

Such additions and subtractions in the Latin text suggest that its editor wished to remove Melania from any association with Monophysite tendencies and to maximize her Romaninity, presenting her as a model of orthodoxy suitable for emulation by Westerners. The Latin editor both "corrected" passages in the Greek original that might be understood to align Melania with the later Monophysites and highlighted her fundamental Romaninity, despite her years spent in the East.

On such a reading of the *Vita Melaniae Junioris*, we thus hypothesize that the text's original language was Greek, that its author was Gerontius, that its recipient was an opponent of Juvenal of Jerusalem, possibly his Monophysite successor Theodosius, and (if so) that the dating of the *Vita* might be assigned to A.D. 452 or 453, when Theodosius was bishop of Jerusalem.

II. TRANSLATION: THE LIFE OF MELANIA

Bless me, father.¹

Prologue

God be blessed, who has aroused your honored Reverence, holy priest, to seek an account from my lowly self concerning the life of our holy mother, Melania the Roman, who has her home with the angels. Since I spent not a little time with her, I know in an indistinct way the story of her senatorial family, and how she entered upon the angelic life, putting under foot all the pride of worldly glory. But since I am keenly aware of my own lack of skill, I deemed myself inadequate to the narration of these great contests. I decided, rather, that it was less dangerous for me to refuse, imagining that I could better extol the noble servant of God through my silence than insult her splendid feats through my own unskilled speech. But since you once again, holy priest, have promised to suffer with us through your holy prayers, I took heart in the power of the Spirit. I prepared to cast myself into the boundless sea of recitation, seeing clearly the heavenly reward from my obedience. It is not so amazing if I, an amateur author and slow of speech, lose heart at the undertaking of such a task, for by my reckoning not even the philosophers themselves have ventured too far on so great an assignment, so it seems. For who would be able to recount in a clear and worthy manner the manly deeds of this blessed woman? I mean of course her utter renunciation of worldly things, her

ardor for the orthodox faith (an ardor hotter than fire), her unsurpassable beneficence, her intense vigils, her persistence in lying on the ground, her ill-treatment and ceaseless ascetic discipline of her soul as well as of her body, her gentleness and temperance that vie with the incorporeal powers, the cheapness of her clothing, and even more than these, her humility, the mother of all good things. Each one of this woman's virtues steers us to a boundless sea of thoughts and the composition of an entire book, a task which surpasses our ability by far. Since, then, I have my doubts about the interminable length of the narrative, I shall try to become like fishermen. They know that they will be unable to catch all the fish, yet for all that they do not abandon their undertaking; rather, each one according to his own ability carries home whatever luck affords. Or again, I shall try to become like those who enter a garden, where they experience every kind of fragrance and pungent flower: even if they are not able to pick flowers from the entire meadow, they nonetheless leave only when they have selected a sufficient number. So using this comparison as well, and strengthened by the prayers of Your Holiness, I shall approach the spiritual meadow of our holy mother Melania's deeds, and gathering there what can be readily plucked, I shall offer those flowers to the ones who are fond of hearing recitations that inflame their virtue and to those who wishing the greatest benefit, offer their souls to God, the savior of us all.

Then with which of her great combats shall I begin? Or with what songs of praise shall I repay the woman who has praise in the heavens, since I am an amateur writer, of slow speech, as I have already said? What shall I offer to the one who has labored so hard

over the hope of my salvation, except merely to call upon her holy prayers for assistance? For these prayers contributed to my salvation while she lived in the flesh, and I appeal to them also after her death, so that I may recall her holy instructions and cast off all sluggishness, forgetfulness, sleepiness, irresolution, and lack of faith. I can thus recount in part her most magnificent virtuous acts that she, according to the manner of the Gospel, was eager to hide.² Yet since it is the voice of the Lord himself that says, "Thus what you have heard with the ear shall be broadcast from the housetops,"³ for this reason the saints' virtues cannot be hidden. Even if those who perform good deeds would prefer to hide them all, God, on the other hand, who strives for everyone's salvation and edification, reveals their greatest virtuous deeds, not only for the profit of those who hear them, as we have already mentioned, but also for the glory of those who for his sake have contested up to the very point of death. Thus I write a few of the numerous things that I have seen with my own eyes as well as those about which I have been carefully instructed by others. I shall leave the rest for you, with your zeal for learning, to discover, just as is written, "Give an opportunity to a wise man and he will increase his wisdom."⁴

1. This blessed Melania, then, was foremost among the Romans of senatorial rank. Wounded by the divine love, she had from her earliest youth yearned for Christ, had longed for bodily chastity. Her parents, because they were illustrious members of the Roman Senate and expected that through her they would have a succession of the family line, very forcibly united her in marriage

with her blessed husband Pinian, who was from a consular family, when she was fourteen years old and her spouse was about seventeen. After she had had the experience of marriage and totally despised the world, she begged her husband with much piteous wailing, uttering these words: "If, my lord, you consent to practice chastity along with me and live with me according to the law of continence, I contract with you as the lord and master of my life. If, however, this seems burdensome to you, and if you do not have the strength to bear the burning passion of youth, just look: I place before you all my possessions; hereafter you are master of them and may use them as you wish, if only you will leave my body free so that I may present it spotless, with my soul, to Christ on that fearsome day. For it is in this way that I shall fulfill my desire for God."

At first, however, he neither accepted her proposal nor did he, on the other hand, completely rule out her plan. Rather, he replied to her in these words: "If and when by the ordinance of God we have two children to inherit our possessions, then both us together shall renounce the world." Indeed, by the will of the Almighty, a daughter was born to them, whom they promptly dedicated to God for the virginal estate.

2. But Melania's heart burned even more strongly with the divine fire. If, as was the custom, she sometimes was sent to the baths by her parents, she went even though she did not want to. When she entered the hot air room, in order to show her obedience, she washed her eyes with warm water, and wiping them with her clothes, she bribed with gifts those who accompanied her so that they would not tell anybody what she had

done. Thus the blessed woman constantly had the fear of God before her eyes.

3. The young man, however, was still desirous of worldly glory. Although she frequently asked him to keep bodily chastity, he would not agree, saying that he wanted to have another child.

4. Therefore the saint kept trying to flee and to leave him all her possessions. When this matter was brought to the attention of the holy men, they advised her to wait a short while longer, so that through her patience she might fulfill the apostolic saying, "Wife, how do you know if you will save your husband?"⁵ Under her silken clothing she began to wear a coarse woolen garment. Her aunt noticed this and pleaded with her not to be so rash as to clothe herself in such a garment. Melania, however, was exceedingly distressed that she had not escaped notice and begged her not to reveal to her parents what she had done.

5. Later on, when the prayers of the saint had taken effect and she was about to give birth to her second child, the feast of Saint Lawrence arrived. Without taking any rest and having spent the whole night kneeling in her chapel, keeping vigil,⁶ at dawn the next day she rose early and went with her mother to the Church of the martyr. With many tears she prayed to God that she might be freed from the world and spend the rest of her days in the solitary life, for this is what she had yearned for from the beginning. And when she returned from the martyr's shrine, she commenced a difficult labor and gave birth prematurely to a child. It was a boy, and after he was baptized, he departed for the Lord.

6. After this, when her blessed husband saw that she was exceedingly troubled and was giving up on life, he lost courage and was himself endangered.⁷ Running to the altar, he cried aloud with tears to the Lord for her life. And while he was sitting next to the altar, the saint declared to him: "If you want me to continue living, give your word before God that we will spend the rest of our lives in chastity, and then you will see the power of Christ." And since he was very fearful that he might never see her again alive in the flesh, he promised this joyfully. Because of grace from on high and the young man's promise, she was cheered; she got better and completely regained her health. She took the occasion of her child's death to renounce all her silk clothing.

At this time, their daughter who was devoted to virginity also died. Then both Melania and Pinian hastened to fulfill their promises to God. They would not consent to their parents' desires, and were so unhappy that they refused to eat unless their parents would agree with them and consent to release them so that they could abandon their frivolous and worldly mode of life and experience an angelic, heavenly purpose.

But their parents, whom we mentioned before, were wary of peoples' reproaches and would not agree to their children's wishes. Melania and Pinian suffered much pain since they were unable to take up the yoke of Christ freely because of their parents' compulsion. They planned with each other to go into seclusion and flee the city. As the blessed woman told us for our edification, while they were plotting these things, as evening was coming on, immediately and suddenly a heavenly perfume descended on them and changed the sadness of their grief to inexpressible joy. Thanking God,

they were emboldened against the schemes of the Enemy.⁸

7. After the passage of some time, her father's last illness finally came upon him. As he loved Christ greatly, he called the blessed ones and said, "Forgive me, my children. I have fallen into a great sin because of my enormous folly. Because I feared the abuses of blasphemous men, I have pained you, by keeping you from your heavenly calling. But now see that I am going to the Lord, and from now on you have the power to gratify your desire for God as you please. May you only intercede on my behalf with God, the ruler of all." They heard these words with much joy. Right away they felt free from fear; they left the great city of Rome and went to her suburban property where they devoted themselves to training in the practice of the virtues. They clearly recognized that it was impossible for them to offer pure worship to God unless they made themselves enemies to the confusions of secular life, just as it is written, "Hear, daughter, and see; turn your ear and forget your people and your father's house, and the king will desire your beauty."⁹

8. When they began the angelic way of life, the blessed Melania was twenty years old and Pinian, who was henceforth her brother in the Lord, was twenty-four years old. Although at the time they were not able to practice rigorous asceticism because of their pampered youth, they clothed themselves in cheap garb. Thus the blessed woman wore a garment that was exceedingly cheap in value and very old, trying in this way to extinguish the beauty of youth. As for Pinian, he then once and for all rejected the magnificent clothes and luxury of his recent life, and garbed himself in Cilician

clothes.¹⁰ The blessed woman was immeasurably saddened to see that he had not yet completely scorned the embellishments of dress. She feared to censure him openly, however, because he was yet unproven in years and experienced the ardor of youth; she saw that he was still vigorous in body. She therefore changed her approach with him and said to him, "From the time when we began to carry out our promise to God, has your heart not been receptive to the thought of desiring me?" And the blessed man, who knew well the rectitude of his thoughts, affirmed in the Lord's presence, "From the time when we gave our word to God and entered the chaste life, I have looked on you in the same way as your holy mother Albina." Melania then exhorted him, saying, "Then be persuaded by me as your spiritual mother and sister, and give up the Cilician clothes; it is not fitting for a man who has left behind worldly frivolities for the sake of God to wear such things." And he saw that her exhortation was for his own good. Straightway he obeyed her excellent advice, judging this to be advantageous for the salvation of them both. And changing his Cilician garments, he clothed himself in those of the Antiochene style that were natural-colored and were worth one coin.

9. Thus by God's grace having successfully accomplished this virtue, they turned anew to another one. Together they wisely considered the matter and said, "If we take upon ourselves an ascetic discipline that is beyond our strength, we will not be able to bear it because of the softness of our way of life. Our body will not be able to bear it, will weaken completely, and later we will be likely to surrender ourselves to sensuality." For this reason they chose this righteous

practice for themselves. They went around to simply all who were sick, visiting them in order to attend to them. They lodged strangers who were passing through, and cheering them with abundant supplies for their journey, sent them on their way. They lavishly assisted all the poor and needy. They went about to all the prisons, places of exile, and mines, setting free those who were held because of debt and providing them with money. Like Job, the blessed servant of the Lord, their door stood open to any of the helpless.¹¹ Henceforth they began to sell their goods, remembering the saying of the Lord that he uttered to the rich man: "If you would be perfect, sell your goods and give them to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Take your cross and follow me."¹²

10. While they were planning these things, the Devil, the enemy of truth, subjected them to an enormous test. Since he was jealous at the great zeal these young people showed for God, he prompted Severus, the brother of the blessed Pinian, and he persuaded their slaves to say, "We realize we haven't been sold yet, but if we are forced to be sold, rather than be put on the open market, we prefer to have your brother Severus as our master and have him buy us." Melania and Pinian were very upset by this turn of events, at seeing their slaves in the suburbs of Rome rising in rebellion....

11. The devout empress Serena understood clearly about the lustre of the blessed Melania's present life. Since she had heard of her great deeds of virtue and of her transformation from worldly frivolity to piety, she very much desired to see her, having in mind the verse from Psalms that goes, "Here is the change of the right

hand of the Most High."¹³ But Melania, completely scorning worldly glory, had refused to visit Serena.

Afterwards, when their slaves in the suburbs revolted, Melania said to her blessed husband, "Perhaps the occasion calls us to see the empress. For if our slaves who are nearby have rebelled against us in this way, what do you think those outside the cities will do to us--I mean those in Spain, Campania, Sicily, Africa, Mauretania, Britain, and the other lands?" Thus because of this problem they were eager to pay a visit to the most holy empress, a visit that took place with the holy bishops intervening on their behalf.

And since we deem it very beneficial to relate some few things pertaining to their visit, things that Melania told us many times for our edification, I shall write them with utter truthfulness for the benefit of those who read them. According to Melania, when many people said that she ought to uncover her head during the visit, according to the custom of those Romans of senatorial rank, she affirmed with noble resolution that she would not change her garments, for it is written, "I have put on my clothes. How shall I take them off?"¹⁴ Nor would she uncover her head, because of the apostolic saying, "A woman should not pray with uncovered head."¹⁵ She said, "No, even if I am likely to lose all my goods, for it is preferable to me not to neglect one jot of Scripture, nor to violate my conscience before God, than to gain the whole world." For those clothes were garments of her salvation, and all her life was considered to be a prayer. Thus she would not uncover her head even for a short while, lest she grieve the angels who were with her.¹⁴

They took with them precious ornaments of great value and crystal vases as gifts for the pious empress,

and other ornaments, such as rings, silver, and silken garments to give to the faithful eunuchs and court officers. Melania presented herself at the palace, and when they had been announced, they were summoned to enter.

12. Straightway the devout empress went to meet them at the entrance to the porch with great joy. She was greatly moved when she saw the blessed woman in that humble garment, and having welcomed her, she had her sit on her golden throne. Serena called together all the servants of her palace and began to speak to them in this manner: "Come, see the woman who four years ago we beheld vigorous in all her worldly rank, who has now grown old in heavenly wisdom. Let us learn from her that pious judgment conquers all the pleasures of the body. Behold, she has trod underfoot the softness of her upbringing, the massiveness of her wealth, the pride of her worth, and, quite simply, all the delightful things of this life. She does not fear weakness of the flesh nor voluntary poverty, nor any other things of this sort at which we shudder. She has rather even bridled nature itself and delivered herself to death daily, demonstrating to everyone by her very deeds that before God, woman is not surpassed by man in anything that pertains to virtue, if her decision is strong."

Truly, the servant of the Lord did not become arrogant at hearing these praises. Rather, the more the empress praised her, the more she humbled herself, fulfilling that prophetic saying, "All the glory of man is like the flower of the field."¹⁷ The empress embraced her and kissed her eyes, reciting once more to those present how much Melania and Pinian had suffered in their renunciation, and how they had been persecuted

by their father, who had completely prevented them from associating with the saints and from hearing the word of salvation concerning God's way. For the Devil had led her father to such an extent (as we said above) that he, a man of such virtue, had committed a great sin under the pretext of good. It was suspected that he wanted to take their possessions and give them to the other children, because he was eager to hinder them from their heavenly project, as we related earlier. The empress again remarked how both of them were blessed, how much trouble they had endured through the machinations of Severus, lord Pinian's brother, who wanted to take all their goods for himself, their numerous and great possessions, and how every one of their senatorial relatives had schemed for their goods, wanting to make themselves richer from them. And Serena said to them, "Do you wish me to make Severus submit to justice, and when he is chastened, he will learn no longer to take advantage of those who consecrate their souls to God?"

But the saints answered the empress in this way: "Christ commanded us to be wronged and not to do wrong; to be struck on the right cheek and turn the other one; to be pressed into service for one mile and go two; and to the person who takes our tunic, to give our cloak as well.¹⁸ It is thus unfitting for us to repay wrong with wrong, and this also when those who try to take advantage of us happen to be our relatives. We trust in Christ that with his support and with the patronage of you, our pious empress, even our modest possessions will be rightly spent."

When the empress heard these things, she was much edified and straightway informed her truly pious, devout brother, the very blessed emperor Honorius, who issued

a decree in every province that their possessions should be sold by the agency of the governors and ministers, and that by their enterprise, the money deriving from them should be remitted to Melania and Pinian. The Christ-loving emperor thus did this, eagerly and with every joy, so that orders were given to the executors while Melania and Pinian were sitting there.

13. Amazed at such liberality in the holy emperor and empress, Melania and Pinian glorified God, the highest Savior. They brought out the ornaments along with the crystal vases and offered them to their Pieties, saying, "Accept from us small blessings, just as the Lord received the widow's two coins."¹⁹ Serena, smiling kindly at this speech, answered them in this fashion: "May the Lord persuade Your Saintliness that I judge the man taking any of your possessions, except for the saints and the poor, to be sacrilegious. The person who does this heaps the eternal fire on himself, because he takes what has been consecrated to God." The empress then ordered the *prepositus*²⁰ and two other illustrious eunuchs to accompany them home with every honor, having made the former swear by the welfare of her most blessed brother that neither they nor anyone else from the palace would consent to take even one coin from them. And the Christ-loving servants of the Christ-loving rulers carried out the orders with every joy and eagerness.

14. The saints departed with great happiness, as they had gained a spiritual benefit. They had as a pledge the Lord's saying, "Well done, good servant, you were faithful over small things, so I will set you over great

ones. Enter into the joy of your master."²¹ They looked forward to scattering on the earth whatever they believed would store up unsullied treasure in heaven. They went back to their own place of lodging and considered what sort of thanks they might render the empress who had done so much for them. Since none of the senators in Rome had the means to buy the house of the blessed Pinian, they let the empress, of whom we have spoken, know through the holy bishops that she might buy it. She did not want to do this however, and said to the intermediaries, "I do not think I have the means to buy the house at its true value." They requested that she at least accept some of the precious statues from the saints as a token of friendship. Serena reluctantly acquiesced, for she did not wish to grieve them any further. The saints were not able to sell the house, and after the barbarian invasion they let it go for less than nothing since it was burned.

15. I shall report on their property by just skimming the surface of things I heard from the mouth of the blessed Pinian. He said that he had as an annual income 120,000 pieces of gold, more or less, not counting that derived from his wife's property. Their movable goods were such that they were too many to be counted. Immediately they began, with zeal, to distribute these, entrusting to the holy men the administration of alms. They sent money to different regions, through one man 40,000 coins, through another 30,000, by another 20,000, through another 10,000, and the rest they distributed as the Lord helped them do.

The saint herself said to her blessed husband and brother, "The burden of life is very heavy for us, and we are not competent in these circumstances to take on

the light yoke of Christ. Therefore let us quickly lay aside our goods, so that we may gain Christ." Pinian received the admonition of the blessed woman as of it came from God, and with generous hands they distributed their goods.

16. Once, when we strongly urged her to tell how they could come from such great heights to such lowliness, Melania began by saying, "Not few were the problems and struggles we endured in the beginning from the Enemy who is hostile to good, until we could divest ourselves of the burden of so much wealth. We were vexed and distressed because our battle was not against flesh and blood, but, as the apostle says, against the principalities, against the world rulers of this realm of darkness."²²

"One night we went to sleep, greatly upset and we saw ourselves, both of us, passing through a very narrow place in a wall. We were totally discomposed in the narrowness, so that all that remained was to give up our souls. When we came through that pain with great suffering," she said, "we found abundant great relief and ineffable joy. God manifested this to us, comforting our faintness of spirit, so that we might be brave concerning the future repose that we would receive after such suffering."

17. "And then again," the highborn and magnanimous servant of Christ said, "one day we had collected a massive, extraordinary amount of gold to send for the service of the poor and the saints: 45,000 pieces of gold. When I went into the triclinium, it seemed, by the operation of the Devil, as if I were lighting up the house with fire from the multitude of gold pieces.

In my thoughts, the Enemy said to me, 'What sort of place is this Kingdom of Heaven, that it can be bought with so much money?'" Melania said, "As I was upset, fighting against the Devil, I immediately ran, sober-minded, for the invincible assistance. Falling on my knees, I prayed to God that he drive the Adversary away from me. After the prayer I was strengthened and said in my mind, 'With these corruptible things are purchased those others, about which the Holy Scripture says, "Things which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has entered into the heart of man, are what God has prepared for those who love him."'"²³

18. Melania said that the same thing occurred a second time. She taught us about the various stratagems of the Devil, that it is necessary for those souls who wish to please the Lord always to be vigilant and never to be totally relaxed. She said, "We had an extraordinary piece of property, and on it was a bath that surpassed any worldly splendor. On one side of it was the sea, and on the other, a forest with diverse vegetation in which wild boar, deer, gazelles, and other animals used to graze. From the pool, the bathers could see boats sailing on one side and the animals in the wood on the other. Therefore the Devil found in this another opportune pretext. He set before me," she said, "the variety of statues there and the inestimable income that derived from the estate itself." For there were sixty-two households around the bath.²⁴

The blessed woman again lifted up her eyes to God in pious meditation and repelled the Enemy by saying, "O Devil! You will not thwart my journey in this way! For, to put it briefly, how can these things that today exist and tomorrow will be destroyed by the barbarians,

or by fire, or by time, or by some other circumstance, that which is bought by means of these corruptible things, be compared to eternal goods that exist forever and will remain through infinite ages?" The Devil then realized that he could not overcome her, but that he himself was rather being defeated and that he was providing her with even more abundant crowns. Disgraced, he no longer dared to trouble her.

19. Furthermore, they fearlessly gave away the remainder of their possessions in Rome, as we have said before--possessions that were, so to speak, enough for the whole world. For what city or country did not have a share in their enormously good deeds? If we say Mesopotamia and the rest of Syria, all of Palestine, the regions of Egypt and the Pentapolis, would we say enough? But lest we continue on too long, all the West and all the East shared in their numerous good deeds. I myself, of course, when I traveled the road to Constantinople, heard many old men, especially lord Tigrius, the priest of Constantinople, give thanks to the holy ones. When they acquired several islands, they gave them to holy men. Likewise, they purchased monasteries of monks and virgins and gave them as a gift to those who lived there, furnishing each place with a sufficient amount of gold. They presented their numerous and expensive silk clothes at the altars of churches and monasteries. They broke up their silver, of which they had a great deal, and made altars and ecclesiastical treasures from it, and many other offerings to God.

When they had sold their properties around Rome, Italy, Spain, and Campania, they set sail for Africa. Just then Alaric set foot on the property the blessed

ones had just sold. Everybody praised the Lord of all things, saying, "Lucky are the ones who anticipated what was to come and sold their possessions before the arrival of the barbarians!" And when they left Rome, the prefect of the city, who was a very ardent pagan, decided along with the entire Senate to have their property confiscated to the public treasury. He was eager to have this accomplished by the next morning. By God's providence, it happened that the people rebelled against him because of a bread shortage. Consequently he was dragged off and killed in the middle of the city. All the others were then afraid and held their peace.

They set sail from Sicily to the most holy bishop Paulinus, to whom even at the beginning they also bade farewell. By the dispensation of God, adverse winds prevented their ship from sailing; a great and sudden storm came upon them. Since there were many people on the boat, a water shortage developed, and for a brief while they were all in danger. When the sailors claimed that this had come about by the wrath of God, the blessed woman said to them, "It is certainly not God's will for us to go to the place we had intended. Therefore give the boat over to what carries it and do not struggle against the winds." They took the saint's advice, stretched the sail, and came to a certain island that the barbarians had blockaded after having carried off the most important men of the city with their wives and children. The barbarians had demanded from them a certain sum of gold which, if they gave it, they would be freed, but if they did not, they themselves would be murdered and the city would be burned by the barbarians. As the saints were disembarking from the ship, the bishop heard of their arrival. He came to them with others, fell on his knees, and said, "We have as much

gold as the barbarians want except for 2500 coins." Melania and Pinian willingly presented them with this amount, freeing the whole city from the barbarians. They also gave them an extra 500 coins, and the bread and other provisions they were carrying with them, thus rescuing the suffering people from both famine and distress. And not only did they do this; they provided 500 coins to ransom one distinguished woman in their midst who had been captured by the barbarians.

20. Then they departed from the island and sailed toward Africa, as we mentioned before. When they arrived there, they immediately sold their property in Numidia, Mauretania, and in Africa itself.²⁵ Some of the money they sent for the service of the poor and some for ransoming captives. Thus they distributed the money freely and rejoiced in the Lord and were gladdened, for they were fulfilling in action what had been written, "He has given funds; he gave to the poor; his righteousness remains from age to age."²⁶

When the blessed ones decided to sell all their property, the most saintly and important bishops of Africa (I mean the blessed Augustine, his brother Alypius, and Aurelius of Carthage) advised them, saying, "The money that you now furnish to monasteries will be used up in a short time. If you wish to have memorial forever in heaven and on earth, give both a house and an income to each monastery." Melania and Pinian eagerly accepted the excellent counsel of the holy men and did just as they had been advised by them. Henceforth, advancing toward perfection, they tried to accustom themselves to complete poverty in their living arrangements and in the food they ate.

21. The town of the very blessed bishop Alypius, named Thagaste, was small and exceedingly poor. The blessed ones chose this as their place to live,²⁷ especially because this aforesaid holy man Alypius was present, for he was most skilled in the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures. Our blessed mother held him dear, for she was a friend of learning. Indeed, she herself was so trained in Scriptural interpretation that the Bible never left her holy hands. She adorned the church of this holy man with revenue as well as offerings of both gold and silver treasures, and valuable veils, so that this church which formerly had been so very poor now stirred up envy of Alypius on the part of the other bishops in that province.

22. They also constructed two large monasteries there, providing them with an independent income. One was inhabited by eighty holy men, and the other by 130 virgins. The holy woman made progress in the virtues. She saw herself become a little lighter from the burden of possessions. Fulfilling the work of Martha, she began henceforth to imitate Mary, who was extolled in the Gospel as having chosen the good part.²⁸ Indeed, in the beginning, Melania would just taste a little oil and take a bit of something to drink in the evening (she had never used wine during her worldly life, because the children of the Roman senatorial class were raised in this way). Then after that she began to mortify her body with strenuous fasting. At first she took food without oil every two days, then every three days, and then every five, so that it was only on Saturday and Sunday that she ate some moldy bread. She was zealous to surpass everyone in asceticism.

23. She was by nature gifted as a writer and wrote without mistakes in notebooks. She decided for herself how much she ought to write every day, and how much she should read in the canonical books, how much in the collections of homilies. And after she was satisfied with this activity, she would go through the *Lives* of the fathers as if she were eating dessert. Then she slept for a period of about two hours. Straightway after having gotten up, she roused the virgins who were leading the ascetic life with her, and said, "Just as the blessed Abel and each of the holy ones offered first-fruits to God, so we as well in this way should spend the first-fruits of the night for God's glory. We ought to keep awake and pray at every hour, for, just as it is written, we do not know at what hour the thief comes."²⁹ She gave strict rules to the sisters with her that no idle word or reckless laughter should come forth from their mouths. She also patiently inquired about their thoughts and refused to allow filthy imaginations to dwell in them in any way.

24. As we said earlier, she fasted from the week of holy Pentecost until Easter, not taking oil at all. Many who knew her well testified that she never slept outside her sackcloth nor ate on Saturday before she finished the entire divine office.

25. After she had lived in this ascetic routine for many years, Melania began to fast on the holy day of Christ's resurrection as well. Her blessed mother, who imitated the holy women of old (her virtuous life requires another person to write about it), was greatly grieved. It is enough for me to say this about Albina, that from the fruit the tree is known, and a glorious

fruit comes from a good root. Albina used to make such comments as these to Melania: "It is not right for a Christian to fast on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ's resurrection; rather, we should refresh our body just as we also refresh our spirit." By saying these things, she scarcely persuaded her blessed daughter to take oil for the three days of the holiday and then return once more to her usual ascetic discipline, just as the excellent farmer who owns a fertile field hastens to his own happy task.

26. The blessed woman read the Old and New Testaments three or four times a year. She copied them herself and furnished copies to the saints by her own hands. She performed the divine office in company with the virgins with her, reciting by heart on her own the remaining Psalms. So eagerly did she read the treatises of the saints that whatever book she could locate did not escape her. To the contrary, she read through the books that were bought, as well as those she chanced upon, with such diligence that no word or thought remained unknown to her. So overwhelming was her love of learning that when she read in Latin, it seemed to everyone that she did not know Greek, and, on the other hand, when she read in Greek, it was thought that she did not know Latin.

27. She showed an inexpressible sweetness to those who trained themselves in philosophy.³⁰ She had such zeal for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and the orthodox faith that if she heard that someone was a heretic, even in name, and advised him to make a change for the better, he was persuaded....But if he was not persuaded, she would in no way accept anything from him to give for the service of the poor.

28. Thus there was a certain woman of high status who ended her life in a foreign country, at the Holy Places. I mentioned her name in the holy eucharistic offering along with those of saints now dead, for it is our custom to do this, so that in that fearsome hour they may intercede on our behalf. Since that woman in communion with us was said by some of the orthodox to be a heretic, the blessed Melania was so disturbed that she said this to me very directly and on the spot: "As the Lord lives, if you name her, I will no longer be in communion with you at the eucharist." When I gave my word at the holy altar that I would not mention her again, she said, "This once was too much. Since you have named her, I am not communing." Thus she believed it was a transgression against the orthodox faith to name heretics during the holy eucharist.

29. Melania yearned so exceedingly for chastity that by money and admonitions she persuaded many young men and women to stay clear of licentiousness and an impure manner of life. Those whom she encountered, she taught with these words: "The present life is brief, like a dream in every way. Why then do we corrupt our bodies that are temples of the Lord, as the apostle of God states?³¹ Why do we exchange the purity in which Christ teaches us to live for momentary corruption and filthy pleasures? Truly, the value of virginity is so great that our Lord Jesus Christ deemed it worthy to be born of a virgin." Many who heard these things were zealous for purity and leaped into the arena of virtue. Only the Lord himself knows how many saints' feet she washed, how many servants of God she served, some through money and some through the exhortation of the word, how many Samaritans, pagans, and heretics she persuaded through

money and exhortations to come back to God! Through him she accomplished such great and numerous feats.

30. It was as if she hoped that by the virtuous practice of almsgiving alone she might obtain mercy; as the Lord said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."³² Her love for poverty exceeded everyone else's. As she testified to us shortly before her departure for the Lord, she owned nothing at all on earth except for about fifty coins of gold for the offering and even this she sent to a certain very holy bishop, saying, "I do not wish to possess even this much from our patrimony." Not only did she offer to God that which was her own; she also helped others to do the same. Thus many of those who loved Christ furnished her with their money, since she was a faithful and wise steward. She commanded these monies to be distributed honestly and judiciously according to the request of the donor.

31. Melania made for herself a garment, a veil, and a hood of haircloth, and did not abandon these clothes from the time of holy Pentecost until the fifth day of the festival of holy Easter, not by day or by night. Such was her burning love for God, even though she had been delicately raised as a member of such an important senatorial family. Those who knew well how she had been reared as a child said that when she still was wearing worldly clothes, it once happened that the embroidery of the expensive dress she was wearing touched her skin and an inflammation developed from it, because of her extreme delicacy. But the Lord who says, "Ask and it shall be given to you, seek and you shall find it, knock and it shall be opened unto you,"³³ gave her the strength from on high for which she asked.

32. Since she had been wounded by the divine love, she could not bear to live the same life any longer, but prepared herself to contend in even greater contests. She decided to shut herself up in a tiny cell and to see no one at all, spending her time uninterruptedly in prayer and fasting. This was impossible to carry out because many profited from her inspired teaching and for this reason everyone bothered her. Thus she did not carry out her plan, but rather set specific hours for herself when she would help those who had come to her for good conversation. For the remaining hours, in contrast, she spoke to God in prayer and accomplished her spiritual work. She had a wooden chest built for herself of such dimensions that when she was lying in it, she could turn neither to the right nor to the left, nor was she free to extend her body. Although she possessed such great and numerous virtues, she never became proud about her own righteous deeds, but always made herself lowly, called herself a useless servant.

33. And sometimes when her mother, full of compassion for her daughter, went to enter Melania's little cell when she was writing or reading, Melania would not even recognize her or speak to her until she finished her usual office. Then she would speak to her as much as was necessary. Albina, embracing Melania in such a manner, said amid tears, "I trust that I, too, have a share in your sufferings, my child. For if the mother of the seven Maccabean children, who in a single hour saw the tortures of her sons, had eternal joy with them,³⁴ how is it not that I, who have been more tortured every day than she was, will have that joy, when I see you thus wearing yourself out and never giving yourself any pause from such labors?" And again Albina said, "I

thank God that I have received a daughter such as this from the Lord, unworthy as I am."

34.³⁵ When they had remained in Africa for seven years and had renounced the whole burden of their riches, they at last started out for Jerusalem, for they had a desire to worship at the Holy Places. They set sail from Africa and headed eastward, arriving at Alexandria, where the most holy bishop Cyril received them in a manner worthy of his holiness. At that time, it just happened that the holy abba Nestoros, a man who possessed prophetic gifts, was in the city. This holy man was accustomed to come once a year to the city for the purpose of curing the sick. He also possessed this gift from the Lord, that he could deliver from diverse diseases those who came to him, using oil that had been blessed. As soon as the saintly ones, who were great friends of the holy men, heard about him, they immediately set out to receive spiritual profit. Because of the immense crowd of people who came to him, they got separated from one another. The first to enter with the limitless crowd was Pinian, the most blessed brother of the saint. He was eager to receive the blessing so that he could leave. The holy man, however, looking intently at him with his spiritual eyes, recognized the beauty of his soul, seized him, and made him stand alongside him. Then Melania, the servant of Christ, also came in with a great crowd. When Nestoros saw her, he recognized her with his spiritual eyes and made her stand with her brother. Thus when Melania's holy mother came in third, Nestoros stopped her and made her stand with the two. After he had dismissed the whole crowd, he began to tell them first with exhortation and prophetic speech what diverse troubles they had endured in

their renunciation. He counseled them like his own children and exhorted them not to lose heart, since the goal of affliction is to have unutterable bliss. He said, "For the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared to the coming glory that is to be revealed to us."³⁶

35. Thus being much encouraged and praising God even more, they set sail for Jerusalem and hastened on to their destination. They stayed in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Since they themselves did not want to distribute with their own hands the gold left to them, they gave it to those who were entrusted with administering charity for the poor. They did not wish for people to see them doing good deeds. They were in such a state of poverty that the holy woman Melania assured us of this: "When we first arrived here, we thought of inscribing ourselves on the church's register and of being fed with the poor from alms." Thus they became extremely poor for the sake of the Lord, who himself became poor for our sakes and who took the form of a servant.

It happened that Melania was sick when we were first in Jerusalem and had nowhere to lie down except in her sackcloth. A certain well-born virgin presented her with a pillow as a gift. When she became healthy again, she spent her time in reading and prayer, sincerely serving the Lord.

36. Thus Melania and her mother lived together by themselves. Melania was not quick to see anyone except the holy and highly reputed bishops, especially those who stood out for their doctrine, so that she might spend the time of their conferences inquiring about the divine

word. As we said before, she wrote in notebooks and fasted during the week. Every evening, after the Church of the Holy Sepulcher was closed, she remained at the cross until the psalm-singers arrived. Then she departed for her cell and slept for a short while.

37. Because of the barbarian invasion, they could not sell all their property, and hence some of it remained unpurchased. A certain believer whose heart God had awakened was able to sell part of it in the area of Spain where peace prevailed. Having collected a little gold from the sales, he took it to the blessed ones in Jerusalem. Melania seized it as if from the lion's mouth and dedicated it to God, saying to her spiritual brother in the Lord, "Let us go to Egypt to inquire after the holy men," And he, who did not hesitate to perform such works, obeyed her cheerfully, as she was a truly good teacher.

When she was about to depart on this spiritual journey, Melania asked her holy mother to have a little cell built for her near the Mount of Olives, with its interior made from boards, where she might dwell peacefully in the near future. They arrived in Egypt and toured the cells of the holy monks and the very faithful virgins, supplying to each as he had need (as it is written),³⁷ for they were indeed wise administrators.

38. In doing this, they arrived at the cell of the holy man, abba Hephestion, as he was called, and asked him to receive from their hand a little gold. He vehemently proclaimed that they should not do this. The blessed woman went around to the holy man's cell and looked over his equipment. She discovered that he had no possessions on earth except a mat, a basket containing a few

biscuits, and a small basket of salt. She was greatly moved at the inexpressible and heavenly richness of the saint, and hid the gold amid the salt. Then she hastened to leave, fearing lest what she had done might be discovered by the old man. They asked for his blessing and then departed in haste, but not unnoticed. After they had crossed the river, the man of God ran toward them, holding the gold and shouting, "Why do I want this?" Holy Melania said to him, "In order to give it to those in need." He solemnly swore that he would not keep it nor give it away, chiefly because the place was a desert and none of the needy was able to come there. Because they could not persuade him to accept their gold, the holy man threw it into the river after a long discussion. Since many other anchorites and very devout virgins did not want to take anything, the blessed woman, through a spiritual ruse, left the gold in their cells. She thought that the refreshment of the holy people was a great spiritual gain, a substantial benefit to the soul.

39. Thus when they had made their tour, they came once more to Alexandria and were honored by not a few holy men. Among those with whom they met was the superior of the Tabennisi monastery, and the very holy abbot Victor, and the most God-loving fathers and superiors called Zeugetes,³⁸ and a certain other most holy priest named abba Elias, and many others, whose names cannot be repeated because of their number. The blessed woman was eager to reap the benefit and the blessing from each of the holy men in her own person and to partake in their virtue. Leaving Alexandria, they came to the mountain of Nitria and to the place called "the Cells," in which the fathers of the most holy men there received

the saint as if she were a man. In truth, she had been detached from the female nature and had acquired a masculine disposition, or rather, a heavenly one. They associated with the holy fathers and were blessed; after they stayed with them in this way, they departed and were conducted by all of them with much gladness.

40. The blessed ones returned to Jerusalem carrying a full cargo of piety. Having completed the work of our Lord Jesus Christ's service with much eagerness, they both fell ill due to the bad quality of the air. The blessed woman found the little cell on the Mount of Olives already finished through the effort of her saintly mother. There, after the day of Holy Epiphany, she shut herself in, and sat in sackcloth and ashes, seeing nobody, with the exception that on some days she met with her very holy mother and her spiritual brother. Her cousin, the blessed virgin Paula, also came to see her. The holy woman Melania had guided Paula in all the commandments of God, and had brought her back to much humility from great vanity and the Roman way of thinking. She also had as a servant one virgin who often assured us, "At the time of Holy Easter, when the blessed woman emerged from that exceedingly narrow cell, we shook the sack that lay under her and enormous lice fell out." Melania lived in this kind of ascetic regime for fourteen years.

41. When the Lord called her holy mother, she departed to his saints to receive the promised goods. When they had carried Albina's remains to the Mount of Olives with much honor and singing of Psalms, Melania straightway remained there in the dark cell, no longer wishing to live in the city. She spent that year in great grief,

ascetic discipline, and fasting, and at the end of it she had a monastery built for herself and decided to save other souls along with herself. She asked her brother to gather some virgins for her. So there arose a monastery of ninety virgins, more or less, whom she trained as a group from the first not to associate with a man. She constructed for them a cistern inside the monastery³⁹ and supplied all their bodily needs, saying to them, "I myself will properly attend to everything for you, as a servant would, and I will not let you lack any necessities. Only be warned about associating with men." She laid hold of women from places of ill-repute and by her admonitions brought them as a sacrifice to God, for she was aware of what was written: "If you bring out the honored from the worthless, you will be as my mouth."⁴⁰ She constantly addressed them on matters concerning their salvation.

In her excess of humility, she would not accept the superiority of the monastery, but chose another woman for this task who was spiritual and burning with emotion for God, while Melania spent her time only in prayer and in serving the saints. When the superior was a bit too unbending, Melania busied herself greatly to take care of the nuns' physical needs. Thus she took heed for the weaker sisters, secretly took them the things they needed, and arranged to place them in each woman's cell under the bed. When the women entered, they would find every refreshment readied for them, without their mother superior learning of the situation. The sisters, however, knew from the manner in which it was done that the saint was the one who had provided these things, and they were eager to cleave to her to a remarkable degree, to obey her in all things, for they knew her boundless compassion.

42. I am not able to relate the continual and inspired teachings she used to put to them, but I shall attempt to report a little about some of them. Her whole concern was to teach the sisters in every way about spiritual works and virtues, so that they could present the virginity of their souls and the spotlessness of their bodies to their heavenly Bridegroom and Master, Christ.

First she taught that it was necessary to stay vigilant during the night office, to oppose evil thoughts with sobriety, and not to let their attention wander, but to focus their minds on singing the Psalms. She would say, "Sisters, recall how the subjected stand before their mortal and worldly rulers with all fear and vigilance; so we, who stand before the fearsome and heavenly King, should perform our liturgy with much fear and trembling. Just keep in mind that neither the angels nor any intelligible and heavenly creature can worthily praise the Lord who needs nothing and is beyond praise. If then the incorporeal powers, who so much surpass our nature, fall short in worthily celebrating the God of all things, as we have already said, how much more ought we, useless servants, to sing Psalms in all fear and trembling, lest we bring judgment upon ourselves for our lack of care in glorifying our Master instead of reward and benefit."

43. "As for pure love to him and to each other, we are taught by the Holy Scriptures that we ought to guard it with all zeal, recognizing that without spiritual love all discipline and virtue is in vain. For the Devil can copy all our good deeds that we seem to do, yet, in truth, he is conquered by love and by humility. I mean something of this sort: we fast, but he eats nothing at all; we keep vigil, but he never sleeps. Let us thus

hate arrogance since it was through this fault that he fell from the heavens and by it he wishes to carry us down with him. Let us also flee the vainglory of this age that fades like a plant's flower. And before all else, let us guard the holy and orthodox faith without deviation, for this is the groundwork and the foundation of our whole life in the Lord. Let us love the holiness of our souls and bodies because apart from this, no one will see the Lord."

And since she feared that one of them might fall out of pride in excessive mortification, she said, "Of all the virtues, fasting is the least. Just as a bride, radiant in every kind of finery, cannot wear black shoes, but adorns even her feet along with the rest of her body, so does the soul also need fasting along with all the other virtues. If someone is eager to perform the good deed of fasting apart from the other virtues, she is like a bride who leaves her body unclothed and adorns only her feet."

44. Concerning obedience to God, she frequently exhorted them saying, "Without obedience, the affairs of the world could not go on, for even worldly rulers are submissive and obedient to each other. When you speak of him who wears the diadem, in most and in very important circumstances, he does nothing by himself, nor does he try to command without first seeking the counsel of the Senate. If in worldly houses you were to remove obedience, the greatest possession, you would take away the whole order of things, and where order does not exist, the limbs of peace are crippled.⁴¹ Thus we all ought to render obedience to each other. And this is obedience: that you do what you do not want to do, to give repose to the one who ordered you, so that you

force yourself for the sake of the one who said, "The Kingdom of God suffers violence, and the violent seize it forcibly."⁴²

She used to tell them the story of an old holy man that concerned the necessity of submitting oneself to everyone, a situation that is likely to be the lot of a person who lives in the midst of humans: "Someone went to an aged holy man wanting to be instructed by him, and the holy man said to him, 'Can you obey me in everything for the sake of the Lord?' And he answered the father, 'I will do everything that you order me to do with great zeal.' The holy man said, 'Then take a scourge, go over to that place, and hit and kick that statue.' The man returned having willingly done what he was commanded. The old man said to him, 'Did the statue protest or answer back while it was being struck or kicked?' And he replied, 'Not at all.' The father said, 'Then go again; hit it a second time and add insults as well.' When he had done this still a third time at the command of the father and the statue did not answer--for how could it, since it was stone?--then at last the old saint said to him, 'If you can become like that statue, insulted but not returning the insult, struck but not protesting, then you can also be saved and remain with me.' Thus let us, too, O children, imitate this statue and nobly submit to everything--to insult, reproach, contempt--in order that we may inherit the Kingdom of Heaven."

45. In regard to exerting oneself in fasting, Melania repeated the apostolic words, "Not from grief or from necessity, for God loves a joyful giver,"⁴³ and left this matter of fasting to everybody's own personal decision. Concerning love, humility, gentleness, and the

other virtues, in contrast, she said, "A person does not blame either his stomach or any other part of his body, but it is inexcusable for any human not to keep the Lord's commandments. Thus I exhort you to wage your contests in patience and longsuffering, for the saints enter into eternal life through the narrow gate. The labor is very small but the refreshment is grand and eternal. Just endure a little, that you may be crowned with the wreath of righteousness."

46. During the night hours she awakened the sisters for a service of praise, in accordance with the prophetic saying, "I have come so late and have cried," and again, "In the middle of the night I arose in order to confess to you."⁴⁴ She said, "It is not helpful to arise for the nightly liturgy after we have sated ourselves with sleep. Rather, we should force ourselves to rise, so that we may receive the reward for the force we have exerted in the age to come." After they had completed their customary office, Melania provided them with a little time to get some sleep, by which they might rest from the toil of the vigil and renew their bodies for the day's psalmody.

47. Their nightly office had three responses and three readings and near the hour of daybreak, fifteen antiphons. They chanted at the third hour, she said, "because at this hour the Paraclete descended on the apostles,"⁴⁵ and at the sixth, because at that hour the patriarch Abraham was deemed worthy to receive the Lord,⁴⁶ and at the ninth, because according to the tradition of the holy apostles, at the ninth hour, Peter and John, while going up at the hour of prayer, healed the lame man."⁴⁴ She also listed other testimonies

from Holy Scripture in accordance with the practice, for example, the most holy prophet Daniel who knelt to pray three times a day,⁴⁸ and the parable in the holy Gospel that tells about the householder who went out at the third, the sixth, and the ninth hours to engage workers for his vineyard.⁴⁹

"As for evening prayers," she said, "we ought to undertake them in all zeal, not only because we have passed the course of the day in peace, but also because in that hour Clophas and the one with him were deemed worthy to travel in the company of the Lord after his resurrection."⁵⁰ She exhorted them to be especially zealous on Sundays and the other important feast days to give themselves to uninterrupted psalmody. She said, "If in the daily liturgy it is good not be negligent, how much more ought we on Sundays and the remaining feasts to chant something beyond the customary office."

48. By thus saying these things, she affirmed the sisters' zeal through her teaching, so that when the blessed woman wished to spare them in their vigil, because of the great toil which they had had....They would not agree and said, "Since you are ceaselessly concerned with our physical needs every day, thus we ought so much the more to be concerned with spiritual things, so that we leave nothing out from the customary office." And the blessed woman rejoiced mightily when she saw their good decision in the Lord. Thus she was eager to have an oratory built in the monastery and to have an altar erected in it, so that they would always have the honor of participating in the holy mysteries. Melania arranged for the sisters to accomplish two eucharistic sacrifices each week, apart from the feast days, one on Friday and one on Sunday. She placed in the oratory

the relics of the holy martyrs, I mean those of the prophet Zechariah, the holy protomartyr Stephen, the holy Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, and others, whose names God knows.

49. While our holy mother Melania was waging her contests, her most blessed brother completed the measure of his life in the flesh. Having fought the good fight, he was crowned with a wreath because of his voluntary poverty and obedience to the divine precepts, and joyfully departed to the God of all things, eight years before Melania's own death. It was God who arranged matters thus to be in accord with Melania's good purpose, so that the blessed woman, contesting even more, might more illustriously carry out her way of life in the Lord.

After her brother, whom we have mentioned, fell asleep in the Lord, Melania remained in the Aposteleion that she had constructed a short time before and in which she had also deposited the remains of the blessed man. She remained here for about four years, very much wearing herself out in fasting, vigils, and constant sorrow. After these things occurred, aroused by divine zeal, she wished to build a monastery for holy men that they might carry out their nightly and daily psalmody without interruption at the place of the Ascension of the Lord and in the grotto where the Savior talked with his holy disciples about the end of time. Some people balked at her good proposal, however, alleging that she would not be able to complete such a great undertaking because of her extreme poverty. But the Lord, who is rich in everything, fulfilled the wishes of that holy soul by arranging for a certain man who loved Christ to offer her two hundred coins. Receiving them with great

joy, she called the priest with her, whom she had taken from the world and presented to God as an offering--and that man was my own pitiable self--and said to him,

Since you believe that you will receive the compensation for this labor from the Lord in the ages to come, take these few coins and buy stones for us, so that we may begin the construction of the men's monastery, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus while I am still in the flesh I may see both the divine service being offered without interruption in the church and the bones of my mother and my master find rest through their chanting."

And when, under God, she began this project, the Lord who worked with her in all things completed the vast undertaking in one year, so that everyone was astounded to learn that truly it was by a heavenly influence that the work had been accomplished. She lodged there holy men, lovers of God, who cheerfully performed the divine service in the Church of Christ's Ascension and in that of the Apostles, where the blessed ones were also buried.

50. Immediately, other battles fell to her, greater than the earlier labors. For when the monastery was finished and she was catching a little breath, straightway letters arrived from her uncle Volusian, ex-prefect of greater Rome, stating that he was going to Constantinople on a mission to the most pious empress Eudoxia, who had been pledged in marriage to our Christ-loving emperor Valentinian. There arose in Melania a desire to see her uncle. She was spurred by grace from above to entertain this desire so that she might save his soul through her great effort, for he was still a pagan. She struggled mightily, lest she do something contrary

to God's pleasure. She told all the holy men about the matter and exhorted them to pray earnestly that her journey might be in accordance with God's will. And after she entrusted the monasteries to the Lord, she left Jerusalem.

51. From the beginning of her journey, the holy men of every city and country (I mean the bishops and clergy) gave her glory and indescribable honor. The God-loving monks and pious virgins, when they had seen her whose illustrious virtues they had heard about for a long time, were separated from her with many tears.

52. I do not consider it without risk to pass over in silence the miracle that God did on her behalf in Tripoli, because, as the Scripture says, "It is good to hide a king's secret, but the works of God are glorious to reveal."⁵¹ When we arrived there, we stayed in the martyrion of Saint Leontius, in whose shrine not a few miracles took place. Since many who were traveling with her did not have the prearranged document, the official proved to be very difficult about releasing the animals. His name was Messala. The blessed woman was very upset about this; she remained in prayer and kept vigil by the relics of the holy martyr Leontius from evening until the time when the animals arrived. We left Tripoli and had traveled about seven miles when the aforementioned official came after us, in total confusion, and asked, "Where is the priest?" Since I was inexperienced about traveling, I was afraid lest he had come to retrieve the animals. Getting down, I asked him why he was upset, and he replied, "I am eager to have the honor of meeting the great woman." Then, when he saw her, he fell down and seized her feet amid many

tears and said, "I beg your pardon, O servant of Christ, that I, not knowing your great holiness, held back the release of the animals." And Melania replied, "God bless you, child, that you did indeed release them, even if belatedly." He straightway took out the three coins that we had given him as a tip and begged us to take them back from him. Since I was not of a mind to do so, he started to confess to the saint: "All night long, both I and your servant, my wife, were strongly tested by the holy martyr Leontius. Thus we got up immediately and both ran to the martyrion. When we did not find you, she returned, because she was not able to run any further, but I, who have overtaken you, beg your holiness to pray for us both, in order that the God of all things may deign to be gracious to us." When we heard this, we accepted the coins, offered a prayer, and let the official go in peace, rejoicing. Since all those traveling along with us were amazed by what had happened, the saint said, "Take courage, for our journey is in accordance with God's will." And when all of us asked her to teach us openly the reason why, the saint answered, "All night I prayed to the holy martyr Leontius that he might show us an auspicious sign for this trip. And behold, though I am unworthy, my request has been fulfilled." Then we joyfully traveled on and were welcomed by everyone.

53. When we finally arrived near the Christ-loving city of Constantinople, the saint was anxious, since she was about to enter this sort of an imperial city after so much ascetic discipline and solitude. We came to the martyrion of Saint Euphemia in Chalcedon where the Victorious One greatly comforted the saint, providing her with much cheer and encouragement. Then strengthened

in the Lord, she entered Constantinople. The lord Lausus, the *prepositus*, received her as was fitting for someone of his virtuous way of life.⁵² She also found her uncle who, by God's dispensation, had fallen ill. When he, who carried himself about in such dignity of worldly glory, saw her in that extremely simple and shabby clothing, with many tears he began to tell my humble self, "Perhaps you don't know, lord priest, how delicately she was brought up, more so than the rest of our family? And now she has humbled herself to such a degree of austerity and poverty!"

The blessed woman took from his words an opportunity for her discourse, and answered him, "Then you have realized from me, my lord, that which concerns the future and eternal good, which the Creator and Ruler of the whole world cheerfully gives to those who sincerely trust him. I have despised glory, possessions, and every pleasure of this present life. I beg you, approach the bath of immortality, so that you may obtain eternal goods, just as you have enjoyed temporal things. Free yourself from the error of demons who will be burned in eternal fire along with those who are won over to them."

And when he perceived that she wished to take the matter to the emperors, he was cut deeply to the heart, and said to her, "I exhort Your Holiness not to take from me the gift of self-determination with which God has honored us from the beginning. For I am completely ready and long to wash away the stain of my many errors. But if I should do this by the command of the emperors, I would gain it as if I had come to it through force and would lose the reward of my free decision."

But Melania was not patient enough to keep silent and through some highly-ranked persons she submitted

the matter to the holy bishop Proclus, who came to Volusian and benefited him greatly by speaking at length about his salvation. Volusian, however, since he was a very sharp-minded man, saw that the archbishop had come to him through the suggestion of the blessed woman, and he disclosed to her, "If we had three men in Rome like lord Proclus, no one there would be called a pagan."

54. Just then the Devil threw the souls of simple people into great trouble through the polluted doctrine of Nestorius. Therefore many of the wives of senators and some of the men illustrious in learning came to our holy mother in order to investigate the orthodox faith with her. And she, who had the Holy Spirit indwelling, did not cease talking theology from dawn to dusk. She turned many who had been deceived to the orthodox faith and sustained others who doubted; quite simply, she benefited all those who chanced to come to her divinely-inspired teaching. Thus the Devil, the enemy of truth, was very jealous both on account of those who came to her for edification and on account of her uncle's salvation. He changed into a young black man, came to her, and said the following: "For how long do you destroy my hopes through your words? Know, then, that if I am strong enough to harden the hearts of Lausus and the emperors...if not, I inflict on your body such tortures that you will fear even for your life, so that you may be kept silent by necessity." After she had made him disappear by calling on our Lord Jesus Christ, she sent for my most humble self to tell me the threats of the Black One. And she had not yet finished speaking to me when she began to feel a pain in her hip. Suddenly her suffering was so strong that she remained mute for three hours. After we had made an offering on her

behalf, she scarcely recovered herself. She spent six days in that unspeakable suffering, feeling far greater pain at that hour when she had seen the Black One. And when on the seventh day it seemed as if she would be released from this temporal life, someone came to announce that her uncle was in danger of dying, and he was still a catechumen.

55. Melania's grief at this announcement was greater than her suffering and her pains. She kept repeating to us, "Take me to him before I die." But we feared even to touch her because her foot was like dry wood. She lay there saying, "Carry me to my uncle, for if you don't, I am in more danger from that affliction." So according to her command we brought a litter and with much labor we hoisted her on it. I arrived before them at the palace and inquired how the ex-prefect was. And some of the famous people answered me, "Yesterday he asked for the saint and upon learning that she was seriously ill, he called lady Eleutheria, the nurse of Eudoxia the most pious empress, and through God he was enlightened." When I heard these things, I was cheered in the Lord and speedily sent off a horseman so that it might be announced to the blessed woman. When she heard that her uncle had been baptized, she was able to move her foot without pain because of her great joy. The Devil, disgraced, withdrew at that hour and with him all the pains totally left the blessed woman, so that she who had not been able to raise herself up, walked up all the stairs and through the side door of the palace, and entered the dwelling of the friend of Christ, the empress Eudoxia. Everyone was amazed and glorified the Lord because of the defeat of the Enemy of our salvation.

Melania herself sat all night at her uncle's bedside comforting him by saying things such as these: "You are truly blessed, my lord, because you have been sufficiently glorified in this life, and in the future one you are going towards the Lord, justified in having received the holy bath of incorruption." She had him participate three times in the holy mysteries and at dawn--it being the feast of Holy Epiphany--she joyfully sent him on in peace to the Lord. And while everybody was giving thanks to the One who did great wonders, the blessed woman said, praising his unutterable love for humans, "How great is his concern for even one soul, that in his goodness he arranged for Volusian to come from Rome and moved us to come from Jerusalem, so that a soul who had lived an entire lifetime in ignorance should be saved!"

56. Melania remained at Constantinople until she had done her time of forty days. She greatly benefited all who were there, most particularly the Christ-loving imperial women. She also edified the most pious emperor Theodosius. And since his wife had a desire to worship at the Holy Places, Melania begged him to let her go. We departed from there at the end of the month of February.

At that time the winter was so fierce that the Galatian and Cappadocian bishops asserted that they had never seen such a winter. And although we were completely covered with snow all day, we made our journey without faltering. We saw neither the ground nor the mountains, nothing except the hostels in which we stayed at night. Melania, who was like adamant, did not let up on her fasting at all. She said, "We ought now to fast more and to give thanks to God, the ruler

of everything, because of the great wonders he has accomplished with me." Persevering in her unceasing prayer, she prevented both herself and us from suffering anything disagreeable in that most terrible cold. She showed that the prayer of a just person is a very strong weapon through which even the very elements are moved and overcome.⁵³

While all the holy men tried to delay us en route, she was not persuaded by any of them to do so, but had one wish, to celebrate Christ's Passion in Jerusalem. This God granted to her, according to the trustworthy promise he spoke through his most holy prophet, "He will do the desire of those who fear him and will hear their prayer."⁵⁴

57. We arrived at the Holy Places the third day of the week before the Savior's Passion.⁵⁵ Having celebrated Easter in a spiritual manner and the Holy Resurrection in great cheerfulness among her own sisters, she again submitted to the customary rule, taking care of both monasteries. And when she saw how well the psalmody was performed in the church by the God-loving monks, another pious desire came to her: she wanted to have built a small martyrion. Thus she said to my own humble self, "This is the place in which the feet of the Lord stood. Therefore let us build here a holy oratory, so that after my journey from this world to the Lord, an offering on behalf of my soul and those of my masters can also be offered unceasingly in this place." Since every wish and desire of hers satisfied the God of all things, the work was completed in a few days. She again gathered other holy men and established them there.

58. When this had taken place, it was announced that the most pious empress was coming to Jerusalem and had already gotten as far as the city of Antioch. Thus Melania considered within herself what then she might do both to glorify God and to benefit human beings. She said, "If I go out to meet her, I fear lest I bring reproach by traveling through the cities in this humble attire. But if I remain here, I must beware that this behavior not be thought arrogant on my part." So finally, having gone over this matter in pious reflection, she set out, saying, "It is fitting that we who have taken on the yoke of Christ, and were strong enough to do so, should carry on our own shoulders such a faithful empress, exulting in the power of the Lord because he has established such a Christ-loving empress."

She then went to meet Eudocia at Sidon, repaying with gratitude the extreme love the empress had showed to her in Constantinople. She stayed in the martyrion of Saint Phocas, which is said to have been the dwelling of the faithful Canaanite woman who said in the holy Gospel of the Lord, "Yes, Lord, for even the little dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the table of their masters."⁵⁶ Thus the blessed woman was zealous to please the Lord even in the matter of a dwelling, as well as in conversation and every other activity.

When the God-loving empress saw her, she fittingly received her with every honor, as Melania was a true spiritual mother. It was a glory for her to honor the woman who had so purely glorified the heavenly King. The saint, acknowledging her faith and the burden of her journey, exhorted her to proceed still further in good works. The pious empress answered her with this speech, worthy of remembrance: "I am fulfilling a double vow to the Lord, to worship at the Holy Places and to see my

mother, for I have wished to be worthy of Your Holiness while you still serve the Lord in the flesh."

In an excess of spiritual love, the Christ-loving empress was eager to get to the saint's monastery. Having arrived there, she regarded the virgins as if they were her own sisters. And since she had been greatly benefited, the empress desired also to go to the monastery of the men and be blessed.

The deposition of the relics in the martyrion newly-built by Melania, as we mentioned earlier, was about to occur. The empress requested that the festival take place while she was present.

59. And the Enemy of good, again envious of such spiritual love, prepared to twist the empress' foot at the deposition of the holy remains, and there resulted from this incident extraordinary trouble. This probably occurred as a contest for the faith of the holy woman. For at the very hour that Melania had escorted Eudocia to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, she had seated herself by the relics of the holy martyrs. Not standing aloof from them, she had prayed earnestly in much sorrow and fasting along with the virgins until the time the empress summoned her and the pain had stopped.⁵⁷ When the pain had improved, the blessed woman did not cease fighting against the Devil, who had desired to make such a difficulty in their midst. When Melania had spent a few days with the empress and had benefited her immeasurably, she escorted her as far as Caesarea. They were scarcely able to be separated from one another, for they were strongly bonded together in spiritual love. And when she returned, the saint gave herself anew to ascetic discipline, praying thus up to the end that the pious empress would be returned to her

husband in good health, which the God of all things granted to her.

60. I shall try to recall a few of the many miracles that the Lord performed through her, for I am not capable of relating all of them, both because of their great number and because of my personal incapacity. Now one day a certain young woman was seized by a very evil demon. Her mouth and her lips were shut for many days. It was completely impossible for her either to talk or to take nourishment, so that quite soon she was in danger of starvation. Many doctors had lavished a number of drugs on her but were not able to make her move her lips even a bit. When medical skill had proven to be incapable of driving out the demon, then at last they carried her with an escort to the saint, with her parents following along. The blessed woman, who shunned the glory of men, said to them, "Since I am a sinner, I am incapable of doing this. Let us bring her to the holy martyrs and by their direct intercession, the God who loves humankind will cure her." As they arrived there, the saint earnestly called upon the Master of all things. She took the oil consecrated from the relics of the holy martyrs and with this she touched the mouth of the sick woman three times, saying in a clear voice, "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, open your mouth." And straightway at the calling on the Lord, the demon, who was disgraced or rather frightened, fled, and the woman opened her mouth. The saint gave her something to eat and all who saw this glorified God. The woman who had been cured returned home with great joy, praising the Lord. Likewise another woman who had suffered from the same sickness was cured by Melania.

61.⁵⁸ Once again, a woman had a very difficult labor and the fetus died in the mother's womb. The wretched woman could neither live nor die. When the true servants of the Lord heard about this, she was very sympathetically grieved. Pitying the woman, she said to the virgins with her, "Let us go to visit the sick woman, so that by seeing the suffering of those who live in the world, we can also thus understand from how many difficulties God has relieved us." When they arrived at the house where the woman was who was dangerously ill, they said a prayer. Immediately the suffering woman, scarcely able to whisper in a weak voice, said to the saint, "Have pity on me." Melania stood there a long time supplicating God earnestly on the woman's behalf. She loosened her own belt which bound her around and placed it on the woman, announcing, "I have received this blessing from a great man, and I believe that his prayers will cure her speedily." Immediately the dead fetus emerged. Having fed the woman, Melania straightway returned home. And God was glorified, as usual. Melania said in humility, "The belt belongs to a saint, whose prayers cured the endangered woman." Thus she always attributed her virtuous deeds to the saints.⁵⁹

62. And once a certain one of the virgins with her asked her if, since she practiced such a high degree of asceticism and virtue, she were not troubled by the demon of vanity and arrogance. Melania began to utter these things for the edification of us all: "I am not aware of anything completely good in myself. If, however, I notice that the Enemy is sowing in me thoughts of arrogance under the pretext of fasting, this is how I might answer him: 'What is so great if I fast for a week, when others do not eat for forty whole days? If

I do not take any oil, there are others who do not satisfy themselves even with water.' And if the Enemy prompted me to become proud about my renunciation, I, made bold by the power of God, would oppose his unspeakable wickedness by thinking like this: 'How many prisoners taken by the barbarians have been deprived of their very freedom? How many who have fallen under the imperial anger have lost their lives along with their possessions? And how many have been left poor even by their parents? And then there are others who have suddenly been reduced to poverty from their former wealth because they fell afoul of a false accusation and robbery? It is no great thing if for the sake of incorruptible and undefiled goods we despise those of the earth.' And again, when I see the Evil One suggesting a vainglorious thought to me (for example, that far from linen and numerous dresses of silk, I now wear haircloth), I think of myself as very lowly. I bear in mind that there are those who lie in the marketplace naked, or only on mats, freezing in the cold. Thus God would drive the Devil from me."

"They say that the plots of the Enemy are manifest. But in my case, the people who have worn the outward garment of sanctity have made more serious trouble for me than the Enemy. They observed that I was eager to fulfill in sincerity the word that the Lord said to the rich man, 'If you would be perfect, sell your goods, give to the poor, and take your cross and follow me.'⁶⁰ They said to me, 'Indeed, it is all right to become poor and to practice asceticism in the Lord, but do so in moderation.' Yet I thought about those who in this world do their service under mortal rulers and how, always grasping for greater honors, they are endangered to the point of death. So if they thus toil wearily

for the flower of the field--for such is worldly glory--how much more should I be eager so as to attain the greater honor in heaven?" Such was her spiritual teaching that assisted the soul.

She had acquired such gentleness and quietness that if when, as usually happened, a sister who had made a problem for her came seeking pardon, the saint would say such things: "The Lord knows that I am unworthy, and I do not judge myself to be good compared to a worldly woman. But I believe that the Enemy will not accuse me on the Day of Judgment of having gone to sleep holding a grievance against someone."⁶¹

63. After a certain time had passed, Melania, like an expert runner who having come round the stadium desires the trophy, was also eager to be released to be with Christ. For she groaned (in the apostle's phrase), desiring "to clothe herself in the garment of heaven."⁶² And when the holy Nativity of the Savior arrived, she said to her cousin, lady Paula, "Let us go to holy Bethlehem, for I do not know if I will hereafter see this festival in the flesh." Thus they went there and kept the whole vigil; at dawn they participated in the fearsome mysteries.

Finally the saint, as if she had received an answer from God, said the following to her cousin: "Pray on my behalf, for henceforth you will be celebrating the birth of the Lord alone. For me, the goal of bodily life is to be finished after a short while." When Paula heard this, she was greatly disturbed. After they returned from holy Bethlehem to the monastery, the saint, not reckoning at all the labor of the vigil and the journey, straightway went out into the grotto and prayed intensely.

64. On the next day we went to the martyrion of the holy protomartyr Stephen--for the memorial of his falling asleep had arrived--and after we had held a service there, we returned to the monastery. During the vigil, I read first, then three sisters read, and last of all Melania herself read from Acts about the death of the holy Stephen. When she had completed the extent of the reading, all the sisters said to the holy woman, "Be in good health for many years, and may you celebrate many memorials of the saints." But Melania, as if she had received complete assurance from on high, answered them, "You stay in good health, too, for you will no longer hear me read." At this word all the women were deeply moved, for they believed that she said these words as a prophecy. And as if she were already passing from this world to the Lord, she left them a spiritual testament, saying these things: "I exhort you to be eager after my departure to perform the office in fear and vigilance, for it is written, 'The one who does the work of the Lord in negligence is convicted.'⁶³ If I am to be separated from you in body in a short while and will no longer be with you, God who is eternal and who fulfills all things will dwell with you, and he knows the depths of every heart. Thus have him before your eyes constantly and keep your souls in love and purity to the end, knowing that all of us must appear before his fearsome throne and that each one will receive either the reward of his labors or the judgment for his sins."

All were grieving greatly because they were about to lose such a good guide and divinely-inspired teacher. She left them and said to my own humble self, "Let us go to the martyrion of the men's monastery in order that we may pray, for there too are laid away the relics of Saint Stephen." With deep sorrow I did according to

the command of the holy woman and followed her.

When we entered the martyrion, she, as if she were already in conversation with the holy martyrs, prayed with tears, saying, "God, the Lord of the holy martyrs, who knows all things before they come to pass, you know what I chose from the beginning, that I love you with all my heart, and from fear of you, my bone has been glued to my flesh. For I have given my soul and body to you, who formed me in my mother's womb, and you have taken my right hand to guide me in your counsel. But being human, I have sinned against you many times both in word and in deed, against you who alone are pure and without sin. Therefore accept my prayer, which I offer to you with these tears, through the intercession of your holy athletes,⁶⁴ and purify me, your servant, so that in my coming to you, the steps of my soul may be unfettered and the evil demons of this air not hold me back, but that I may go to you spotless, guided by your holy angels. May I be deemed worthy of your heavenly bridal chamber, when I have heard your blessed voice by which you will say to those who please you, 'Come, the blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world.'⁶⁵ For to you belongs inexpressible compassion and abundant pity; you will save all those who hope in you."

Next she entreated the holy martyrs, saying, "Athletes of the Lord who shed your honored blood in order to confess him, be compassionate to your humble servant who always revered your holy relics. Just as you have always listened to me, do so also now, you who speak openly, be my ambassadors to the God who loves mankind, so that he may receive my soul in peace and guard the monasteries up to the end in the fear of him."

She had scarcely finished her prayer when right away her slight frame began to shiver. When we returned to the monastery of the virgins, we came upon the sisters still celebrating the psalmody. And I, who was in anguish at being overwhelmed by distress, could not stand up any longer and went away to rest for a while, but Melania once again went to the divine office.

When the sisters saw that hence she had become weaker, they strongly begged her and said, "Rest yourself a bit, for you are not strong enough to stand." She did not agree to that and replied, "Not until we have completed the morning hymns." After the entire liturgy was completed, she departed and lay down. Gripped by a pain in the side, she became much weaker. She sent for my humble self and all the sisters, and began to speak to me: "Behold, I am going to the Lord. Therefore pray for me." And I was deeply pained in my heart when I heard this.

65. Once more she said to the virgins, "I beg you to pray for me, because I have never wished evil on any of you. Even if I at any time spoke a harsh word to one of you, I did it out of spiritual love. Therefore consider yourselves as true servants of Christ. Spend the remainder of your lifetimes in all knowledge, in order that you may have bright lamps on that day and be pleasing to the heavenly Bridegroom.⁶⁶ Therefore behold, I entrust you to God who can guard your souls and bodies. I entrust you also to the lord priest and exhort you not to distress him in anything, but submit to him in all humility, knowing that he too carried your burden for the sake of God, and that she who resists him and does not submit to him causes grief to God." Having said these things, she desired to be placed in the oratory, and said, "Carry me close to the holy martyrs."⁶⁷

66. Then when her pains increased even more, she said to us, "The day has been fulfilled." All lamented bitterly, especially the virgins who mourned, since they were being deprived of a truly tender mother. When the saint saw that my heart as well was very pained, she said to me, on the fifth day of her illness, which was also the day she died, "My child, as much as you may pray and weep, it benefits nothing. For I have heard a voice saying in my heart that it is necessary that I be completely freed from the bonds of the body and go out to the Lord, according to his command." When the Lord's day was dawning, she said to me before sunrise, "Do me the honor of celebrating for us the holy offering." And while I was performing the offering, because of my great grief I was not able to speak up. When Melania did not hear the epiclesis,⁶⁸ she, who was in total agony, indicated to me while I was standing at the altar, "Raise your voice so that I will hear the epiclesis."

67. When she had thus received the divine mysteries, the bishop dearest to God arrived with the clergy. He spoke words appropriate to the salvation of the soul and finally the blessed woman said to him, "I commend to you the priest and the monasteries; oversee all as a good shepherd looks after flocks endowed with reason, imitating your own master." When he saw how great a good was about to depart the earth, he was very much troubled. The saint asked for communion from him, too, and bade him farewell in peace.

68. Finally the God-loving monks from her monastery entered and she said to them, "I take leave of you, as I am about to depart from this present life. I exhort you to give relief to the priest in all ways, knowing

that in this you give rest to the God of all things, for he, although he was free from all things, became your servant for the sake of the Lord, and although he was not under any necessity, he bore our burdens."

Then people came from the rest of the monasteries and from the city. She was a truly noble woman, for despite the fact that severe pain gripped her body, she was not neglectful in any way, but with undisturbed heart and with great patience bade farewell to everyone, as was fitting.

After these events, her cousin Paula came in to her, with all her household. Melania admonished everybody, cheering her who was so grieved at being separated from her, and after many blessings and prayers, she dismissed them.

Last of all she spoke these words to my humble person: "It is superfluous to ask a friend of God such as you to look after the monasteries, for while I was still living in the flesh, you were the person who carried the care and burden of all things, and helped me in everything. That is why I now entrust the monasteries to you and exhort you, in my absence, to be even more solicitous to submit to toil for their sakes. May God give you a reward for doing so in the age to come."

And as she had given instructions to everybody in peace, she said, "Do pray." Thus she dismissed all of them, saying, "Leave me now to rest." About the ninth hour she began to lose consciousness. We assumed that she had died and tried to stretch her legs, but she recovered a little and whispered in a weak voice to my humble person, "My hour has not yet come." As for me, I was not able to bear the grief that overcame me, and answered her, "When the hour comes, will you tell us?" And she replied, "Yes." She said this, I think, to

indicate that there was no need to adjust her body after her death. And some holy men remained with me, for that had always been her prayer, to give over her spirit in the midst of holy men.⁶⁹

Again came the Christ-loving bishop, and the anchorites who lived around Eleutheropolis, most holy men, who said to the blessed woman, "You have fought the good fight on earth. Go with joy to the Lord, as all the angels rejoice. But we are greatly distressed that we will be separated from your beneficent presence." And she uttered to them her last word, "As the Lord has pleased, thus has it come to pass." And immediately she gave over her holy soul to her Master, gently and peaceably, in joy and exaltation, on the evening of the same holy Lord's day, in order that she might show in this her great love for the Lord and for his holy resurrection.

Her holy remains needed no further adornment, for her legs were found stretched, both her hands were folded on her chest, and her eyelids had naturally closed. As she had ordered, the holy fathers who had gathered from different places later buried her, after they passed the entire night in solemnly singing Psalms and readings.

69. Her burial garments were worthy of her holiness. I think it necessary for me to describe them for the benefit of those who may read this account. She had the tunic of a certain saint, the veil of another servant of God, another garment without sleeves, the belt of another which she had worn while she was alive, and the hood of another. Instead of a pillow she had a hood made from the hair of another saint, which we made into a cushion and placed under her honored head. For it was

fitting that she be buried in the garments of those whose virtues she had acquired while she was living. She had no burial cloth, except the linen with which we wrapped her from without.

70. The saint received the answer to her prayer and rose to the heavens with joy, having clothed herself in virtues as a garment. Therefore the hostile powers did not trouble her, for they were able to find nothing of their own in her. And the holy angels joyously received her, for in her corruptible body she had copied their passionlessness. Likewise, the holy prophets and apostles, whose lives and teachings she had fulfilled in deeds, welcomed her rejoicing into their own choir. The holy martyrs, whose memory she had glorified, and whose combats she had voluntarily endured, came to greet her, rejoicing.

Thus she is receiving in heaven "what eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has entered into the heart of man, what God has prepared for those who love him."⁷⁰ To him be glory and power forever and ever. Amen.

III. COMMENTARY

A. Melania's Ancestry and Family

The *Vita Melaniae Junioris* provides an instructive example of the disruption that the vocation to Christian asceticism brought to aristocratic Roman families of the late imperial period: the issues of continuance of family line and inheritance of property were not taken lightly by those who numbered consuls and prefects in their ranks and whose possessions included palaces in Rome, suburban villas, and vast estates scattered throughout the empire. Yet the ascetic resolution of Melania the Younger was not novel even within her own family: her grandmother, Melania the Elder, after whom the *Vita's* heroine was named, had followed the same course some three decades earlier.¹ According to Palladius, she provided the inspiration and example that spurred her granddaughter to desire a life of renunciation.²

Although numerous details of genealogy and dating are irretrievably lost, we can posit that Melania the Elder stemmed from the *gens Antonia* on the paternal side; her grandfather, Antonius Marcellinus, was consul in A.D. 341.³ According to Palladius, she was of Spanish descent,⁴ most likely on her mother's side of the family.⁵ Melania the Elder's husband, of the *gens Valeria*, was perhaps the Valerius Maximus who served as praetorian prefect in the early 360s.⁶ Palladius reports



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