society. The Stylites and other "holy fools" living in the cities inadvertently played a very powerful role within society. The city-dwelling holy man often functioned as mediator and judge, and it was by their intervention into the patrons' lives that the village sought a sense of communal identity with the holy fool.⁶² These ascetics played a visible role in society during Late Antiquity, but their role as living solely for God as an ascetic was never subordinated.

Both Egyptian and Syrian ascetics were highly venerated due to their "super-humanness;" but they were also venerated as the "new martyrs" in an age free from persecution, living this life in replacement of martyrdom--thus, asceticism was a form of spiritual martyrdom, filling the vacuum created by the Imperial adoption of Christianity. For centuries, since the murder of the first Christian martyr, St. Stephen in 34 A.D., martyrdom was the most respected and sought after expression of Christian beliefs and faith in Christ. To suffer and die in Christ's name was the ultimate expression of one's faith, suffering the passion as Christ suffered and died for man. During the numerous persecutions of the first few centuries A.D., untold numbers of Christians perished, often by means of creatively grotesque and agonizing tortures.⁶³ Constantine embraced the Church after his victory at the Milvian Bridge in 312 A.D., and jointly signed the 'Edict of Milan' with co-Emperor Licinius in 313 A.D. as an Imperial order of toleration of Christianity. Christian panegyrists, such as Eusebius of Caesarea, lauded him for this, paralleling his action of leading the Christians from persecution to that of Moses and the plight of the Jews, who led them out of Egypt.⁶⁴ It was precisely at this time in the early decades of the fourth century A.D. that asceticism surged throughout the Roman Empire, from Egypt to Palestine, and Syria to Western Europe. Martyrdom as a sought after way to die was no longer an option in the empire, which was rapidly being Christianized in the fourth century; yet, the ideal was deeply rooted in the minds of Christians.

The evidence that points to asceticism as an out-growth of martyrdom is abundant, showing great similarity between the descriptions of ascetics and martyrs. Theodoret of Cyrhus, as well as other chroniclers of Saints and ascetics' lives in the fourth and fifth centuries, make frequent reference to ascetics as "athletes." For example, in the Prologue of the *Historia Religiosa*, Theodoret describes all ascetics as "athletes, putting on the breastplate of righteousness, taking up the shield of faith, and receiving the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit;" all of these objects were attributes that an athlete in the fourth century would have, as he risked his life on the floor of the city's colosseum.⁶⁵ However, the term was being used to refer to martyrs three centuries before by Christian apologists and early church fathers. Clement of Rome, writing in the late first century A.D., belonged to a generation of Christian fathers commonly referred to as sub-apostolic. He spoke of martyrs in this way:

Let us come to an end of those ancient examples of jealous persecution, and come to the athletes of most recent times; let us take the noble examples of our generation. Through envy and jealousy the greatest and most righteous 'pillars' were persecuted and engaged in the contest unto death.⁶⁶

Metaphors of heroism were commonly employed when describing the trials and persecutions of Christians. Martyrs were commonly referred to as athletes playing out their devotion in the arena, in the midst of a hostile and greatly un-Christian Roman Empire.

But martyrs were not the only subjects of Christian heroism that received the title of athlete. The ascetics of the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. were also commonly described in this manner, representing the heroic suffering of the hermit in both Egypt and Syria alike. Their mode of life was a substitute for martyrdom, filling the vacuum created by the abolishment of persecution after Constantine. The ideal was the same, but was expressed in a new form of devotion to Christ. The mode in which man could emulate Christ's suffering on Earth changed, but the desired result was nonetheless preserved in the fourth and fifth centuries A.D., as Christians moved out of a world opposed to them, and into one in which they were accepted and were greatly increasing in numbers. Athanasius spoke of Antony's anchoritic life as "withdrawing to the cell, and was there daily being martyred by his conscience and doing battle in the contests of faith."⁶⁷ The expression of suffering took on a new form: the renunciation of the body, and self-inflicted mortification that both Egyptian and Syrian ascetics imposed upon themselves, although in differing degrees of severity. Both martyrdom and asceticism were striving for the same ideal.

The ascetic literature, such as apophthegmata and histories of the ascetics' daily lives of suffering, were written for many of the same reasons as the *Passiones* and *Gesta Martyrum*, which attested to the death and suffering of the martyrs; both demonstrated to the Christian world the power of God throughout the lives of these men who suffered. The endurance of the martyrs was a miracle in and of itself, and the heroism and courage were dissociated from normal human courage "for the exemplary courage of the martyrs

and apostles had been lifted by God out of the domain of mere physical endurance and mere human strength."⁶⁸ It raises the question once again--are you human?

Finally, the relics of dead ascetics were as highly venerated and sought after as those attributed to martyrs. The relics of martyrs were powerful and important remains of the Christians who died for the faith. "Praesentia, the physical presence of the holy, was the greatest blessing that a late-antique Christian could enjoy."⁶⁹ It was the presence of an invisible person that had surrendered his life to the executioner in the name of Christ as Christ himself had done on the Cross in the name of God the Father and all human beings. Relics continued to play a role in the veneration of the "new martyrs"--the austere and ascetic who had died after years of suffering and endurance in the deserts and wilderness in Egypt and Syria. The physical remains of the ascetic who lived his life in the ultimate form of Christian expression were highly sought after as a reminder of his miracles and devotion to a selfless way of life. Theodoret of Cyrrhus relates the story of James of Cyrrhestica, who, suffering from a near fatal disease, inflicted upon him after spending years absolutely exposed to the elements, was mobbed by the local villagers believing he was already dead.

Many came together from all sides to seize his body, all the men of the town, when they heard of it, hastened together, soldiers and civilians, some taking military equipment, others using whatever weapons lay to hand. . . . Forming up in close order, they fought by shooting arrows and slinging stones - not to wound, but simply to instill fear. Having thus driven them off, they placed the all-round contestant on a litter, while he was quite unconscious of what was happening - he was not even conscious of his hair being plucked out by the peasants.⁷⁰

As the example illustrates, the mere thought of the ascetic's death caused great excitement among the locals, who wanted to ensure the power of his physical body for themselves. The village members living closest to him regarded his remains as an holy possession, defending their property against others equally as familiar and fond of the ascetic's holy way of life. The great haste to arrive at his body before foreigners found him insured that their village would have the holy remains, and become a place of pilgrimage within the Empire.⁷¹ The same veneration of ascetics took place in the deserts of Egypt; "we saw him ourselves, and having worshipped God, venerated his relics in the Thebaid."⁷² But the relics need not have been actual bodily remains, rather, they were often objects in which the holy man used, such as a tunic or even a piece of fruit: "for many years the Paternuthius' fig remained with his disciples as evidence of the father's visit to Paradise . . . indeed a sick man had only to smell it and he was at once cured of his illness."⁷³ For those venerating an ascetic's remains, the relics represented a physical symbol of the power of asceticism, as the relics of Christian martyrs symbolized the power of martyrdom. The physical remains of the saint allowed the Christian to come into direct contact with a physical symbol of the power of the resurrection, as the ascetic himself was believed to be resurrected due to his exemplary Christian life of suffering and renunciation. In the minds of those men and women who came to venerate the ascetic's relics, his years of solitude and physical endurance had paid off; the ascetic, like the martyr, would live forever in Paradise, at the right hand side of the Father, and his

remains symbolized this fact for every Christian who came to gaze at the "super-humanness" of the ascetic.

Therefore, the Roman Empire between the fourth and fifth centuries experienced the development of a new form of Christian piety--the rise of asceticism. Both the Provinces of Egypt and Syria were home to the ascetic discipline; yet, the outward expression of the a[skhsi] differed between the two areas. The geographical constraints and harsh desert climate severely limited the Egyptian ascetics, confining them to cells, where they practiced the ascetic discipline of fasting, prayer and meditation. Their modes of life differed from the ascetics in Syria, a province with a wide-range of geographical terrain, such as deserts, steppe-lands and mountainous areas, as well as more favorable climatic conditions. This allowed the Syrian ascetics to develop a more rigorous expression of the a[skhsi], emphasizing bodily mortification. Although Egyptian ascetics were occasionally found to self-inflict harm upon their bodies, it was nevertheless mild in contrast to the Syrians, and an exception rather than a rule. The Syrians also aspired to live life as angels in the flesh, emulating the bodiless creatures that live in heaven. Although there was a marked contrast between ascetics in Egypt and Syria, ascetics in both provinces served as spiritual martyrs, as an out-growth of martyrdom that had ceased to play a role in Christianity after the official Imperial adoption of the religion, putting an end to the once frequent and wide-spread persecutions that claimed so many Christians in first few centuries A.D. Asceticism was truly a higher life, and an extreme expression of Christian piety, attested to by the countless men in Egypt and Syria who suffered for Christ.

Endnotes

1 Although each form of asceticism existed contemporaneously, this paper is intentionally limited to the analysis of anchoritic asceticism in the Roman provinces of Egypt and Syria during the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. Coenobitism arose in the upper Nile Valley of Egypt under the direction of Pachomius, who was trained as an anchorite, but decided later in life to practice the ascetic discipline communally at Tabennisi in the Thebaid in Upper Egypt. Pachomius' monastery had a huge impact within Egypt and throughout the Empire, for daughter monasteries were established throughout that province and abroad even before his death in 347 A.D. Within decades of Pachomius' establishment of his community at Tabennisi, the ideal of communal monasticism had rapidly spread from Egypt into Palestine, Syria and Asia Minor. Sts. Basil and Cassian, each beginning their lives as monastics, were greatly influenced by the coenobitic ideal, and exported it to the province of Gaul in the mid-fourth century, where it was to flourish and become one of the few stable institutions in Western Europe throughout the early Middle Ages. In fact, even during the age of Charlemagne, monks were more highly esteemed by the Christian population in Europe than priests or even bishops. Medieval warriors would often donate a great portion of the spoils from their war campaigns to the monasteries, in order for the monks to pray for them and their souls. There are many references to coenobitic asceticism. For an introduction and bibliography, refer to Derwas

Chitty, *The Desert a City: An introduction to the Study of Egyptian and Palestinian monasticism under the Christian Empire* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966), passim. Also, see W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), passim. Also refer to Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), ch. 17-19. Furthermore, this is also a study exclusively about male ascetics, although there are numerous examples of females who devoted their lives to the ascetic discipline. For references to female ascetics, as well as bibliographies, refer to any number of the following: J. Anson, "The Female Transvestite in Early Monasticism: The Origin and Development of a Motif," in *Viator* 5 (1974): 1-32. Also see Sr. Benedicta Ward, *Harlots of the Desert: A Study of Repentance in Early Monastic Sources* (Oxford and London: Mowbray, 1987), passim. Refer also to C. Wolfskeel 'Makrina', in M. E. Waite (ed.), *A History of Women Philosophers in Ancient Women Philosophers, 600 B.C.-500 A.D.* (Dordrecht: Nijhoff, 1987). For more general information please see E.A. Clark, *Women in the Early Church* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1983), 139-168, as well as Brown, *The Body and Society*, ch. 13.

2 There are a number of Greek terms in the following paper. Please refer to the appendix for definitions. 3 Mt. 19:21, 6:34: *Vita Antonii* (trans. Robert C. Gregg in *The Classics of Western Spirituality: Athanasius, The Life of Antony and The Letter to Marcellinus* [New York: Paulist Press, 1980]), 2, 3.

4 Derwas Chitty, *The Desert A City* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell and Mott, Ltd., 1966), 7. Also W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 423. In fact, the life of ajnacwvrhsi" was advocated by the third century North African sectarian Mani, the founder of Manicheism. Mani insisted that a truly religious life was that of an ascetic, unworried about transitory matters. Manicheism was a reworking of first and second century Gnostic theology, in which Mani asserted that purity concerned the soul only, and came only from Gnosis, which freed the soul from death and destruction. Manicheism went further than the Gnostics, defining Gnosis as knowledge of the division between light and darkness, the two primary entities in the universe. Dualism had been assumed in Gnostic theology, but the Manicheians defined the division between God-Light and Evil-Darkness in detailed material terms. See Frend, *Rise of Christianity*, 314-316.

5 *Apophthegmata Patrum* (trans. Sr. Benedicta Ward in *The Desert Christian: Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection* [New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1975]) Matoes, 13.

6 For the ideas expressed in this paragraph, I am greatly indebted to the study by Peter Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 83-85.

7 The practice of fleeing into the desert was a centuries-old, pre-Christian phenomenon in Egypt; for ancient examples of this, refer to any number of anthologies of ancient Egyptian life, such as Miriam Lichtheim, ed., trans. *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book*

of Readings vol. 1 (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975). Refer specifically to "The Admonitions of Ipuwar," papyrus leiden 344, recto, 149-155.

8 Apophthegmata Patrum, xv.

9 Derwas Chitty, *The Desert A City*, 2.

10 Vita Antonii, 89. For information on his life in the tombs, refer to *Ibid.*, 8. Also, refer to *Ibid.*, 12-14 for Athenasius' description of Antony's twenty years in the Roman fortress. Note too the eschatological significance of moving into the tombs - a place reserved for the dead. This would have been unheard of in the 4th century, not to mention now. By going to live among the tombs, literally shows Antony as being dead to the world, renouncing civilization, and turning the world up-side down.

11 One reason for the dependence of the ascetic on the cell was the harsh, unrelenting desert conditions, receiving an annual rainfall of 1.1 inches per year, which limited the individual ascetic to his cell. Refer to Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity" in *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 110. These were the natural geographic and climactic conditions that molded the appearance of Egyptian monasticism; the absence of which allowed the Syrians to develop quite a different approach to the monastic ideal. As in the villages, cooperation was a necessary survival factor; for the hermit, cooperation was with the land, often requiring him to remain in one place, relying on others to bring him food; such is the case with Antony, to whom bread was brought by his disciples twice a year. Refer to Vita Antonii, 12. It is rare and atypical, for example, to find bovskoi, or wandering, grazing ascetics in Egypt, but rather characteristic of Syrians to live this mode of life. bovskoi were found occasionally in Egypt, but generally disapproved of there. Refer to Chitty, *The Desert a City*, 17, n. 36. For the only two examples I know of, refer to Palladius, *Paradise* (trans. E.A. Wallis Budge in *The Paradise of the Holy Fathers*, vol. I. [Seattle: St. Nectorios Press, 1984]) 2.18, 19.

12 Pachomian Koinonia, trans. Armand Veilleux, vol. (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1980), *passim*.

13 Apophthegmata Patrum, xvi. Nitria is often referred to as the gateway to the desert, the meeting place between the world and the desert. Here, the anchoritic and coenobitic paths are not so sharply distinct and independent of each other as they are with Antony and Pachomius. Also refer to Chitty, *The Desert a City*, 11.

14 There are many examples of this in the sources available in translation. For a couple of them, refer to Vita Antonii, and also Palladius, *The Lausiac History* (trans. Robert T. Meyer in *Ancient Christian Writers Series*, vol. 34 [London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1965]).

15 *Historia Monachorum in Ægypto* (trans. Norman Russell in *The Lives of the Desert Fathers*. [Kalamazoo: Cistercian Press, 1981]) Abba Or, 2 . 6.

16 Palladius, *The Lausiaca History* (trans., ed., Robert Meyer in *Ancient Christian Writers Series*, no. 34 [London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1965]) Stephen, 24, 2.

17 Chitty, *The Desert a City*, 31.

18 *Historia Monachorum in Ægypto*, 25.

19 Rufinus of Aquileia, *Historia Monachorum in Ægypto* (trans. Hellen Waddell in *The Desert Fathers*, [London: Cistercian Publications, 1962]), 17.

20 *Historia Monachorum in Ægypto*, On Paul, 24 . 1.

21 *Ibid.*, 8.

22 *Ibid.*, 9.

23 *Vita Antonii*, 14. This quote differs some from the translation by Gregg, and is based on a translation from the original MSS by Derwas Chitty in *The Desert a City*, 4, n. 17. "w{sper e[k tino" ajluvtou memustagwhmevno" kai; qeoforouvmeno"."

24 The association between Adam's fall and the sin of sexuality in the West is in part largely due to the importation and reworking of eastern ascetic traditions in the west by such men as Cassian, Ambrose, and Augustine. John Cassian summarized the spiritual teachings which he had received in Egypt, in two books, *The Conferences* and *The Institutes*, adapting it to the somewhat different conditions of the West. His writings had a large impact on the development of Western monasticism. In regards to unchastity as the most formidable sin in the Western tradition, he states that "the commandment given by God to . . . Adam, told him to keep watch over . . . the first inklings of the pernicious thoughts by means of which the serpent tries to creep into our souls. If we do not admit the serpent . . . which is the provocation of the thought, we will not admit the rest of its body [which is] . . . the assent to the sensual pleasure . . . and so debase the mind towards the illicit act itself." Refer to John Cassian's *Institutes*, 6 . 6 in *The Philokalia*, ed., trans. G.E.H. Palmer et al., vol. 1 (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1979). Both *The Conferences* and *The Institutes* have also been translated by E.C.S. Gibson, in P. Schaff and H. Wace, eds., *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 2nd. series, Vol. 11 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1955).

25 Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 220. For an interesting, but unsatisfactory review of Brown's book, in which the author feels Brown's thesis fails due to selective and partial readings of early Christian texts, refer to Robin Young Darling, "Recent Interpretations of Early Christian Asceticism" *The Thomist: A Speculative Review* 54 (1990): 123-140.

26 There are numerous references to the ever present fear of starvation in Late Antiquity. For some examples, refer to Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae*, 19.10.2-3, 27.3.14

(trans. Walter Hamilton in Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire* (A.D. 354-378) [New York: The Penguin Group, 1986]). Refer also to Peter Garnesy, *Famine and Food Shortage in the Graeco-Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 257-268. More evidence can be found in Aline Rouselle, *Porneia: De la maîtrise du corps à la privation sensorielle*, 205-206, cited in Peter Brown, *The Body and Society*, 218. Also see Caroline Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 31-40. Also refer to Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Phillip II of Spain*, trans. Sian Reynolds (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), ch. 2, *passim*.

27 For such common food allowances, refer to any number of saints' lives, or apophthegmata, such as John the Hermit who was said to have eaten nothing except "communion which the priest brought to him on Sundays." Refer to *Historia Monachorum in Ægypto*, On John, 13. However meager the Egyptian diet may seem, it is very mild when contrasted with the Syrian encratite ascetic tradition, to be discussed later in the paper.

28 Refer to note 10.

29 Lu. 18:1, 1st. 5:16-18.

30 *Patrologia Latina* 12, 9: col. 942. An English translation can be found in Benedicta Ward, *Daily Readings with The Desert Fathers* (Springfield: Tempelgate Publishers, 1990), 61.

31 *The First Greek Life of Pachomius*, G c. 6 (trans., Armand Veilleux in *The Pachomian Koinonia*, vol., "The Life of Saint Pachomius and His Disciples" [Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1985]), 301.

32 Palladius, *The Lausiatic History*, Moses the Ethiopian, 19. 7.

33 *Ibid.*

34 Peter Brown, *The Body and Society*, 227-229.

35 Palladius, *The Lausiatic History*, Evagrius, 38, 10.

36 Egyptian ascetic and monastic ideals could be found in Western Europe in monasteries established by Sts. Basil and Cassian, modeled after the Pachomian coenobitic monasteries in Upper Egypt. Yet, the rigorous style of Syrian asceticism was disapproved of, and not exported with Cassian. Refer to O. Chadwick, *John Cassian*, 2nd. ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1968). Also see, Sulpicius Severus, *The Life of Saint Martin of Tours*, (trans. F. R. Hoare in *The Western Fathers: Being the Life of Saint Martin of Tours, Ambrose, Augustine of Hippo, Honoratus of Arles, and Germanus of Auxerre* [New York: Harper and Row, 1954]).

37 John Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1989), 83. Also, refer to pp. 81-94 for a brief, but informative synopsis of Eastern monasticism.

38 In Fact, Arthur Vööbus argues that the roots of Syrian asceticism go directly into Manichean dualism. Refer to Arthur Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient*, vol. I (Louvian: Secrétariat du Corpus SCO, 1958), 109-130. For an extremely brief description of Manicheism, refer to note 1. Also, refer to Frend, *Rise of Christianity*, 212-218.

39 Robert Murry, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 17-18.

40 Frend, *Rise of Christianity*, 424. For further information on second and third century enkratite ascetic movements that flourished in Syria and other parts of the Empire, refer to *Ibid.*, 195-197, 212-218.

41 Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient*, vol. II, 120-121. Also, Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity" in *Society and The Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 110-113.

42 Theodoret of Cyrillus, Ep. 42., cited in Brown, *The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity*, 111.

43 Theodoret of Cyrillus, *The Cure of Hellenic Maladies*, 3. 91-92, Trans. R. M. Price, cited in Theodoret of Cyrillus, *A History of the Monks of Syria* (trans. R. M. Price [Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1985]), 30, 31.

44 Brown, *The Body and Society*, 323-327.

45 Aphrahat, *Demonstration VI, On Monks* (trans. John Gwynn in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Ser. 2, vol. 13 [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956]), 364. Aphrahat was a contemporary of Ephrem the Syrian, writing in the fourth century A.D.

46 St. Peter of Damaskos, *A Treasury of Divine Knowledge* (trans. Kallistos Ware in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text Compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth*, Vol. 3 [London: Faber and Faber, 1984]), 89.

47 Theodoret of Cyrillus, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, Prologue, 2, n. 3.

48 *Life of Symeon Stylites*, in Theodoret of Cyrillus, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, 26. 23.

49 Chitty, *The Desert a City*, 17, n. 36. Also see Brown, *The Body and Society*, 213, 230.

50 Apophthegmata Patrum, Pambo, GYPTIAN AND SYRIAN ASCETICISM IN LATE ANTIQUITY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE ASCETIC

51 For example, during Lent - a common time for fasting even among twentieth century Christians - Marcarius of Alexandria was noted by Palladius to have . . . moistened a great many palm leaves and stood in a corner until the forty days were over and it was Easter. He ate no bread and drank no water . . . and partook nothing but a few cabbage leaves . . . so that he might at least give the appearance of eating. Palladius, *The Lausiaca History*, Marcarius of Alexandria 18, 14. Other rare examples of bodily mortification seem only to have been executed as a means of penance. For example, Marcarius was sitting in his cell and a gnat stung him on the foot. Feeling the pain, he killed it with his hands. He accused himself of acting out of revenge and he condemned himself to sit naked in the marsh of Scete out in the desert for six months. Here the mosquitoes lacerated even the hides of wild swine. Soon he was bitten all over his body, and became so swollen that he was recognized only by his voice. *Ibid.*, Marcarius of Alexandria, 18, 4.

52 St. Isaac of Nineveh, *On Ascetical Life*, trans. Mary Hansbury (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1989), 1, 8. St. Isaac was a Bishop of the East Syrian tradition, living in the region of modern day Qatar. He preferred to live his life as an anchorite, spending much of his time as a Scriptural scholar, eventually becoming blind due to his fervent scholarship, and having to dictate his writings. He lived in the seventh century, and was consecrated Bishop between 660-680 A.D. Although he lived later than the other subjects used in this study, his doctrines on the ascetical life are, nonetheless, in tradition with the Syrian ascetics of the fourth and fifth centuries A.D.

53 Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, James of Cyrrhestica, 21. 8.

54 *Monumenta Syriaca*, 1.11, cited in Vööbus, *Asceticism in The Syrian Orient*, 265.

55 Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Historia Religiosa*, 21. 1484, cited in *Ibid.*, 278.

56 Numerous examples of these forms and others can be found in untranslated material cited in Vööbus, *Asceticism in the Syrian Orient*, 277-278, but also throughout his two volume work. Also refer to any of the lives described in Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, probably the most complete source of Syrian ascetics in translation.

57 1 Corinthians, 3:18, 19.

58 John Saward, *Perfect Fools: Folly for Christ's Sake in Catholic and Orthodox Spirituality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 12-17.

59 St. Simeon the Stylite, 26, in Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *A History of the Monks of Syria*. He found it necessary as a means of escape from the numerous pilgrims who venerated

him, escaping their devotion by climbing his column, standing at a final height of 'forty cubits' where he spent the next thirty years completely exposed to the elements.

60 Life of St. Daniel the Stylite, 21, in E. Dawes and N.H. Baynes, *Three Byzantine Saints* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1948).

61 *Ibid.*, 23.

62 Brown, *The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity*, 127.

63 For a fascinating, but gruesome account of the wide variety of tortures implemented during the persecutions, refer to the *De SS. Martyrum Cruciabiatis* in Antonio Gallonio *Tortures and Torments of the Christian Martyrs* (Los Angeles: Feral House, 1989). The book is most intriguing due to the abundance of reproduced woodcuts of actual devices and methods of torture in Antiquity aimed specifically at persecuting Christians.

64 Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 9.9.5,6 (Trans. J. E. L. Oulton in Loeb Classical Library [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932]).

65 Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, Prologue, 4.

66 Clement of Rome, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 9. 5-6, (ed., trans. Henry Bettenson in *The Early Christian Fathers: A Selection from The writings of the Fathers from St. Clement of Rome to St. Athanasius*, 9th ed. [New York: Oxford University Press, 1987]).

67 *Vita Antonii*, 48.

68 Augustine, *Gesta cum felice*, 1.12., cited in Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 80, n. 56. Chapter four was very useful in gaining an understanding of the meaning of martyrdom in the Western Roman Empire, and many of the ideas can be extrapolated to fit the Egyptian and Syrian ideals of the power of martyrdom, as well as its connection with the ascetic ideal in the East.

69 Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 88.

70 Life of James of Cyrrhestica, 21. 9, in Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *A History of the Monks of Syria*.

71 Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 132.

72 *Historia Monachorum in Ægypto*, On Apollonius, 19. 12.

73 Symeon the Stylites' tunic of animal skins was a holy relic, passed onto Daniel the Stylite and venerated in regards to both saints after his death. Refer to Life of Daniel the

Stylite, 20, in E. Dawes, *Three Byzantine Saints*. For the touching account of the "holy fig," refer to *Historia Monachorum in Ægypto*, On Paternuthius, 10. 21-22.

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Appendix

List of Greek Terms in Order of Appearance

a[skhsi"	"askesis"	discipline, exercise, training
ajnacwvrhsi"	"anachoresis"	withdraw; retreating, place of retreat
apophthegma		a thing uttered, a sententious answer
bovskoi	"boskoi"	grazers; from bovskw, to graze, to feed
teveio"	"teleios"	perfect; without blemish, complete
fuvsin	"phusin"	natural; nature; inborn quality
diavkrisi"	"diakrisis"	discernment, judgment, the faculty of distinguishing
hJsuciva	"hesychia"	meditation, stillness, peace, to be at rest
logismoiv	"logismoi"	streams of consciousness, reflection
ajpaqei'a	"apatheia"	impassability, apathy