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Philosophy and Simplicity

The Problem of Classical Education in Early Christian Biography

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When he was a child he lived with his parents, cognizant of little else besides them and his home. As he grew and became a boy, and was advancing in years, he could not bear to learn letters, wishing also to stand apart from friendship with other children. All his yearning, as it has been written [of Jacob], was for living, an unaffected person, in his home.

Καὶ παιδίον μὲν ὢν ἐτρέφετο παρὰ τοῖς γονεῦσι, πλέον αὐτῶν καὶ τοῦ οἴκου μηδὲν ἕτερον γινώσκων. Ἐπειδὴ δὲ καὶ αὐξήσας ἐγένετο παῖς καὶ προέκοπτε τῇ ἡλικίᾳ, γράμματα μὲν μαθεῖν οὐκ ἠνέσχετο, βουλόμενος ἐκτὸς εἶναι καὶ τῆς πρὸς τοὺς παῖδας συνηθείας. Τὴν δὲ ἐπιθυμίαν πᾶσαν εἶχε, κατὰ τὸ γεγραμμένον, ὡς ἄπλαστος οἰκεῖν ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ αὐτοῦ.

The Life of St. Antony 1

Thus begins probably the best known and most widely read early Christian biography.[1] The author's decision to make the lack of schooling a sign of the holiness of Antony, the beginning of his saintly life, has had far-reaching consequences. The image of Antony as uneducated and illiterate—exemplifying St. Paul's famous assertion that God "chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise"—has greatly contributed to the idea that the ideal desert monk, even the ideal saint, is one who is totally unaffected by schooling, a prophet

1. The chapter epigraph quotes the *Vita Antonii* 1, ed. G. J. M. Bartelink, Eng. trans. Gregg, *Athanasius*, 30. The explicit reference to Jacob is only found in the later metaphrastic Greek MSS on which the Migne text is based, but it is already attested in the early Latin translation (see G. J. M. Bartelink, *Vita di Antonio*, 3d ed. [Milan, 1981]).

taught by God alone, and himself a teacher of supreme wisdom. What is surprising is that most modern scholars have readily accepted this rhetorical introduction to Antony's career as a historical fact.[2] That Antony later on, at the height of his career, is described as an accomplished philosopher, amply able to illustrate that Christianity is intellectually superior to Greek mythology, has on the contrary generally been read as something completely lacking historical foundation. Thus scholars have made what in the *Life of St. Antony* is part of an argument about the sources of true knowledge into a solid foundation for a distorted image of the pioneers of Egyptian monasticism as illiterate peasants.[3] There are good reasons to question whether the purpose of this rather startling introduction to the life of a holy man, a man living the true philosophic life, was to situate his hero among unlettered rustics.

Behind the simple statement about Antony's schooling, it is not difficult to perceive a much deeper and more general problem, a problem that naturally haunted any bishop of a great city of the fourth century: How could Christian truth, being a revelation handed down to simple fishermen, also meet the standards of the intellectual elite? How could Christians saints be both undefiled by human learning and wiser than Greek philosophers? How could a well-educated bishop, knowing the values of *paideia*, be an admirer of tales of and about simpletons?[4] The apologists wrote in defense of their faith against the attacks and ridicule of a self-conscious Greek intellectual elite. As teachers of Christian philosophy, they could leave the *simpli-*

2. See, e.g., the articles on Antony in *Dictionnaire de la spiritualité* (G. Bardy) and in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 3d ed. (H. Dörries), and see further Heussi, *Der Ursprung des Mönchtums*, 78, and Griggs, *Early Egyptian Christianity from Its Origins to 451 C.E.*, 103. The most obvious result of the opening statement has, however, been the reluctance to accept the letters of Antony as authentic on account of his alleged illiteracy (see n. 3 below).

3. For a more thorough critique of traditional interpretations of *VA* as evidence for the illiteracy of early Egyptian monasticism, see Rubenson, *Letters of St. Antony* (1995), 119–25, 141–44. See also the discussion in Goehring, "Encroaching Desert, Literary Production and Ascetic Space"; id., "Monastic Diversity"; and Luisier, "Autour d'un livre récent et des *Lettres* de saint Antoine." A positive appraisal of monastic literacy is also found in Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church*, 170–74.

4. The problem is most forcefully expressed by Gregory of Nazianzus in his comment that he would have accepted ἀλογία as faith had he really been a fisherman and had the power of miracles as his mode of speech. See his *Or.* 36.4. For the general question of the early Christians and learning, see inter alia Gamble, *Books and Readers*, Kaster, *Guardians of Language*, 70–95, and Fox, "Literacy and Power."

ciores behind and maintain that traditional *paideia* was preparatory to Christian truth.[5] With Christianity becoming the officially endorsed cult in the fourth century, and with the simultaneous growth of various forms of monastic anti-culture, the old answers were no longer tenable, at least not in the same form. After Constantine, the bishops were gradually becoming the elite, responsible for the official cult and obliged both to defend *and* transform the culture and civilization they had inherited, including both philosophers and the unlettered.[6]

In addition to the challenge of the pagan elite, there were the growing number of alternative spiritual patrons claiming to be Christians and the great variety of alternative interpretations of the Scriptures by teachers of Christian philosophy, of true *gnosis*, as well as perfect *politeia*. In addition to the question of how someone could be a Christian philosopher surpassing his pagan opponents in wisdom and simultaneously an orthodox Christian submissive to the authoritative teaching of the Church, there was the question of how a rustic *idiotes* with spiritual powers could be a civilized man, a model for urban Christians. The role of the teacher and the place of education were becoming questions of vital importance for ecclesiastical authority and the unity of the Church. The accommodation of learning and literature in the Church was no longer a matter of defense against pagans, it was becoming a defense against sectarian Christians relying either on their own philosophical schooling or on the *charismata* of the undefiled.[7]

The idea that a prophet, a revealer of divine knowledge, should himself be devoid of learning, is well attested in Jewish and early Christian tradition. Divine truth is revealed in visions or dreams, and, if in a book, the prophet should, like Ezekiel, rather eat the scroll than study it and reflect on how to communicate its message (Ezek. 3.1–3). In the early Christian revelation known as the *Shepherd of Hermas*, a work regarded as canonical in wide circles until the fourth century, divine authenticity is safeguarded by the explicit statement that Hermas copied what was shown to him letter by letter, because he did not understand the syllables (Visions 2.1). Spiritual power had other sources and manifestations than literacy. And in contrast to the Jews, for whom scribes—that is, professional students of the holy texts—were necessary to interpret divine revelation, Christians found in the New Testament arguments against serving letters. To Montanists as well as many Gnostics, the ability to interpret divine truth had little to do with an acquired ability to read a text, or interpret it with the help of logic. To others, more orthodox, a reliance on classical education was dangerous to the purity of the Gospel.[8] In the long run, there was, however, no way to support the growth and protect the unity of the Church without relying on literacy.[9] But if it was almost inevitable that bishops, teachers, presbyters, and lectors should be literate, what about the zealous ascetics, who without holding any office had considerable spiritual power, partly precisely because they did not belong to the culture of the society at large? Could someone be a "holy man" if he had had a Greek—that is, pagan—education?

The early biographers of Christian saints wrote in the context of this conflict between a tradition emphasizing the rejection of worldly learning and the purity of the ideal Christian, on the one hand, and the need, not only to accommodate literacy in the Church, but even to create forms for and enhance the value of learning and culture in an established Church, on the other. In contrast to the biographies of later centuries, such as, for example, those of Cyril of Scythopolis, where education is simply taken for granted, the authors of the fourth century still perceived the paganism permeating all education as a foe, a potential threat. Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, Jerome, and at least the Greek followers of Pachomius knew very well that many pagans did not at all appreciate Christians taking over their heritage, the most radical example of this being the emperor Julian, with his edict

5. For the apologists and their reaction to classical education, see the recent survey, with references to older literature, in the introduction by Richard Klein to *Gregor der Wundertäter: Oratio Prosphonetica ac panegyrica in Origenem*, 83–116.

6. For recent studies treating two of the most prominent bishops of the fourth century, Basil of Caesarea and Athanasius, see Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea*, Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, and Elm, *"Virgins of God."*

7. For the problem of independently minded teachers, see Williams, *Arius*, and for the connection between sectarian tendencies and monasticism in Egypt, Brakke, "Canon-Formation and Social Conflict," and Goehring, "Monastic Diversity." For similar problems in Cappadocia, with an emphasis on the role of women, see Elm, *"Virgins of God,"* 184–223.

8. Most vividly demonstrated in the prohibition for Christians to be teachers in Hippolytus, *Traditio apostolica* 16.5.

9. For the question of literacy and spiritual power, see Fox, "Literacy and Power," 126–48. See also the discussion on learning and literacy in third- and fourth-century Egypt in Rubenson, *Letters of St. Antony* (1995), 109–15 and 119–25, with references to the evidence of the papyri.

against Christian teachers of Greek *paideia*.[10] In their stories the biographers thus had to find solutions to the problem of how to present ideal Christians as being at the same time pure, divinely inspired prophets and accomplished philosophers, uncorrupted visionaries and trained teachers. They had to find ways to combine biblical images and ideals, biblical saints, with deeply rooted, pervasive rhetoric devices and conceptions so that both the general public and the literate intellectual elite could accept someone as a Christian saint and simultaneously recognize in him a true philosopher.[11]

According to common biographical tradition, the life of a philosopher should be introduced not only by information about land of origin and parents, but also about education, before the career of teaching, ascetic struggle and miracles, and finally the accomplished virtues are described. But the lack of any concept of progress in traditional biography naturally led to the idea that the superior gifts of perception and understanding of the wise philosopher were present from the beginning. The role of education seems, in the words of Patricia Cox, to have been primarily that of "a kind of discipline, the fine tuning of an already overpowering intelligence."[12] Education in the myths and in philosophical tradition, in Homer and Plato, as well as rhetorical skill, did not actually add anything, it simply confirmed inherent and divine wisdom and established the language of the holy man. The tension between an emphasis on some kind of inherent divinity, on the one hand, and participation in the Greek cultural tradition, on the other, is eased by identifying the contents of both.

For the Christian biographer, the problem was greater. Somehow the authors of early Christian biographies had to come to terms with the fact that all education was Greek, while at the same time a holy life was a philosophical life in which detachment from the world and asceticism had the purpose of refining knowledge, *gnosis*. By looking at how they solved this problem, I think we are able to gain deeper

10. For a discussion of Julian's edict and its significance, see Wilken, *Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, 171–76.

11. The importance of biographies of holy men for the Christianization of the rhetoric of late antiquity is rightly emphasized by Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, 89–119 and 141–52.

12. For a discussion of how the "holy philosopher" was characterized and of the place of education in biography, see Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 20–23; the quotation above is from p. 22.

insights into the larger question of the transformation of classical culture by the early Church. In order to understand how Greek *paideia* came to be replaced by Christian education, we cannot confine ourselves to the well-known treatises on this topic by St. Basil and St. Augustine,[13] but should also look at how popular hagiography reveals existing tensions, as well as various solutions suggested by their authors. I thus in what follows analyze how the education of a saint is depicted in some of the biographies of the fourth century, starting with the *Life of St. Antony* and continuing with three quite different authors writing in the decades after Athanasius, all of them more or less dependent on his account: St. Jerome, St. Gregory of Nyssa, and the compiler of the Greek Life of St. Pachomius.

THE *LIFE OF ST. ANTONY*

What is at stake in the opening phrases of the *Vita Antonii* is much more than some historical facts, it is the theme of the entire biography, the essence of Antony's character. By combining a rejection of *grammata* with a reference to Jacob, who in the Septuagint is described as unformed (ἄπλαστος), the author signals the natural and inherent holiness of Antony right from the beginning.[14] Throughout the *Vita*, the two ideas, lack of schooling and a simple and unaffected mind, recur.[15] Antony leaves everything behind, not only money and social status, but also books, in order to remain simple and in accordance with his God-given nature. The only formation he receives and constantly exhorts his disciples to stick to is the practice of asceticism. But in contrast to worldly formation, asceticism does not add anything to man, its purpose is not growth and development but protection of stability. Ascetic formation prevents the ascetic from change, from becoming easily moved by the waves of the sea. It is not based on any education, it does not demand any "crossing of the sea." The combats of Antony and the three stages of his retreat are not so much signs of progress and ascent as proofs of his persistence. Antony re-

13. Basil of Caesarea, *Ad adolescentes;* Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana.*

14. *VA* 1 where the implied reference is to Gen. 25.27.

15. It is, however, important to notice that the lack of *grammata* is not in the *VA* itself interpreted as illiteracy, but only as a sign of independence of Greek learning. See Rubenson, *Letters of St. Antony* (1995), 141–42.

mains the same; his inaccessibility and his exposure to demonic assault are what increase.[16]

When Antony's monastic education is described, the emphasis is thus strongly on the older ascetics as models. Antony *sees* the zealous men, he *sees* their way of life, but nowhere is it said that he *listens* to them and their teaching. His initial monastic education is summarized by the revealing sentence: "He grasped everything and in him the memory took the place of books" (*VA* 3).[17] This initial instruction by imitation is, however, only preparatory. Antony's real education takes place in the secrecy of his shrine, where he becomes "initiated into the divine mysteries and inspired by God" (*VA* 14). When he emerges from his twenty years of seclusion, he is depicted as the perfect natural human being. His body and soul are described as totally unaffected by his twenty years of solitude, spiritual combat, and ascetic endeavors. He has neither become fat from lack of exercise nor emaciated from fasting. His soul is neither constricted by grief nor relaxed by pleasure. "He maintained utter equilibrium, like one guided by reason and steadfast in that which accords with nature" (*VA* 14).[18] The same emphasis on preservation of the natural condition is found in the concluding passage commenting on his life after the description of his death: "He possessed eyes undimmed and sound, and he saw clearly. He lost none of his teeth—they simply had been worn to the gums because of the old man's great age. He also retained health in his feet and hands, and generally he seemed brighter and of more energetic strength than those who make use of baths and a variety of foods and clothing" (*VA* 93).

The long sermon he preaches after his initiation also revolves around this theme: virtue is natural and simple. Everything necessary and beneficial is inherent in man. Everything external is a threat to inner unity, equilibrium, and calm. The Greeks travel to obtain wisdom, but the "kingdom of heaven" is within ourselves. "All virtue

16. In opposition to the established interpretation (see, e.g., Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 53–54), I agree with Roldanus, "Origène, Antoine et Athanase," which emphasizes that the stages in the *VA* are not characterized by any *internal* development.

17. A saying preserved by Evagrius of Pontus catches the same attitude: Antony is said to have replied to the philosophers that he did not miss the comfort of books, since his book is the nature of things created. See Evagrius of Pontus, *Praktikos* 92, quoted *verbatim* in Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 4.23. See Rubenson, *Letters of St. Antony* (1995), 159.

18. . . . ὅλος ἦν ἴσος, ὡς ὑπὸ τοῦ λόγου κυβερνώμενος καὶ ἐν τῷ κατὰ φύσιν ἑστώς.

needs is our willing, since it is in us and arises from us. For virtue exists when the soul maintains its intellectual part according to nature. It holds fast according to nature when it remains as it was made—and it was made beautiful and perfectly straight" (*VA* 20).[19] Later on in the sermon, even the Scriptures are relativized: like everything else from the world of senses, they can easily be used by the demons. Final authority and judgment lies within man himself, with what does not disturb or distract from simplicity and single-mindedness. The sermon thus ends with pointing at detachment, ἀταραξία, as the sign of perfection.[20]

The most evident passages on our theme are, however, the descriptions of Antony's three encounters with the philosophers. The two first stories are very short, contrasting Antony's wisdom, in spite of his lack of education, with the futile cunning of the philosophers. Both are introduced with a reference to Antony not having studied *grammata*, and both end with the philosophers withdrawing, amazed by his intelligence and understanding. In the first story what is deemed foolish emerges as wise; in the second, the opposition is between a sound mind and acquired letters. The philosophers have to admit that the mind, *nous*, is prior to letters, *grammata*, and thus that one who has a sound mind does not need to study, and, moreover, that an untrained man from the wilderness might be as civilized and gracious as any city-dweller: "They [the philosophers] went away marveling because they had seen such understanding [σύνεσις] in an untrained man [ἰδιώτης], for he did not have the wild demeanor [ἄγριος] of someone reared on a mountain and growing old there. Instead he was gracious and civil [πολιτικός], and his speech was seasoned with divine salt, so that no one resented him—on the contrary, all who came to him rejoiced over him" (*VA* 73).

The third and most detailed encounter is actually an apology for Christian faith and an attack on pagan beliefs. Antony is challenged by a group of philosophers who use their logic to ridicule the fool-

19. This is a not only a theme constantly recurring in the *VA*, but an Antonian conviction also attested in his letters. See *Ep. Ant.* 3.43–48; 4.16–18. The same idea is also found in Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii* 6.35: "Hard as it is to know oneself, I myself consider it harder for the sage to remain always himself; for he cannot ever reform evil natures and improve them, unless he has first trained himself never to alter in his own person" (quoted in Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 25).

20. *VA* 43. The same expression is used in ch. 36 as the proof of a vision being angelic and not demonic.

ishness of Christian faith. Antony replies by ridiculing both traditional pagan myths and what is most probably some kind of Neoplatonic or Gnostic teaching about the *nous*. He then attacks the philosophers on their own ground, forcing them to admit that faith (*pistis*) is prior to demonstration (*apodeixis*), and that where there is active faith, there is consequently no need for any sophistic demonstration. To prove his case, Antony heals some bystanders suffering from demons, explaining, with an allusion to St. Paul: "We do not prove in plausible words of Greek wisdom but persuade by the faith that clearly precedes argumentation" (*VA* 80). In all this Antony himself argues like an accomplished philosopher, using *apodeixis*. What is at stake is apparently not primarily the method but the source of knowledge, the difference between inherent, and thus divine, wisdom and power, on the one hand, and acquired, and thus human, futile and feeble logic, on the other. Faith in Christ simply makes proofs by arguments irrelevant.[21]

Summarizing his entire account, the author of the *Vita*, after relating the death of Antony, describes him as totally uncorrupted, his body remaining in perfect health, and as marveled at everywhere, because his fame did not rest on writings (συγγράμματα), secular wisdom (ἡ ἔξωθεν σοφία), or any skill (τέχνη), but on his piety (θεοσέβεια) alone (*VA* 93).[22] From beginning to end, Antony is depicted as a natural, unaffected, simple-minded human being, in conscious opposition to the learned and diligent philosophers of this age. His wisdom is not based on any human sources; it has not been gained from outside. He is, as it is said in a revealing passage, "taught by God"

21. It is worth noting that the author in the quotation from 1 Cor. 2.4 drops the positive reference to ἀπόδειξις πνεύματος and only cites the rejection of persuasion by words of wisdom.

22. The expression ἡ ἔξωθεν σοφία, as well as the related expressions ἡ ἔξωθεν παίδευσις and ἡ ἔξω φιλοσοφία used by Gregory of Nyssa in his biographies, are difficult to translate. In addition to the literal meaning *outside, outward, external*, ἔξω and ἔξωθεν are also used for foreigners or exiles in classical literature, while in the Septuagint and the New Testament, reference is usually to those outside, i.e., the non-Jews. With Paul's expression ὁ ἔξω ἄνθρωπος, a new dimension is added. See *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans, 1985), 2: 575–76, 698–99, and *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, ed. G. W. H. Lampe (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 503–4. Moreover, the traditional translations, pagan or profane, as opposed to Christian or religious, do not include the associated meaning "public," in contrast to "secret," that is reserved for the initiated. Despite some misgivings, I have decided to stick to *secular wisdom, secular education*, etc.

(θεοδίδακτος).[23] But the holiness of Antony is not only, or even primarily, revealed in anecdotes about miracles, visions, and his ascetic combat, elements common to stories about holy men, but rather in his teaching, summarized in two sermons, covering almost a third of the biography, and his three debates with the philosophers. His essential character, natural simplicity, not only reveals his affinity to the divine, it also manifests a philosophy superior to Greek mythology, based on an education that is not merely human. The biblical models are Jacob and Elijah, not Moses or Solomon.

THE BIOGRAPHIES OF ST. JEROME

The first clear evidence of the great impact of the *Life of St. Antony* is found in one of the first literary works of Jerome, his *Life of St. Paul the Hermit*, written ca. A.D. 375. Jerome explicitly refers to discussions as to who was the first monk, and quotes the statement in the *Life of St. Antony* that Antony was the first to settle in the desert.[24] Through Jerome we also know that his benefactor at the time he wrote the *Life of St. Paul* had made a Latin translation of the *Life of St. Antony*. Most probably the *Life of St. Antony* was not only one of his sources but the very stimulus that prompted him to write.[25] In his second biographical work, the *Life of St. Hilarion*, Jerome again returns to Antony, first briefly as the original inspiration for Hilarion, and later as the goal for his flight from fame in Palestine.[26] It is obvious in his lives of the hermit saints Paul and Hilarion that Jerome both wants to take advantage of Antony's fame and to distance his two heroes from Antony, avoiding any impression that he was their master. Only his third biography, that of Malchus, does not explicitly mention Antony.[27]

In spite of this connection, Jerome's lives are very different from the *Life of St. Antony*. Besides the obvious fact that Jerome, unlike

23. *VA* 66.

24. *Vita Pauli* 1, ed. *PL* 23: 17–28.

25. For other references to the *VA* in Jerome see his *De viris illustribus* 125 and *Epistula* 57. In addition to the explicit intention to rectify the impression given in the *VA* that Antony was the first desert hermit, Jerome skillfully changes the story told in *VA* 91 about the cloak he had been given by Athanasius. Instead of the cloak being handed back as a sign of subordination and that the assignment was fulfilled, the cloak is on Paul's orders used to wrap his dead body, not because this was by any means important, but simply to help Antony to overcome the death of this greater saint. See *VPaul* 12.

26. *Vita Hilarionis*, ed. *PL* 23: 29–54 .

27. *Vita Malchi*, ed. *PL* 23: 55–60.

Athanasius, was a very self-conscious author, the stated purpose of his biographies is also quite different. Jerome explicitly says that he wrote the *Life of St. Paul* simply because he thought it wrong that Paul's history should be forgotten. Likewise, in his *Life of St. Hilarion*, he refers to the need to have his hero's story retold. The third story Jerome states to be nothing but a practice in anticipation of his never realized Church history. Athanasius says he is writing a story to be emulated, but Jerome writes because he has stories to tell. He writes about persons he has heard interesting things about, whereas Athanasius writes about his own ideals personified in someone he claims to have known very well. Thus there is an intimacy in the *Life of St. Antony* that is totally missing in Jerome's biographies. Although he attempts to tell stories about extraordinary individuals, not to depict an ideal, Jerome strangely enough ends up creating a much larger distance between the reader and the heroes. Paul, Hilarion, and Malchus are far less alive than Antony. Their stories are told, but there is almost no interest in their own experiences and inner struggle, and there are no vivid descriptions of their encounters with others.[28] Instead, Jerome constantly alludes to classical literature, using well-known *topoi* of novels and biographies. The *Life of St. Paul* is full of references and allusions to classical literature, including encounters with centaurs and lions. The *Life of St. Hilarion* is introduced by a quotation from Sallust, according to which the greatness of a hero depends on the skill of the biographer, and a hint that the story Jerome is to tell will make Homer envious. The third, the *Life of Malchus*, is a Christian copy of a traditional love story. Jerome writes in order to prove his literary abilities, to show that Christian literature can be as good as pagan, and simply to amuse his audience. The constant call to emulate the saint, so characteristic of the *Life of St. Antony*, is thus completely missing from Jerome's lives.[29]

Jerome's own struggle with the problem of classical education and biblical simplicity is well known and will not be retold here.[30] A lover of antique authors, and himself a proud man of letters, he was constantly ashamed of his admiration for Latin and Greek authors and likewise ashamed of the literary poverty of the biblical texts. To Jerome there was definitely a conflict between *paideia* and faith, not only theoretically but also personally. In spite of his own preferences, he maintained that the Christian had to abandon the classical heritage and stick to the pure and simple faith of the Bible. Although the lives of his holy men might therefore be expected to reflect this detachment and stick closely to the model of the *Life of St. Antony*, the opposite is true. In his biographies, Jerome solves the relation between classical education and the sanctity of the holy man very differently. It is even possible to read at least the lives of Paul and Hilarion as explicit criticisms of the way Athanasius makes someone who is uneducated a model for the Christian monk.

28. Coleiro, "St. Jerome's Lives of the Hermits," 166, notes that although he purports to be writing historical texts, Jerome completely fails to connect his heroes with the outer world and its known historical events.

29. For a discussion of the structure and models for Jerome's biographies, see Fuhrmann, "Mönchsgeschichten des Hieronymus."

30. For details of this, see, e.g., Kelly, *Jerome*, 41–44; Kaster, *Guardians of Language*, 81–83, and Hagendahl, *Latin Fathers and the Classics*, 309–28.

After telling us where Paul came from, his family background, and his age, Jerome says that he was both "highly skilled in Greek as well as Egyptian learning" and "gifted with a gentle disposition and a deep love for God,"[31] indicating that this learning was not something acquired prior to his becoming a Christian and later rejected. He was a civilized man, and his flight into the desert was not caused by a desire to renounce the world and its learning, but entirely by fear of persecution. In contrast to Antony, Paul was a Christian who had no difficulty with his worldly learning, and who went into the desert out of sheer necessity. There was nothing to reject and no fight to engage in. Later, like Antony, he fell in love with the solitude and decided to settle down there. Nowhere is there any mention of conflict with philosophers or emphasis on natural simplicity in contrast to secular life. Throughout the story, Paul is calm and relaxed; it is Antony, visiting him, who experiences anxiety, the onslaught of the demons, and external pressure.[32] Antony also has to admit that Paul far surpasses him in everything, and at the end he becomes his heir, the Elisha of Elijah.[33] For Paul, his background is never a problem, never a temptation, only a sign of the greatness of the holy man who, although so gifted and educated, preferred the silence of the desert.

31. *VPaul* 4: "Litteris tam Graecis quam Aegyptiacis adprime eruditus, mansueti animi, Deum valde amans."

32. See, e.g., *VPaul* 9–14.

33. See *VPaul* 9, where Antony echoes the words of St. John the Baptist about not being worthy to serve Christ; ch. 12 where Antony has to fetch the cloak given to him by Athanasius and use it to wrap Paul's body after his death, and ch. 13, where Paul is likened to Elijah, John the Baptist, and even St. Paul perfected in paradise.

It is not difficult to see the shadow of Jerome himself in his story of Paul, and perhaps also his disdain for the coarse monks of the wilderness claiming to be the heirs of the first hermit and desert-dweller.

The much longer *Life of St. Hilarion* is very different, but reveals the same attitude. Here again, after presenting his birthplace and his family, we are told that Hilarion was sent to Alexandria to study. Although Jerome explicitly states that it was his pagan parents who sent him to the pagan school, Hilarion is said to have given proofs of remarkable ability and character and soon to have become an accomplished rhetor. In contrast to Antony, Hilarion has no difficulties with his fellow students and does not hesitate to travel to gain education. Without the mention of any kind of conversion, Hilarion is also described as a believer in Christ, having his whole pleasure in the assemblies of the Church (*VH* 2). His retreat into the desert is not caused by any rejection of the world, but by curiosity aroused by Antony's fame. After staying with Antony for some time, Hilarion decides to change his life and become a monk. But the crowds pressing upon the holy man disturb him and he decides to retreat into the desert. A description of his *ascesis*, his struggle with demons, and his miracles follows. In his retreat, there is, however, very little of solitude: what matters is service to the community, not spiritual combat in total seclusion. Completely missing is the theme of natural simplicity as opposed to secular learning. Instead of any sermon or teaching, the *Life* is filled with numerous stories of Hilarion's miracles and finally a series of chapters recounting his flight from fame, taking him from Gaza to Egypt and then to Sicily and Dalmatia, before ending up in Cyprus.[34] Nowhere is Hilarion troubled by philosophers, nowhere is he said to have been taught by God alone. Like the Greek philosophers whom Antony ridicules, Hilarion traverses the sea, although not to gain *gnosis*, but rather to demonstrate his achievements.[35] His fame does not rest on his being wise in spite of being uneducated, but on his miracles.

The third biography, the *Life of Malchus*, is an entirely different story. Jerome claims to have heard it from Evagrius of Antioch, his

34. *Vita Hilarionis* 33–41.

35. The contrast between the solitude and *stabilitas loci* of Antony and his emphasis on the futility of studies, travels, and fame, and the way Jerome depicts his hero and his journeys is striking. See *VA* 20, 49, 85, 90.

host in Syria. After recounting Malchus's origin and his relation to his parents, Jerome goes on to tell us that he fled home to avoid marriage and become a monk. After many years, we are told, Malchus decided to go home to his country, in spite of his abbot trying to prevent him.[36] The major part is, then, the story of Malchus's adventures with robbers and with a woman captured together with him, their escape, a lion killing their pursuers, and Malchus's final return to the monastery. The biography has more in common with a novel (robbers, a beautiful woman, a slave dealer, escape by night, pursuers, a lion, and a happy ending) than with the traditional lives of holy men. There is no word about education, whether secular or Christian, nothing about theology or forms of worship, and even very little on asceticism. Malchus is not someone to emulate, and the entire story is told not to edify but to amuse. By putting an emphasis on Malchus being Syriac and non-Greek, Jerome actually enhances the distance between his readers and his subject. Malchus belongs to the rural wilderness, he is a natural hero, someone a civilized person can read about and marvel at, but not identify with. Classical education features in the lives of Paul and Hilarion, but it is of no importance, whether positively or negatively. In the *Life of Malchus*, Jerome goes a step further and makes classical education totally irrelevant.

It is not difficult to see how his lives of Paul, Hilarion, and Malchus reflect Jerome's own concerns. Classical education and social respectability are harmonized with the ideal of Christian asceticism and obligations to the community.[37] What finally makes Malchus escape from his captivity is the image of the ants working for their common good, an implicit criticism of the solitary and rather comfortable life of the hermit. Like Jerome, Hilarion remains closely in touch with the world he has forsaken. Like him, his heroes quote classical authors and are well versed in the Scriptures. The conflicts they engage in are not with philosophers but with the pre-Constantinian persecutors of Christianity in the *Life of St. Paul*, with Malchus's pagan master, who insists that he marry (alluding to Pharaoh and Jo-

36. *Vita Malchi* 3.

37. See *Vita Malchi* 7. We might also compare how the *Life of Paul* focuses on how Antony and Paul shared the bread with the complete lack of any reference to liturgy and communion in the *Life of Antony*, where it is even said that Antony preferred to eat alone. See *VA* 45.

seph), and with the crowds pressing upon the holy man in the *Life of St. Hilarion.*[38] It is also worth noting that neither Paul nor Hilarion have disciples who have to be taught. Like Malchus and Jerome himself, they stand surprisingly alone. None of them gives a sermon or even reflects on spiritual conflicts or the relation between faith and knowledge. In the ideal life of a saint, there is no tension between faith and knowledge, between divine revelation and classical education. Where Athanasius opted for God-granted and even inherent divine wisdom in contrast to acquired knowledge, Jerome avoids any contrast between these. The idea that one might be born a Christian, that virtue and faith are natural in everyone, was totally foreign to him. But although he strongly maintains that "one becomes a Christian; one is not born one," he is little concerned about any need for conversion.[39]

ST. GREGORY OF NYSSA ON ST. GREGORY THAUMATURGOS, ST. MACRINA THE YOUNGER, AND MOSES

There is no evidence that Gregory of Nyssa ever read *The Life of St. Antony,* although it is quite likely that he did. The Greek text was known to Gregory of Nazianzus at the time of his oration on Athanasius in 373, as well as to Evagrius of Antioch, probably already in 372 when he still was in Rome, and by 385 the Latin version was known in Trier.[40] But even if he read it, there is not the slightest indication that it influenced his own biographical writing. There is no imitation and no competition. Gregory's three lives, the *De vita Gregorii Thaumaturgi,* the *Vita Macrinae,* and the *De vita Moysis,* are very different from one another, and the last one is not really a biography at all. *De vita Gregorii Thaumaturgi* and the *Vita Macrinae* deal with Gregory's own family and background, the first being about the conversion of

38. The way Jerome's own life is reflected in the three biographies he wrote would repay a more detailed study. For some examples, see Coleiro "St. Jerome's Lives," 171.

39. For the reference to Jerome, *Epistula* 107.1.4 (*fiunt, non nascuntur Christiani*), as well as a discussion of Jerome's attitude to learning and his difficulties with respect to both promoting and circumscribing education, see Philip Rousseau, "'Learned Women' and the Development of a Christian Culture in Late Antiquity" (the quotation is found on p. 136).

40. For Gregory of Nazianzus, see his *Or.* 21 (*PG* 35); for Evagrius of Antioch, see Kelly, *Jerome,* 33; for the Latin text read at Trier, see Augustine, *Confessiones* 8.6.15.

his native land and the second about his own sister, but *De vita Moysis* is about a biblical figure. But in spite of their different character, the question of the place of secular education in the life of a Christian is central to all of them.

The first biography by Gregory of Nyssa, the *Life of St. Gregory Thaumaturgos,* presents us with a famous and learned bishop.[41] Unlike Antony, this Gregory is not a poor and illiterate monk of the desert, but a rich, well-educated man from Neocaesarea. His background is not the village church and the Gospel, but the pagan school and the classical authors. His biographer devotes long passages to his zeal for learning and his education, discussing in detail the relation between secular learning and Christian truth, between *Hellenismos* and *Christianismos.* He compares his saint, not only to Moses, who was thoroughly educated in Egyptian knowledge, but also to Abraham, who knew Chaldean wisdom.[42] But, like Joseph, Gregory is not seduced by the world; through restraint, he preserves his integrity. After having thus obtained all secular wisdom, Gregory becomes the student of Origen, who "did not disdain to put other teachings at the service of theology."[43] His background and learning make him suitable to be made bishop of a place with almost no Christians, a missionary to the pagans. The development from student to bishop is natural, there is no conversion or rejection of what he had learnt. When he withdraws from society, it is in order to escape the tumultuous crowd and gain the silence necessary to contemplate divine mysteries. He is unable to escape ordination, however, and the words he has to speak are given to him in a vision. He is the new John the Evangelist.[44] Later, he is both a saint known for his numerous miracles and a wise, virtuous bishop who is able to convert an entire province, teaching the pagans the true faith. The model is not Jacob, but Moses.

41. Gregorius of Nyssa, *De Vita Gregorii Thaumaturgi* (ed. G. Heil, *Gregorii Nysseni Opera* 7.1). Gregory of Nyssa must have gained most of his information about Gregory Thaumaturgos through family tradition (his grandmother is said to have known Gregory), but it is also possible that he knew the *Oratio panegyrica in Origenem* by Gregory Thaumaturgos himself. For the problems surrounding the life and works of Gregory Thaumaturgos, see the introduction by Klein in *Gregor der Wundertäter,* 7–11, 45–63, and Crouzel, "Faut-il voir trois personnages en Grégoire le Thaumaturge?"

42. *VGThaum* 9. Instead of secular *paideia,* Gregory of Nyssa speaks about ἡ ἔξω σοφία and ἡ ἔξω φιλοσοφία and even ἡ ἔξωθεν διδαχή.

43. ἑτέρῳ χρήσασθαι διδασκάλῳ πρὸς τὰ θεῖα τῶν μαθημάτων οὐκ ἀπηξίωσεν (*VGThaum* 13).

44. *VGThaum* 15–19.

Gregory is a prophet whose words are verified by his acts. His simplicity is not inherent, like Antony's, it is a God-granted power—a power manifest also in his being able first to master philosophy and then to leave it behind.

In the *Life of St. Macrina*, Gregory of Nyssa tackles the question of education directly after his account of Macrina's birth, at which she is already marked as a saint by receiving in secrecy the name Thecla.[45] Her saintliness depends on her being chosen by God; it is not of her own making. In contrast to the rejection of education in the *Life of St. Antony* and the approval of it in Jerome's first two lives, Gregory of Nyssa introduces a new option: a Christian education. On the one hand, as befits a child of her class, Macrina is taught what children are usually taught, and as befits a holy woman and teacher of true philosophy, she excels in her studies. On the other hand, her mother rejects the idea of having her read the classical pagan authors, the secular and general education (ἡ ἔξωθεν καὶ ἐγκύκλιος παίδευσις), because of the immorality of the texts. Instead, she is given the Scriptures. Thus Macrina can both be described as a diligent student, always carrying her books, and later on even as a teacher and philosopher,[46] and at the same time as a virgin preserved pure and unaffected by pagan mythology. It must be noted, however, first, that the pagan texts are rejected because of their immorality, not because they are pagan and thus non-Christian, and, second, that the reason for the rejection of the classical authors is closely linked to Macrina's being female and predestined to remain a virgin.[47]

By substituting the Bible for the classical authors, Gregory of Nyssa is not forced to make Macrina unlettered, in spite of the fact that he, like Athanasius, rejects classical *paideia* for his saint. Instead of depicting an opposition between the philosophy of the Greeks and the wisdom of faith, Gregory places the Scriptures as an alternative route to the same goal as the classical philosophical tradition.

45. *VMacr.* 2.

46. For Macrina as a teacher, see *VMacr.* 10, 12, 17, 18, 19, 20, 26 and 28. For Macrina as the bearer of a higher philosophy, see *VMacr.* 17. The innovative character and significance of Macrina's way of life as a model is emphasized in Elm, "*Virgins of God*," 39–47, 78–105.

47. Actually the same idea that the education of a Christian *girl* ought to be restricted to Christian texts is found in Jerome's letter to Laeta about the upbringing of Paula. See Jerome, *Epistula* 107, ed. Hilberg, *CSEL* 55 (1912). For the question of educated Christian women in general, see Rousseau, "Learned Women."

Through the Wisdom of Solomon, Macrina is taught the ethos and philosophy of classical upbringing without having to encounter the stories belonging to pagan mythology.[48] In contrast to Antony, who opposes the philosophers with simple, God-granted faith, Macrina through her studies achieves a higher philosophy. Although her life is circumscribed, her reading restricted to the Scriptures, and her intercourse limited to the family estate, she is able to defeat the philosophers on their own ground. It is not, however, in any real encounter with the philosophers, as in the *Life of St. Antony*, or by reference to miracles that she proves them to be wrong, but in a philosophical dialogue with her brother on her deathbed.[49]

In his *Life of Moses*, written at the end of his life, Gregory of Nyssa develops his views on the place of classical *paideia* in the life of the saint. Here there are no restrictions: Moses is educated in both Egyptian and Greek wisdom.[50] But although adopted by and brought up in the pagan tradition, he returns to his origins. His flight into the desert opens up a second level of education for him and becomes an occasion for greater wisdom. His life is a continuing ascent, in which previous levels are left behind, but not rejected. In the second part of the *Life of Moses*, the contemplation on Moses's life, Gregory interprets the story. Already from the beginning, teaching and knowledge are emphasized as necessary. The ark, which saved Moses from the waters of the Nile, is the basic education in the various disciplines, the only safe refuge in the waves of temptation.[51] Moses's double attachment to the Egyptian princess and his mother signals that, although classical education is necessary, a Christian must at the same time be nourished by the milk of the Church, since secular philosophy (ἡ ἔξωθεν παίδευσις) is barren.[52] Whenever it comes to a conflict between pagan and biblical tradition, the Christian must either fight or flee. And when forced to live together with what is foreign, one must chase away those who misuse *paideia*, that is, heretics (2.16–17). Moses keeps his foreign wife, since there are things in the secular wisdom that should not be rejected by anyone striving for virtue

48. *VMacr.* 3.

49. The dialogue is only hinted at in *VMacr.*, but later developed by Gregory as his *Dialogus de anima et resurrectione.*

50. *Vita Moysis* 1.18–19; 2.7–18.

51. Ibid., 2.6–9.

52. Ibid., 2.10–12.

(2.37). To attain the highest forms of wisdom, it is, however, necessary to leave everything behind and become initiated by God, something Moses experiences on Mount Sinai (2.153).

A key to Gregory's understanding of the role of secular education in the life of the Christian is his interpretation of the plundering of the Egyptians by the Israelites (Exod. 3.21–22, 11.2, 12.35–36), an interpretation also encountered in Origen's letter to Gregory Thaumaturgos, a possible source for Gregory of Nyssa:

> The loftier meaning is therefore more fitting than the obvious one. It commands those participating through virtue in the free life also to equip themselves with the wealth of pagan learning by which foreigners to the faith beautify themselves. Our guide in virtue commands someone who "borrows" from wealthy Egyptians to receive such things as moral and natural philosophy, geometry, astronomy, dialectic, and whatever else is sought by those outside the Church, since these things will be useful when in time the divine sanctuary of mystery must be beautified with the riches of reason.[53]

What is rejected in the *Life of St. Antony* and bypassed by Jerome is here accepted as something that can be, not only useful, but even used to beautify the divine temple of Christian mystery. The biblical story, interpreted in the *Life of Moses*, becomes a defense for Gregory's own use of his *paideia*.

In Gregory's biographies, it is not the untouched, natural, and immovable holy man that emerges, but the saint ascending to ever higher levels of wisdom and insight. Although Gregory makes it clear in the beginning of his biographies that Macrina, Moses, and Gregory Thaumaturgos were predestined to be saints, belonging to a tradition, perfected from the beginning, there is a marked development in their lives. While their ascetic practice keeps them constantly the same, it also leads them into deeper knowledge of things divine.[54] Revelation of true wisdom, of the mysteries of God, presupposes a long training in which even secular education plays an important formative role. Even a holy man, or woman, has to be formed, if not by Greek *paideia*, by studying the ethics of the Wisdom of Solomon, if

53. Ibid., 2.115. This interpretation is the basis on which the use of philosophy for Christian exegesis is explained in Origen's *Ep. ad Greg. Thaum.*, in *Grégoire le Thaumaturge*, ed. Crouzel.

54. For examples and a short comment on this, see Harl, "Modèles d'un temps idéal," 223–24.

not by reading Homer, by reading the Psalms.[55] To Gregory, the equilibrium and holy simplicity that mark the saint are not inherent qualities, which merely have to be protected from all external thoughts, but rather the result of a penetration and integration of the deeper essence of all wisdom. Nature is not simply to be preserved, as in the *Life of St. Antony*, but to be outstripped (*VMacr.* 1). Initiation by God does not depend on being uneducated, but rather on having grown up in wisdom and philosophy. The ideal is not Jacob, but Moses.

THE *LIFE OF ST. PACHOMIUS*

The biography in many ways most akin to the *Vita Antonii* is the *Vita Pachomii*, especially in its Greek version. The saint depicted is an Egyptian monk of the same generation, and at least the compiler of the Greek life known as *Vita Prima* makes it clear that the *Life of St. Antony* is his ideal and model.[56] There is also an evident attempt in the *Vita Pachomii* to set up Pachomius as a rival to Antony.[57] But, at the same time, Pachomius belongs to a different world, Coptic Egypt, a world where classical education and knowledge of Greek was more limited. The marriage between Christianity and Greek philosophy was not as natural to the people of Upper Egypt as to those of Alexandria, Antioch, or Athens, and neither was literacy as strongly linked to the Greek classical authors. Added to this is the fact that in contrast to the other biographies, the *Life of St. Pachomius* does not have a single author. Leaving the intricate discussion on the various versions of the *Life* aside, it is obvious that the text is a compilation of stories about Pachomius collected from various sources, many of which were probably oral. The purpose is not the making of a model to emulate, but the preservation of a history that regulates and legitimizes present tradition.[58]

55. A similar use of the three other works of the Septuagint traditionally attributed to Solomon, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs, as introductions into the three branches of learning, Ethics, Physics, and Enoptics, is described by Origen, *Commentary on the Song of Songs, Prologus*, ed. Baehrens.

56. The complicated issue of the various versions of *The Life of Pachomius*, as well as the history and reasons behind the compilation is of little relevance for this chapter. For a thorough discussion and references to previous works, see Rousseau, *Pachomius*, 37–45.

57. *VP/G* 2, 22, 99, 120, and 136. See Rubenson, *Letters of St. Antony* (1995), 165–72, and Rousseau, *Pachomius*, 45–48, 72–73.

58. Rousseau, *Pachomius*, 45–48.

Although Pachomius is born and educated as a pagan, in contrast to the other saints discussed here, he is from the beginning chosen by God and, because of his inherent virtue, both unable to worship the idols and unacceptable to the Egyptian gods.[59] After his conversion, away from home, he is instructed in the Christian faith and baptized, and more or less immediately he becomes a monk.[60] He receives his monastic education from an old ascetic, Palamon, and after about seven years, he emerges as the founder of a new monastic tradition. In the subsequent description of Pachomius's role as a leader of the *koinonia*, he is primarily a great teacher, well versed in the Scriptures and in their spiritual interpretation, but there is no indication of how he was able to study the Scriptures or learn about their interpretation. His lack of knowledge of Greek is attested by the story about how, in his old age, he made an effort to study Greek for the benefit of his Greek-speaking disciples, and his illiteracy is at least implied by the reference to him dictating his own letters.[61]

But, unlike in the case of Antony, his lack of education is nowhere an ideal or even something essential to the purity of his teaching. On the contrary, there is no doubt in the *Vita Pachomii* that education, literacy, and the study of Scripture were things Pachomius encouraged and even demanded. Pachomius was a holy man, not only by virtue of his *ascesis* and his visions, but even more by virtue of his discernment, his interpretation of Scripture, and his profound insights. The only passage in the *Vita Prima* that shows a manifest opposition by Pachomius to an intellectual tradition is the story about him throwing a book by Origen into the Nile (*VP/G* 31). There are however good reasons to regard the story as a later addition.[62] Compared with the *Life of St. Antony*, the complete lack of any other attack by Pachomius

59. *VP/G* 3. The explanation for why Pachomius was chased out of the temple by the pagan priest is revealing: it was not because the demons knew beforehand that he would become a Christian monk, but because they are opposed to anyone who is upright, as God had created him. The similarity to Antony's emphasis on inherent natural virtue is obvious.

60. Here the Greek and Coptic versions differ. The Coptic texts make Pachomius serve for three years in Sheneset before he joins Palamon, while the *Vita Prima* lets him join Palamon directly. In any case, his vision, calling him to monastic life, is in both versions described as following directly upon his baptism. See *VP/G* 6 and *VP/Bo* 9–10.

61. *VP/G* 95.

62. *VP/G* 31. The story is missing in the Coptic and Arabic versions, and in the Greek version, it is inserted into an account of Athanasius's visit to Upper Egypt.

on heretics is striking. Instead of Pachomius, it is actually Antony who in the Sahidic *Life of St. Pachomius* is said to have defended the necessity of testing the orthodoxy of monks asking for hospitality.[63]

The only passage in the *Life* that reveals anything of Pachomius's views of Greek philosophy is the description of the debate with the philosophers, a passage perhaps intended as a parallel to Antony's encounter with the philosophers.[64] But Pachomius does not himself encounter the philosophers. Instead, he sends first Cornelius, who skillfully averts the accusation of the philosophers, and then Theodore, who silences them by replying correctly to their intricate question. The story is remarkable, first, because Pachomius does not meet the attack himself, and, second, because the monks are satisfied with their ability to reply to the questions, and the philosophers apparently as satisfied with the answers they get. In contrast to the story in the *Life of Antony*, there is no real conflict, and, at least in the Greek version, no attempt by the monks to fight back or even question the philosophers. In the Coptic, more elaborate, version the monks claim that the talk of the philosophers is vain, but no argument is presented, and no discussion follows. The world of the monks in the *koinonia*, based on the Scriptures, is completely detached from the world of the pagan philosophers. In contrast to the *Life of St. Antony*, there is no common ground, there is nothing to discuss.[65] Thus there is no need for Pachomius to appear. His teaching is reserved for the faithful. The sound logic of Antony, based on a kind of natural revelation, is missing. It is not what is inherent in everyone but the Scriptures that form the foundation of the mental world of the *koinonia*.

Inasmuch as it is not simply a biography, but a story of the Pachomian movement, the *Life of St. Pachomius* also contains elements of two other biographies, however, those of Theodore, the second successor of Pachomius, and Theodore the Alexandrian. Here we encounter two other monks, both with a background in urban Alexandria, closer to the world of Antony, Hilarion, and Macrina. The first Theodore is from a Christian family of high standing. In contrast to

63. *VP/Bo* 129. The story is missing in the Greek version.

64. *VP/G* 82; *VP/Bo* 55. For a short discussion highlighting the difference between this account and the *Life of Antony*, see Rousseau, *Pachomius*, 163–67.

65. Here I find it difficult to agree with Rousseau's interpretation in his *Pachomius*, 162–69.

Antony, he is explicitly said in the Coptic version to have learnt to read and write in school and to have advanced greatly in wisdom.[66] His conversion to monasticism is brought about by intellectual reflection, and it is only after hearing someone recount an allegorical interpretation of the Tabernacle by Pachomius that he decides to make Pachomius his teacher.[67] Throughout the *Life of St. Pachmius*, he is characterized as wise and perceptive, the true heir to Pachomius.

The second Theodore was also an educated man, lector of a church of Alexandria. Upon hearing about Pachomius, he decided to become a monk. He rapidly learned Coptic, was made housemaster for the non-Egyptians (that is, for the Greeks of the Pachomian monastery), and became the faithful translator of all the teachings of Pachomius and his successor Horsiesius. He is described as diligent, intelligent, and stoutly orthodox.[68] In both cases there is a clear emphasis on educational responsibilities within the *koinonia*. But nowhere do we find any mention of secular learning, of Greek *paideia*. There is no explicit rejection of classical tradition, but also no place for it. Education in the Pachomian context is limited to expounding Scripture, and in contrast to the rules of Pachomius, the *Life* has very little to say about the place of books and learning in the community.[69]

The world of the *Life of St. Pachomius* is strangely set apart. Pachomius stands on his own; he does not relate to Greek culture and is even cautious in his relations to the church of Alexandria and its archbishop, hiding from Athanasius when he visits Upper Egypt. It is only after the death of Pachomius that relations with Alexandria are strengthened.[70] His monasteries are strictly guarded against dangerous influences from the outside. Hospitality is checked by testing visitors, and family relations no longer exist as such.[71] His learning is

66. *VP/Bo* 31, which gives a much fuller account than the Greek version.
67. *VP/G* 34, *VP/Bo* 29.
68. *VP/G* 94–95; *VP/Bo* 89–91.
69. For a detailed discussion of the evidence for books and scribal activity among the Pachomians, see Scholten, "Nag-Hammadi-Texte." It is significant that Scholten's evidence is almost exclusively taken from other sources than the various lives of Pachomius.
70. The caution evident in the Coptic versions is less obvious in the *Vita Prima*, in which Pachomius is made into a supporter of the bishops. See, e.g., *VP/G* 30–31 and *VP/Bo* 28. Stronger ties with Alexandria begin at about the time of Pachomius's death. See *VP/G* 113, 120, 136–38, 143–44, 150.
71. For the testing of visitors, see the Coptic version *VP/Bo* 129; for family relations, see the instructive story about Theodore's mother coming with letters from several bishops to have him handed back to her (*VP/G* 37).

described as confined solely to the Bible; his own instructions he receives through visions. And although his two disciples, both named Theodore, come from Alexandria, one of them even being an educated Greek, they are primarily his disciples, taught by him. Their background, like Pachomius's own, is not a problem; like family connections, it is something simply dropped when entering the monastery. Inside the monastery, there is, however, an insistence on education not found in any other fourth-century Christian context. Although this is mainly expressed in the Pachomian rules, the *Life of St. Pachomius* is already permeated by an emphasis on instruction and education. But this instruction is decidedly orthodox, and thus in no way a problem. We are here far removed from the Alexandrian philosophical tradition reflected in Gregory of Nyssa, in the letters of St. Antony, and most explicitly in Evagrius: that all letters, ideas, and concepts are to be, if not rejected, at least transcended. For monks entering the *koinonia*, there is no question of relying on inherent simplicity, on relying on true self-knowledge. Formation of souls is the explicit purpose of the community.[72]

CONCLUSIONS

Out of the eight lives discussed, all but two inform us about the education of the saint. In all the lives, written as they were in the late fourth century A.D. or the first decade of the fifth, education means classical Greek education. This education is accepted in two of the lives by Jerome, as well as in two of the lives by Gregory of Nyssa . In Antony's case, it is rejected; in Macrina's, it is replaced. The two lives that have no reference to a *paideia* are the *Vita Pachomii* and the *Vita Malchi*. Both of them depict saints who do not belong to the Greek (or better Hellenic) culture at all, but to the Coptic and the Syriac respectively. This saves them from the problem of harmonizing Greek *paideia* and Christian saintliness. Their piety owes nothing to Greek philosophy; they are, as it were, independent. The case of Pachomius is especially revealing, because he is depicted as the great teacher and interpreter of Scripture. Still, he is not imprisoned in the world of *grammata* and *philosophia;* he does not know Greek, his letters are written in a secret

72. For a thorough discussion of this theme in the Pachomian literature, see Rousseau, *Pachomius*, 57–76.

code, and he does not have to bother about debating the philosophers of Panopolis. He belongs to another world.

In the other lives, we can detect two different approaches to classical education and its relation to the sanctity of the saint. On the one hand there is the rejection of and withdrawal from Greek *paideia* as in the *Life of St. Antony* and, although rather differently, in the *Life of St. Macrina*. In both cases the saint has a kind of inherent purity, which is to be guarded against the pollution of *grammata*. Already from the beginning, they are set apart. Their education is not of this world. This is most radically manifested in the *Life of St. Antony*, where Antony is initiated in his fortified abandoned well. It is his shrine, a protected place outside the world, outside *polis*, outside *civitas*. In the *Life of St. Macrina*, the distance is not so vividly manifest. But here again Macrina is, unlike her brothers, locked up at home, protected from the immorality of worldly education, enshrined by Scripture. Instead of traditional *paideia*, instead of the *gymnasium*, Antony and Macrina each create their own *polis* and method of instruction for teaching their disciples. If we add the second work by Gregory of Nyssa on Macrina, the *De anima et resurrectione*, we find that Macrina, like Antony, is depicted as engaging in philosophical debate, in proving that Greek philosophy is futile compared with Christian truth.[73] Although unaffected by classical education, they both emerge as masters of the philosophers.

On the other hand, there is the prevalent idea of Greek *paideia* being the foundation upon which Christian knowledge and piety can build. This is what we find in Jerome's two lives, and it is probably most explicitly developed in Gregory's *Life of Moses*, reflecting the educational program of Origen as described in the oration by his pupil Gregory Thaumaturgos, in whose *Life* by Gregory of Nyssa it is again echoed.[74] Classical education is, as in the biographies of pagan "holy men," taken for granted in anyone who is a teacher of philosophy. Like Gregory and Jerome themselves, their saints (except the woman, Macrina) are educated before they become leaders or holy men. But in contrast to Antony and Macrina, they are not made into teachers of philosophy who refute false ideas and lead their disciples into true insights. For Paul, Hilarion, Moses, and Gregory Thaumaturgos,

73. See Gregory of Nyssa, *De anima et resurrectione*.
74. See Gregory Thaumaturgos, *Oratio panegyrica in Origenem*.

there is no conflict, but rather a natural cohabitation of *paideia* and *pistis*. The second rests upon the solid basis of the first. The biblical models here are Moses and Samuel, not, as in *Life of St. Antony*, Jacob and Elijah. This does not mean that there is no difference between the lives by Gregory and those by Jerome. Gregory clearly regards secular education as positive, something the saint utilizes in his life, but the secular education received by Paul and Hilarion is manifestly isolated from and irrelevant to their ascetic life. Although proud of his learning, Jerome could never really harmonize classical *paideia* and Christian faith. Classical literature remained a temptation. He loved it but thought it shameful, an infidelity to Christ. To Gregory of Nyssa, it had its beauty and its use, but also its limits.[75]

But, and this is important, Moses too needed to withdraw from the world. Although there is no conflict, the holy men of the *Life of St. Paul*, the *Life of St. Hilarion*, the *Life of St. Gregory Thaumaturgos*, and the *Life of Moses* all leave the world of *paideia* and experience a higher level of education. Before they can emerge as teachers, they have to leave everything behind, go out into the desert and experience a direct encounter with the divine. Like Antony, they are also taught by God, something that can only be brought about in the context of renunciation and solitude. But in contrast to Antony and Macrina, they enter their solitude, their monastic life after being initiated into philosophy by secular education. Their lives are all characterized by three phases: *education, retreat, leadership*, except that the last phase is transformed in Jerome's lives into a travel account in the case of Hilarion and into the humiliation of Antony in the case of Paul.

To conclude, I would like to suggest that the study of these lives gives an important insight into the wider question of the relation between Christianity and Greek *paideia* and the emergence of a specifically Christian culture with a Christian educational system of its own. It is in the *Vita Macrina* and the *Vita Pachomii* that we find the first traces of something Antony and even Athanasius could not yet imagine, something Jerome found hard to believe in, but that Augustine later considered natural and necessary: a purely Christian *paideia*. Instead of the illiteracy of Antony, Macrina reads her Psalter, instead of the seclusion of the shrine, Pachomius has a monastic school with

75. For a short discussion of the difference between the attitudes of the Cappadocians on the one hand and Jerome on the other, see Kaster, *Guardians of Language*, 77–82.

lectures, libraries, and discussions. One can even argue that these two lives are, as it were, introductions to Christian traditions of teaching. In Gregory's *De anima et resurrectione*, Macrina has become the teacher of true, that is, Christian, philosophy. But in contrast to the *Life of St. Antony*, she is a teacher of a pupil asking questions, not an opponent of proud pagans. The *Life of St. Pachomius* in its turn is full of references to the writing down of Pachomius's teaching. But unlike Antony's teaching, which rests upon its own logic and is verified by the outwitted philosophers, Pachomius's teaching rests entirely on Scripture and is verified solely through his miracles, seen by his disciples. Macrina and Pachomius move in a purely Christian context.

This emerging Christian culture is first reflected in the two biographies of saints not belonging to the traditional world of Greek culture, the biographies of a woman and of a Copt. What could probably not be part of the *Life* of a holy man within the male Greek world of the late fourth and early fifth centuries could be described as the essential way for a holy woman and a non-Greek saint. Christian education as the solution to the conflict between philosophy and simplicity starts at the fringes of classical *paideia*. What has been observed by previous scholars about the emergence of a Christian educational system, Christian schools, in late antiquity, is actually substantiated by the biographies.[76] Within the centers of Greek culture and education, Christians did not develop their own schools but made use of and, as it were, tried to transform the pagan tradition. What had been natural in the Jewish context, seeking to preserve religious identity with the help of an independent educational system, only developed among Christians in areas where Greek was not the major language, and primarily within the context of the new monastic *civitas*, a society in which women played an important and often pioneering role.

76. See, e.g., Marrou, *Histoire de l'éducation dans l'antiquité*, 454–56 and 466–67.

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