The Arrow Prayer in the Coptic Tradition

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Declaration

I certify that the work in this thesis entitled “The Arrow Prayer in the Coptic Tradition ” has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree to any other university or institution other than Macquarie University.

I also certify that the thesis is an original piece of research and it has been written by me. Any help and assistance that I have received in my research and in the preparation of the thesis itself have been appropriately acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information, sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

25th December 2018
Anthony St Shenouda

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Abbreviations

AP - Apophthegmata Patrum

NPNF - Nicene Post Nicene Fathers

Biblical verses are generally according to the Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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Abstract

The New Testament injunction to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18) was put into practice by early Christians and was further formulated by the Egyptian monks and was eventually known as the Arrow Prayer. The Arrow Prayer was practised by the continuous repetition of a formula, which consists of a bible verse, a saying of a monastic elder, the name of Jesus, or a liturgical formula.

From reading key monastic, liturgical and hagiographical sources, we can appreciate the extent of the use of the Arrow Prayer across various social milieus. The aim of this thesis is to provide the social backdrop that explains the widespread use of this prayer, providing evidence from the education system, and the practice of memorisation and meditation in antiquity. I further argue that the Bible was one of the primary sources for the formulas for the Arrow Prayer and for how the practice of this prayer was prominently used to identify the Holy Man in hagiography. By providing the historical context and stipulating the use of the prayer in different milieus, it becomes clear that the Arrow Prayer was in use by monastics and laity in the Coptic Church from the early centuries of Christianity and to an erratic degree the twentieth century.

Introduction

Prayer has played an integral part in human history. It is a vital aspect of any religious system or belief. It is where a religion or a belief system expresses its theological convictions and worldviews. Therefore, to study the depth of a particular religious tradition, one must look at the way faith was expressed through prayer. Prayer in early Christianity was an expression of the Christian beliefs and theology. What makes Christianity distinct from other religions was their understanding of who God is as Trinity and the implications of this has for their practice of prayer. Many of the early Christian writers, such as Origen[1], described prayer as something that you are rather than something that you do. Other Christian writers see prayer as a means of communication with God and therefore a Christian strives to pray so as to be in continuous contact with God.

Since the beginnings of Christianity, there have been many forms of prayer, including but not limited to private, communal and liturgical prayers. Some have involved specific gestures, others singing. Some of these prayers came from Jewish influences, while others developed within the life of the church [2]. All of these factors combined make the task of untangling the historical development of any specific mode of prayer a difficult one.

[1] Origen, *On Prayer*, XII Greer, 1979, p. 104.

[2] Bradshaw, 2010, pp. 77-82.

When studying any mode of prayer, it is always tempting to concentrate on the theological aspects of prayer and thus often, unintentionally, neglect its social aspect. While it is important to study prayer and its many modes of practice from a theological perspective, it is also essential to test these theories against the backdrop of their social context. It is important to realise that despite Christianity's influence on the society in which it grew, Christian practices have also been greatly influenced by its own surrounding culture whether it was Jewish, Graeco-Roman or Muslim. In this thesis, I present the social backdrop of one of the early Christian practices of continuous prayer, the Arrow Prayer.

I define the Arrow Prayer as:

> A short prayer that is prayed by monks and laity, its content can be inspired from a verse from the bible or a personal prayer that is repeated throughout the day while practising their day to day activities.

Therefore, the Arrow Prayer is the practice of continuous prayer that was developed in the early church and was later formulated and regularly practised by the desert monks in Egypt. The prayer itself consisted of a repeated psalm, small prayer, or a bible verse, which we will call a *formula*. While the same formula is repeated throughout the day the prayer does not prescribe any specific formula. The person practicing the prayer can use any verse from scripture and repeat the same formula for extended periods of time, and the formula can change from time to time depending on the person's spiritual need. This practice is, as I will argue, a result of the practice of the memorisation and meditation on various books of the scripture in an oral cultural setting by monastics and lay people alike while doing various daily chores. Since the

prayer is practiced during the day-to-day activities, it therefore does not necessarily have a meditative aspect. The mere repetition of the prayer is enough to interiorise the prayer that is being prayed.

In one of St Shenoute's sermons, he teaches his listeners, monks and laity to use a short prayer during every action in thier daily life. For the monks, while they are coming in and out of their cell, while they are lying down to sleep or getting up, when they bless or pray[3]. In the same sermon he gives the same advice to lay people during their everyday activities, when they are joyful or distressed, when they are drawing water, running away from barbarians or wild beasts, or those who are taken as prisoners of war[4]. In this sermon St Shenouda highlights the three aspects of the practice of the Arrow Prayer layed out in the diffinition as early as the fifth century. From outside of Egypt we know Gorgonia, the sister of St Gregory of Nazianzus repeated a single verse from the psalter on her deathbed[5]. Similarly St Macrina the sister of St Gregory of Nyssa, repeated verses from the psalter while she did her chores, meals and preparation for bed[6].

Continuous Prayer in the Early Church

Before considering the development of the use of the Arrow Prayer in the desert, it is important to note the origins of this prayer before the start of the monastic movement. The command for the practice of continuous prayer was first introduced by Jesus in

[3] *I am amazed*: 802-803 Davis, 2008, pp. 283-284.

[4] *I am amazed*: 821 Davis, 2008, pp. 285-286.

[5] *Gregory of Nazianzus, oration*: 8.13,22.

[6] *Gregory of Nyssa, Vita Macrina:* 8.1.373-74.

the parable of the persistent widow, beginning in Luke 18:1 with "Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart". Yet the most frequently quoted verse that supports the practice of continuous prayer is St Paul's command in 1 Thess. 5: 17 to "pray without ceasing" [7].

During the pre-Constantinian period many Christian writers assumed that prayer was something you do all the time throughout the day and the observance of set time of the day for prayer was only a reminder for the practice of continuous prayer[8]. This concept has been deeply rooted in the everyday practices of the early church from as early as Polycarp in the second century. In his epistle to the Philippians, he repeated the command to widows to pray continuously[9]. Ignatius, a contemporary to Polycarp, in a letter sent by the earlier confirmed the latter's practice of ceaseless prayers[10]. Clement of Alexandria, around the year 200 A.D. whilst allocating certain hours of the day for prayer, states that a mature Christian is not limited to them: "Now, if some assign definite hours for prayer—as, for example, the third, and sixth, and ninth—yet the gnostic prays through his whole life, endeavouring by prayer to have fellowship with God"[11]. Clement further emphasises the importance of having prayer permeate everyday activity:

[7] St Paul also refers to this topic elsewhere: Rom 12:12; Eph 6:18; Col 4:2; 1Pet 4:7.

[8] Coyle, 1999, p. 34.

[9] *Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians:* IV, It is interesting to note that he directs this instruction specifically to widows, following the gospel account of the persistent widow.

[10] "all in love, as also thou doest. Give thyself to prayer without ceasing". In a later pious legend about Ignatius it is said that in the midst of his tortures he did not cease calling on the name of Jesus Christ. When he was asked by the executioner why he did this, he replied "I have this name written in my heart and therefore cannot stop invoking it!" after his death, those who heard him were driven by curiosity they took his heart out if his body split it down the middle and found the name of Jesus Christ inscribed there in golden letters Voragine, 1993, pp. 140-143.

[11] *Stromata:* 7.7; Hägg, 2010, p. 135.

> His [the gnostic's] sacrifices are prayer, and praise, and readings in the Scriptures before meals, and psalms and hymns during meals and before bed, and prayers again during the night… while engaged in walking, in conversation, while in silence, while engaged in reading and in works according to reason, he in every mood prays[12]

Not much later, Origen describes the life of the saints as those who pray constantly[13]. Tertullian from north Africa reluctantly advises specific times of the day: "the extrinsic observance of certain hours will not be unprofitable"[14] yet he reminds believers not to neglect the normal practice of prayer throughout the day before eating, and going to the bath "for the refreshments and nourishments of the spirit"[15]. After the Constantinian 'edict of religious tolerance', Christians were able to publically gather for services and build churches, and this is when we started to see greater emphasis on ritual communal prayer.

Continuous Prayer in Monasticism

When the monastic movement started, living a prayful life was one of its main virtues for a monk to attain, therefore, it was only natural to find the practice of ceaseless prayer as an integral part of the monastic life. In many instances, St Anthony is recorded to have "prayed all the time having learned that it is necessary to pray by

[12] *Stromata:* 7.7.49.4-7.

[13] On Prayer: XII, Rowan, 1979 It is also interesting to note here that Origen also refers to Jesus as the one who commanded this prayer, referring to it as the prayer "which Paul gives in accordance with the exhortations of Jesus". Also see Danielou, 2016, p. 36.

[14] Tertullian, *De oration:* 25.

[15] Tertullian, *De oration:* 25.

oneself without ceasing"[16]. When he accepted disciples, he used to teach them to "pray without ceasing, to say the psalms before going to sleep and after arising from sleep, to learn by heart the precepts of the scripture"[17].

From that time on, we see continuous prayer as the marker of the monastic fathers. Abba Isidore is said to "set no limit to prayer; the night was for me as much the time of prayer as the day"[18]. On his death bed, Abba Benjamin exhorted his disciples to "be joyful at all times, pray without ceasing and give thanks for all things"[19]. St Pachomius in his Holy Week instruction prescribes "manual labour, manifold prayers, guard of the mouth, purity of body and holiness of heart"[20] to be practised during these six days of Holy Week. Also, in an instruction before Lent, St Shenoute exhorts his listeners to pray without ceasing, calling it the "the great measure that is perfect"[21] Finally, we have this account that demonstrates the importance and centrality of the practice of continuous prayer to the monastic life outside of Egypt:

> The Blessed Epiphanius, bishop of Cyprus, was told this by the abbot of a monastery which he had in Palestine, "by your prayers we do not neglect the appointed round of psalmody, but we are very careful to recite Terce, Sext and None". Then Epiphanius corrected them with the following comment, "it is clear that you do not trouble [yourself] about [praying] the other hours of the

[16] *Life of Anthony:* 3.6 Vivian & Athanassakis, 2003, p. 63 Elsewhere he is said to "pass the entire night without sleep" *Life of Anthony:* 7.6 Vivian & Athanassakis, 2003, p. 75.

[17] *Life of Anthony:* 55.3 *Vivian & Athanassakis, 2003, p. 175.*

[18] *Isidore:* 4 Ward, 1984a, p. 97.

[19] *Benjamin:* 4 Ward, 1984a, p. 44.

[20] *Pach. Instr:* 2.2 Veilleux, 1982, p. 47.

[21] Moussa, 2010, p. 131.

day, if you cease from prayer. The true monk should have prayer and psalmody continually in his heart'[22].

In order for early Christians and, later on, monks to practise continuous prayer, there was a need for them to create or rather to further develop existing techniques in order to practise this mode of prayer. As I will demonstrate, it would be highly plausible that some of these techniques came from the late antiquity practice of memorisation and meditation, especially in a school setting. In doing so, I attempt to place the practice of the Arrow Prayer in its social context.

The Arrow Prayer

There is no direct reference to where the name 'Arrow Prayer'[23] originated, the earliest attestation of the name of the prayer comes from the twentieth century under the Arabic name *al-salat al-sahmiyya*[24], but we know that as early as the beginning of the third century, Origen refers to continuous prayer as such: "It goes forth from the soul of the one praying like an arrow shot from the saint by knowledge and reason and faith. And it wounds the spirits hostile to God to destroy and overthrow them"[25].

[22] *Epiphanius*: 3 Ward, 1984a, p. 57.

[23] This is different from the Golden Arrow Prayer that started in 1843 by Sister Mary of St. Peter, a Carmelite nun in France. While the nineteenth century definition of the Arrow Prayer in some English sources refers to short, spontaneous prayer, it seems from my study of the late antiquity sources below that this was not the case in the ancient world.

[24] Vogt, 1997, p. 114.

[25] *On Prayer:* xii,1 Greer, 1979, p. 104; Commentaries on the invocation to pray without ceasing in 1 Thes: 5:17 seem to be surprisingly missing from patristic bible commentators such as Augustine and St John Chrysostom. In their commentaries they usually emphasis the verse before and after about rejoicing always and in everything giving thanks. The Same level of silence is also observed in other verses such as Eph 6:18 and Luke 18:1.

Abba Palamon is said to have taught St Pachomious "according to what he learned from those who went before us" to pray the rule of the synaxis "not counting the ejaculatory [prayers] we make so as not to be defaulters, since we are commanded to pray without ceasing"[26]. In the sayings, Abba Paphnutius was said to "recourse to short prayers"[27]. Evagrius also taught that in times of temptation, "use a short and intense prayer"[28]. St Augustine refers to the monks of Egypt this way: "The brethren in Egypt are reported to have very frequent prayers ... very brief and as it were, sudden and ejaculatory"[29]. In the seventh century, St John of Scetse saw a vision where his short and intense prayers were like arrows that wound the devil[30].

As I will demonstrate, the sources provide traces of evidence that the practice of the Arrow Prayer remained in use not only amongst the monastics but also amongst the laity at large through its inclusion in liturgical prayers. The latest attestation to its use comes from the writings of Pope Kyrillos the Sixth and Matthew the poor in the twentieth century[31].

In the thirteenth century, a new way of practising one of the formulas of the Arrow Prayer developed on Mount Athos, which is known today as the Jesus Prayer. While the Athonite practice of the Jesus Prayer is outside the scope of my thesis, I dedicate the last part of chapter two to pointing out the relationship of the Arrow Prayer to this

[26] *Bohairic Life of Pachomius:* 10 Veilleux, 1980, p. 31.

[27] *Abba Poemen:* 190 Ward, 1984a, p. 193.

[28] *On Prayer:* 98 Sinkewicz, 2006, p. 203 The theme of the Arrow Prayer being used as weapon against the demons will be discussed later.

[29] NPNF Vol 1 letter 130.

[30] Zanetti, 1996.

[31] See chapter 1 for details.

tradition, which for centuries was practised parallel to the Coptic tradition. It is also important to note the fact that we owe the revival of the interest in the subject of continuous prayer in part to the publication of the book *The Way of a Pilgrim*[32], which narrates the story of a monk in the Siberian wilderness who embarked on a quest to learn the practice of the Jesus Prayer in its Athonite tradition.

To set the limitations of my thesis, I will be studying the social context and influences that affected the development of the practice of continuous prayer commonly known as the Arrow Prayer. While there are many traditions of the practice of continuous prayer throughout the Christian world, I will limit my research to its practice within the Coptic Church[33]. In my research, I will use some published and unpublished material, from archaeological finds and wall inscriptions as well as school exercises and Church canons, hagiography, liturgies, theological and spiritual treatises, from time periods ranging from the beginning of Christianity to the twentieth century.

In this thesis, I wish to explore further the many aspects of the Arrow Prayer in its Coptic tradition. The thesis is divided into three parts. Part one deals with the status quaestionis and the sources of the Arrow Prayer. After a review of the current state of research on the topic, in chapter two I will survey the different sources that provide evidence for the use of the Arrow Prayer in monastic, liturgical, archaeological and hagiographic texts. This will allow appreciation of the continuity and intensity of its use in the everyday life of the church by both lay and monastic communities.

[32] French, 1954.

[33] I realise that I use the term Coptic Church loosely throughout my thesis. What is generally meant by the term is the non-Chalcedonian Church of Alexandria. I may make reference to other traditions but only to emphasise a certain point.

Part two which is made up of the next three chapters (chapters three, four and five) will explore the social context from which this prayer came and will address how this practice was influenced by the social practices of the time. I will start by discussing the background behind the name of the prayer and show that while it was not called Arrow Prayer until the twentieth century yet it has been referred to in the imagery of war fares and specifically arrows in early monastic writings. In chapter four, It will discuss the oral culture out of which this prayer developed. I explore how a person in an oral culture processes information, showing some evidence from Graeco-Roman culture and how it is evident in many monastic texts. In order for the mind to process information in such a setting, it relies heavily on breaking up texts, not into words, but phrases. I also explore how orality is not limited to the spoken word but clear traces of orality are also evident in written text.

In the fifth chapter, I use the current research from Lund University[34] about the level of education amongst monks in antiquity to demonstrate the education system in antiquity, which would have also been in use in monasteries, and could have influenced the practice of the Arrow Prayer. We see examples of this in monastic circles such as St Pachomius's who prescribes some level of education to the monks who are joining his monastery to enable them to read and memorise the scriptures. In other monasteries, we see a high level of scribal activities, which are unprecedented in any other organisation. In looking at these different schooling techniques, there is a heavy reliance and a great emphasis on the use of formulas. Also, hidden among the

[34] Centre for Theology and Religious Studies: Lund University,

hundreds of pieces of papyri that are found in monastic archaeological sites, are a large number of prayer formulas that were often used as school exercises.

In chapter six, I emphasise how essential the practice of memorisation was in an oral culture and how different cues were often used in both secular and Christian literature. Some of the more popular cues were made in the cells of monks. From the excavation of various monastic dwellings, we come across wall inscriptions of prayer formulas that monks would repeat. Elsewhere, wall paintings of the four living creatures who are described in the Bible as being in a state of constant prayer are often found, which the monk used as a reminder of his own practice of continuous prayer. The use of mental images was another contested issue in the church at the time and therefore I shed some light on how the use of images, even if they were mental images, served as a cue for monks in antiquity, sometimes replacing written formulas, to keep their mind focused in prayer.

Part three, which is made up of the last four chapters, maps the use of the prayer in different contexts. In chapter seven I will present a very important aspect of the Arrow Prayer that has a direct influence on its practice, which is the practice of meditation in antiquity. I start off by giving a review of scholarship on the definition of the word meditation from the Greek (*Melétē*) which, among many things, means the constant repetition of a verse or a sentence and how this practice was often a loud recitation. I further point out the important relationship between meditation and work and how meditation was almost always accompanied by handiwork, which is again one of the main features of the Arrow Prayer.

In chapter eight, I will look at the Scripture as a source of the formula for the Arrow Prayer. I will do this through examining the way scriptures were read and quoted or alluded to in the sayings of the desert fathers and other monastic texts. By this I wish to demonstrate that the Scripture was intensively memorised and used by early monks in their everyday life, as it is evident in monastic hagiography and literature. The practice of memorising books from the Scripture therefore made the Scripture, and particularly the Psalms, the main source of inspiration for the prayer formulas used in the practice of the Arrow Prayers.

In chapter nine, I will then deal in some depth with some hagiographical sources that give evidence for the continuous use of the Arrow Prayer, especially in periods of church history when there is no sufficient literary output from which to draw a clear picture of how and if the prayer was practised. From my analysis of some of these hagiographies, it becomes obvious that the practice of the Arrow Prayer was a prominent part in the lives of the saints.

The saint or the Holy Man was often portrayed as a reflection of the life of Christ. One of the aspects of the Holy Man's imitation of Christ is not only his practice of continuous prayer, but going further than that to becoming a *praying presence*. His relationships with the other monks and the villagers are centred around prayer rather than his ability to perform miracles. Such relationships extend throughout his life and even to his deathbed where his disciples usually surround him and the Holy Man repeats short psalms or scripture verses. Furthermore, hagiography itself, as put forward by Carson Bay[35], was predominantly used as a vehicle for monastic Paideia –

[35] Bay, 2014, pp. 334-363.

a vehicle by which the writer uses the hagiography to pass on the virtues of the Holy Man, praying short prayers being one of them, to monastic and non-monastic audiences.

Looking at the practice of the Arrow Prayer from different sources, one quickly appreciates the extent to which the prayer was used among monastics and laity and how it became an important part of their everyday life. Such devotion to this mode of prayer developed as a result of the great admiration of the early Christians for the Scripture. This admiration was supported by social factors that played a major role in the development of the practice of this prayer. Before I present the sources and the social context from which the Arrow Prayer grew, it is important to get an overview of the state of research on the topic.

PART ONE

THE STATUS QUAESTIONIS AND THE SOURCES OF THE ARROW PRAYER

1- Literature Review

The subject of Christian prayer is a broad topic that can be approached from multiple angles and across many academic disciplines, such as theological, liturgical, patristic, historical, archaeological, or literary. Far more research has been done on the theological and liturgical aspects of prayer than on any other discipline. The most recent attempt to present a multidisciplinary work on the topic was in 2008 by Roy Hammerling who edited a volume on the history of prayer during the first five centuries AD[36]. The volume is made up of a collection of papers from various disciplines and is divided chronologically from the first to the fifteenth centuries. This volume is interesting as it examines the history of scholarly debate around various topics surrounding the subject of Christian prayer.

In his introduction, Hammerling presents a dilemma that we often encounter when studying a difficult topic such as prayer. This difficulty comes not from the sources or lack thereof, but from the scholar's background, as some can define and analyse prayer from assumed biases and ideas from their own personal experience of prayer and others from preconceived ideas as observers of others who pray[37]. While this dilemma makes the task of defining and understanding prayer all the more difficult, it also brings deeper perspective to the debate.

[36] Hammerling, 2008.

[37] Hammerling, 2008, p. 2.

One of the limitations of this study in relation to my topic is that, apart from the first section, it mainly deals with the topic in the context of medieval and later western Christianity. The first section of this volume, however, concentrates on the first four centuries of Christian prayer, which is mainly influenced by monastic or eastern writers. What this section succeeds in doing is presenting an up-to-date study of various modes of prayer, such as private, communal and imageless prayer. There are other modes of prayer that are not discussed in this section, such as liturgical, silent, and, more importantly for our topic, ceaseless prayer, but we will see that these modes overlap in many areas of my topic.

The subject of the practice of the Arrow Prayer has thus far received very little scholarly attention. Apart from various papers dealing with some literary or archaeological occurrences where the practice of the Arrow Prayer is evident, there is no comprehensive study of the origin and social contexts of the practice of the Arrow Prayer. The reason for this is that most of these papers are written as a result of archaeological finds or are a study of a manuscript. This undoubtedly provides us with a number of invaluable primary sources that make up the puzzle pieces of my research. Yet to date there has been no study that attempts to fit these pieces of the puzzle together.

Another impediment that has taken attention away from, and often skewed the results of current research on the topic is that the majority, if not all, of the studies on ceaseless prayer in recent times are done in the context of the Athonite practice of the Jesus Prayer that developed in the thirteenth century. It would even be fair to say that

the Athonite tradition of the Jesus Prayer is responsible for the renewed interest in the practice of ceaseless prayer in modern times[38], especially after the publication of the nineteenth-century Russian book *The Way of a Pilgrim*[39], which is an ascetical biography of a monk who went on a voyage across Siberia to learn from elder monks the practice of the Jesus Prayer.

In my research, I will emphasise my argument, which is sometimes misunderstood and often neglected in scholarship, that the practice of the Jesus Prayer is as old as the practice of the Arrow Prayer and shares the same origin – the Egyptian desert[40] – yet they should not be looked at as different entities. I will argue that, historically, the Arrow Prayer is the parent tradition out of which the Jesus Prayer was conceived. I will further argue in following chapters that while the concept of ceaseless prayer is deeply rooted in the Bible, the manner in which it is practised stems from the education system in antiquity, especially the practice of memorisation and meditation. One of the formulas of this tradition is the Jesus Prayer formula, which is attested to as early as the third century by St Anthony of Egypt[41].

The confusion between the Arrow Prayer and the Jesus Prayer often causes some misinterpretation of the primary sources. More often than not, scholars start their research with the Jesus Prayer of the Athonite tradition and impose later practices that developed over time onto the original practice of the prayer. We see this in one of the

[38] Fr Lev Gillet gives a summary of the widespread influence of the book and the use of the Jesus Prayer in Gillet, 1987, pp. 81-91.

[39] French, 1954.

[40] As successfully argues by Patricia Ann Eshagh in her dissertation Eshagh, 2016.

[41] Eshagh, 2016, p. 47.

first scholarly treatments of the topic by Antoine Guillaumont[42]. While this research should be credited for bringing this topic to light, it was limited to the use of the Jesus Prayer, without considering the larger tradition. The name of the article itself "The Jesus Prayer Among the Monks of Egypt", which singles out the Jesus Prayer rather than the practice of continuous prayer in general, shows the influence of the newly translated Russian book *The Way of a Pilgrim* into the English language.

In his research, Guillaumont succeeds in presenting a case for the frequent use of the Jesus Prayer from monastic texts belonging to the Macarian tradition, as well as some of Evagrius's writings. He further presents an archaeological discovery of a wall inscription relating to the Jesus Prayer. We can see the problem with using the Jesus Prayer as a starting point when studying the practice of the continuous prayer in the way he analysed the sources. Though he succeeds in being faithful to the first half of the title of the article, his interpretation of the second half is highly influenced by the Athonite tradition. This is evident in the way in which he refers to a breathing technique: "The invocation of the name of Jesus is bound up with respiration, to those rhythm it is wedded. Both have a double movement, out and in, and this double movement is followed by a moment of rest"[43].

I will argue later that there is no evidence that the Egyptian monks practised any breathing techniques and that, while the sources do use breathing as a metaphor, it is just that – a metaphor. Breathing was used as a metaphor alongside chewing to imply the necessity of constant prayer.

[42] Guillaumont, 1974.

[43] Guillaumont, 1974, p. 68.

Another problem in current studies of the Jesus Prayer is the dating of its beginning. Until recently, most scholars have dated the earliest use of the prayer to the seventh century, which coincides with some of the texts that come from Sinai and Palestine, which later influenced the Athonite tradition. Later discoveries show that St Shenoute refers to the practice of praying to Jesus as early as the fifth century. In the recent translation of one of the works of St Shenoute, *I am amazed*[44], that is dated by most scholars[45] to the middle of the fifth century. In one of the sections of this sermon, St Shenoute argues against those who say that prayer must be made to God the Father and not to Jesus, since Jesus Himself prayed[46]. This shows that this controversy over praying to Jesus does not belong to the seventh century as previously thought, but to a much earlier date, possibly the middle of the fifth century.

Soon after Guillaumont's article, Emanuel Lanne [47] contributed some new pieces of evidence from the Psali, a daily liturgical text offered to Jesus. The composition of this liturgical prayer dates to the fourteenth century, as Lanne suggests, yet Youhanna Nessim Youssef in a recent article argues for an earlier date, possibly as early as the seventh or ninth centuries[48]. In his study, Lanne analysed the theme of each of the daily Psali. He further observed that the Psalis have a distinct practice from that of the Byzantine/Athonite tradition, in that they act as a bridge between the monastic private piety and the liturgical prayers[49].

[44] For the most recent translation, see, Davis, 2008, pp. 283-286.

[45] Davis, 2008, p. 60.

[46] Davis, 2008, p. 285.

[47] Lanne, 1977.

[48] Youssef, 2009, p. 245.

[49] Lanne, 1977, p. 195.

Lanne recognises fluidity within the practice of the formula of the Jesus Prayer, yet his main point of reference is still the Byzantine/Athonite tradition. In his analysis, he discarded two sources that point to the larger tradition of the Arrow Prayers. The first is the wall inscriptions at Esna[50] of other prayers that are not necessarily to Jesus but to the Holy Trinity; the other source is the prayers found in the margins of manuscripts[51] to Jesus yet different to the later formula of the Jesus Prayer. In his conclusion, he was successful in dating the Jesus Prayer to a much earlier date than previously thought, yet he discarded these two sources as a *different* tradition from that of the Jesus Prayer practised in Lower Egypt;[52] he therefore did not make the connection between the Jesus Prayer and the Arrow Prayer.

Two years later, Lucien Regnault published a paper[53] that brought to scholarly attention a newly published Arabic version of the *AP*. This version contained a whole section made up of 14 sayings devoted to the Jesus Prayer. In his analysis, Regnault traces evidence of the Jesus Prayer from early monastic writings without attempting to date the edition at hand. He indirectly makes the assumption, without sufficient evidence, that the Arabic version, which was first published in 1951, directly relates to the earliest translations of the *AP* to the Arabic and Ethiopic that come from the sixth and seventh centuries. On the contrary, there is no evidence for any other earlier manuscripts that match the present version and, more importantly, there is no earlier manuscript that collected the sayings about the Jesus Prayer under one heading. Furthermore, the introduction to the first published Arabic version makes it clear that

[50] Lanne, 1977, p. 199.

[51] Lanne, 1977, pp. 200-201.

[52] He later affirms this in his conclusion Lanne, 1977, p. 203.

[53] Regnault, 1979.

it is a compilation from other Arabic and even English sources. Therefore, the special section dedicated to the Jesus Prayer is the work of the editor rather than an ancient source. This emphasis on the Jesus Prayer is more likely a result of the editor's admiration for the newly translated edition into Arabic of *The Way of a Pilgrim* than his adherence to an ancient source.

Scholarly attention was later drawn to a new category of literary sources, the newly discovered literary sources from the Arabic Christian literature by renowned scholars in the field, such as Samir Khalil[54] and Mark Swanson[55]. In their articles, they both address the topic as a result of a new piece of literary evidence for the use of the Jesus Prayer; both range from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries and both are in the Arabic language. By this time, some significant aspects had become unanimously accepted among scholars, such as:

- The Jesus Prayer was practiced int the early years of Egyptian monasticism
- The Jesus Prayer was a part of the everyday life of monks and laity alike
- The Jesus Prayer has multiple formulas

Both papers have succeeded in bringing fresh evidence for their claims, especially that these primary sources come from the middle ages, which says something about the continuity of the practice of ceaseless prayer among Egyptian monastics and laity alike. Yet they still follow the trend in approaching the topic through the lens of the Jesus Prayer.

[54] Khalil, 1993.

[55] Swanson, 2000.

The above-mentioned two papers have been complemented by another recent study by Kari Vogt[56] who went to great lengths to interview contemporary members of the Coptic Church, both laity and clergy, about the current practice of the Jesus Prayer. An interesting outcome of this study was that some members of the Coptic Church used and cherished the practice of the Jesus Prayer, while others actually rejected it as foreign to the Coptic tradition[57]. This demonstrates that confusion between the Jesus Prayer and the Arrow Prayer exists even among members of the church. I believe that this confusion results from the fact that church members' knowledge of the Jesus Prayer is based on the publications of the Arabic translation of the *Way of a Pilgrim* and is therefore branded as a Russian tradition rather than as a Coptic one.

A very interesting aspect of this study is that in one of the interviews, the informant referred to the practice of repetition of the name of Jesus as the "Arrow Prayer" (*el salah el sahmya*), which shows that this term for ceaseless prayer was still in use in the twentieth century.

Apart from the above-mentioned scholarly work on the topic, there are many papers dedicated to the use of the Jesus Prayer in its Athonite tradition[58]. Nearly all of these publications take the text of the *Philokalia* as their primary source. Therefore, they succeed in analysing the use of the Jesus Prayer in its Athonite tradition, which became a separate parallel tradition to the Coptic use of the Arrow Prayer after the thirteenth century, yet some fail to make the link with its parent tradition. Recently,

[56] Vogt, 1997.

[57] Vogt, 1997, p. 117.

[58] For example: Kallistos Ware, 1985; Hausherr, 1978; Gillet, 1987; Chryssavgis, 2004.

Patricia Ann Eshaghh has successfully argued the Egyptian origins of the Jesus Prayer and traced its influence on western monasticism in later centuries[59].

This study moves beyond previous research on the topic by providing the historical context in which the practice of the Arrow Prayer was born. Research on this topic so far has been limited to providing evidence for the practice of the prayer, while my research attempts to test this evidence against it historical context. To help establish the historical backdrop that gave birth to the practice of the Arrow Prayer, I have consulted some key scholarly studies that discuss some of the elements that would have had a major influence on the practice of the Arrow Prayer.

The first of these elements to consider is the fact that the culture in which this prayer developed was an oral culture and in order to understand the historical background, one must consider how individuals living in an oral culture process information. The most extensive research on this topic was carried out by Walter Ong[60] who points out some key aspects that a person living in an oral culture would take for granted. One of these aspects is their method of using formulas to process information. In this point, he was building some of his conclusions on Milman Parry's[61] groundbreaking case study on the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey.* In his study, Parry discerns some formulas in the Homeric poems that helped in their composition. Without the use of such formulas, as well as mnemonics, the ancient mind was unable to memorise, process, or create new ideas[62]. Paula McDowell has observed an important aspect, which is absent from

[59] Eshagh, 2016.

[60] Ong, 1982, p. 36.

[61] Parry, 1930.

[62] Wipszycka, 2017, p. 236.

Ong's work. which is the overlap between orality and literacy, i.e. the transition between orality and literacy through centuries during which we have oral aspects in written texts[63]. That these formulaic way of thinking in written texts are discernible in ancient Christian and monastic writings has been later demonstrated by Douglas Burton-Christie's work *The Word in the Desert*[64] and David Carr's study *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature*[65], and they continue to exist even to the present date[66]. In recent work by Lourdes García Ureña, she analysed the oral aspects of the book of Revelation especially the use of the formulaic language across the text[67].

The second element concerns the delivery of education to individuals in late antiquity. There is an extensive bibliography about educations systems, levels of education and methods of education. Foundational research can be found in the comprehensive, now classic study by Henri-Irenee Marrou *History of Education in Antiquity*[68] and an overview of the Egyptian documentation in Roger Bagnall's book *Egypt in Late Antiquity*.[69] An important subject of debate in these studies is the level of education acquired, especially in the monastic circles. An important driving force in this discussion, which has informed much of my own research, is the group of scholars at Lund University "Early Monasticism and Classical Paideia"[70]. Much of the evidence for this is provided by the study and publication of school exercises that were found

[63] McDowell, 2012, p. 175.

[64] Nau 392 [ROC 18:144], cited from Burton-Christie, 1993, p. 115.

[65] Carr, 2005, pp. 72-73.

[66] Schuman, 1972.

[67] Ureña, 2012, p. 313.

[68] Marrou, 1982.

[69] Bagnall, 1993.

[70] Centre for Theology and Religious Studies: Lund University,

on papyri by Raffaella Cribiore in her seminal work *Writing, Teachers and Students in Graeco-Roman Egypt*[71], as well as by the study of archaeological evidence, which highlights the widespread presence of schools in monasteries[72]. As a result of these studies, it is unanimously accepted by scholars today that ascetics enjoyed much higher levels of education than had previously been thought[73].

Two vital tools in the education system in antiquity were memorisation and meditation. These are also the two core educational tools that are responsible for the development of the practice of the Arrow Prayer in the way it is known today. While most of what is said about memorisation is referring to the memorisation of large piece of text such as poetry or texts such as the book of psalms in Christian circles, yet what I wish to highlight is the emphasis on the use of formulas and their repetition in the process of memorising these texts.

Much of the scholarly work undertaken on memorisation has arisen from the study of the western medieval monastic culture, such as Mary Carruthers's *The Craft of the Thought*[74] and *The Book of Memory*[75]. While these studies are outside the temporal and cultural framework of this study, they show that most educational theories and methods in medieval culture originated in, and are consistent with, the philosophies and practices of antiquity[76]. Clues on how the monks in antiquity practised memorisation come not only from literary sources, but also from archaeological finds.

[71] Cribiore, 1996 For further reading on the topic, see Cribiore, 2001 and Kaster, 1983.

[72] Derda, 1995; Crum, 1921; Winlock, Crum, & Evelyn-White, 1926a.

[73] Rubenson, 2012.

[74] Carruthers, 2000.

[75] Carruthers, 2008; as well as Yates, 1966.

[76] Yates, 1966, pp. 27-49.

Furthermore, Elizabeth Bolman[77] and Darlene L. Brooks Hedstrom[78] have argued that the architectural design and wall paintings of some churches and monastic cells, especially images of God enthroned and surrounded by the four incorporeal beings, lend some evidence for the monks using them as cues to remind them of the practice of continuous prayer, especially since the four incorporeal creatures are described in the Bible (Revelation 4:6-8) to be in a state of continuous prayer[79].

Meditation is another very important educational tool central to the practice of the Arrow Prayer. Most of the studies on meditation were conducted on medieval writers, such as Pierre Hadot's *Philosophy as a Way of Life*[80], where he challenges previous interpretations of ancient philosophy as a mere mental exercise and shows that it was considered a way of life. He further highlights a misconception that has dominated earlier scholarship, such as Paul Rabbow's study of the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola[81], which had assumed a gap in the practice of spiritual exercises between the Stoics and Epicureans of pre-Christian antiquity and the sixteenth-century saint Ignatius, while Hadot documents the use of the spiritual exercises by Christian writers as early as the second century[82].

Some of the research on monastic meditation, such as John Wortley's *How the Desert Fathers Meditated*[83], highlights what it meant to "meditate". In contrast to the widely

[77] Bolman, 2001, and Bolman, 2007.

[78] Brooks Hedstrom, 2001.

[79] Bolman, 2001, pp. 43-44.

[80] Hadot, 1999.

[81] Rabbow, 1954.

[82] Hadot, 1999, p. 140.

[83] Wortley, 2006.

assumed meaning of the word as being a synonym to "contemplate", Wortley demonstrates that the monks understood by "meditation" the constant repetition of a word or a phrase over and over until its meaning is internalised. Per Rönnegård[84] further traces the meaning of the word *Melétē* and compares its use in monastic writings and in Greek philosophical schools. A final aspect of the practice of meditation that has a direct bearing on this thesis and on which a majority of scholars are in dispute is that the practice of meditation was not limited to a certain time of day but accompanied every aspect of daily life[85].

The use of the Scripture in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* is another topic of interest for this study, especially the attitude of late antique monks towards scripture. Initially, scholarship misinterpreted the hostile comments[86] towards reading the Scripture in the monastic writings as anti-bible statements. It was not until Burton-Christie's[87] *The Word in the Desert* that the importance of the Bible in the monk's life was highlighted. Instead of taking these hostile comments at face value, scholars such as Lillian Larsen and Per Rönnegård have extensively studied the different ways in which scripture was used in the *AP*. Larsen's research successfully places the *AP* in its historical context as she compares the way the scripture is used in the *AP* with Roman and Greek rhetoric school exercises[88]. I disagree, however, with her implicit suggestion that the *AP* is no more than a collection of school exercises that monks used as part of their monastic education. I will argue against this conclusion, putting special emphasis on the consistency of the *AP* with other monastic texts. Per

[84] Rönnegård, 2013, I am grateful to the author for providing me with the unpublished manuscript.

[85] Graham, 1987, p. 134.

[86] Such as in, *Theodore of Pherme:* 1 Ward, 1984a, p. 73 and *Abba Serapion: 2* Ward, 1984a, p. 227.

[87] Burton-Christie, 1993, pp. 107-133.

[88] Larsen, 2006a.

Rönnegård takes a different approach to the topic as he studies how the text of the scripture is integrated into the *AP*, keeping in mind that the purpose of the *AP* is not to interpret scripture but to provide guidance on how to conduct one's life[89].

More recently Ewa Wipszycka has argued for the practice of recitation of short passages of the scriptures among the monastic communities in Thebes, Naqlun and Kellia[90]. Jacques van der Vliet further confirms that some of these short texts that were previously assumed to be school exercises are in fact short text that are copied for the purpose of private contemplation[91].

To consider the way the Arrow Prayer was transmitted within the monastic circles and to laity, we must consider an important genre of writing – hagiography texts. To study hagiography, I will start in chapter nine with the subject of the Holy Man. In Peter Brown's groundbreaking paper "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man"[92], he instigated a whole new way of looking at the way saints or the Holy Man functioned in relation to the nearby community, which was primarily limited to being a patron to the villagers who needed his voice of support in court or were in need of his prayers for their financial, family, or other matters. As a sign of true scholarship, Brown later reviewed some of his conclusions in a paper titled "The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity" [93] where he emphasised the role of the Holy Man as the "joining point between God and man… in whom human and divine had come to be joined"[94]. In

[89] Rönnegård, 2010, p. 13.

[90] Wipszycka, 2017, p. 217.

[91] Van Der Vliet, 2017, p. 156.

[92] Brown, 1971.

[93] Brown, 1983.

[94] Brown, 1983, p. 6.

other words, the Holy Man's life is an imitation of Christ's life. An important aspect of this imitation is the Holy Man's *praying presence*; he does not offer prayers on behalf of the people but he himself is offering himself as a *praying presence* for his visitors and his community. This notion is confirmed by Mark Burrows's analysis of St Pachomius as a Holy Man as he affirms that the Holy Man "like Christ his eloquence was one not only of word and deed but of 'presence'"[95]. Looking at the Holy Man from this perspective accurately places him in his historic context, especially when we consider the way the Holy Man is often portrayed in hagiography as repeating psalms or scripture verses throughout his life and the theme continues until his deathbed.

Hagiography has often been viewed with scepticism in the academic world. This scepticism started at the beginning of the twentieth century with Hippolyte Delehaye's seminal work "Les légendes hagiographiques"[96] where he viewed hagiography as a document that promotes the life of a saint[97]. In a recent paper, Claudia Rapp has challenged this view, arguing that promotion of the saint is not the focus of the hagiography but rather "*to make saints* out of those who encounter [t]his work"[98]. Such observation highlights the educational value of hagiography, as the main concern of the hagiographer is not the promotion of the Holy Man but rather the effect of his narrative on the readers/listeners. This concept was further developed by Carson Bay in his recent article "The transformation and transmission of Paideia in

[95] Burrows, 1987, p. 22.

[96] Delehaye, 1907.

[97] Delehaye, 1907.

[98] Rapp, 2010, emphasis is mine.

Roman Egyptian monasticism"[99] in which he argues that the way the Holy Man was portrayed in hagiography as a subject of emulation places hagiography in its function closely with the Greek Paideia in antiquity.

[99] Bay, 2014.

2- The Sources

To help appreciate the scale on which the Arrow Prayer has influenced church life in the Coptic tradition, I present below a survey of the primary sources that attest to the use of the Arrow Prayer throughout history. These sources come from different collections and genres, such as monastic literature, hagiography, archaeological finds, liturgical text, and Arabic Christian literature. Some of these sources have been published and/or studied before, yet there are a number that have not been published. I have laid out the sources from different points in history in their different categories so awidespreads to help appreciate the wide spread practice of the prayer across different literary and non-literary genres. The texts are presented here as found in the manuscripts or editions without any correction. I have also provided an English translation[100] to those that have not been translated in earlier editions.

Monastic Literature

The Apophthegmata Patrum

The *Apophthegmata Patrom (AP)*, commonly known as the *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, are a collection of writings of the lives and sayings of the desert fathers of Egypt. This collection has come to us via three main collections. The first, called "the

[100] The translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

alphabetical collection"[101], lists the names of the fathers and mothers alphabetically and relates their lives and sayings. The second collection, named the "systematic collection"[102], divides up the sayings into themes rather than personalities. The third collection is known as the "anonymous collection"[103] and is a collection of sayings of unknown authors.

The Arrow Prayer as I have defined it above has been a common practice in the daily life of the Egyptian desert monks, beginning with St Anthony the Great, who prayed at a time when he was overcome by *acedia* (boredom), saying "O Lord, I desire to be saved but my thoughts are fighting against me. What shall I do in this affliction? How can I be saved?"[104] This plea for the way of salvation then became a common plea of a disciple to his master: "Father, tell me, what shall I do to be saved". St Anthony also used passages from the psalms to combat different thoughts. For example, during an attack of the enemy he prayed, "Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear"[105] (Ps 27: 3). In another instance, he said "The Lord is on my side to help me; I shall look in triumph on those who hate me"[106] (Ps 118: 7).

Abba Arsenius is also said to have prayed "Lord lead me in the way of salvation" and following this he heard a voice saying "Arsenius, flee from men and you will be saved". While he was in the solitary life, he prayed the same prayer again and he

[101] Ward, 1984a, pp. 285-286.

[102] Ward, 2003.

[103] Ward, 1986.

[104] *Anthony the Great: 1 Ward, 1984a, p. 2.*

[105] *Life of Antony: 9* Vivian & Athanassakis, 2003, p. 81.

[106] *Life of Antony: 6* Vivian & Athanassakis, 2003, p. 71; In his letters, St Anthony writes to his disciples telling them that he does not "cease praying" for them day and night in a number of places (*Letters 5:3, 5:5, 6:27*) but there is no mention of specific verses.

heard a voice saying "Arsenius, flee, be silent, pray always, for these are the sources of sinlessness"[107]. In another saying, Abba Lucius emphasised the importance of manual labour during prayer, giving himself as an example: "I sit down with God, soaking my reeds and plaiting my ropes, and I say, God, have mercy on me, according to Your great goodness and according to the multitude of Your mercies, save me from my sins"[108].

The *sayings* also contain all the elements of the Jesus Prayer. Abba Ammonas recommended the prayer of the publican to an old monk who wished to do extra ascetic labours, "sit in your cell and eat a little every day, keeping the word of the publican always in your heart, and you may be saved"[109]. We are also told by St Athanasius that St Anthony performed an exorcism in the name of Jesus Christ, "Antony rebuked the demon in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and it left the man"[110]. Abba Sisoes also remained for thirty years praying for the sins of his tongue, "Lord Jesus, save me from my tongue"[111].

We can also discern the continuity of this short prayer tradition in later translations of the *AP*. The Arabic translation of the text contains a considerable number of references to the use of arrow prayers. In fact, Lucien Regnault in his study of the Jesus Prayer in the Arabic *AP* asserts that the Arabic translation is unparalleled in its content of the short prayers, which includes the name of Jesus[112]. In his study,

[107] *Arsenius: 1,2 Ward, 1984a, p. 9.*

[108] *Lucius: 1 Ward, 1984a, p. 120.*

[109] *Ammonas: 4 Ward, 1984a, p. 26.*

[110] *Life of Antony: 63* Vivian & Athanassakis, 2003, p. 191.

[111] *Sisoes:* 5 *Ward, 1984a, p. 213.*

[112] Regnault, 1979.

Regnault points out fourteen different sayings and Swanson points out another one by St Anthony[113] that invoke the name of Jesus Christ. This translation of the text is believed to have come as early as the late sixth or early seventh centuries[114].

The Arabic edition of the *AP* that is available today is entitled *The Garden of the Monk*. According to the editor, it was first printed in the 1940s but was then revised and republished in 1951 after the addition of more sayings and lives of saints that were not in the first edition. However, the new edition kept the proportion of sayings from each father the same and it did not add fathers who were not originally in the Coptic and Greek texts, such as St Shenoute[115]. This edition is divided into two sections: the first narrates the lives of saints, yet not alphabetically as in the Greek collection. The second section lists the sayings of the fathers thematically and again it does not follow the themes of the Greek or any other collection. In the thematic collection, there are two interesting subheadings under the chapter on prayer: the first is on *continuous prayer*[116]*,* which has four sayings, the other is on *the remembrance of the name of Jesus*[117], which has fourteen sayings. While some sayings can be traced back to the Greek text, others are not found in any of the Greek collections.

[113] Swanson, 2000, p. 703.

[114] Regnault, 1979, p. 354.

[115] Bani Swif Diocese, 1968, p. 5.

[116] Bani Swif Diocese, 1968, pp. 257-258.

[117] Bani Swif Diocese, 1968, pp. 258-261; The term remembrance may or may not mean that the name of Jesus was used in the prayer. However, given that the sayings are grouped in two distanced groups; one on *continuous prayer* and the other on *the remembrance of the name of Jesus,* this suggests that when they say remembrance it refers to the invocation of the name of Jesus rather than any Bible verse.

That fact that the twentieth century editor[118] has emphasized the devotion of the early monks to the prayer by grouping them under a special heading attests to the devotion of the twentieth century monks to the prayer. This also coincides with the monastic revival in Egypt that started after the papacy of Pope Kyrollos (1959-1971). Also, we can see from the two subheadings that arrow prayers were not limited to the invocation of the name of Jesus. These are the fourteen sayings that we have in the second edition of *The Garden of the Monks*.

قال انبا دياراخس: من يشاء ان يطهر قلبة جدا فليتخذ لة كل حين الذكر الصالح الذى هو أسم ربنا يسوع المسيح الآسم القدوس، عملا وهذيذا وكلاما وفكرا بغير فتور وبمحبة عظيمة وشوق كثير، وليخرج من عقله وسخ الخطية بعمل الوصايا كل حين"	1. Abba Zakrias said: "whoever wants to purify his heart let him keep the remembrance of the Holy name of Jesus Christ continuously – while working, meditating, talking, or thinking. Do this with great love and longing, and the filth of sin will leave your mind when you continually fulfil the commandments".
قال مار افرام: "بمقدار ما للتوانى من مضار، بمقدار ما للتيقظ من منافع تسبب كل صلاح، لان المتيقظ فى كل حين، ذكر الله حاضر عنده، وحينما نتلوا ذكر الله، تكف عنه كل افعال الخبيث"	2. St Ephraim said: "As much as negligence has negative consequences so does vigilance lead to all righteousness. Because he who is always vigilant the remembrance of God is always present. And when we always remember God, all the work of the devil departs from us".

[118] The publisher states in the introduction that this volume is a collection of sayings from different Arabic manuscripts Bani Swif Diocese, 1968.

قال القديس باخوميوس: "لا تخل قلبك من ذكر الله دائما لئلا تغفل قليلا فيستظهر عليك الاعداء المترصدون لاصطيادك"	3. St Pachomius said: “Let not your heart be empty from the continuous remembrance of God, lest while you are negligent the enemy who is waiting for you to attack”.
قال شيخ: "ليس هناك فضيلة من الفضائل تشبه فضيلة مداومة الصلاة والتضرع بأسم ربنا يسوع المسيح فى كل وقت اما فى العزلة بالشفتين، وأما فى القلب فبغير تنزه (تظاهر)"	4. An Elder said: “There is no other virtue like continuous prayer and pleading in the name of Jesus Christ, either audibly in solitude or discreetly in the heart”.
وقال اخر: " أذا ما رفض الذهن اوامر الروح القدس تبعد القوة ذاتها، وتثور أوجاع القلب. فاذا ما رجع القلب الى الله وحفظ اوامر الروح القدس كان عليه ستر، وحينئذ يعلم الانسان أن مداومة ذكر أسم القدوس ربنا يسوع المسيح هو الذى يحرسه تحت ستر رحمته"	5. Another said: “if the mind refuses the work of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit is quenched and the passions are stirred up. If the heart does not return to God and keep the work of the Holy Spirit, then the person will realise that the remembrance of the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ is what keeps him in the shadow of His mercy”.
كذلك قيل: "داوم على ذكر الاسم القدوس، اسم ربنا يسوع المسيح فهذه هى الجوهرة التى من اجلها باع التاجر الحكيم كل هوايا قلبه واشتراها واخذها الى داخل بيته فوجدها	6. It was also said: “Persist in the remembrance of the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ for this is the treasure for which the wise merchant sold all his heart’s desire to buy it. He then took

احلى من العسل والشهد فى فمه. فطوبى لذلك الانسان الذى يحفظ هذه الجوهرة فى قلبه فانها تعطية مكافأة عظيمة فى مجد ربنا يسوع المسيح	it inside his house and found it sweeter than honey in his mouth. Blessed is this man who keeps this treasure in his heart because it will reward him with great rewards in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ”.
وقيل ايضا: " أن كان كل ملء اللاهوت قد حل فى السيد المسيح جسديا كقول الرسول فلا نقبل زرع الشياطين الانجاس عندما يقولون لنا: "انكم اذا صحتم باسم يسوع فلستم تدعون الاب والروح القدس". لانهم يفعلون ذلك مكرا منهم لكى يمنعونا من الدعاء بالاسم الحلو الذى لربنا يسوع المسيح، لعلمهم انه بدون هذا الاسم لا ولن يوجد خلاص البته كقول الرسول بطرس: "انه ليس اسم آخر تحت السماء اعطى للناس به ينبغى ان نخلص"، ونحن نؤمن ايمانا كاملا باننا اذا دعونا باسم ربنا يسوع انما ندعو الاب والروح القدس لاننا لا نقبل البته فرقا ولا انقساما فى اللاهوت. ونؤمن ايضا ان ربنا يسوع المسيح هو الواسطة الذى به يحصل الناس على الدنو من الله والحديث معه كقول الرسول : "وفى هذه الايام كلمنا فى ابنه"	7. It was also said: “If in Him dwelled the fullness of the Godhead bodily as the apostle said, then we reject the weed of the devil when they say: ‘If you pray in the name of Jesus then you don’t pray to the Father and the Holy Spirit’. For they do this deceitfully to stop us from praying to the sweet name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because without this name there would be no salvation at all, as the apostle Peter said: ‘There is no other name under the heavens that has been given to mankind that by which we must be saved’. And we believe that if we call on the name of our Lord Jesus we also call on the Father and the Holy Spirit. Because we don’t accept any division in the divinity. We also believe that Jesus Christ is the only Mediator who brings to God. And talking to him as the apostle said: ‘In those days he spoke to us in His Son’”.

قال اخ للقديس مقاريوس الكبير: "انى خائف بسبب خطاياي فماذا اعمل يا ابى؟" قال له الشيخ: "تقو وتمسك برجاء الحياة والرحمة التى لا حد لها الذى هو اسم ربنا يسوح المسيح".	8. A brother said to St Macarius the Great: “I am scared because of my sins, what should I do my father?” The Elder said to him: “Hold fast to the hope of life and mercy that has no limits which is the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”.
وسأل اخ شيخا: "عرفنى يا ابى كيف اتمسك باسم الرب يسوع بقلبى ولسانى" أجابة الشيخ: "مكتوب ان القلب يؤمن به للبر، والفم يعترف به للخلاص. فهدئ قلبك تجده يرتل باسم الرب يسوع دائما. اما ان اصابه عدم هدوء وطياشه فعليك ان تتلوا باللسان حتى يتعود العقل. فاذا نظر الله الى تعبك أرسل لك معونة عندما يرى شوق قلبك ، فيبدد ظلمة الافكار المضادة للنفس"	9. A brother asked an Elder: “Tell me my father how do I hold fast to the name of the Lord Jesus with my heart and with my tongue”. The elder replied: “It is written that the heart believes in Him for righteousness, and the mouth confesses to Him for salvation. So quieten your heart and you will find him singing the name of the Lord Jesus always. But if it was not quietened but disturbed you must recite it by the tongue until the mind is quietened. If the Lord sees your labours he will send you help, when He sees your heart’s desire, He will destroy the dark thoughts that oppose the soul”.
وسأل اخر: "يا ابى ماذا أعمل بهذه الحروب	10. Another asked: “My father, what do I do

with all these wars against me?”	الكائنة معى؟"
The Elder replied: “the continuous remembrance of the name of Jesus stops all distractions”.	أجاب الشيخ: "ان مداومة اسم الرب يسوع تقطع كل آكلة"
11. It happened that Abba Poemen visited St Macarius the Great and said to him: “My father what should a person do to acquire eternal life?”	حدث ان زار الانبا بيمن انبا مقاريوس الكبير، فقال الانبا بيمن: " يا ابى: ماذا يعمل الانسان كي يقتنى الحياة؟"
St Macarius said: “If you persist on the food of life which is the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ without ceasing and find it sweet in your mouth and your soul is fattened by it, then by this you can acquire eternal life”.	فقال انبا مقاريوس: "ان انت داومت كل حين على طعام الحياة الذى للاسم القدوس : اسم ربنا يسوع المسيح بغير فتور فهو حلو فى فمك وحلقك وبترديدك اياه تدسم نفسك وبذلك يمكنك ان تقتنى الحياة "
12. An Elder said a parable: “A man in a village had a beautiful sister. When it was the feast of the village his sister asked him to go to the festival. Because her brother was worried to send her alone, lest people were seduced by her youth, he got up, held her hand and went with her to the festival, lest he said if she leans to act in ignorance, she would be prevented because he was holding her hand. There were many looking at the young woman and desiring her for her	قال شيخ مثلا: "كان لانسان فى قرية اخت جميلة. ولما كان يوم عيد تلك القرية سألته اخته ان يأخذها الى موضع ذلك العيد واذ كان اخوها يخاف ان يرسلها وحدها لئلا يحصل لقوم عثرة بسبب شبابها، فقام ومضى بها الى مكان عيد القرية وهو ممسك بيدها. وكان ينتقل بها، من مكان لاخر وهو ممسك بيدها. لأنة قال : أن هى مالت الى فعل جهالة فانها لن تستطيع لانى ممسك بيدها، وهكذا فقد كان الكثيرون ينظرون الى الصبية

ويشتهونها من اجل جمالها ولكنهم لم يستطيعوا ان يفعلوا بها شيئا لان اخاها كان ممسكا بيدها. . وهى كذلك كانت تنظر الى الصبيان الذين يشتهونها وتميل بضميرها للذة ولكنها لم تتمكن من اكمال شهوتها لان اخاها كان ممسكا بيدها.	beauty but they could not do anything to her because her brother was holding her hand. She was looking at the young men who were desiring her and would have leaned towards her natural desire but she could not fulfil her desire because her brother was holding her hand".
ثم قال الشيخ الذى ذكر هذا المثل: ما دامت النفس ذاكرة اسم ربنا يسوع المسيح الذى صار لها اخا بالتدبير، فانه يكون فى كل وقت ممسكا بيدها .. وان اراد الاعداء الغير المنظورين خداعها فلا يستطيعون ان يفعلوا بها شيئا لان اخاها ممسكا بيدها . وان هى خضعت للافكار ومالت للذات العالم ، فلن تستطيع اكمال الخطية لان اخاها ممسكا بيدها ان هى تمسكت فى كل وقت بالاسم المخلص الذى لربنا يسوع المسيح ولم ترخه.	13. The Elder who said this parable said: "As long as the soul is in continuous remembrance of the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has become her brother, He will always be holding her hand. If the invisible enemies wanted to seduce her they couldn't because her brother was holding her hand. If she leaned towards her thoughts and wanted the desires of the world she couldn't fulfil the sin because her brother was holding her hand. But this was only if she continually held onto the name of the Saviour our Lord Jesus Christ and did not let it go.
أرايت يا حبيبى كيف ان التمسك بهذا الذكر الصالح الذى لاسم ربنا يسوع المسيح هو خلاص عظيم وحصن منيع وسلاح لا يقهر وخاتم خلاص النفس ؟ فلا تتوان عن ان تقتنى لنفسك هذا الكنز الذى لا يسرق وهذه	Have you seen my beloved how holding fast to the remembrance of the good name of our Lord Jesus Christ is a great salvation and strong fortress and unbeatable weapon and a seal of salvation to the soul. Do not tarry from keeping

الجوهرة الكثيرة الثمن التى هى اسم ربنا يسوع المسيح ذلك الاسم المخلص.	this expensive treasure, that cannot be robbed from you, for yourself, which is the saving name of our Lord Jesus Christ".
قيل عن الاب ايليا: انه لمحبتة للوحدة اقام فى بربا خربة ، فاتاه الشياطين قائلين : " اخرج من هذا المكان لانه موضعنا " فأجابهم الشيخ : "انتم ما لكم مكان" ، فبددوا خوصه ، وقالوا له : "اخرج من هاهنا" فقام وجمعه ، وجلس يضفر وهو صامت، فبددوه له ايضا قائلين : "اخرج من موضعنا" ، فقام ايضا وجمعه وجلس صامتا . ثم ان الشياطين امسكوا بيده وبدأوا يجرونه الى الخارج قائلين : " لا تقم هاهنا ، لانه موضعنا " ، فلما بلغ الباب امسكه بيده وصرخ قائلا : " يا يسوع المسيح ألهى اعنى " وللوقت هربت عنه الشياطين فابتدأ الشيخ يبكى ، فجاءة صوت الرب قائلا له : "لماذا تبكى؟" فقال الشيخ "كيف لا ابكى ، وهؤلاء يتجاسرون هكذا على محاربه خليقتك؟" فقال لة الرب : "انك انت الذى توانيت ، فلما طلبتنى وجدتنى".[119]	14. It was said about Abba Elijah: "Because of his love for solitude, he lived in an old tomb. The devil then came to him saying: 'Get out of this place because it is ours'. The Elder answered them 'you have no place of dwelling'. So they distorted his palm leaves and said to him 'get out of here'. So he went and rearranged them [the palm leaves] and silently sat down to plait the palm leaves. They again destroyed his work and said: 'Go away from our dwelling place'. He again rearranged them and sat silently. The devils then took him by the hand and dragged him outside and said: 'do not stay here because it is our dwelling place' when he reached the door he held onto it and said 'My God Jesus Christ help me' and immediately the devils fled from him. The Elder then started to weep, so God spoke to him saying: 'Why do you weep?' the Elder said: 'How can I not weep when those [devils] are waging war against your creation'.

[119] Bani Swif Diocese, 1968, pp. 258-261.

	The Lord said to him: 'You are the one who delayed. When you asked for me, you found me'".

Saint Macarius (300 – 390 AD)

St Macarius of Egypt, or St Macarius the Great, to distinguish him from Macarius of Alexandria, was a disciple of St Anthony[120]. He founded the monastic settlement in Scetes, south west of the Nile delta, around the year 330[121]. There are three different textual traditions for Saint Macarius[122]: *The Sayings of St Macarius of Egypt*[123], *The Virtues of St Macarius of Egypt*[124], and *The Life of St Macarius of Scetis*[125]. Among the many teachings of the saint, in these texts there is special mention of his practice and his teachings on the practice of continuous prayer. The first two texts present a variety of different formulas of the Arrow Prayer, some of which include the Jesus Prayer, whereas the third seems to be lacking any reference to this topic.

[120] *Macarius the Great: 4 Ward, 1984a, p. 127.*

[121] Vivian, 2004b, pp. 19-21.

[122] An English translation of the three texts can be found in Vivian, 2004b.

[123] There are two collections of his sayings, 41 sayings from the Greek Alphabetical collection of the *AP* and 34 sayings from a Coptic collection; see Vivian, 2004b, p. 23. Vivian provides a synoptic table of the two collections Vivian, 2004b, pp. 49-51.

[124] This exists in a single tenth-century Bohairic manuscript, see Vivian, 2004b, p. 26.

[125] Attributed to Sarapion of Thmuis and found in two tenth-century Bohairic manuscripts, see Vivian, 2004b, pp. 34-35.

According to Vivian, the *Virtues of St Macarius* come from a single tenth century manuscript and he dates the composition of the work to the sixth to eighth centuries. The text has clear reference to the use of the Jesus Prayer in multiple instances[126].

In his *Sayings*, St Macarius stressed the idea of praying short prayers, suggesting: "It is enough to stretch out one's hands and say 'Lord, as you will, and as you know, have mercy.' And if the conflict grows fiercer, say 'Lord help'"[127]. In the *Virtues,* however, a clear reference to the formula of the Jesus Prayer is made. St Macarius is quoted teaching one of his disciples to "Concentrate on this name of our Lord Jesus Christ with a contrite heart, the words welling up from your lips and drawing you to them. And do not depict Him with an image in your mind but concentrate on calling Him: 'Our Lord Jesus, have mercy on me'"[128].

Another brother asked the saint about the meaning of the verse "the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you" (Ps 19:14). He replied: "There is no better meditation than having this saying the blessed name of our Lord Jesus Christ continually within you"[129]. Again, another brother asked St Macarius about the work of the ascetic. The saint replied: "Blessed is the person who will be found tending the blessed name of our Lord Jesus Christ without ceasing and with contrition of heart"[130].

Abba Macarius also does not claim authorship of this prayer, but it is mentioned that he learned this prayer from an elder: "I visited an old man who had taken to his bed

[126] The Virtues of Saint Macarius of Egypt: 13,34,35,41,42,44.

[127] *Macarius the Great: 19 Ward, 1984a, p. 131.*

[128] *The Virtues of Saint Macarius of Egypt*: 41 Vivian, 2004b, p. 117.

[129] *The Virtues of Saint Macarius of Egypt*: 35 Vivian, 2004b, p. 112.

[130] *The Virtues of Saint Macarius of Egypt*: 34 Vivian, 2004b, p. 111.

with an illness, but the old man preferred to say the saying and blessed name of our Lord Jesus Christ"[131].

Abba Evagrius, one of the disciples of St Macarius and a great advocate of short prayers, as we will see below, learned this tradition from St Macarius. One day Abba Evagrius, feeling distressed in his thoughts, went to consult St Macarius. He replied: "It is not easy to say with each breath, 'Lord Jesus, have mercy on me. I bless you my Lord Jesus.' If you are distressed by people and misfortunes of this world, say 'My Lord Jesus, help me'"[132].

Here I would like to highlight an important observation, the relationship between breathing and the Jesus Prayer. Breathing in the above quotes was understood and remained understood until the twentieth century in the Coptic tradition as a metaphor to emphasise the importance of the continual recitation of the prayer, and was not understood in the literal sense. St Macarius used other metaphors to portray the same idea to Abba Poemen:

> I know that when I was a child I used to observe that the old women and the young people were chewing something in their mouths so that it would sweeten the saliva in their throats and the bad breath of their mouths, sweetening and refreshing their liver and all their innards. If something fleshly can so sweeten those who chew it and ruminate it, then how much more the food of life, the spring of salvation, the fount of living water, the sweet of all sweets, our Lord Jesus Christ! If the demons hear his glorious name blessed by our mouths, they vanish like smoke. This blessed name, if we persevere in

[131] *The Virtues of Saint Macarius of Egypt*: 44 Vivian, 2004b, p. 120.

[132] *The Virtues of Saint Macarius of Egypt:* 42 Vivian, 2004b, p. 117.

it and ruminate on it, opens up the spirit, the charioteer of the soul and the body and drives all thoughts of evil out of the immortal soul and reveals to it heavenly things[133].

Abba Evagrius of Pontus (345-399)

Abba Evagrius was born in 345 AD in the town of Ibora in the Roman province of Pontus. He was ordained a deacon by St Gregory of Nazianzus and played a role in the conflict of Patriarch Nektarios (St Gregory's successor) against the Arians. He then headed to Jerusalem where he became a monk under Rufinus and, shortly after in 383 AD, he went to Egypt where he spent the last sixteen years of his life[134].

During these years in the desert, he wrote many monastic writings, most of which are extant in different languages[135]. From these writings, we can begin to appreciate the great influence St Macarius had on Evagrius's teachings.

In his writings, Abba Evagrius recommends the use of short intense prayers with different formulas. For example, in *On Prayer*, he prescribes the prayer of the publican: "O God have mercy on me a sinner. O God, forgive me my debts"[136].

In his chapter *On Thoughts,* Abba Evagrius prescribes different biblical verses as an answer to different thoughts that attack a monk. For example, when a particular

[133] *The Virtues of Saint Macarius of Egypt:* 13 Vivian, 2004b, p. 96.

[134] The biographical information on Abba Evagrius comes from Sinkewicz, 2006, pp. xvii-xix and Dysinger, 2005, pp. 8-16; for a translation of *The Coptic Life of Evagrius,* see Vivian, 2004a, pp. 69-92. For other biographical text, see Vivian, 2004a, pp. 167-179.

[135] For a survey of his work, see Sinkewicz, 2006, Dysinger, 2005, Joel Kalvesmaki,

[136] *On Prayer:* 102 Sinkewicz, 2006, p. 203. A similar recommendation is made in *Admonition* 2, Sinkewicz, 2006, p. xix.

thought leaves a monk for a long time, then attacks again for reasons not pertaining to the negligence of the monk, that monk should call out: "Lord Christ, the power of my salvation, 'incline your ear to me, rescue me speedily, be a rock of refuge for me a strong fortress to save me (Ps 31:2)'"[137].

For those who live the anchoritic life and are fought by voices and images of chariots with horses figured in the air, one should encourage the soul with the words of the holy David: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits, who forgives your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy (Ps. 103: 2-4)"[138].

For those who seek pure prayer, they will experience noises, crashing voices and tormenting screams that come from the demons during prayer. Abba Evagrius therefore teaches that they should say: "I fear no evil; for You are with me" (Ps. 23:4).[139] He then affirms, "In times of temptations such as these, use a short and intense prayer"[140].

In Luke Dysinger's study of the scripture quotations in the work of Evagrius, he suggests that Abba Evagrius's work *On Thoughts* on its own has 492 short verses from the Scripture. He also notes that: "Although the psalms are the book of the Bible

[137] *On Thoughts*: 34 Sinkewicz, 2006, p. 177.

[138] *On Thoughts*: 23 Sinkewicz, 2006, p. 169.

[139] *On prayer*: 97 Sinkewicz, 2006, p. 203.

[140] *On prayer*: 98 Sinkewicz, 2006, p. 203.

most frequently cited, there are sections of the *Antirrhetikos* in which the number of citations from Proverbs exceeds those from the Psalms"[141].

The prominent place of the book of psalms in other Christian writings is also evident in the writings of St Athanasius. In his letter to Marcellinus, St Athanasius expands on the importance of reading the psalms because of their "winning exactitude for those who are prayerful"[142]. It is important to note that his was not a private letter to a monk but to a deacon, which gives us the sense of the importance of the psalter to the Christian community at the time[143] which will also be evident in the other sources.

Evagrius' text *On Thoughts* is divided into eight books, one for each of the thoughts that fight a monk, including: gluttony, lust, avarice, sadness, anger, acedia, vainglory, and pride. In each book, Abba Evagrius gives a brief description of the offending demon in the form of a thought or a habit and concludes with the counter verse from the Scripture. This range of verses prescribed by Abba Evagrius serves the monk as kinds of exorcisms that repel or negate offending thoughts. By no means is the monk restricted to a certain formula, but the Scripture served him as a source containing a number of weapons to be used to combat attacking thoughts. Abba Evagrius advocates this idea clearly in his *letter 11.2:*

> Therefore one must be intrepid in opposing his foe, as blessed David demonstrates when he quotes voices as if out of the mouth of demons and [then] contradicts them. Thus if the demons say, "When I will die, and my name perish?" (Ps. 40: 5) he then also replies, "I shall not die, but I shall live

[141] Dysinger, 2005, pp. 136-137

[142] Letter to Marcellinus 2 Gregg, 1980, p. 101.

[143] Gregg, 1980, p. 22.

> and recount the deeds of the Lord!" (Ps. 117: 17). And if, on the other hand, the demons say, "Flee like a bird to the mountains" (Ps. 10: 1), then one should say, "For he is my God and my saviour, my strong place of refuge; I will not waver" (Ps. 17: 3). Therefore observe the mutually contradicting voices and love the victory; imitate David and pay close attention to yourself![144].

Evagrius draws his theory behind this idea of counter-attacking the devil with verses from the scripture itself, imitating Jesus when he was tempted by the devil in the wilderness when He answered their attacks with passages from the scripture (Mt 4:1-11), (Lk 4:1-13). Recently David Brakke[145] has translated Evagrius's work in *Antirrhetikos*, which can be translated to *Talking Back*. This text lists five hundred thoughts that can afflict a monk and in it he provides biblical responses to each one of them.

St John Cassian (360 -435)

St John Cassian was a monk and an ascetic writer. Born in present-day Romania, near the delta of the Danube, about 360 AD[146], he was the son of wealthy parents, receiving a good education. While he was a young man, he visited the holy places in Palestine, accompanied by a friend, Germanus, who was some years his senior. In Bethlehem, Cassian and Germanus began living the monastic life, but, as in the case

[144] Dysinger, 2005, p. 134.

[145] Brakke, 2009.

[146] The following biographical information comes from Ramsey, 1997, pp. 5-7.

of many of their contemporaries, the desire for learning the science of sanctity from its most eminent teachers soon enticed them to the Egyptian deserts.

They lived in Scetes from about 380 AD until 399 AD. They may also have visited Nitria and Kellia, and may have had contact with the Pachomian monasteries also. It was during this period of his life that Cassian collected the necessary materials for his two principal works, the *Institutes* and the *Conferences*.

After he left Egypt, Cassian would go on to establish two monasteries near Marseilles, and it was for this audience that he wrote his two works. He was not writing a history of Egyptian monasticism, though there is a tendency to rely on him for this purpose. Rather he was trying to reform monasticism in his monasteries by showing them how the Egyptian monks lived.

Unlike Abba Evagrius, St John did not prescribe many formulas for unceasing prayer. He rather limited himself to the one formula and applied it to all aspects of life and spiritual warfare. This idea is consistent with Cassian's idea of progress in prayer[147], which started with many words or multiple formulas then, as the monk progressed, he concentrated on one short but intense prayer throughout the day. Finally, he went to the highest state of prayer, the wordless prayer, which was when the monk felt he was absorbed in God's presence at all times[148].

[147] As John Main puts it, meditation for Cassian is not a mere techniques but "purity of heart" Main, 2007, p. 32.

[148] Stewart, 1998, p. 105.

Amongst the many topics discussed in the *Conferences*, Cassian devoted two conferences (IX and X) with Abba Isaac from the Egyptian desert to the practice of continuous prayer. In the ninth conference, he alluded to the importance of short, frequent prayers: "For this reason prayer should be made frequently, to be sure, but briefly, lest if we take our time the lurking enemy be able to put something in our heart"[149].

In the tenth conference, Abba Isaac gave a specific formula and instruction for unceasing prayer. Unlike Saint Macarius, Abba Isaac subscribed a single formula to St John Cassian from the psalm 69, "O God, incline unto my aid; O Lord make haste to help me", which he claims to have been handed down to him by the elders. While he was writing to advocate the repetition of the verse, he himself used it repeatedly in the text to give the reader a taste of its use. In his instruction, Abba Isaac, like other Desert Fathers, made it a free practice that permeated every aspect of a monk's life[150].

St Shenoute The Archimandrite (347 – 465)

St Shenoute was the abbot of the White Monastery near modern Sohag in Upper Egypt. His monasteries are said to have housed 2200 monks and 1800 nuns[151]. He is considered by Coptologists to be the greatest known writer in the Coptic language[152].

[149] *Conferences* 9: XXXVI Ramsey, 1997, p. 353.

[150] John Cassian lists very specific circumstances to use the verse in prayer only to emphasise the fact that you can use the prayer at all times. *Conferences* 10: X, 3-14.

[151] Bell, 1983, p. v.

[152] Orlandi, 2002, p. 211.

The majority of his writings are still unedited and unpublished, but their literary structure has now been established by Stephen Emmel. [153]

The Life of Shenoute has come to us in several versions: a full text in Boharic Coptic, earlier texts in Sahidic, and Arabic version. The authorship and date of the life of St Shenoute has been convincingly contested by Nina Lubomierski, who argues that the *Life* of Shenoute is a compilation of speeches of praise and episodes of his life that were used in the yearly commemoration of the saint, some of which might have come from Besa others where added by later editors. These stories were eventually compiled and attributed to Besa to give it authority[154]. While there is scholarly debate about the earliest version of the life, the alleged miracles of the saint seeing the prophets as the monk's recite books of the scripture[155], which is transmitted in all the versions, attest to the emphasis on scriptural memorisations and recitation in the Shenoutian communities[156].

It has been argued that despite the emphasis on manual labour, the daily routine in the white monastery was structured around prayer, not only in the form of structured individual or communal prayers but the monks of the white monastery were instructed to pray without ceasing[157]. During the lifetime of St Shenoute, a controversy broke out about the concept of a prayer to Jesus rather than to the Trinity. A group of

[153] Emmel, 2004b.

[154] Nina, 2008, p. 8.

[155] *Sahidic Life of Shenoute:* 94-97 Bell, 1983, pp. 70-71.

[156] Layton, 2014, p. 8.

[157] Krawiec, 2002, p. 18.

Origenists who had misinterpreted Origen's work[158] said that prayer must be made to God the Father and not to Jesus, since Jesus Himself prayed. In his response, St Shenoute asserts that "When we say 'Jesus', we speak of the consubstantial Trinity"[159]. He backed up his answers with Christ's commandment to his disciples, "Go and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19) and the apostle also said "you were baptised into Christ," (Gal 3:27) and again it is mentioned, "they were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 8:16). He thus concludes, "When we name Jesus we name the Holy Trinity"[160].

He does not stop at a theoretical answer to such a heresy but gives his monks a practical way in which they can use the name of Jesus in their everyday life in this Doxology:

> When he [the monk] goes in, (he says) 'God',
>
> and when he comes out, (he says) 'Jesus.'
>
> When he lies down to sleep, 'God',
>
> and when he gets up, 'Jesus'.
>
> When he blesses, 'God',
>
> and when he prays, 'Jesus'.[161]

[158] It is a misinterpretation because of the fact that Origen himself used the Jesus Prayer in the Doxologies with which he closed almost every homily. Furthermore, In his *Contra Celsum* Origen, insists that prayer should be addressed to the Father through the Son, which is a very different argument as he also expresses prayer as an act of communion with the Trinity Perrone, 2001, pp. 3,16.

[159] *I am amazed*: 803, cited from Davis, 2008, p. 284.

[160] *I am amazed*: 818-819, cited from Davis, 2008, p. 285.

[161] *I am amazed*: 802-803, cited from Davis, 2008, pp. 283-284.

Shenoute's audiences were not limited to monks but it is known that he often gave sermons to a mixed audience of monks and a great number of near-by villagers. He therefore includes the rest of the audience in his sermons and suggests a practical solution to these villagers[162].

> Seek after the fulfilment of these words and you will find them on your lips and on the lips of your children.
>
> When you celebrate a feast and are joyful, (say) 'Jesus.'
>
> When you are grieving in heart and are distressed, (say) 'Jesus.'
>
> When your sons and daughters laugh, (say) 'Jesus.'
>
> The one who draws water, 'Jesus'.
>
> The one who runs in the face of barbarians, 'Jesus'.
>
> Those who see wild beasts and something frightening, 'Jesus'.
>
> Those who are suffering with pains and illnesses, 'Jesus'.
>
> Those who are taken as prisoners of war, 'Jesus'.
>
> Those who have severed perversion of justice and violent treatment, 'Jesus'.
>
> The name of the one who is on their lips is their salvation and their life, he himself along with the Father[163].

From the above two quotes, we can see how St Shenoute not only theologically contested the wrong teachings that were being propagated around his vicinity, but that he also gave a practical solution to spread his teaching to the simple among the monks and villagers[164]. These exhortations mark the earliest semi-ritualised form of the use of a short prayer that includes the name of Jesus, in both a monastic and a non-

[162] Schroeder, 2007, p. 15.

[163] *I am amazed*: 821, cited from Davis, 2008, pp. 285-286.

[164] McGuckin, 1999, p. 81.

monastic setting. This idea of ritualising will be further elaborated upon in the seventh to ninth century when the Psalis will be written and will be formally used in the church's daily midnight service.

Amma Syncletica (fifth century)

The *Sayings* mention three female ascetics – Sarah, Theodora, and Syncletica. Amma Syncletica is the only one of the three that has a full biography that Mary Schaffer believes was written as early as the fifth century. A considerable section of the sayings attributed to her consist of her monastic teachings, which are highly influenced by Evagrius of Pontus[165].

According to the *Life of Syncletica*, she was born in Alexandria from Macedonian parents and had a strong Christian upbringing. She lived in her parents' house whilst practising the monastic virtues and refusing any attempt from her parents to get her married. After her parents' death she took her blind sister, sold all they had and gave the money to the poor, and she went to live in a tomb which was at a distance from the city. Her fame become known and attracted many women who shared her love for God[166].

In her teachings, she did not directly mention some repeated prayers but, like Evagrius, she related unceasing prayer to the psalms. In the *Life* she advised that when one is suffering from the thought of pride:

[165] Schaffer, 2001, pp. 5-7.

[166] Schaffer, 2001, pp. 9-19.

> Without ceasing one must meditate upon the inspired word which the blessed David proclaimed when he said: *but I am a worm, and not human (Ps. 22.6)*. And in another passage Scripture says: *I who am but dust and ashes (Gen18:27)*. And also, to be sure, one should listen to that passage of Isaiah, the one which says: *all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth (Isa 64:6)*[167].

She also advised to fight against the spirit of lust, even if it has left for a period of time: "Pray without ceasing (1 Thess 5: 17) because of the instability of the sea and the bitter malice of the enemy"[168].

St Syncletica's teachings were filled with short verses from scripture. Some verses were repeated more frequently than others, which led Mary Schaffer to conclude, "the repetition suggests that this passage recurs in Syncletica's own prayer"[169]. Such references to repeated psalms and scripture verses have escaped earlier scholarship on the topic because of the focus on the Jesus Prayer as the starting point when talking about continuous prayer rather than the larger tradition of the Arrow Prayer that included psalms and other books of the Scripture.

Barsanuphius and John (sixth century)

Saints Barsanuphius and John are both of Egyptian descent but went to live in Palestine as monks. Whether or not they started their monastic life in Egypt before they went to Palestine and their reasons for going there are unknown. But what is

[167] *The Life of Syncletica*: 50, Bongie, 2001, pp. 34-35.

[168] *The Life of Syncletica*: 19 Bongie, 2001, p. 17.

[169] Schaffer, 2001, p. 89.

known for certain is that their teachings present fundamental concepts that are characteristic of the Egyptian desert fathers' spirituality[170]. As John Chryssavgis observed "each of the prominent elders of Gaza is balanced and non-polemical in their nature and in their counsel, much like the disposition of the Egyptian monastics"[171].

Most of what we know about these two great saints comes from their correspondence with other monks and lay Christians. There are approximately eight-hundred-and-fifty letters, four hundred directed to Abba Barsanuphius and four-hundred-and-fifty to Abba John. These letters are answers to questions about various aspects of spiritual, social, theological and economic life. But if we were to summarise the content of these correspondences into two principal virtues, as Chryssavgis suggests, they would be unceasing prayer and tears[172]. John's answers to his correspondence provides both structure and flexibility in his prayer with the intention of providing harmony between work, meditation and prayer[173].

Among this vast collection of questions and answers, the subject of unceasing prayer arises and these two fathers answer in a manner that is typical of their predecessors. For example, Abba Barsanuphius was once asked if the invoking of the name of the master Christ was necessary when the thoughts are calm and not afflicted by the devil. He replied, "such practice is a necessary safeguard to our thoughts lest the devil

[170] Chryssavgis, 2003, pp. 10-15.

[171] Chryssavgis, 2003, p. 45.

[172] Chryssavgis, 2003, p. 37.

[173] Stewart, 2003, p. 118.

suddenly attacks"[174]. Abba John was also asked whether it was good to invoke the name of God when in conversation with someone, to which he responded that it was not only good but necessary to "invoke the name of God"[175] before, during and after a conversation.

He was further asked on how one can practically fulfil the command to pray unceasingly. It seems from the response that the question came from a layperson: "When one is alone, one should recite the psalms and pray with one's mouth and one's heart. However when one is in the market place or with other people, it is not necessary to recite the psalms with one's mouth, but only with one's mind"[176].

The above three responses reveal the authentic practice of the unceasing prayer that comprised "invoking the name of the master Christ"[177], "invoking the name of God"[178], and also without particular reference to the name but instead to the saint-prescribed verses from the psalms. This highlights the fact that the concept of the invocation of the name of God does not necessarily mean saying the name Jesus, but can refer to the remembrance of God through invocation of verses from scripture[179].

One last observation to make is that the saints integrated the short verses from the psalms into their letters not only as a monastic practice but also for the laity in their

[174] *Letter:* 425 Chryssavgis, 2003, p. 129.

[175] *Letter:* 710 Chryssavgis, 2003, p. 184.

[176] *Letter:* 710 Chryssavgis, 2003, p. 184.

[177] *Letter:* 425 Chryssavgis, 2003, p. 129.

[178] *Letter:* 710 Chryssavgis, 2003, p. 184.

[179] Irénée Hausherr, makes this point in Hausherr, 1978, p. 224 I will come to this point again.

conversation or in the marketplace, just as was discussed in the case of St Shenoute. This connection links the teachings of these saints back to the Egyptian desert.

Abba Philemon (sixth – seventh century)

Abba Philemon was a monk who lived in Scetes in the middle of the sixth century. It is debatable whether he belonged to the Chalcedonian or the non-Chalcedonian traditions but Father Samir Khalil has shown that he most likely belonged to the non-Chalcedonian tradition for two reasons[180]. Firstly, we know from his life that he went to church every Saturday and Sunday, therefore to go to church and to receive the sacraments he must have belonged to the non-Chalcedonian church. Secondly, he is celebrated in the Coptic Synaxarium on the 18th of Kiahk (December 14) and the fact that he was canonised in the Coptic Church also suggests that he is from the non-Chalcedonian church. Nevertheless, whichever tradition he belonged to, his account still reveals to us the way continuous prayer was practised in Egypt during his time.

Interestingly enough, we first hear of Abba Philemon's life in the *Philokalia*[181], which is a collection of monastic writings that was compiled by two Greek monks, St Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain (1749-1809) and St Makarios of Corinth (1731-1805) and is a book which is still very well known in the Greco-Russian tradition today. When Abba Philemon was asked by a certain brother named John: "What should I do, father, to be saved? For my mind wanders hither and thither, where it should not be", Abba Philemon replied: "Go acquire secret instructions in your heart and it will cleanse your mind". The brother asked: "What is this secret instruction,

[180] Khalil, 1993.

[181] Kadloubovsky & Palmer, 1992, pp. 401-416.

father?" He replied: "Go practise sobriety in your heart, and in your thought repeat soberly, with fear and trembling. 'Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me!' This is what Abba Diadochus recommends for beginners"[182].

The brother went his way and found rest and joy in the practice but, after a while, he could not keep sobriety during prayer. He went back to Abba Philemon to tell him what had happened. Abba Philemon encouraged him to continue in praying mental prayers during his everyday work:

> In this way, you will be able to understand the depth of the divine scriptures and the power concealed in them, and will give your mind a constant occupation in obedience to the word of the apostle: "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. v. 17). Keep attention diligently in yourself and guard your heart from accepting bad thoughts, or thoughts that are idle and unprofitable. But always, whether you sleep or rise, eat or drink, or converse with someone, make your heart mentally and in secret either seek instruction in psalms, or pray: "Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me!" in the same way, when you utter psalms with your tongue, pay attention lest your lips say one thing and your thoughts be diverted towards something else[183].

The interesting aspect of Abba Philemon's teaching on this topic is that it has the typical Egyptian desert flavour. While he gave the formula for the Jesus Prayer, "Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me!" as a practice for "a beginner", he also suggests many other formulas: "Take as much as you can to go to sleep with psalms on your lips…whatever thoughts you had during prayer, draw instruction from them:

[182] *The Narrative of Abba Philemon*: 10 Kadloubovsky & Palmer, 1992, p. 406.

[183] *The Narrative of Abba Philemon*: 10 Kadloubovsky & Palmer, 1992, p. 406.

and when you lie down in your bed make them remain in you while you sleep and converse with them when you awake"[184].

He even suggests the repetition of the Creed before going to sleep: "Recite also the holy symbol of the Orthodox faith before you drop asleep, for to profess true faith in God is the source and preservation of all blessings"[185].

He himself also used to repeat the Lord's Prayer, until it was imprinted in his heart:

> For two years I have remained in prayer before God, imploring Him with my whole heart and zeal to let the Prayer he gave to his disciples constantly and undistractedly be imprinted in my heart. And seeing my labour and patience the merciful Lord granted me what I asked[186].

Recently, Father Samir Khalil conducted a study[187] of a fourteenth-century manuscript in the possession of the British library[188] that contains, among other things, an extract from the life of Abba Philemon. What is significant about this extract is the scribe's choice of the text. The Greek text of the *Philokalia* contains the name of Jesus in a prayer formula twice throughout the text and this is precisely the part of the text that the scribe, who is believed to be a monk of the El Muharak Monastery, has chosen to copy/translate in the fourteenth century.

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[184] *The Narrative of Abba Philemon*: 11 Kadloubovsky & Palmer, 1992, p. 407.

[185] *The Narrative of Abba Philemon*: 11 Kadloubovsky & Palmer, 1992, p. 407.

[186] *The Narrative of Abba Philemon*: 12 Kadloubovsky & Palmer, 1992, p. 407.

[187] Khalil, 1993.

[188] MS British Library: *Oriental 1330.*

Father Khalil further notices the re-occurrence of some key phrases in this small Arabic text, such as: "secret meditation" (six times), "hesychia" (twice), "heart" (eight times), "spirit" (five times), "thoughts" (four times). These words are the very words that frequently occur in the *Philokalia*. Father Khalil concludes:

> Therefore, it seems useful to see how our text is from the Egyptian tradition of the 4th -6th Centuries. This is all the more necessary for many people who seem to associate the "Jesus Prayer" to the Byzantine and Greco-Slavic world and unknown in the Egyptian tradition[189].

To put things into perspective, El Muharak Monastery in Assiut (Upper Egypt) in the fourteenth century was recovering from a decline in the number of monks. It only had 19 monks at the time of Patriarch Gabriel (1370-1378 A.D.), the 86th patriarch who himself came from El Muharak Monastery. This decline in monastic life in the monastery was attested to in the life of Patriarch Matthew I (87th patriarch) before he succeeded Patriarch Gabriel to the Patriarchate:

> And thus this father [Matthew] remained but a little at the Monastery [of St Anthony]; afterward he took permission from the blessed Mark (Marcos Al-Antouni), and he went to the mountain of Kuskam at al-Muharrak (Monastery). And this was by an economy of God for the profit of the brethren dwelling there, because there were among them those who did not continue fasting on every day up to the ninth hour (3pm). And this Father instructed them to continue the fast up to the ninth hour with the great striving with

[189] Khalil, 1993, p. 30.

which he was wont to strive before them in order that they might be instructed from him by seeing[190].

In addition to this passage from the life of Abba Philemon, Father Khalil notes that a number of prayers were randomly scattered on the margins of the manuscript. These prayers were short prayers from the psalms as well as prayers that included the name of Jesus. Therefore, the copyist's choice of text from the teaching of Abba Philemon and the scattered short prayers in the manuscript are clear evidence of the influence the Arrow Prayer had on the revival of the monastic life in El Muharak Monastery in the fourteenth century.

St Isaac the Syrian (Isaac of Nineveh) (seventh century)

St Isaac was born in Bet Qatraye, near present-day Bahrain on the Persian Gulf. He was known for his extensive study of the scriptures, which caused him to lose his sight and henceforth he had to dictate his writings. The Nestorian Patriarch George knew about his holy life, so he took him and ordained him as the bishop of Nineveh. Five months after his ordination he fled the office and went to the monastery of Rabban Shabur in Iran, near the Persian Gulf where he continued his ascetic life and writing until his departure[191].

Even though some scholars believe that he belonged to the jurisdiction of the Nestorian patriarchs, his writings do not have any traces of the theological debates of

[190] al-Masih, Burmester, Atiya, & Khater, 1943, p. 239.

[191] Biographical information comes from Hagman, 2010, p. 25.

the time[192]. His writings have been an essential part of the ascetical monastic literature in the East and West alike. His ascetical homilies remain essential reading material in many monastic circles up till the present day.

While Saint Isaac never lived in the Egyptian desert, his inclusion in this collection of sources is essential because of the great influence that his writings had on Egyptian monasticism in the twentieth century. His writings on the solitary life have inspired many of the prominent figures of the Coptic Church in the twentieth century, such as Fr. Mina El-Baramousi (Pope Kyrillos VI), Fr Antonious El-Souriany (Pope Shenouda III) and Fr Mathew the Poor.

The writings of Fr. Mina show his familiarity with St Isaac's works and spirituality. In one of his letters to his spiritual son, he advises him:

> Persist in and honour reading, if possible more than prayer. Reading is the spring of intelligent prayer. For as I have previously told you, "reading for a good purpose will show you how to walk on the virtuous path". Whoever reads the books to understand the path of virtue, this path will be opened before him[193].

The passage above seems to directly reflect similar teachings of St Isaac:

> If your thoughts are in a state of distraction try to read rather than pray. You should choose your reading matter in accordance with your rule of life… Hold

[192] Hagman, 2010, pp. 28-30.

[193] Unknown Author, 2000, p. 40.

> reading in higher esteem than standing in prayer, because it is a source of pure prayer. Never, never despise reading[194].

The other reason he is included in this collection of sources is the fact that he is frequently quoted as an advocate of the Jesus Prayer in the Athonite tradition, yet his writing reveals otherwise. Like the Desert Fathers of Egypt, his main emphasis is on the inner disposition of the heart rather than on the words or the formula of prayer:

> When your thoughts reach a state of recollection, do not interrupt your prayer. Don't worry that prolonging this prayer of recollection may interfere with your psalmody. Psalmody is not as important as praying with genuflections. If you are able to pray this, it can take the place of your office of psalms when you receive the gift of tears during the office, do not think that this sweetness is an interruption of the office, for the charisma of tears is the consummation of prayer[195].

Short prayers constitute a considerable part in the writings of St Isaac, many of which are published today in prayer books or books of daily devotion. In all these prayers, St Isaac the Syrian shows no conformity to a specific formula. As Irénée Hausherr concludes:

> Isaac of Nineveh, cannot be numbered among the advocates of the philosophy of the name or of devotion to the name of Jesus or of assiduous meditation of a single formula as an aid to continual Prayer. Nor can he be numbered among the advocates of the Jesus prayer[196].

[194] Cited from Hausherr, 1978, p. 231.

[195] Cited from Hausherr, 1978, p. 231.

[196] Hausherr, 1978, p. 233.

Hagiography

St John of Scetes (585-675)

St John of Scetes was titled the Hegumen of Scetes. According to the Coptic Synaxarium, he met with St Samuel the Confessor during his exile[197]. After his return, he was ordained a hegumen over Scetes. He is well known from the number of disciples that were gathered around him, as well as because of the translation of the lives of the forty-nine martyrs of Scetes[198]. His life in Arabic, which was recently published by Ugo Zanetti with a French translation[199], manifests the importance of the Arrow Prayer in both his teaching and his practice.

وعمل الصلاة هو هذا أن لا تتركوا ذكر الله ؛ فى كلَّ حين تتلوه ، وكونوا تطلبوه بالدوام فى كلَّ موضع ان كنتم تأكلون أو تشربون أو تمشون فى الطريق أو تصنعون في كلَّ عمل بالجملة. لأن الصلاة هكذا تنوَّر العقل | وتهدئ ألم القلب، وتيبَّس الشهوة، وتطرد الشيطان، وتنقص الخطيئة وتجدد النفس. وعلى الجملة تجعل كلَّ	The work of prayer is this; do not cease from the remembrance of God at all times. Entreat him always and in every place, whether you were eating or drinking or walking in the street or doing any work. For praying in this manner enlightens the mind and cools the sighs of the heart and cools the passion, repels demons, lessens sins and renews the soul. Overall it makes all evil sin

[197] Mentioned in the Coptic synaxarium on the 30th of Kiahk.

[198] Coptic Encyclopedia Coquin, 1991, p. 1362, Col 2.

[199] Zanetti, 1996.

خطيئة شريرة غريبة من الانسان، كما قال مخلّصنا فى الانجيل : "صلُّوا لئلاّ تدخلوا التجارب". يعلمنا بهذا أنَّه، اذا كان الانسان يصليَّ فى كلَّ حين، فلا يستطيع شيء من الافكار الشريرة يقف أمامه.[200]	strange to people. As our Saviour said in the gospel: “pray lest you enter into temptations.” By this He teaches us that if a person prays all the time, none of the evil thoughts can stand in his way.

And on his deathbed the writer highlighted the fact that the saint himself always practised continuous prayer:

لأنَّ الطوبانى، لّما قرب أن يتنيّح، لم يتخلَّ قطُّ عن ذكر الله، بل كان يتلو فى كلامه مثل ما كان يصنع فى كلَّ حين. ولّما قربَتْ الساعة التى يخرج فيها من الجسد، كان يقول هولاء الكلمات، دفعة: "بنورك نعاين النور" ومرَّة: "نسير من قوة الى قوة" ولم ينقطع ذكر المخلّص من فيه الى أن أسلم الروح.	When the departure of the saint (lit. the blessed) was near, He did not cease from the remembrance of God. But he used to repeat in his sleep what he used to always say. And when the hour of his departure approached he used to repeat these words “In your light we see light” and other times “we walk from strength to strength”. The memory of the Saviour did not cease from his mouth until his death[201]

The above two quotes show that the author used the “remembrance of God”, “remembrance of the Saviour” and recitations of verses from the psalms as equally the same practice of continuous prayer.

[200] I used the Arabic edition in Zanetti, 1996, p. 351, the English translation is mine.

[201] *The Life of John of Scetes*: 261 Zanetti, 1996, p. 361.

Later in the *Life*, St John went to his spiritual elder Abba Youanis to seek counsel about his struggles with evil thoughts. In reply, Abba Youanis narrated to him his struggle in praying continuously and finally shared a very elaborate vision explaining the power of the prayer. This further provides us with a visual imagery that explains where the name Arrow Prayer originated.

ومن بعد هذا تركتُ عنني كلَّ اهتمام وقلق شغل اليد ، واعطيت قلبى للصلاة بقوة قلب عظيمه، وكنت اقوم فى كلَّ قليل وأطلب من الله أن يرحمني ويعينني حتَّى كنت أقوم دفوعاً كثيرة فى اليوم نحو ثلاثين مرة وأكثر منها.	After that, I left all bodily care and handiwork and I gave myself to prayer with strength of heart. I used to get up every little while and ask God to have mercy on me and support me. I used to get up a number of times in the day about thirty times or more.
ومن بعد أيَّام قلايل وأنا أصنع هكذا كان منِّى يوم وأنا متفرِّد وقلبى متعلَّق بالله وكنت أعمل فى شبكة فنظرتُ واذا حبشى ، طفل صغير عريان يكون عمره ثمانية سنينأاو عشرة كما قلتَ أنت ، وجسده كلُّه مغروز ابَر، حتَّى انَّه لم يوجد فى جسده موضع واحد سالم، بغير ابر. وكان يقلق مثل من هو فى السبى ، ويسوع الى هذه الناحية، وهذه الناحية، ولا يستطيع أن يجلس ولا يقف. ولَّما نظرتُه كنتُ مفكراً ما هو هذا.	One day while I was alone and my heart was engaged with God whilst making a net, I looked and behold a young, naked Ethiopian child, whose age was about eight or ten years old and all his body was pierced with needles, to the extent that there was no part of his body that was unpierced...
ولَّما وقفتُ كنتُ اصلىٌّ، فصار مثل من هو أسير، وكان يصرخ قائلاً : "حسبك! حسبك تحاربنى! لستُ أكلَّمك بعد !" وكان يقلق ويسير الى هاهنا وهاهنا مثل من هو مربوط	When I stood up to pray he was as a hostage screaming and saying: ‘stop, stop fighting me! I will not bother you again!’ and he was worried and ran from here to there as someone who is

فى منسج الشبكة.	caught in a net.
قال الشيخ القّديس: "فأجبتُه: مَن أنت هكذا؟". فأجابنى ذلك: "ألم تعرفنى من أنا؟". قلتُ له: "لا" قال له "أنا هو الذى ألقيتُ هولاء الآتعاب جميعهم عليك". فقلتُ له: "وما هم هولاء الذين فى جسدك؟". فقال: "هولاء رماح". فقلت له: "ومن الذى صنع بك هولاء". فقال "أنت هو" فقلت له: وبأى نوع صنعتُ أنا بك هكذا؟". فقال لي: "كلَّ دفعة تقف للصلاة يغروا فى جسدى واحدة.ولهذا قلت: هؤلاء الجراحات جميعهم لأجل طلباتك.فلا تصلىَّ من الآن من اجلى، فلست أتعبك بعد!".	I said to him: 'who are you?' He replied: 'don't you know who I am?' I said to him: 'no' He said to me: 'I am the one who brought all these troubles on you' I said to him: 'and what are these on your body?' He said: 'these are arrows.' I said to him: 'who did all this to you' He said: 'you are the one' I said to him: 'and how did I do this to you?' He said to me: 'every time you stand up to pray, one of these pierces my body'
وكان مفتضحاً وهو خائف ومرتعد أمام الصلاة. فدمتُ أنا فى الصلاة بقوة قلب، وهكذا غاب عنى | وفرغتُ أن أنظره بعد. ومن ذلك اليوم لم يعود يتعبنى البتَّة.	He was embarrassed and fearful in front of the prayer, so I continued praying with a strong heart and stopped looking at him. Since then he has never come to bother me[202].

This narrative is very unique in the sources in the way it portrays many aspects of the Arrow Prayer in the form of a vision: first, there is the fact that the prayers were represented as arrows that were aimed at the demons, which therefore refers to the

[202] *The Life of John of Scetes*: 159-168 Zanetti, 1996, pp. 333, 335.

Arrow Prayer without actually naming it; Second, the arrows are referred to in plural which emphasizes repetition of the prayer; third, the Arrow Prayer was used to fight against thoughts, which is a recurring theme in monastic literature, as will be discussed in later chapter; finally, it shows how the prayer was practised while doing handiwork.

Jirjis al Muzahim (tenth century)

According to the *Martyrdom of Jirjis al Muzahim*[203], he was born from a Muslim father and a Christian mother by the name Muzahim. He would go to church with his mother and when he would see children dressed up in nice clothing and eating from the holy bread, he longed to be baptised. He married a Christian girl and expressed his desire to be baptised. He was baptised in Birma in the Delta and was named Jirjis in his baptism. When the Muslim neighbours heard about this, they reported him to the authorities, who tortured him until he was finally martyred[204].

While these events date to the tenth century, the earliest manuscript of the martyrdom comes from a fourteenth-century manuscript in the Coptic Museum[205]. While the manuscript is written in good Arabic, Swanson rules out the possibility that it could

[203] St Bishoy's Monastery, Miamer 237; As mentioned in the MS, the saint's name is Muzahim and his name at baptism is Jirjis without the definite article; for more on the name, read Swanson, 2012, p. 3. According to the Synaxarium of the Coptic Church, he was martyred on the 19th of the Coptic month of Baunah 675 of the martyrs (13th June 959 A.D.).

[204] For a further study and bibliography about the life of the saint see Swanson, 2012; and Swanson, 2015.

[205] Coptic Museum Hist 469 Simaika 96/Graf 712, A.D. 1360s, no. 10, ff. 319r-329r.

be translated from Coptic[206]. The manuscript I will use comes from St Bishoy's Monastery (Miamer 237) from an unknown date.

A theme that runs through the martyrdom narrative is his devotion to the name of Jesus. It mentions three times that the saint used to call on the name of Jesus: once when he was hiding from authorities and the other two when he was being tortured. However, he is constantly described as being "martyred for the sake of the name of Jesus Christ" – this expression was repeated seven times throughout the narrative.

فلم يحتمل الشيطان حيث رأى القديس وهو يصلي للرب يسوع حيث رأى القديس وهو يصلي ليلا ونهارا ولا يفتر من ذكره[207]	The devil could not bear it seeing him praying to our Lord Jesus Christ day and night and he would not cease from his remembrance.

فلما سمع هذا وقف على رجليه ورفع يديه إلى السماء وقال يا سيدي يسوع المسيح انت عالم بما يكون قبل أن يكون انت تعلم محبتي فيك من أجل وجعي وقتلي من أجل اسمك المقدس	When he heard this, he stood up and raised his hands to heaven and said: "my Lord Jesus Christ, you know everything before it happens, you know my love to you for my torture and death is for your name's sake.
ولكن رأفتك تعلم أنني قد توكلت عليك يسوع حياتي يسوع قوتي يسوع رجائي يسوع مجدي يسوع فخري سيدي يسوع المسيح اسمع صلاتي [208]	But your graciousness knows that I have relied on you Jesus my whole life, Jesus my strength, Jesus my hope, Jesus my pride. My Lord Jesus Christ hear my prayer

[206] Swanson, 2012, p. 4.

[207] *The Martyrdom of Jirjis al Muzahim*: St Bishoy's Monastery, Miamer 237, 12b.

[208] *The Martyrdom of Jirjis al Muzahim*: St Bishoy's Monastery, Miamer 237, 33b.

فأما الذين كانوا يضربوه بالعصي فلم يفتروا من ضربه وأما القديس فلم يذكر شيئا غير المسيح اسم السيد يسوع [209]	But as for those who struck him with canes, they did not cease from striking him, but as for the saint, he did not mention anything other than the name of Jesus Christ.

Fr Marcos Al-Antouni (fourteenth century)

Fr Marcos Al-Antouni is one of the fourteenth-century saints who had a great influence on Coptic monasticism at the time, especially at St Anthony's Monastery, where he lived most of his life. He became a monk at the age of 23 and was very austere in his ascetic practices, especially fasting. He was also well known for accepting back those who renounced the Christian faith[210].

This period of the history of the Coptic Church also saw many other ascetics from St Anthony's Monastery, such as St Abraham Al-Fani and St Matthew I, known as Al-Meskin, the 87th Patriarch of Alexandria. Also living at the same time was Saint Barsoum the Naked and Abba Tegi, better known by his camel's name (Ruways)[211].

From the life of Fr. Marcos[212], we know that on his deathbed his disciples heard him repeat the psalm:

[209] *The Martyrdom of Jirjis al Muzahim*: St Bishoy's Monastery, Miamer 237, 45b.

[210] Biographical information from Swanson, 2007.

[211] Swanson, 2010, pp. 107-114.

[212] *Paris*, Arabe 7447.

كان لا يفتر من ان يرتل بهذا المزمور قائلاً	He did not cease singing this psalm saying:
اعظمك يارب الهى صرخت اليك فشفيتنى ايها الرب الهى لانك قبلتنى ولم تسر بى اعدائى ومن الجحيم رفعت نفسى ومن الهابطين فى الجب نجيتنى	"I glorify You my Lord and God, to You I cry and you have healed me. O Lord my God for you have accepted me and did not make my enemies rejoice over me. From Hades you have saved my soul and from those who have fallen into the pit you have saved me."
وكان هذا الاب يردد هذا المزمور فى لسانه النهار كله ولايفتر من تكريره فى سماعنا[213]	Our father repeated this psalm from his tongue all day and would not cease repeating it in our hearing.

The practice of the saints repeating the psalms on their deathbed is a prominent theme in hagiography, as I will show in the rest of the sources and in later chapters.

Archaeological Finds

Wall inscription (mid-seventh – mid-eighth centuries)

Evidence for unceasing prayer is not limited to literary sources; archaeological finds have also brought to light some important inscriptions. During the excavation in 1965 of the monastic settlements at Kellia, some inscriptions were found on the wall of one

[213] *The Life of St Marcos Al-Antouni*: *Paris*, Arabe 7447, ff 263.

of the monastic cells[214]. The subject of these prayers was a defence of the use of the Jesus Prayer against those who object to its use, on the ground that it assumes separation between the persons of the Trinity.

The inscription translated below, as Antoine Guillaumont describes it, was found on the wall of a room that was the oratory of a cell. Guillaumont was unable to precisely date the inscription, but from the context of the other finds, he dated it between the middle of the seventh to the middle of the eighth century[215].

The twenty nine lines of inscription attest to the fact that the monk who lived in the cell fervently practised some primitive formula of the Jesus Prayer, such as: "Jesus Christ, the saving name", "My Lord Jesus Christ, help us".

Like St Shenoute a few centuries earlier and six hundred kilometres south, we see the same controversy breaking out about the use of the Jesus Prayer. This inscription provides solid evidence that confirms the use of short prayers that included the name of Jesus in a monastic settlement in Kellia.[216]

ⲁϥϫⲟⲥ ⲛϫⲉ ⲟ [ⲩ…	A … said;
ϫⲉ ⲉϣⲱⲡ ⲁⲣⲉϣⲁⲛ ⲛ	"if the
ⲇⲉⲙⲱⲛ ⲥⲓϯ ⲉⲣⲟⲛ	demons sows seeds in us[217]

[214] Guillaumont, 1974; For extensive bibliography about the inscription see Grillmeier & Hainthaler, 1996, p. 187-189.

[215] Guillaumont, 1974, p. 71.

[216] The text of the inscription comes from, Guillaumont, 1968, p. 9.

[217] Lit. 'put to us'/ 'sow to us'.

ϵγχω mmoc χϵ ϵ	saying;
ϣωπ ⲁkϣⲁnωϣ ϵboλ	‘if you cry out
ϵqmhn χϵ oc ⲓhc̄ ϵk	continually ‘Lord Jesus’ it is
twb2 mφiωt ⲁn: oy	not to the Father that you are praying:
ⲇϵ ⲡiⲡn̄ⲁ ϵθoyⲁb: tϵn	nor (to) the holy spirit’: we
ϵmi rⲁp χϵ tⲁikϵχinici†	know that this other sowing
χϵ tⲁ nnⲡⲁnoyproc t[ϵ	i[s] that of the wicked;
nϵtcϵt ⲡiⲡⲁnxρϵω[cthc (?)	those who sow the all-debtor(?)[218],
ϵyρ 2htϵc nϣϵnq ϵρ ψ[ω	beginning to ask him to m[o]ck
bϵ oybϵ nϵtϸϵn φρⲁn [n	those who are in the name [of]
ⲓhc̄ χϵ ϵyϵtⲁko nϵtⲡictϵy[ϵ	Jesus, so that those who trust in his name
ϵⲡϵqρⲁn ncϵϵmi ⲁn ϵⲡth[pq	may be lost[219]. They do not know the whole.
ⲁnon ⲇϵ tϵnϵmi χϵ ⲁn[ϣⲁn	But as for us, we know that if we
twb2 nⲓhc̄ ⲁntωb2 m[φi	pray to Jesus, we pray to the
ωt nϵmⲁq nϵm ⲡiⲡn[ⲁ ϵθ	Father and him, and the holy spirit
oyⲁb nϵmⲁq ntϵ φiωt ρω	of the father with him again.
nnϵcϣωⲡi rⲁp ϵθρϵnφωρ[χ	For it may not happen that we divide
n†tpiⲁc nnoy† noyⲁb ϵb[oλ	the divine and holy Trinity,
ⲁλλⲁ ϵϣϣh ntωb2 ⲁnϣⲁn	but rather it is fitting to pray (thus); if we
χoc χϵ ⲡxc̄ ⲓhc̄ ϣⲁnχo[c	say ‘Christ Jesus’, we say
χϵ ⲡϣhpi mφ† φiωt :	‘the son of God, the father’:
ϣⲁnχoc χϵ φiωt mⲡxc̄ ⲓhc̄	we say ‘the father of Christ, Jesus’,

[218] Difficult to determine this word as partially restored by the editor.

[219] Alternatively active – ‘so that they may lose those who trust in his name’.

ⲟⲩⲟⲩ ⲉⲛⲭⲱⲕ ⲛⲉⲩⲭⲏ ⲛⲓⲙ ⲛⲉⲙ[ⲁⲩ	and we complete every prayer with him;
ⲱⲁⲛⲭⲟⲥ ⲭⲉ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲓⲧⲉⲛ ⲡⲉⲕⲙⲟ[ⲛⲟ	we say 'through your only
ⲅⲉⲛⲏⲥ ⲛⲱⲏⲣⲓ ⲡⲉⲛⲟⲥ ⲓⲏ̅ⲥ̅ ⲡⲭ̅ⲥ̅ †	son, our Lord Jesus Christ'."

Liturgical Texts

Lord Have Mercy

One of the formulas that gained prominence in the Christian East, particularly in liturgical use, was the "*Kyrie Eleison*" or the "Lord have mercy". This formula has roots in the Scripture[220], not necessarily in a liturgical context but in the context of personal pleading.

The use of this formula was first recorded in liturgical prayers in the fourth-century text *The Apostolic Constitution (book VIII)*[221] in the context of a series of litanies that are followed by the response "Lord Have Mercy". This formula is further evident in the liturgy of St Basil[222], a version of which is used in the Coptic Church today, where it contains numerous responses of the same formula "Lord have mercy".

[220] Old Testament (Psalm 4:2,6:3, 9:14, 25:11, 121:3; Isaiah 33:2; Tobit 8:10; etc., in the Septuagint). The New Testament the form occurs repeatedly (Matthew 9:27, 20:30, 15:22; Mark 10:47; Luke 16:24, 17:13).

[221] Apostolic Constitution VIII.

[222] O.H.E. KHS-Burmester, 1976.

This short prayer was also used and recommended by monks as in the account of Abba Philemon, which records that he "repeated within himself 'Lord have mercy' with his whole attention and for a considerable time."[223]

The Psalis (seventh – ninth century)

Psalis are a collection of liturgical hymns usually chanted in the midnight service. There is a special Psali for every day of the week, which is followed by a Theotokia (or a praise for the Virgin Mary). The earliest attestation of the Psalis comes in fragments that date from the twelfth or thirteenth century, and the earliest full attestation of the Psalis comes from the fourteenth century in the writings of Abu Al-Barakat[224], and it appears identical to the one used in the Coptic Church today. Yet, as Dr. Youhanna Nessim convincingly suggests, its linguistic style suggests that it was first composed in the seventh to ninth centuries[225]. Its original composition is in the Coptic language and it lacks any Greek influence, which suggests that it was written in Coptic after the Arab conquest in the seventh century. It also shows fluency in the Coptic language and no influence of the Arabic language, which is a feature of many of the writings composed before the decline of the Coptic language in the tenth century. Youhanna Nessim further suggests that the Psalis were composed by the monks of Scetes. Yet their use was not limited to the monks as it seems to have quickly been applied in a liturgical setting, as evidenced by certain twelfth- and thirteenth-century attestations[226].

[223] Kadloubovsky & Palmer, 1992, p. 404.

[224] Abū al-Barakāt ibn al-As'ad Ibn Kubr, 1950.

[225] Youssef, 2009.

[226] Youssef, 2009, p. 245.

The name of Jesus is a recurring theme in the Psalis. Each day of the week, praises are dedicated to the name of Jesus in a special way and present a different formula each day, yet it was not only the name of Jesus that was repeated in every verse of the Psali. In Fr. Abd El-Masih Salib Al-Masoudi's nineteenth-century edition of the *Psalmodia* (*Book of midnight praise*) he published an annotated edition of the Psalis[227]. In this edition, he referenced the words and themes from the Psali to verses from the Scripture. In addition, R. F. Lanne[228] has explained the themes used in the Psalis and their relationship with some monastic texts, such as the *AP*.

It is important to note the function of liturgical hymnography and how it was used. Among the many functions, hymnography was a tool for meditation and was actively integrated into the everyday life of both monks and village laypeople[229]. The use of repeated formulas was a memory tool for listeners not only to meditate on the hymns during liturgical prayers but also to memorise it by reciting it throughout the day. This was particularly evident in the repeated formulas of the Jesus prayer. If memorisation for the purpose of use outside the liturgical setting was not an intended function of the hymn there would have been no need for repeated verses as they would have had liturgical books to read from during the service.

Another function of hymnography was to teach church doctrine. The only way to teach monks and village lay people the doctrines of the church was through hymns[230].

[227] Baramous Monastery, 2003 which is taken from MS 2/74 From the el Baramous monastery library.

[228] Lanne, 1977.

[229] L. MacCoull, 1999, p. 359.

[230] L. MacCoull, 1999, p. 372.

This is a case in point for the Psalies as we know that during the same time of the composition of the psali, a controversy started in monastic settlements in Kellia regarding the use of the name of Jesus in prayer[231]. Therefore composing the psali would have been the monks way of teaching other monks and village laypeople the right doctrine.

Therefore, the Psalis attest to the liturgical use of the Arrow Prayer among the monks of Scetes in their liturgical prayers, possibly as early as the seventh century. This liturgical use matches the earlier monastic use of the invocation of the name of Jesus in different formulas mixed with verses from the Scripture. From twelfth- and thirteenth- century fragments, we can also conclude that the Psalis formed a bridge that passed on the spirituality and tradition of the Arrow Prayer from the desert to the everyday liturgical practice of lay people. This observation is particularly important, especially during periods such as the fifteenth until eighteenth centuries in which there were no textual references to the Arrow Prayer. Thus we see that the tradition was still practised in the daily celebration of the liturgy, not only in monasteries, but also in parish churches.

Arabic Christian Literature

The book of the Master and Disciple (eleventh century)

[231] Guillaumont, 1974, p. 71.

A text titled "The Master and Disciple" [232], written during the last three decades of the eleventh century by an unknown author[233], shows a very interesting development in the practice of continuous prayer. This text contains an instruction to lay Christians on how a Christian should conduct his life. In one of the questions, the disciple asks: "What is the ascription of praise and holiness *[al-tasbih wal-taqdis]* that is obligatory for the believer?" The master answers:

> The early morning prayer when he arises from sleep, before all work. Let him pray to the best of his ability and say in his prayer whatever [prayers] he might know; but it will suffice him that he say:
>
> "My Lord Jesus, have mercy on me!
>
> My Lord Jesus, help me!
>
> I praise you, my Lord Jesus, and bow down to you!"
>
> These three words will suffice him if he does not know anything besides them.

The Master further emphasises the three elements of the prayer to be "let all his petition be for the forgiveness of sins, salvation from Satan the true enemy, and the attainment of the kingdom of heaven."

He then confirms that it is to be used by all laity throughout the day, as we have observed earlier by St Shenoute:

> whether man or woman; let them pray it before their labour for their subsistence.

[232] Many texts with the same title are found in the Arabic-Coptic tradition, see Swanson, 1997.

[233] For a study of the text and dating, see Swanson, 2000.

a) At sunset, let him pray and prostrate himself as in the early morning prayer.

b) The bedtime prayer, before he goes to sleep. Let him pray and prostrate himself as in the early morning and the evening prayers.

These three [prayers] are incumbent upon [each] man and woman every day; they have no pretext before God for neglecting them. As for the other four, it is incumbent upon them to pray them while in their places of livelihood, whether seated or standing, riding or walking, with their faces directed wherever they were, because the Lord is in every place and every direction.

He then concludes:

Other than that, let the name of the Lord Jesus be always in their hearts and mouths. Whenever one thinks of him, let one say:

"My Lord Jesus, have mercy on me!

My Lord Jesus, help me!

I praise you, my Lord Jesus![234]

Of this eleventh-century text, two observations can be made. The first is that even though the ascribed prayers have the name of Jesus at their core, continuous prayer is nevertheless the primary concern of the writer. This is made obvious in the order in which the author lists the elements of prayer:

- Petition for forgiveness of sins
- Salvation from Satan the true enemy
- The attainment of the kingdom of heaven

[234] Cited from Swanson, 2000, pp. 701-702.

- Let the name of Jesus Christ be always in their heart and mouth

Secondly, the practice of continuous prayer seems to have not been limited to the monastic circle. In the above text, the formula is ascribed to both men and women, to the working class and the non-working class. This shift from the monastic use of monologue prayers inscribed within the monastic circle to the general laity is not a late invention of the prayer because, as we have already observed, these prayers were used among the laity as early as the time of St Shenoute in the fifth century.

Yet what is interesting to observe here is that the use of the Arrow Prayer comes as a replacement for the traditional church prayers of the hours *(The Agbia)*[235]. The reason for this replacement is the gradual decline of the use of the Coptic language during the end of the eleventh century and the unfamiliarity of the Coptic laity with the prayer of the hours, which was not yet translated. As Mark Swanson has observed, there was unease about praying in the Coptic language, which was not understood by the laity as was expressed in the canons of Gabriel Ibn Turayk, the 70th Patriarch of Alexandria (1131-1145). The Third Canon reads:

> It is incumbent upon each of you bishops to instruct the Christian people whom he pastors, and to teach them by heart the *Doxa,* the Prayer which the Lord Christ taught his disciples, and the holy Creed, *in the language that they know and understand,* in order thus to pray during times of prayer, and *not* to jabber senselessly *[yahd'i]* in what they do not know[236].

[235] Swanson, 2000, p. 710.

[236] Swanson, 2000, p. 711 Although widespread illiteracy prevailed during the middle ages in Egypt, we know from the fourteenth century text *Kitāb al-jawharah al-nafīsah fī 'ulūm al-Kanīsah*: 35 that there was specific seven hours of the day that Christians were expected to pray. In Ch 60 of the same

St Bulus al Bushi - Bishop of Old Cairo (1170s-1250)

As the name implies, Bulus al Bushi was from the town of Bush, which is located north of modern-day Beni Suef. He became a monk at the monastery of St Samuel at Qalamun. After the death of Patriarch John VI (1189-1216), he was nominated to the patriarchate. Internal conflict within the church, as well as external pressure from the government, influenced the election of Cyril III Ibn Laqlaq (75th patriarch), who was ordained instead. Because of his piety and good standing with the new patriarch, the synod of bishops and the people, he was ordained a bishop of Old Cairo[237].

In addition to his popularity in the ecclesiastical circle, he was also one of the most prolific Arabic Christian writers. Arabic was widely used among the Copts and the church library lacked original Arabic texts, so he used his knowledge of the patristic literature to produce a number of spiritual and theological treatises that are mostly available today. Among them, there is a group of homilies on eight major feasts in the Coptic calendar that celebrate events in the life of Christ. In the homily about the feast of the Annunciation, he urges the congregation to give this feast its due importance since it is chronologically the first feast in the story of incarnation. He does this by giving them a list of spiritual exercises they can do, such as[238]:

---

text the author does not give concisions to working laity but advices to observe the prayers during their work which attests to the emphasis on the laity's observance of the prayers.

[237] Biographical information from Davis, 2008, pp. 238-240.

[238] The Arabic text comes from, St Macarius's monastery manuscript (M18, 3v-17r). The English translation is mine.

فالآن قراءة الكتب التي من تلقاء الروح كرامتكم، (وكذلك) الترتيل في كلام الله،	So now let reading the inspired books be your pride as well as singing God's words
فخركم الوقوف في الصلوات،	your honour is in standing up in prayer
عزاؤكم مواظبة الابتهال لله،	your consolation is your constant joy in the Lord
رجاؤكم اتصالكم به بمثابرة،	your hope is in your relentless communication with Him
تذكار اسمه القدوس غذاؤكم،	Remembrance of His holy name be your food
كما يقول داود: "إني إذا ذكرتك، تمتليء نفسي كشبعها من الشحم والدسم"[239]	as David has said: if I remember you, my soul is satisfied as from marrow and fatness. (Psalm 63: 5)

While this is a lonely quote among the many writings of the author and not a dominating theme in his other writings, it is an important one because of its timing, as I mentioned already that Bulus al Bushi is one of the first writers to write in the Arabic language rather than translate existing Greek or Coptic writings. Therefore, to have this quote from the outset of the Arabic Christian heritage shows a great dedication to the prayer.

Pope Kyrillos VI (twentieth century)

The twentieth century saw a great revival of the use of the Jesus Prayer. The reason for this revival was the publication of the Arabic translation of *The Way of a Pilgrim*

[239] Homily on the feast of Annunciation, *St Macarius monastery library* Ms 18, published in St Mark magazine October 2009.

in 1950[240]. Yet before we discuss the effect of this publication, I want to discuss the use of the Arrow Prayer, which includes the Jesus Prayer, during the first half of the twentieth century by looking at the writings of one of the century's most influential personalities in the Coptic Church in this period, Pope Kyrillos VI.

Fr. Mina, the pope's name as a monk, lived most of his monastic life in solitude at a cave outside El Baramouse monastery, then at a windmill near El-Moukatam mountain at the outskirts of Cairo,. Fr. Mina continued his monastic life in a church in Old Cairo where he took care of the revival of the monastic life at St Samuel's Monastery of El-Qalamun in the Fayoum Oasis. He also served the university students who came to Cairo to study. In these two decades, Fr. Mina established a reputation as a spiritual director who was also devoted to the solitary and contemplative life in the midst of the city[241]. He was later elected to the Patriarchate in 1959.

Many letters survived and are published in a fragmentary manner amongst a large collection of published books detailing his miracles. These letters were written when he started his life in the windmill in 1947 till he became Patriarch in 1959. In these letters, he advises one of his spiritual sons, Fr. Macari El Samuel (the late Bishop Samuel):

> From time to time while you are at work, you can say "O Jesus, my Lord, help me. Jesus, my Lord, save me. I praise you, my Lord, Jesus Christ". The

[240] French, 1954 *The Way of a Pilgrim* is the story of a monk who goes into the Siberian wilderness to learn the practice of the Jesus Prayer from monks who live there. The writer of this text is a great advocate of the Jesus Prayer in its Athonite tradition.

[241] Biographical information from Watson, 1996.

> name of Jesus is the sword with which we can torment our enemies. Become accustomed to saying these words. If you say them silently within your heart, they will be a prayer[242].

While it can be argued that the above advice is influenced by the publication of the Arabic translation of *The Way of a Pilgrim,* it could also have come from his personal experience of the Coptic Church's liturgical life, as he was accustomed to praying midnight psalmody and liturgy daily. This liturgical life influenced his personal prayer and spirituality. Another reason is his reference to the Arabic translation of the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, known as *The Garden of the Monks,* which he helped in its publication in 1951.[243] In one of the letters to a monk, he quotes Abba Jacob's visit to Abba Isidore:

> Abba Jacob visited Abba Isidore and found him writing. While sitting he saw that from time to time he raised his face towards heaven and silently moved his lips. He asked him, "Why did you do that father? What were you saying?" He replied, "Don't you do this?" Abba Jacob said, "No father." He said, "If you don't then you have not been a monk for even a single day. As to what I was saying, it was, 'My Lord, Jesus Christ, help me. My Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me. I praise You my Lord, Jesus Christ. My Lord help me. Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord'"[244].

[242] Unknown Author, 2000, p. 37.

[243] Vogt, 1997, pp. 113-114.

[244] Unknown Author, 2000, p. 37.

A third and more convincing reason is the presence of similar teachings in the writings of one of the earlier monastic figures who lived in the same monastery as Pope Kyrillos, Fr Abd el Messeh el Masoudy (1816-1906). In one of the letters that he wrote to Pope Kyrillos V upon his request, which was titled "To every monk who wants to live a true ascetic life", he says[245]:

وثابر علي التوسل قلبا ولسانا باسم يسوع حكمة الله وقدرة الله ليستنير عقلك ويستضيئ ذهنك بأنوار معرفة أبن الله وينعكس ذلك الضياء عنك علي المبروءات التي أبدعتها حكمة الله وتدرك سر الوجود بألهام الله	Persevere in supplication with your heart and your mouth in the name of Jesus the wisdom of God and the power of God so that your mind and thought is enlightened with the knowledge of the Son of God. This light would reflect on all that is around you and you will comprehend the mystery of being in His presence.
وعليك ياحبيبي بالتجرد الكلي والفقر الطوعي إستغناء بالله وبيسوع الذي به ومنه وله كل ماخلق الله ليكون قلبك وعقلك مسكنا لحلول روح الله فأنك إذا صقلت مرآة نفسك وجلوت صفحة ذهنك بذكر أسم الله أنكشفت لك أسرار الله وغدوت من خواص الله وكان نصيبك الخلود في جنان الله .	My beloved, you must acquire detachment and voluntary poverty and Jesus should be sufficient for you, who by him, and through him everything was created so that your heart and mind may be a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit. If you shine the mirror of your soul and clear your mind by the remembrance of the name of the Lord, the mysteries of God will be revealed to you and you will become one of

[245] This letter is published in full in the biography of his nephew, Fr Abd el Messeh Salib el Masoudy, A Monk from the Baramouse Monastery, 1998, p. 85.

	God's people and you will live with God forever.

There is no doubt that later monks were greatly influenced by the publication of the Arabic translation of *The Way of a Pilgrim*, as Kari Vogt has observed in her study[246]. Even though we see a revival of the Jesus Prayer, yet we see it in its Coptic tradition, as she notices too many variants to the formula of the Jesus Prayer.

In her study, Vogt interviewed a number of unnamed members of the clergy and deaconesses. One of the Bishops (Bishop A), whose spiritual guide was Pope Kyrillos VI, relates that "the only time I mentioned the Jesus Prayer was when I asked his permission to practice it. Pope Kyrillos gave his permission at once"[247]. The same bishop expressed his familiarity with the place of the Jesus Prayer in the Coptic tradition as a part of the Arrow Prayer:

> The Jesus Prayer is a part of the Egyptian tradition that goes back to the first Christian centuries. The first monks were expected to practice al-da'ima, the unceasing prayer. This was, however, not what we call the Jesus Prayer today but a formula like "O Lord help me", "Forgive me, O Lord, I am a sinner," – what we call the 'arrow prayer' (*sahmyat*). These short prayers are easy to combine with all kinds of work; making baskets or other handwork. The Coptic Church has no rules [concerning the prayer]: We admire the strict rules of others – they admire our freedom[248].

[246] Vogt, 1997.

[247] Vogt, 1997, pp. 113-114.

[248] Vogt, 1997, p. 114.

Matthew the Poor (twintieth century)

Fr Matthew the poor is one of the twentieth century most prolific writer. In 1948 he became a monk and was one of Pope Kyrillos's many spiritual disciples[249]. He wrote his well-known book on the topic of prayer "The Orthodox Prayer Life" in the early sixties. This book was compiled from a number of articles that he previously published over a decade[250].

Though he dedicated a chapter to the practice of continuous prayer and refers to the use of short prayer or psalms verses he never refereed to it as the Arrow Prayer. In this book he laid out a systematic approach to prayer, which starts from vocal to mental prayer and then meditation, which is of interest to my thesis.

Meditation for Fr Matthew is defined as "profound and heartfelt Bible reading"[251] which is practiced by the slow meditative reading of the scripture "repeating them in an audible voice"[252] the reiteration and rumination of the words of the scripture eventually results in making the words of the scripture your own. Yet meditation is not only limited to repeating the reading in an audible voice but it extends to "reiterating that reading silently and inwardly more than once"[253]

[249] Watson, 2006, p. 70.

[250] Watson, 2006, p. 67.

[251] Matthew The Poor, 2003, p. 43.

[252] Matthew The Poor, 2003, p. 44.

[253] Matthew The Poor, 2003, p. 45.

The practice of meditation is not for the purpose of memorising it but memorisation is a byproduct of this practice. This is vastly different from the fourth century practice where memorisation came first then contemplation.

The Jesus Prayer In the Byzantine Tradition

In this section, I will briefly explore the practice of continuous prayer in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, namely in the desert of Sinai and later on Mount Athos. Though the practice of ceaseless prayer in the Byzantine tradition is outside the scope of my thesis, yet it is vital to investigate this tradition, even if only briefly, because for centuries it has run parallel to the Coptic tradition of the practice of the Arrow Prayer. As will be seen, however, it forms a whole new set of rules that are in a sense very different from the traditional practice that started and continued in the Egyptian tradition. Yet the aim in both traditions remains continuous prayer to God, and to be continuously in His presence. It is also important to study the practice of continuous prayer in the Eastern tradition because it was out of this tradition that the revival of the use of the Jesus Prayer took place in the twentieth century, after the publication of the well-known book that deals with this prayer *The Way of a Pilgrim*. It was this book that revived the use of the Jesus Prayer in Egypt in the twentieth century[254] and added certain elements onto an already existing tradition, such as the emphasis on the Jesus Prayer formula. The impact of the revival of Eastern Orthodox hesychasm on twentieth century Coptic monastic practise would be a vital area for further study.

[254] Patricia Ann Eshagh, further argues that it was the reason for the spread of the use of the prayer in western christianity Eshagh, 2016, p. 48.

The earliest known Greek writer outside of Egypt to write about the topic of continuous prayer was the fifth-century ascetic St Nilus of Ankara, who died about 430 AD. Kallistos Ware argues that in the discourses on the eight vices, which are attributed to St Nilus, the theme of the use of the invocation of the name of Jesus is present, yet it is not a dominant theme[255]. This is true only in part, because even though he advised the invocation of the name of Jesus Christ, he did not mean the invocation of the name but the remembrance. As Hausherr rightly notes, "It appears that Nilus understood 'invocation of the venerable name of Jesus' more in the theological than in the phonic sense"[256]. Even if St Nilus understood the invocation of the name in the phonic sense, he was not limited to it. This is confirmed in his advice to combat the thought of fornication by saying "Son of God, help me"[257], which appears to be more closely related to the Macarian formula than it is to the Jesus Prayer formula. St Nilus further explains his understanding of the "invocation of the name" in the following passage: "The weapons to use against the demons are: remembrance of our Saviour, fervent invocation of the sacred name day and night, frequent signs of the Cross on the forehead, the breast, the heart, and other places, and also the meditation of inspired texts"[258].

From the above passage, we may conclude that St Nilus offers a very primitive form of the Jesus Prayer.

[255] Kallistos Ware, 1985, p. 557.

[256] Hausherr, 1978, p. 212.

[257] Cited from Hausherr, 1978, p. 212.

[258] Cited from Hausherr, 1978, p. 212.

A generation after St Nilus came St Diadochos, Bishop of Photiki (400-487AD)[259]. His main work, "The hundred Gnostic Chapters", is considered by some scholars to be the inception of the Jesus Prayer. Both Kallistos Ware[260] and Lev Gillet[261] argue that St Diadochos is the one who first developed the formula and technique of the Jesus Prayer[262]. Hausherr had earlier argued against the attribution of the development of the Jesus Prayer formula to St Diadochos[263], noting that he talks about the remembrance of the name of Jesus, but not necessarily the invocation of the name[264], as can be noted in the following passages:

> "Cleave fervently to the remembrance of the glorious and holy name of the Lord Jesus"[265].
>
> "If the intellect at that time (when overcome by sleep in prayer) is remembering the Lord Jesus attentively, it easily destroys the enemy"[266].

Ware, on the other hand, argues that the use of the definite article before one of the passages, "the O Lord Jesus", gives the possibility that he was referring to a particular prayer, to an invocation and not merely remembrance[267].

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[259] Ermatinger, 2010, p. 1.

[260] Kallistos Ware, 1985, p. 560.

[261] Gillet, 1987, p. 36.

[262] Kallistos Ware, 1985, p. 559.

[263] Hausherr, 1978, p. 267.

[264] As Irénée Hausherr explains that the remembrance of the name of Jesus does not necessarily mean saying the name Jesus, but can refer to the remembrance of God through invocation of verses from scripture Hausherr, 1978, p. 224.

[265] *Diadochos of Photiki: On Spiritual Knowledge*: 31 Palmer, Sherrard, & Ware, 1983, p. 261.

[266] *Diadochos of Photiki: On Spiritual Knowledge*: 32 Palmer et al., 1983, p. 262.

[267] Kallistos Ware, 1985, pp. 560-561.

Ware's argument seems to be more plausible, especially seeing as St Diadochus recommends the use of the specific name of Jesus in other passages. It is clear from the passages cited above that the remembrance of God especially through the invocation of the name of Jesus, is very prominent in St Diadochus's practice of continuous prayer. He might have also used or suggested the formula but it is not clear from his hundred chapters if he did so. There is a high possibility that when he was talking about "the prayer 'Lord Jesus'" that he was referring to a formula of the Jesus Prayer. This is supported by Ware's observation of St Diadochus's good knowledge of the Macarian homilies and the writings of St Evagrius who both used a jesus prayer formula in one way or another. Yet Dorries regards the Macarian influence upon Diadochus as far more significant than that of Evagrius. In his view, Diadochus might even be considered a disciple of Macarius[268].

As we approach the last decades of the fifth century, we see a new centre of monasticism rising in Sinai and Palestine. With this shift, we see a growing number of saints, some of whom have some roots in the desert of Egypt, either by spending their early years of monasticism there or being influenced by the writings of the Egyptian monks[269]. So when we speak of the history of the Jesus Prayer, we can consider the Sinaite and Palestinian monasticism as a "transmitter" of the Egyptian tradition rather than originators of a new tradition[270]. While we can discern some kind of devotion to the name of Jesus, there is no sign of a strict formula.

[268] Kallistos Ware, 1985, p. 558.

[269] For a good review, see Bruria Bitton-Ashkelony & Kofsky, 2006, pp. 6-46).

[270] Hausherr, 1978, p. 279.

Among the saints of this transitional stage is St Dosithy, the disciple of St Dorotheos of Gaza, who lived in the second half of the sixth century[271]. In the life of Dosithy we read this very interesting passage: "For he [Dorotheos] lived in continual remembrance of God. [He] handed down to him [Dosithy] the rule that he should always repeat these words: 'Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on me! Son of God, save me!' He therefore said this prayer continually"[272].

What we see here is not only a combination of invocation and remembrance but a combination of the two elements of the Jesus Prayer, the name of Jesus and the asking for mercy. This echos the Macarian spirituality: "Concentrate on this name of our Lord Jesus Christ with contrite heart, concentrate on calling Him: 'our Lord Jesus, have mercy on me'"[273].

This hypothesis is plausible, especially given that Dorotheos himself was a disciple of saints Basrsanuphius and John who lived in the Egyptian desert at the beginning of their monastic life[274]. Hausherr further suggests that there is no mention in the text that this is to be the only prayer he ought to use, but rather that Dorotheos selected one of many formulas that he learned from saints Barsanuphius and John (his spiritual directors) that he thought was most appropriate for his disciple, yet leaving him with the great degree of freedom that would be observed later on[275]. This can be shown in the next passage in the life when Abba Dorotheos asked Dosithy about his prayers

[271] The earliest Greek *Life* of Dorotheos which mentions the use of the Jesus prayer is dated to the tenth century which is two centuries after St Macarius' *Life.*

[272] Wheeler, 1977, p. 42.

[273] *The Virtues of St Macarius of Egypt*: 41 Vivian, 2004b, p. 117.

[274] Hausherr, 1978, p. 269.

[275] Cited from Wheeler, 1977, p. 43.

and he replied, "Pardon me, Father, I have no longer the strength to keep it going.' Dorotheos said to him, 'never mind, leave your prayer now just remember God and think that he is there at your side"[276].

In the seventh century, a very prominent figure lived in the Sinai desert and wrote *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. St John Climacus has been referred to by many thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Hesycasts to be one of the main advocates to the fixed formula of the Jesus Prayer. Undisputedly, the use of short prayers is an integral part of St John's spirituality. In *The Ladder* he strongly expresses his view that prayer should be short and simple:

> In your prayers there is no need for high flown words, for it is the simple and unsophisticated babbling of children that has more often won the heart of the Father in heaven. Try not to talk excessively in your prayer, in case your mind is distracted by the search for words. One word from the publican sufficed to placate God, and a single utterance saved the thief. Talkative prayer frequently distracts the mind and deludes it, whereas brevity makes for concentration[277].
>
> "If it happens that, as you pray, some word evokes delight or remorse within you, linger over it[278].

In his exposition, he not only prefers the use of short frequent prayers over long organised phrases, but he further suggests that a monk should have complete freedom in his choice of phrase. This is alluded to in his metaphor of the "babbling of

[276] Cited from Wheeler, 1977, p. 43.

[277] *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*: Step 28 Luibheid & Russell, 1982, p. 275.

[278] *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*: Step 28 Luibheid & Russell, 1982, pp. 275-276.

children". He further emphasised this idea by suggesting that one should simply repeat any word that evokes delight while praying.

Elsewhere, he prescribes specific spiritual texts[279] but he is sure to make clear that "all loaves of heavenly bread do not have the same appearance"[280], meaning that short prayers (heavenly bread) do not have a strict formula (same appearance): different verses are more useful in some situations than others and different people may use different formulas than others. Among these many formulas, the Jesus Prayer is present. He recommends it as a weapon that should be used to flog the enemy for those who may be frightened in the dark: "Do not hesitate to go in the dark at night to those places where you are normally frightened…as you go where fright will lay hold of you, put on the armour of prayer and when you reach the spot, stretch out your hand and flog your enemies with the name of Jesus"[281]. Elsewhere, he advises the use of the Jesus Prayer for temptations that might come while you are lying in bed:

> We have to be especially sober and watchful when we are lying in bed, for that is the time when our mind has to contend with demons outside our body. And if our body is inclined to be sensual then it will easily betray us. So let the remembrance of death and the concise Jesus prayer go to sleep with you and get up with you[282].

[279] Psalm 15: 8, Luke 21:19, Matthew 26:41, Proverbs 24:27, Psalm 114:6, Romans 8:18, Psalm 49:22, Psalm 6:3 in step 15 p. 184.

[280] *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*: Step 27 Luibheid & Russell, 1982, p. 272.

[281] *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*: Step 21 Luibheid & Russell, 1982, pp. 199-200.

[282] *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*: Step 15 Luibheid & Russell, 1982, p. 178.

It has been argued by Irénée Hausherr[283] that while the Jesus Prayer is named in this text, it does not necessarily mean a formula that includes the name of Jesus in it; especially as elsewhere St John refers to the Lord's prayer by the name of the Jesus Prayer[284]. Kallistos Ware counters this argument by saying that if St John was merely referring to a general form of prayer, he would have used the term 'single-phase prayer' rather than 'single-phase Jesus prayer'[285]. Ware's argument seems much more plausible, especially as short formulas of prayer that include the name of Jesus had already been adopted by the monks in Sinai.

Other than St John Climacus, there are two other significant figures from Sinai who are known for having taught the Jesus Prayer, St Hesychius and St Philotheus. Like Climacus, both saints have linked the Jesus Prayer with breathing. Hesychius said, "Let the remembrance of Jesus be united with your breathing"; and Philotheus "We must always breath God"[286]. Both saints have emphasis on breathing, which may or may not be a macarian influence[287].

From the seventh till the fourteenth century, there is a big gap in the Byzantine literature about the use of the Jesus Prayer. There is no evidence that it fell out of use, but there is no Byzantine writer who has written about it, with the exception of some instances that have been briefly discussed by Hausherr[288], most of which do not specifically refer to the Jesus Prayer but also the "Lord Have Mercy" and the sign of

[283] Hausherr, 1978, pp. 280-286.

[284] *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*: Step 9 Luibheid & Russell, 1982, p. 153.

[285] Luibheid & Russell, 1982, p. 46.

[286] Both quotes are cited from Kallistos Ware, 1986b, p. 183).

[287] *The Virtues of St Macarius of Egypt*: 42 Vivian, 2004b, p. 117.

[288] Hausherr, 1978, pp. 291-302.

the cross. One of these writers is St Symeon the New Theologian, who did not directly write about the prayer yet, as Gillet concludes, it is "absent indeed by name, but present in spirit"[289]. Interestingly, however, there is a story in his biography that recounts him continually praying "Lord, have mercy".

It was not until the fourteenth century that the Jesus Prayer started to polarise on Mount Athos into a very specific formula and a special breathing technique that preceded or sometimes accompanied the prayer. This development was first noticed in the writings of St Gregory the Sinaite 1346AD, who spent a considerable time on Mount Athos where he had a great influence in propagating this mode of prayer, not only on Mount Athos but also, later on in his life, throughout Bulgaria, Serbia and Russia[290]. The Jesus Prayer formula known today – "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner" – holds a central place in the life and teaching of St Gregory[291]. He further insists on a body posture and breathing technique that, as he suggested, enable the monk to concentrate during the prayer.

The fourteenth century also saw a great controversy that influanced the idea and practice of the Jesus Prayer, which is commonly known as the Hesychast controversy. Hesychasm is a way to attain perfection by union with God through the practice of stillness and perpetual prayer. In practical terms Hesychast spirituality provided a health milieu for the development of the Jesus Prayer because of its emphasis on continuous prayer and the practice of solitude and silence[292].

[289] Gillet, 1987, p. 45.

[290] Kallistos Ware, 1986a.

[291] Goettmann & Goettmann, 2008, p. 22.

[292] Hester, 2001, p. 6; also see Maloney, 2008, pp. 27-33.

The main advocate of the Hesychast movement was St Gregory Palamas (1296-1359) and his opponent was Barlaam the Calabrian (1290-1348)[293]. Central to this controversy was the contention concerning the way humans can attain the mystical experience of God, as either uncreated (Gregory) or created (Barlaam). St Gregory was victorious in this controversy, which in turn gave the Jesus Prayer a greater devotion until today.

From this short review of the development of the Jesus Prayer, we can conclude that the practice of the single formula with the name of Jesus has gradually developed into a parallel tradition at Mount Athos. This prayer was already in use in Egypt as early as St Anthony and shared many of its characteristics yet, by the fourteenth century, the prayer developed into a single formula that was accompanied by certain body postures and breathing techniques that were specific to the Athonite tradition. It is important to point out this development when studying the practice of the Arrow Prayer, as it was often confused with the Jesus Prayer.

Conclusion

It is clear from the sources examined above[294] that the Arrow Prayer has remained an integral part of the prayer life of the Copts from the early days of monasticism until

[293] For a brief summary of the controversy, read Špidlik, 2005, pp. 319-349) and Kallistos Ware, 1986a, pp. 248-255).

[294] I examined the following texts, some mention prayer but none mention prayer without ceasing: Besa, *Letters and Sermons*; Ps-shenoute/Besa, *On Christian Behavior*; Panegyric on Apollo; Panegyric

the present day. Despite the silence of the sources regarding the use of the Arrow Prayer in some later centuries[295], especially between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries, we know from the sources discussed above that the prayer was integrated into the church's liturgical prayers and practice. Therefore, it would not be unreasonable to conclude that these liturgical practices acted as reminders for its use in private prayers.

There are a number of conclusions that we can draw from these sources. Firstly, we can see that the Arrow Prayer had no set formula. We can conclude that some formulas were more popular than others, especially in liturgical prayers, but when it came to personal use, as evident in hagiography, we see as many formulas as there are stories. The source of most of these formulas was the Scripture.

Secondly, while we can say that the practice of the Arrow Prayer was formulated in an Egyptian monastic setting, its use was by no means limited to monks. In the instructions of St Shenoute, the letters of Barsanuphius and John, the text of the Master and Disciple, and the homily of St Bulus al Bushi we observe a consistent voice that included laity in the practice of the prayer.

One last observation regards the flexibility of this practice throughout the normal activities of the day, not restricting it to a specific time or place. This is again prevalent in the sources listed above, as they specify that the prayer should be done

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on John the Baptist attributed to Theodosius; Rufus of Shoteb's, *Commentaries*; Benjamin's, *On Cana of Galilee*. As well as Coptic Arabic literature: Pseudo-Sawirus, *Kitab al-Idah*; Sawirus, *Kitab Musbah*

[295] We also need to consider the fact that during this period there is a general scarcity of sources from all genres.

while undertaking day-to-day activities. However, that is not to say that the flexibility in the practice of the Arrow Prayer that was afforded to the laity was a special concession and that monastics required a more rigid mode of practice. As we can see in the sources, monks also continuously practised their prayer while they were doing their manual labour, as was the case in the *AP,* St Shenoute's *Instruction to monks,* and the life of St John of Scetes.

PART TWO

ANTECEDENTS AND CONTEXT

3- Arrow Prayer as Weapon of War

The purpose of this chapter is two fold. The first is to show the heavy reliance on the name of Jesus and short verses from the psalms in private prayer to fight against demons. The other purpose of the chapter is to show the wide spread use of the war imagery when using short prayers. This is particularly important since the earliest attestation to the name of the prayer comes from the twentieth century which is very late attestation. In this chapter I would like to demonstrate that though the name of the prayer was not used in earlier centuries yet the imagery of short prayers as weapons against the demons was well known in Christian texts in general and monastic texts in particular.

Demons have been a regular feature of the monastic literature since the first recorded monastic biography, the *Life* of Anthony. In fact, we can see that a substantial part of the *Life* revolves around fighting, or rather the saints' victory over demons or advice on how to discern the tricks of the demons[296]. As early as the fifth paragraph, we see Anthony having his first encounter with demons, and it is also this chapter that reveals many aspects about demonology that are consistent with other Christian writings from other genres as early as Origen, Irenaeus, and Justin the Martyr and continues throughout other ascetical and hagiographical writings. Eshagh brings to our attention the fact that the early monastic fathers living in the desert are perceived by an early

[296] Harmless, 2004, p. 85.

Egyptian peasant to live where demons live, as the desert for an ancient Egyptians was the home of demons[297].

One of these aspects is the *Life*'s undertone as a theological apology against heretics[298]; in the case of the *Life* of Anthony, it is the Arians, where St Athanasius emphasises how the incarnation was the reason for St Anthony's victory: "he who had vaunted himself against flesh and blood was being rebuffed by a flesh and blood human being. For working with Anthony was the Lord, *who for us bore flesh and gave the body victory over the Devil*" [299]. In the closing paragraph of the *Life*, he again uses it as an apology against the pagans: "If the need arises, read this also to the pagans so they too may know in the same way that not only is our Lord Jesus Christ God and Son of God, but also that those who truly serve him and faithfully believe in him are *repudiating the demons whom the pagan themselves believe to be Gods*"[300].

The other aspect, which is much more common, is the use of Anthony's victory as an inspiration for other monastics to enjoy the same victory. In the preface, St Athanasius states that his intention in writing the *Life* was to *emulate his zeal.* Also, in paragraph five, he declares the victory that was won by Anthony in his first battle with the demons was "so that *each of those who struggle like Anthony* can say it is not

[297] Eshagh, 2016, p. 55.

[298] Some scholars such as Brakke (Brakke, 1998, pp. 201-203) have reduced the *Life* of Anthony to a work of political propaganda while others such as Harmless, 2004, p. 93 and Urbano, 2008, pp. 894-895 have taken a moderate view of Athanasius' political stances.

[299] *Greek Life of Anthony*: 5.7 Vivian & Athanassakis, 2003, p. 69 emphasis is mine.

[300] *Greek Life of Anthony*: 94.2 Vivian & Athanassakis, 2003, p. 259 emphasis is mine.

I but the grace of God that is in me"[301]. For St Athanasius the monk's life should be in the state of constant warfare to ensure his spiritual progress[302].

David Brakke[303], in his treatment of the demonic attacks that St Anthony endured, notices a progression in the way that demons launched their attacks. The first attack came in the form of "thoughts" that distracted him by wondering about his sister's wellbeing, the possessions he left behind, pleasure of life in the form of food and the luxuries of life. When St Anthony was able to conquer these thoughts, he was faced by a second wave of attacks, which was in the form of visions aimed at making him feel confused, helpless, and dejected. The third wave of attacks was directed at the body, which came in the form of physical attacks and the appearance of women. As Brakke finally remarks, "these are not systematic, precisely ordered lists, but they provided in part the ingredients for Evagrius's carefully ordered set of eight thoughts, which would serve as the template for the monk's struggle with the demonic as Evagrius envisioned it"[304].

The struggle of the monk with demons was often depicted in monastic writings as an imagery of warfare. This warfare was sometimes between the demons and angels[305], other times between the monk and the demons. Furthermore, the attacks are sometimes initiated by the demons who try to distract the monk from his prayer or lead him to fall into fornication, which is a very common scenario in monastic literature. To a lesser extent, the monks are sometimes depicted as attacking the

[301] *Greek Life of Anthony*: 5.7 Vivian & Athanassakis, 2003, p. 69 emphasis is mine.

[302] Marx, 1956, p. 114.

[303] Brakke, 2006.

[304] Brakke, 2006, p. 28.

[305] As depicted in, *Macarius the Great:* 33 Ward, 1984a, p. 134; *Moses:* 1 Ward, 1984a, p. 138.

monks, as David commanded Joab to "take the city and sack it"[306]. Abba Poemen explains further, "the city is the enemy"[307]. In a later hagiography of St John of Scetes, he narrates that the demons once appeared to an elder named Youanis, saying: "stop, stop fighting me! I will not bother you again!"[308] Abba Youanis continued:

> I said to him: 'and what are these on your body?'
>
> He said: 'these are arrows.'
>
> I said to him: 'who did all this to you'
>
> He said: 'you are the one'
>
> I said to him: 'and how did I do this to you?'
>
> He said to me: 'every time you stand up to pray, one of these pierces my body'[309]

In other instances in the *sayings* there seems to be a confusion regarding who is fighting whom, as an anchorite once asked, "why do you fight me like this, Satan?" Satan replied, "it is you who fights me so greatly"[310]. Elsewhere, a demon is reluctant to wake up a sleeping monk because one time when he woke him "he got up and burned me by singing psalms and praying"[311].

Paragraph five of the *Life* of St Anthony clearly presents the struggle of St Anthony with the demons in the language of the martyr's struggle with beasts in the arena, as noted by Brakke:

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[306] *Poemen:* 193 Ward, 1984a, p. 194.

[307] *Poemen:* 193 Ward, 1984a, p. 194.

[308] I used the Arabic edition in Zanetti, 1996, pp. 233-335.

[309] Zanetti, 1996, pp. 233-335.

[310] *Anonymous:* 5.35 Stewart, 1997, p. 27.

[311] *Anonymous:* 6.36 Stewart, 1997, p. 27.

> Athanasius describes this combat, whether mental, physical, or visual, with the vocabulary of the arena: it is a "contest" (*Athlon*), in which the devil is "thrown for a fall" (*katapalaiein*) like the wrestler (VA 5.3, 7.1). Like the martyrs before him, Anthony proves paradoxically to be powerful and triumphant when he is the most vulnerable[312].

Later on in the *Life,* Athanasius is consistent in using the martyr language when he describes Anthony after a physical attack from the devil as "lying on the ground, unable to speak because of the torturous blows"[313]. In another instance, they appear to him in the shapes of various beasts that tortured martyrs in the arena: "the lion was roaring, wanting to leap on him; the bull acted as though it would gore him; the snake crawled forward but did not reach him; the wolf rushed at him, but then stopped"[314].

Similarly, in the *AP* there are numerous examples of the imagery of the monk's fight against demons expressed in the language of war. When the noble woman went to visit Arsenius, he explained to her why it was wrong of her to be in the desert, saying: "Do you not realise that you are a woman, and that it is through women that *the enemy wars* against the Saints?"[315] Also when St Macarius asked a certain monk called Theopemptus about his spiritual life, he asked him if his "thoughts war against" him"[316]. Abba Agathon even calls the hard-working monk a "warrior"[317]. Further on,

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[312] Brakke, 2006, p. 30.

[313] *Greek Life of Anthony*: 8.2 Vivian & Athanassakis, 2003, p. 79.

[314] *Greek Life of Anthony*: 9.7 Vivian & Athanassakis, 2003, p. 83.

[315] *Arsenius:* 28 Ward, 1984a, p. 14, emphasis is mine.

[316] *Macarius the Great:* 3 Ward, 1984a, p. 127.

[317] *Agathon:* 1 Ward, 1984a, p. 20.

Abba Agathon makes the connection between the Prayer, Warfare, and Demons in the following saying:

> I think there is no labour greater than that of prayer to God. For every time a man wants to pray, his enemies, the demons, want to prevent him, for they know that it is only by turning him from prayer that they can hinder his journey. Whatever good work a man undertakes, if he perseveres in it, he will attain rest. But prayer is warfare to the last breath[318].

The use of war and arena imagery is particularly interesting for our topic since it provides us with a plausible reason behind the naming convention of the Arrow Prayer that we see used in Christian literature as early as the third century[319]. The war imagery, as I have demonstrated, is a common metaphor for the spiritual battle between the monk and the demons. While this name is not used as a common name for the prayer, it always comes up as a result of, and an extension to, the battle metaphor. This is obvious from its first recorded uses by Origen when he refers to continuous prayer as "an arrow shot from the saint by knowledge and reason and faith. And it wounds the spirits hostile to God to *destroy and overthrow them*"[320]. The arrow as weapon-of-war metaphor here points to a more specific practice that becomes more apparent in the monastic literature.

Again in paragraph five of the *Life* of Anthony, the saint is described to be using some weapons when attacked by demons. Among the list of weapons that are used by St Anthony, such as Faith and Fasting, we read that the devil was "cast down by

[318] *Agathon:* 9 Ward, 1984a, p. 22.

[319] Rowan, 1979, p. 104.

[320] Rowan, 1979, p. 104, emphasis is mine.

Anthony's unceasing prayers"[321], and by "reflecting on Christ in his heart and the goodness he had through him, and reflecting on the spiritual insight given to him by his soul, extinguished the devil's deceitful coal"[322]. By unceasing prayer, St Athanasius is undoubtedly referring to meditating on passages from scripture, especially the psalms, as well as remembering the name of Christ. This is very apparent from the way these practices are frequently referred to throughout the *Life*.

In paragraph nine, when St Anthony returned to the tomb after being beaten up by demons, he "continued to pray while lying down. And after his prayer he would cry out… even if you do worst things to me, nothing 'will separate me from the love of Christ'. Then he also recited the psalm: 'Though an army should array itself against me, my heart will not be afraid'"[323]. In other instances, the demons would show him illusions of gold in the desert but he warded them off by chanting the psalms[324]. In general terms, the advice St Anthony gave to "all the monks who came to see him" is to "pray without ceasing, to say the psalms before going to sleep and after raising from sleep, to learn by heart the precepts in the scriptures, and to remember the works of the saints and with them zealously train the soul to be mindful of the commandments"[325].

Likewise, in the *sayings* an Abba advises that it is "good for a person to study the sacred scriptures against the attacks of the demons"[326]. Also, when St Macarius

[321] *Greek Life of Anthony*: 5.3 Vivian & Athanassakis, 2003, p. 67.

[322] *Greek Life of Anthony*: 5 Vivian & Athanassakis, 2003, pp. 68-69.

[323] *Greek Life of Anthony*: 9.3 Vivian & Athanassakis, 2003, p. 81.

[324] *Greek Life of Anthony*: 40 Vivian & Athanassakis, 2003, p. 145.

[325] *Greek Life of Anthony*: 55.2 Vivian & Athanassakis, 2003, p. 175.

[326] Cited from Burton-Christie, 1993, p. 132, note 69.

succeeded in helping Theopemptus to confess his sins, he gave him this exercise: "meditate on the Gospel and the other Scriptures, and if an alien thought arises within you"[327]. It is also said about another brother that as long as he was meditating the demons were unable to attack him, but when he stopped they were able to fight against him[328]. These meditations on the scriptures have a power to save from the demon attacks, regardless of the understanding of the monk being attacked, as an elder explains: "The magician does not understand the meaning of the words which he pronounces, but the wild animal who hears it understands, submits, and bows to it. So it is with us also: even if we do not understand the meaning of the words we are saying, when the demons hear them, they take fright and go away"[329].

Unceasing prayer not only included recitation of the psalms and other scripture verses. In the life of Anthony we have very specific references to what would be later called the Jesus Prayer. I am not referring here to the specific formula that was later developed on Mount Athos, but I am referring to the concept of calling on the name of Jesus against the attacks of the demons. There are numerous examples in the *Life* of Anthony when he resorted to the name of Christ to repel demons.

When the demon tried to trick St Anthony by appearing to him, pretending to be God, Anthony repelled him by "invoking the Lord's name… suddenly this huge apparition disappeared, along with all his demons". St Athanasius again emphasises the cause of

[327] *Macarius the Great*: 3 Ward, 1984a, p. 127.

[328] *Anonymous Series:* 235 Ward, 1986, p. 63 Meditation here, as will be discussed in later chapters, refers to the repetition of some psalms or verses of the Bible.

[329] Ward, 1986, p. 17.

St Anthony's victory to be "because of the name of Christ"[330]. In a different demonic attack, St Athanasius, (whether intentionally or not is not clear), explains the use of the name of the Christ by referring to a psalm (20:7) "'these come with chariots and these others come with horses, but we will be exalted through the name of Lord God'. And by these prayers, these demons were turned away by the Lord"[331]. In another instance, when it was not St Anthony's intention to invoke the name of Christ but was only part of his speech with the demons, St Athanasius says: "when the Devil heard the name of Christ, he could not stand the searing heat and disappeared"[332]. Elsewhere, the demons are chased away just by Anthony's declaration that he is a "servant of Christ"[333].

Similarly, in the sayings, an elder advises a monk who is overcome with passion to "kneel down, saying, 'Son of God, have mercy on me'". St Macarius, when asked about how to pray when a monk is attacked, replied: "it is enough to stretch out one's hands and say, 'Lord, as you will, and as you know, have mercy'. And if the conflict grows fiercer, say, 'Lord, help!'" [334.] Abba Elias also narrates the story of another monk who was physically attacked by demons to get out of a temple, the monk cried out, "'Jesus, save me.' Immediately the devil fled away"[335].

The power of the name of Christ was not only applicable to St Anthony's personal war with demons, but he also used it to exorcise those who were possessed by

[330] *Greek Life of Anthony*: 40 Vivian & Athanassakis, 2003, p. 145.

[331] *Greek Life of Anthony*: 39 Vivian & Athanassakis, 2003, p. 143.

[332] *Greek Life of Anthony*: 41 Vivian & Athanassakis, 2003, p. 147.

[333] *Greek Life of Anthony*: 53 Vivian & Athanassakis, 2003, p. 171.

[334] *Macarius the Great*: 19 Ward, 1984a, p. 131.

[335] *Elias:* 7 Ward, 1984a, p. 71.

demons. When he was once on a boat he *smelled* the demon that possessed a young man who was on the boat, so St Anthony "rebuked the demon in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and it left the man"[336]. In another anecdote, St Anthony exorcises the daughter of a women who was afflicted by a demon: "when Anthony prayed and invoked the name of Christ, the child was healed"[337].

It is of interest to note here that the concept of calling on the name of Jesus to ward off demons or evil thoughts had been a common teaching and practice in the early Christian church. We have evidence as early as the second century AD, in the writings of Justin the Martyr[338] and Irenaeus Bishop of Lyons[339], supporting the use of the name of Jesus Christ to exorcise demons. Yet we notice that this practice is further developed in the monastic literature[340].

Evagrius's Weapons of War

Evagrius, not too long after St Anthony, further developed and systemised the way short prayers were used to ward off evil thoughts. For Evagrius, the best weapon of war was the Book of Psalms. King David was the ideal model of spiritual progress for

[336] *Greek Life of Anthony*: 63 Vivian & Athanassakis, 2003, p. 191.

[337] *Greek Life of Anthony*: 71 Vivian & Athanassakis, 2003, p. 209.

[338] "We call him our Helper and Redeemer, by the power at whose name even the demons shudder; even to this day they are overcome when we exorcise them in the name of Jesus Christ." *Dialogue with Trypho, Second Apology*: 30.3 Halls, 2003, p. 46; *Dialogue with Trypho, Second Apology*: 85.2 Halls, 2003, p. 133.

[339] "Yet "no other name" of the Lord "has been given under the heavens, by which men are saved," except that of God, who is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, to whom even the demons are subject as well as evil spirits… through the invocation of the name of Jesus Christ" *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching:* 97 Behr, 1997, p. 99.

[340] The same practice is observed in the fifth century Palestine, Horn, 2006, pp. 131, 174.

Evagrius because of his balance between his success in waging war against the Philistines, who generally symbolised war against evil[341], and his contemplative life[342]. While Evagrius was the first to systemise the use of the psalms in the monks' warfare, Luke Dysinger asserts that the source of this practice is the practice of psalmody and memorisation of psalms that was prevalent in the monk's life:

> Evagrius asserts that the Book of Psalms is a means by which the Holy Spirit taught David the 'contest' of the *praktiké*. Thus the monastic practice of psalmody, which presupposes memorization and ongoing recollection of the psalms, places at the monk's disposal a rich source of biblical verses for use in the monastic 'contest'. [343]

Evagrius, in his writings, went to great lengths to systematise short prayers that were inspired from different books of the Scripture. The most well-known work is *Antirrhetikos*, often translated as 'talking back'[344]. In this work, Evagrius composed a collection of verses from scripture that a monk should use against different thoughts. For Evagrius, answering a thought with a contradicting bible verse is a great aid for the ascetic to clear his mind before prayer. These short prayers are used as a weapon of war against any distracting thoughts that may attack a monk at any time, but especially during prayers. He advises that when one is attacked with these thoughts, they should not continue their prayers but "direct some words of anger against the one causing the affliction"[345]. Only then can one attain pure prayer.

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[341] For Evagrius's use of this imagery, read Dysinger, 2005, pp. 130, note 3.

[342] Dysinger, 2005, p. 130.

[343] Dysinger, 2005, p. 132.

[344] The term literally means *refutation* or *contradiction* yet its more common meaning is 'talking back'.

[345] *Praktikos:* 42 Sinkewicz, 2006, p. 105.

In his work *Antirrhetikos*, he provided a list of 492 verses from throughout the Bible that can be used against different thoughts. He divided his work into eight chapters, each chapter dealing with one of the eight principal thoughts that may assail the monk, such as gluttony, fornication, avarice, anger, sadness, acedia, vainglory, and pride. For each of these thoughts, he introduces a thought that relates to this thought, then he gives a verse from the Scripture to combat this thought.

This idea of answering back evil thoughts with verses from the Scripture is not original to Evagrius. St Anthony before him is said to have used the same technique against the assaults of the demons. In the *Life* of Anthony, St Athanasius describes a dialogue between St Anthony and a demon that called itself the 'spirit of fornication'. At the end of the dialogue, he recited a verse from the psalms: "the lord is my helper, and I shall look upon my enemies"[346] after which the demon fled away. In another instance, he was physically beaten by demons and taken to the town. When he returned to the tomb, he said to the demons "look, here I am – Anthony! I will not run from your blows! Even if you do worse things to me, nothing 'will separate me from the love of Christ'", then he recited a verse from psalm 26:3[347].

Evagrius himself does not claim to be a pioneer in this kind of attack on thoughts, as he expounds to the recipient of one of his letters that David used the same technique in the psalms:

> Therefore one must be intrepid in opposing his foe, as blessed David demonstrates when he quotes voices as if out of the mouth of demons and

[346] Ps 117:7.

[347] Elizabeth A. Clark gives more examples of the use of the 'talking back' technique as a rhetorical tool in some Christian ascetical exegesis in Clark, 1999, pp. 128-132.

> [then] contradicts them. Thus if the demons say, "When will he die and his name be forgotten?" (Ps. 40: 5) he then also replies, "I will not die, but live and proclaim the works of the Lord!" (Ps. 117: 17). And if, on the other hand, the demons say, "Flee and abide like a sparrow on the mountain" (Ps. 10: 1), then one should say, "For he is my God and my saviour, my strong place of refuge; I will not waver" (Ps. 17: 3). Therefore observe the mutually contradicting voices and love the victory; imitate David and pay close attention to yourself![348]

Not only was David used as an example of talking back to demonic thoughts, but we find in some monastic writings the example of Jesus's verse-for-verse refutation with the devil on the mountain[349] after spending forty days of ascetical rigor of fasting and prayers that we see is very common in the monastic way of life. *Life of Anthony* offers a clear reference to this connection between Jesus on the mountain and the monastic practice. In chapter 37, St Anthony gives a treatise on how one should discern the spirits when they come in apparitions; he used the example of Christ who "whenever such apparitions came to him, the Lord rebuked them and said 'get behind me Satan!' for it is written, 'the Lord your God shall you worship and him only shall you serve'"[350].

Jesus is also used by Evagrius as an example of this practice[351]. When he was tempted on the mountain, Jesus was able to defeat Satan by quoting verses form the scriptures.

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[348] Cited from Dysinger, 2005, p. 134.

[349] Matt 4.

[350] *Greek Life of Anthony*: 37 Vivian & Athanassakis, 2003, p. 139.

[351] Dysinger, 2005, p. 134.

In his prologue to his work, *Antirrhetikos,* Evagrius refers to Jesus's use of the biblical verses in His temptation in the desert as a proof for his endeavour: "Our Lord Jesus Christ [. . .] [together with] all his teaching handed on to us what he did when he was tempted by Satan so that in the time of battle, when the demons are fighting us and hurling darts against us, we [may] answer them from the holy scriptures"[352].

Furthermore, it is interesting to notice the language Evagrius uses in his analogy, which is battle language. Not only that, but his use of the demons' attacks as darts is consistent with other writers, as already discussed above, and it is also consistent with the naming of this mode of prayer that came later in history to be called the Arrow Prayer.

To get a better understanding of the way the Arrow Prayer was practised in antiquity and to help make sense of these conclusions, we must study the social factors that must have influenced the practice of this prayer. In the following chapters, I will discuss some of the social factors that I believe had a profound influence on the practice of the Arrow Prayer and are consistent with the conclusions I have made above. In so doing, I will attempt to accurately place the practice of the Arrow Prayer in its historical context. Before I do that, I will discuss the background that gave rise to the name of the prayer.

[352] Cited from Dysinger, 2005, p. 134.

4- Oral Cultures

To provide a backdrop for the social context in which the Arrow Prayer developed, we must first consider a significant aspect of late antiquity culture. While there was a considerable level of literacy, especially among those who lived in the urban culture of the late Roman Empire, society at large was composed of an oral, rural culture. The same mix of literacy and orality can be found in monastic communities. As I argue in this chapter, some monastic texts, such as the *AP*, testify to the oral nature of the culture and how these oral aspects of the culture could have affected the development of the Arrow Prayer [353].

The transition from orality to literacy was not a smooth transition.[354] We see this clash between oral and written cultures in the tales of mythological Greek heroes. Prometheus who is said to have brought many gifts to mankind, one of which is the combining of letters the "creative mother of the Muses' arts, wherewith to hold all things in memory"[355], which is a very bold statement to make in a culture that held memory, not letters, to be the "mother of all Muses" as was commonly sung in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*. Such bold statements caused Prometheus to be later punished by Zeus. In the same way in the tales of Thoth in Egypt, he expresses his belief that writing can be an aid to memory, which was strongly refuted by Thamus in a dramatized legend by Plato: "now you, who are the father of letters, have been led

[353] Burton-Christie, 1993, pp. 3-5, 76-81.

[354] Burton-Christie, 1997, p. 146.

[355] Aeschylus Prometheus bound 461 (in Loeb. Cl. Lib).

by your affection to ascribe to them a power the opposite of that with which they really possess. For this invention will produce forgetfulness in the minds of those who learn to use it, because they will not practice their memory."[356] In his apology, Plato, is opposing the ability to be creative which to him cannot be achieved by words in a book which is lifeless when compared to spoken word. We see further echoes of this strong prejudice towards the written text in Pythagoreas' and Socrates' schools of philosophy, who abstained from the written word to the extent that the students of Pythagoras remained faithful to his ideology about the use of memory in transmitting his teaching till as late as the fourth century when they started to commit it to writing.[357]

In the monastic milieu, the first of these testimonies is the apparent hostility that the fathers in the *AP* showed towards reading books. The second testimony is the fact that in an oral culture, the spoken word often gave immediacy to action that cannot be replicated in a written text. And the third is that because oral teaching had an interactive nature, it would have been difficult to learn abstract terms without the use of analogies and parables. Finally, I will consider the oral nature of the text of the *AP*. Even when we speak of reading or writing in an oral culture, they themselves are highly influenced by the dominating oral nature of the culture. While it is obvious that the *AP* is a text, and is therefore not oral, yet it is very common for ancient texts to carry on their oral characteristics, as I will present in the second half of this chapter.

[356] Phaedrus 274e-275a (in Loeb Cl. Lib).

[357] Gamble, 1995, p. 178.

One of the main testimonies that can be observed in the *AP* is the apparent hostility of some of the monks towards reading books. Words of hostility towards written texts[358] are found to be a very consistent attitude in such an oral culture. Committing words to writing was often conceived as undermining the power of the spoken word. To keep words in people's memory was to keep the words alive. This was as important for the *word* as it was for those who kept the word in their memory, as memory was not perceived as merely a static memory of some text, but it was the store house of their thoughts and, therefore, it was the place where the ancients were able to be creative[359]. This thought was often contested by advocates of the written word, arguing that the written text was a way of preserving the text rather than killing it and was an aid to memory rather than a replacement. To bring this debate closer to our time, we can think in our day of the development of the electronic book industry, where many argue that it poses the threat of killing off the traditional printed text, while others argue that electronic books actually offer a way of bringing books that have been long out of print back to life. In the same way that people in our day have not suddenly stopped using printed books and moved to ebooks, the oral word and its advocates existed well into the time when the written text was commonly used.

Echoes of this clash between two opposing points of view on reading, a conservative view that holds memory in the highest regard for thinking and creativity and the more radical view that sees writing not only as a way of preserving culture but also as a tool for memory are prevalent in the monastic texts. We often encounter words of hostility towards reading or the use and ownership of books. Such words of hostility are very

[358] For example: *Serapion:* 2 Ward, 1984a, p. 224; *Nau* 392 [ROC 18:144], cited from Burton-Christie, 1993.

[359] A. Notopoulos, 1938, p. 475.

consistent with a culture that does not use manuals or self-help guides in learning new skills[360]. The way someone is taught a trade is by observing the master at work. Abba Isaac relates that when he was young he went to two elders, Abba Cronius and Abba Theodore of Pherme, who never asked him to do anything but they did all the work themselves. When he asked for advice from other elders, they enquired from Abba Theodore and he replied, "As far as I am concerned, I do not tell him anything, but if he wishes he can do what he sees me doing"[361]. This saying carries with it other connotations than the obvious lesson on discipleship. Earlier, Abba Theodore retorted, "Am I a cenobite, that I should give him orders?"[362], referring to the rules that St Pachomius established for the community, which did not go well with a culture that applied apprenticeship rather than a list of rules in passing along a trade or, in this case, a way of life. Similarly, Evagrius shows the contrast between learning from a written text and the teaching of one of the elders in his saying: "I have read many books before, but never have I received such teaching"[363]. Learning from an elder rather from text also provided the listener with the chance to question the meaning of the elder's words[364], the intended lesson form the analogy he had given[365], or simply ask a follow-up question[366].

[360] Burton-Christie, 1993, pp. 134-137.

[361] *Isaac, priest of the cells:* 2 Ward, 1984a, p. 100.

[362] *Isaac, priest of the cells:* 2 Ward, 1984a, p. 100.

[363] *Euprepius:* 7 Ward, 1984a, p. 62 This saying is attributed to Euprepius in the Alphabetico-Anonymous collection, but there is strong evidence from other manuscripts that the saying comes from Evagrius. See Regnault's remarks in *SPAlph*, 91.

[364] *Macarius:* 27 Ward, 1984a, p. 133 *Macarius:* 16 Ward, 1984a, p. 131.

[365] *The Virtues of St Macarius of Egypt:* 40 Vivian, 2004b, p. 116.

[366] *Alonius:* 4 Ward, 1984a, p. 35; *Pistamon:* 1 Ward, 1984a, p. 200.

From the many polemical sayings that are scattered in the *AP*, we see an objection to the danger of separating the oral word from action, even if this written text was the Scripture. Abba Serapion said to a monk who possessed books, "What shall I say to you? You have taken the living of the widows and orphans and put it on your shelves"[367]. This is to say that by a monk owning such books, he has actually forsaken the commandment to do charity and therefore separates the text from its required action. Elsewhere, a monk sold a book of the gospels that he owned and when he was asked for the reason, he said: "I have sold the very word which speaks to me saying: 'Sell your possessions and give to the poor' (Mt. 19:21)"[368]. He therefore highlights the ultimate aim of reading the text of the gospels. As Ong puts it, "Writing fosters abstractions that disengage knowledge from the arena where human beings struggle with one another… in keeping knowledge embedded in the human life-world, orality situates knowledge within a context of struggle"[369]. In other words, the use of books in an oral culture posed the threat of confusing the value of the written texts, not as a mediator between word and action but as an end in and of itself.

To better understand the effect of oral culture on the practice of the Arrow Prayer it is important to focus on three main aspects being; how in an oral culture word and action relate and how much power the spoken word has especially when we consider that the practice of the prayer was almost always practiced with manual labour. Secondly, the use of the formula as a prominent practice in an oral culture, which also constitute the basic form of the Arrow Prayer. Thirdly how oral culture has influenced written text, and how the formulaic aspect of the culture is very prominent

[367] *Serapion:* 2 Ward, 1984a, p. 227.

[368] *Nau* 392 [ROC 18:144], cited from Burton-Christie, 1993.

[369] Ong, 1982, p. 43.

in texts. This is especially important to note since these texts were memorised by the monks and to memorise such a large text they would have had to constantly repeat a number of formulas which were used as memory markers.[370]

Word and Action

Another aspect of oral culture is the fact that a spoken word has the power of being a call for action[371]. In a predominantly oral culture, the spoken word often required immediate attention, otherwise the word may or may not be reproduced. By contrast, in a textual culture the word recorded in a text does not give the reader the urgency to act. We observe this urgency to transform the word into action in the *AP* in the way monks asked for advice: "Abba give me a word". This request for a word was often followed by a promise of action: "that I might live". The reason for the question is not to gain knowledge but to transform it into action.

In the same sense, words and actions were highly connected. We also see this concept in the meaning of the Hebrew word *dabar* which means both 'word' and 'event'[372]. Similarly, the title for the collection of writings of the desert fathers, the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, was sometimes called *rhema* in earlier compilations, which can also mean both word and action[373]. There is a stronger expression of the close relationship between word and action in the teachings of the *AP*; an Abba only spoke words to those who were going to act on them and not merely for knowledge. Abba

[370] Ureña, 2012, p. 315.

[371] Walhout, 1994, p. 441.

[372] Ong, 1982, p. 32.

[373] Burton-Christie, 1993.

Theodore once refused to give a word to one of the brothers because he was not interested in doing it but rather was asking for the sake of showing off[374]. On the other hand, Abba Arles was happy to give one of the brothers advice because "he [was] a hard worker and what I tell him he carries out eagerly. It is because of this that I speak the word of God to him"[375].

The word also carries with it power in a different way. Not only does the word require action but it can also have a vital impact on the listeners, "One evil word makes even the good evil, while one good word makes even the evil good"[376], said Abba Macarius. Abba Xanthias further emphasises the impact that a word can have on one's salvation, illustrating it by the story of the thief on the cross who was "justified by a single word"[377]. Abba Poemen cautiously warns against the potentially destructive nature of words, preferring silence over speaking: "If man remembered that it is written: 'By your words you will be justified and by your words you will be condemned', (Matt. 12.37) he would choose to remain silent"[378]. Therefore, words did not only carry within themselves an immediate call to action, but they also carried within them something very valuable, being the salvation of the monk's soul and that of his fellow monks.

This connection between the word and praxis is further discernible in written texts. Evagrius, one of the desert fathers, who has numerous writings on monastic spirituality yet only has seven sayings in the *AP,* used the Greek word *hesychia* (an

[374] *Abba Theodore of Pherme:* 3 Ward, 1984a, p. 74.

[375] *Abba Arles:* 1 Ward, 1984a, p. 35.

[376] *St Macarrius the Great: 39* Ward, 1984a, p. 137.

[377] *Xanthias:* 1 Ward, 1984a, p. 159.

[378] *Poemen:* 42 Ward, 1984a, p. 173.

abstract concept) which means stillness in its verbal form, and the word *hesuchazein* to give the meaning of something being active in the sense that the monk had to actively work to achieve it[379]. Therefore, even his choice of words reflected his emphasis on the practical aspect of the word. What is even more intriguing is that the use of this verbal form of the word is consistent with the way it is used in the *AP*[380].

Powerful words were not only words of scripture; we learn from the *AP* that the word of the elder was usually equal in value to that of scripture and sometimes when the elder said the words of scripture, this emphasised its power. Abba Anthony was visited by some brothers who asked him for a word that they may be saved, "the old man said to them, 'you have heard the Scriptures. That should teach you how.' But they said, 'We want to hear from you too, Father'"[381]. It was not enough for the brothers to hear a word from the scripture, but they wanted to hear the word of the scripture from Abba Anthony. Actually, it was the power of the monk's word that made him an Abba, not merely his age, as in the case of Abba Poemen who called Agathon 'Abba'. When he was asked why he called him Abba even though he was very young, he said: "Because his speech makes him worthy to be called Abba"[382].

The use of allegory and parables is another important aspect of an oral culture that we see in the *AP*. Teaching by parables is an effective way of teaching abstract ideas and

[379] Sinkewicz, 2006, p. xxii.

[380] Sinkewicz, 2006, p. xxii It is interesting to note here the overlap between oral and literate culture or the oral characteristics in texts, that is not assumed in Walter Ong's argument in Ong, 1982, pp. 50-53, also see McDowell, 2012, p. 175.

[381] *Anthony the Great:* 19 Ward, 1984a, p. 5.

[382] *Poemen:* 61 Ward, 1984a, p. 175.

makes them come to life[383]. For example, an elder would be walking and upon seeing an event, it would trigger within him a teaching of a certain virtue, such as when a monk who was doing his manual labour saw a man (most probably another monk) carrying a dead man and so said to him "Do you carry the dead? Go and carry the living"[384] in order to teach him a lesson in perseverance. Abba Poemen, also seeing a woman weeping bitterly for the death of her husband, son, and brother, found it a perfect situation to teach his disciple compunction, saying: "I tell you, if a man does not mortify all his carnal desires and acquire compunction like this, he cannot become a monk. Truly the whole of this woman's life and soul are turned to compunction"[385].

In other instances, the Abba would bring the lesson to real life by asking the disciple to perform a certain task. For example, Abba John the Dwarf was asked by his Abba to water a piece of dry wood every day for three years, having to walk a substantial distance in the process until it finally brought fruit[386]. It was the way of the Abba to bring to life the virtue of obedience in a real life situation rather than through abstract teaching. In a similar way, Abba Macarius, wanting to teach a brother how do deal with praise and abuse, sent him to the cemetery and asked him to abuse the dead and to then go and praise them. He then asked him if they replied to his praise or abuse, to which the brother said no. Then, Abba Macarius, after having given the practical lesson, proceeded to spell out the message of the exercise in that: "You know how you insulted them and they did not reply, and how you praised them and they did not

[383] Burton-Christie, 1993, pp. 278-279.

[384] *Anonymous:* 204 Ward, 1986, p. 55.

[385] *Poemen:* 72 Ward, 1984a, p. 177.

[386] *John the Dwarf:* 1 Ward, 1984a, pp. 85-86.

speak; so you too if you wish to be saved must do the same and become a dead man. Like the dead, take no account of either the scorn of men or their praises"[387].

When real life situations were left wanting, the Abba resorted to allegory to bring his teaching to life. It is not surprising to see that many of these allegories had an agricultural theme. Abba Isaiah, for example, in his teaching on the bearing of insults said: "Nothing is so useful to the beginner as insults. The beginner who bears insults is like a tree that is watered every day"[388]. Abba Poemen also used the analogy of the axe and tree to explain discernment, "A man can spend his whole time carrying an axe without succeeding in cutting down the tree; while another, with experience of tree felling brings the tree down with a few blows. He then said that this axe is discernment"[389]. About keeping the fear of God, Abba Poemen said: "Just as smoke drives the bees away and also takes the sweetness out of their work, so bodily ease drives the fear of God from the soul and dissipates all its activity"[390]. Abba John the Dwarf preferred using war analogies in describing spiritual warfare, where he said: "If a king wanted to take possession of his enemy's city, he would begin by cutting off the water and the food and so his enemies, dying of hunger, would submit to him. It is the same with the passions of the flesh: if a man goes about fasting and hungry the enemies of his soul grow weak"[391]. Therefore, the desert fathers were able to formulate abstract concepts such as obedience, discernment, bearing insults, etc., into real life situations to which the hearer could relate. It was the way that they processed abstract ideas in their minds.

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[387] *St Macarius:* 23 Ward, 1984a, p. 132.

[388] *Abba Isaiah:* 1 Ward, 1984a, p. 69.

[389] *Poemen:* 52 Ward, 1984a, p. 174.

[390] *Poemen:* 57 Ward, 1984a, p. 174.

[391] *John the Dwarf:* 3 Ward, 1984a, p. 86.

Even something as simple as speaking or, more precisely, persuasion, was an art in and of itself. Convincing someone of an idea did not only require good arguments but also required the right body language and maintaining the right eye contact. This is vividly illustrated in the way the elders always advised against engaging in arguments when buying or selling their handiwork in the market place. Buying and selling was not as simple a transaction as buying milk from the corner store today. It required a combination of verbal manoeuvers and the right body gestures to be able to get a bargain. This practice was adamantly opposed by the desert fathers because of the danger of distracting the monk from his inner peace and continuous prayer. It was said of Abba Agathon and Abba Ammon that when "they had anything to sell, they would name the price just once and silently accept what was given them in peace. Similarly, when they wished to buy something, they gave the price they were asked in silence and took the object adding no further word"[392]. Abba Pistamon further explains, "Abba Sisoes and all the others used to sell their manual work; that is not dangerous in itself. When you sell it, you say the price of each thing just once, then, if you want to lower the price a little, you can do so. In this way you will be at peace"[393]. This verbal dual sometimes got so intense that when Abba Isidore "saw anger approaching"[394] he left his things and fled. Abba Barsanuphius, therefore, advises to recite the psalms in the market place even in one's mind[395] to save him from losing his peace.

[392] *Agathon:* 16 Ward, 1984a, p. 23.

[393] *Pistamon:* 1 Ward, 1984a, p. 200.

[394] *Abba Isidore:* 7 Ward, 1984a, p. 97.

[395] *Barsanuphius and John: 720* Chryssavgis, 2003, p. 184.

The use of formulas

An oral culture that relies heavily on memorisation rather than writing puts a lot of emphasis on making up a set of patterns or formulas, mnemonics, and themes that allows people to recollect their thoughts. In an oral culture, to think of something in a non-formulaic way is a waste of time, as it cannot be recollected but is merely a passing thought, rather than abiding knowledge[396].

The formula is the building block for the memory by which creativity and recollection of thought take place[397]. It is important to note here that all the writers I discuss did not operate in a culture that is completely oral yet these writings were highly influenced by the surrounding oral culture. Carruthers observed in Cassian's writing that he uses the formula in the context of elementary schooling; she further defines the formula as "various schemata that were used to present material in a memorable way to students"[398].

The repetitive nature of the formula in an oral culture and text influenced by oral culture enhances not only the listener's interaction with the text but also provides memory markers for the person memorising the text. Memorisation by repetition of these key phrases or formulas is essential for the memorisation of the whole text and simultaneously would have been a form of the practice of the Arrow Prayer. What

[396] Ong, 1982, p. 36; on the different types of the formula see Ureña, 2012, p. 314.

[397] Carruthers, 2008, p. 18.

[398] Carruthers, 2000, p. 76.

constitutes a key phrase or a formula in a text is not only the frequency of its repetition in the text but also the message that the formula conveys as well as the length of the formula that allows the person listening to the text being read retain the information[399].

Peter Brown, in his study of the effect of Christianity on local cultures, demonstrated how in his sermons to the North Africans of his diocese, St Augustine, whose listeners were not fluent in Latin, used a technique of quoting the scripture that was not common to his literary style:

> [In] an attempt to enable a bilingual society to participate in an exclusively Latin religious culture, gravitating around a Latin holy text, Augustine's method of allegorical exegesis even betrays this pressure: for this approach to the scriptures involves moving backward and forward throughout the whole length of the Bible in each sermon. By piling half-verse on half verse, from Genesis to St Paul and back again, *via* the psalms, the bishop would create a whole skeleton of verbal echoes, well suited to introducing large areas of the text to an audience used to memorising by ear[400].

This technique of bible quotation is not unique to St Augustine. Many Alexandrian writers have used this technique of quoting strings of bible verses from the Old and New Testaments to make their argument[401]. St Athanasius, for example, in one of his writings, *Against the Arians*, uses strings of bible verses from Deuteronomy, Psalms,

[399] Ureña, 2012, p. 315.

[400] Brown, 1968, p. 91.

[401] The bible its self Is written in a formulaic language, as has been argues for the book of revelation in Ureña, 2012, p. 315.

Isaiah, John, Matthew, Philemon, and 1 Corinthians to paraphrase St Peter's Pentecost speech in order to explain a troublesome phrase in Act 2:36. For St Athanasius, this is not a method of harmonising the Scripture since Athanasius presumes an original harmony in the text, but it was the way an oral culture stored and recollected information, sometimes even when they put it into writing[402].

The same style was adapted by some of the monastic texts. In *The Instructions of St Pachomius* [403], *The Letters of Horsiesios*[404], *The Letter of Bishop Ammon*[405], and *The Letters of St Anthony*[406] there are many instances where the writer gives paragraphs, at times with strings of bible quotes from all over the Scripture, to convey the desired message[407].

Oral thought and expression in written texts

There are various theories about the process of transmission from an oral to a written culture and the possible formulas and mnemonic techniques that were used to memorise the written texts. Lord, for example argues that there was a point in time when there was a decisive shift from an oral to a literate culture and therefore there is little overlap between the characteristics of orality, and consequently memory, and textuality. On the other hand, Carr, rightly notes that the oral compositions cited by Lord and others "may be as much or more characteristic of societies with writing as

[402] Ernest, 2004, p. 131.

[403] *Instr:* 1-12 Veilleux, 1982, pp. 13-14, *Instr:* 24-26 Veilleux, 1982, pp. 23-24; As well as the third letter of St Pachomius to Cornelios: 1-13 in Veilleux, 1982, pp. 53-59.

[404] *The Letters of Horsiesios:* 1-4 *Veilleux, 1982, pp. 153-165.*

[405] *The Letter of Bishop Ammon:* 3-10 Veilleux, 1981, pp. 72-77.

[406] *The Letters of St Anthony the Great:* II, III, V, VII Chitty, 1975, pp. 7, 10, 14, 26.

[407] *The Letters of St Anthony the Great:* I, II, III, IV, V Chitty, 1975, pp. 4, 7-8, 10, 12, 15.

they are of purely non-literate societies"[408]. He further argues that despite the claims of verbatim recitation of texts in an oral culture, there are significant variations in their reproduction. Once the text became available to the audience, they were provided with something with which to compare it and were able to recognise any variations in the text [409] and how accurate this memorisation was.

It would be a difficult task to identify, with a great degree of certainty, what formula the desert fathers used in memorising scripture for the simple reason that we do not have a copy of the text of the scripture that they used, as well as the fact that the *AP* have been edited and re-edited over the years, which adds the possibility of the editor adjusting the biblical text with which they are familiar. But we at least know that in liturgical recitation there was great emphasis on verbatim recitation. In the *AP* an Abba recalls being reprimanded by an elder for not accurately reciting the scripture:

> It happened that my memory failed me and I forgot a word of the psalms. When we had finished the prayers the old man said to me, "When I am saying the prayers I think of myself as being on top of a burning fire, and my attention cannot stray to the right or to the left. Where was your attention when we were saying the prayers and that word of the psalm escaped you? Don't you know that you are standing in the presence of God and speaking to God?"[410]

We see further in the rules of Pachomius that a monk who "forgets anything or hesitates in speaking, shall undergo punishment for his negligence and

[408] Carr, 2005, p. 7.

[409] Carr, 2005, p. 7.

[410] *Anonymous:* 14 Ward, 1986, p. 4.

forgetfulness"[411]. In other instances, when elders were giving advice to younger monks or when they used the psalms for their own meditation against certain thoughts, they used the text with a great degree of fluidity to make it their own. Their intention was not to change the text, nor was it ignorance of the text, but it was a way of making the words of the scripture their own[412]. Abba Poemen makes a perfect example of this in the following:

> Abba Poemen said, it is written: "Give witness of that which your eyes have seen" (Proverbs 25.8); but I say to you even if you have touched with your hands, do not give witness. In truth, a brother was deceived in this respect; he thought he saw his brother in the act of sinning with a woman; greatly incensed, he drew near and kicked them (for he thought it was they), saying, "Now stop; how much longer will you go on?" Now it turned out that it was some sheaves of corn. That is the reason why I said to you: even if you touch with your hands, do not reprove"[413].

This story vividly illustrates the dangers of judging others, even if it is something we see with our own eyes. But what is intriguing is how Abba Poemen in his use of scripture found it necessary to go beyond what is asked in the scriptures saying "but I say to you" to alert his listeners to the dangers of making quick judgments on things we see. He extended the command to even if you "touched with your hands, do not give witness". Apart from the fact that this is an amazing teaching on how one should not be in haste to judge others but give room to doubt, it also illustrates how he took a

[411] *The Rules of St Pachomius:* 14 Veilleux, 1981, p. 147, Veilleux further notices in the footnote that the Greek *Excerpta* translates, 'for neglecting the text to be learned by heart'.

[412] Charlesworth, 2012, p. 332.

[413] *Poemen:* 114 Ward, 1984a, p. 183.

passage from the scripture and personalised it to the situation, without diverting it from the original meaning of the text[414].

The use of formulas remained well into the middle ages when the written culture was dominating, yet there were some residual oral components. Scholars have applied Parry's method in discerning formulas to Old and Middle English, Medieval French epics, and Spanish and English ballads. Ong, in his analysis of some of the characteristics of orally based thoughts and expressions, further notices traces of oral influence in Douay's seventeenth-century English translation of the Bible, when compared with the twentieth-century New American Bible (1970)[415]. In Egypt, an archaeologist named Verne B. Schuman reports strikingly similar features in private letters, well into the twentieth century. His first observation was: "When I first went to Egypt in 1927, near the Post Office in Cairo were many booths in which sat professional scribes to read and write the letters of the illiterate"[416]. He also noted that, similar to antiquity, the scribes were writing letters in a language that was not their mother tongue (English), and consequently made many spelling mistakes. Also like antiquity, the paper used was scraps from old notebooks. But more relevant to our research, he noted that the letters often followed a certain formula that also had parallels in antiquity: "at the beginning there is usually an expression of concern over the recipient's well-being and at the end greetings not only from the 'writer' to the recipient, but also friends and relatives of both parties are included. In between there is usually some information about the 'writer's' health and activities"[417]. We therefore

[414] For the many different ways the monks modified the scriptures, read Rönnegård, 2010, p. 149.

[415] Ong, 1982, p. 37; on residual oral culture see McDowell, 2012, p. 176.

[416] Schuman, 1972, p. 72.

[417] Schuman, 1972, p. 72.

see a shift from the oral tradition to written text. This shift is very slow over time and traces of it can be found up until the twentieth century in Egypt. While this shift is taking place, many features of the oral culture are adapted in the written text.

The use of formulas and mnemonics had a great influence on the way in which many monks in antiquity read and memorised scripture, as I have demonstrated above. These formulas required memorisation by repetition if it was to be of any use. The practice of the repetition of formulas in monastic circles, as I will further argue in the following chapters, would have been a key factor that gave rise to the practice that was later known as the Arrow Prayer.

5- Education as a Source of Formula

Literacy

The question of literacy in antiquity is not straightforward. How can we determine or quantify the percentage of literate people? The reason for this difficulty is that the measures of literacy in antiquity were very different from ours today. A person who can write, for example, may not know how to read, as the two skills were taught separately and in ancient schools writing preceded reading[418]. Of those who were able to write, some could only write their names to sign legal contracts. Others worked as scribes but their skill was limited to writing some standard formulas for private letters. Even what we call literate culture may have included far fewer literate people than we can imagine. As Roger Bagnall puts it: "a society may be called literate even where a very high percentage of its members are not"[419], nevertheless most adults in antiquity participated in a system where writing was constantly in use. To add to the problem, how was a person who knew how to write in his native tongue (Coptic) but did not know Greek considered? Bagnall observes in Greek epistolography an uneven fluency of Coptic and Greek, especially with letters written by women[420].

[418] Cribiore, 1996, p. 9.

[419] Bagnall, 2011, p. 3.

[420] Bagnall, 2011, p. 95.

We get most of our information about monastic literacy in antiquity from the fragments of papyri from different monasteries and ancients sites mainly from the fourth and fifth centuries AD. These sites show that they were main centres of scribal activities, where people from nearby villages went to get their documents written by these scribes[421]. A great number of papyri have been unearthed from towns like Oxyrhynchus, containing letters describing borrowing, buying, and copying of books, which suggests a high literacy rate, at least among government officials and the wealthier class[422]. Also, the high number of papyri, as well as lectionaries and copies of parts of the Scripture or the lives of saints, and non-literary papyri, such as school exercises and sale contracts found in monasteries and monastic communities suggest a high level of literacy, or at least reading, among the monks of these monasteries[423].

The level of literacy amongst monks has traditionally been thought of as very low, and such a view was for a time propagated by scholars[424] who relied on Socrates's view of monks as being simple men without an education and therefore frequently illiterate[425]. This idea has been long contested, especially in light of the libraries of books, wall graffiti, and school exercises that have been found in monastic settlements since antiquity, however small in number the community was[426]. It would be another mistake to assume that every monk in the community was able to read and write, but the presence of elaborate graffiti in the monks' cells suggests that a good

[421] Rees, 1964, Crum, Bell, & Thompson, 1922.

[422] Bagnall, 1995, pp. 19-20.

[423] As evident in Orlandi, 2002, p. 224 and Derda, 1995, pp. 42-49.

[424] For a good survey of scholarship, see Bagnall, 1995, p. 2.

[425] *Socrates, Historia Ecclesiastica VI. 7.687-8.*

[426] Wipszycka, 1984; In Teresa Morgan's analysis of the literacy levels at different centers across Egypt she attest to the fact that most surviving archives come from monasteries Morgan, 2003, p. 161.

number of them could at least write and presumably read. We also see a great deal of private letters and book lists in various collections that proves that both the writers and readers of these texts, who are mostly monastic, acquired a reasonable level of education, much higher than the skill of someone who could sign his name on a contract or copy the text of a book, which did not require much understanding of the text. Whether they gained their education in the monastery or they were educated before they entered the monastery is another aspect that should not be generalised. While there were a number of highly educated personalities, such as Evagrius of Pontus, who became monks, there is evidence of schools inside the monasteries that taught reading and sometimes writing[427]. This further confirms the emphasis monks put on literacy.

Some scholars suggest that monks living an eremitic or a semi-eremitic life, such as those in the Naqlun[428], came from at least the middle class of society, since they had to pay for the extravagant ceramic and glass decorations which are found in the hermitages on the site. Therefore they must have enjoyed a better education before they became monks than those living in a community where they were not required to pay for their everyday living.

Education System

Theories of education in the ancient world were very different from those today. One of the stark differences between the two is the dichotomy we see today between education and other aspects of society such as politics, theology, and philosophy. The

[427] Orlandi, 2002, p. 224.

[428] Derda, 1995, p. 49.

ancient theories of education were not interested in the developments of individuals per se, but their main concern was how to make the link between education and the person's role in society[429].

Since the first century of Christianity, Christian groups had educational texts such as the New Testament and the Didache, which were instrumental in the educational formation of new converts to Christianity[430]. Even though Christianity was geographically born in Palestine, we must not forget the fact that it started in a Hellenistic culture and developed in a Graeco-Roman civilisation and that the Scripture itself was written mostly in Greek. These facts will help us understand that as Christians came to teach the Scripture they used methods that were common in secular Hellenic schools[431]. Initially, Christians showed varied degrees of hostility towards sending their children to secular schools; this hostility varied from banning their children entirely from going to or teaching at a school that taught idolatry, to having a code of conduct for Christian teachers to go by when they taught at these schools[432].

Nevertheless, teaching techniques and methods were very similar to those found at secular schools. There is evidence from a fifth or sixth century exercise book of a student that cannot be distinguished from that of a contemporary Hellenic and Greco-Roman school, in both its use of Greek mythological names and stories, except for the

[429] Morgan, 1998, p. 242.

[430] Estes, 2015.

[431] Burton-Christie, 1993, pp. 56-57.

[432] Marrou, 1982, pp. 419-438.

sentence "Blessed be God"[433] on top of the page and a monogram of the cross at the beginning of every page. This practice was eventually substituted for verses from the psalms[434] and biblical names[435]. While the shift in the content of the school exercises changed, the same teaching techniques remained in use, as is evidenced by the presence of passages from the writings of Homer and the psalms on the same piece of papyri that were used for school exercises[436]. It is interesting to note that some of these papyri are found in monasteries[437].

Levels of education in antiquity were also not as uniform as one might expect, as Cribiore suggests: "The literary sources and the papyri, in fact, testify to much variety in school structure in accordance with situational circumstances, convenience to parents, and availability of teachers"[438]. It was originally believed that education in the Graeco-Roman world had a rigid structure (elementary, secondary, etc.), however, this notion has been challenged with the argument that the education system varied on the basis of social class[439]. Slaves and the free born of lower social class had a basic literacy level, while upper class students enjoyed a more advanced level of a grammarian school which also taught the basic letters[440]. Yet, Cribiore gives a more convincing alternative:

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[433] *Papyrus Bouriant*, P. Collart, Paris, 1926 (= *P. Bouriant 1*), c.f. Marrou, 1982, p. 433, no. 393 in Cribiore, 1996, p. 276.

[434] no. 295 in Cribiore, 1996, p. 244.

[435] no. 124 in Cribiore, 1996, p. 202.

[436] no. 388 in Cribiore, 1996, pp. 273-274.

[437] no. 68 in Cribiore, 1996, p. 189.

[438] Cribiore, 2001, p. 37.

[439] Cribiore, 2001, p. 37.

[440] This is suggested by Alan Booth in his work Booth, 1979.

> Uniformity and consistency did not characterize the organization of ancient schools even in large urban environments. But particularly in towns and villages that were away from the main centers of education, teachers did not follow fixed schemes; rather, they catered to the population according to its needs and their own capabilities. Far from conforming to prearranged education models, teachers aimed at leading each student up to the level of literacy demanded by that pupil's place in the social and economic pyramid and his or her future role in the community[441].

Similarly, the schools in villages had to cater for diverse levels of education, ranging from those who would attend class for only one year, which would allow them to recognise a written letter of a business transaction, and to properly sign their name at the bottom of a letter or a receipt; to those who would pursue the secondary level, which might help them to be a scribe, who wrote letters for those who could not or to copy major works; to a privileged few who would go and study in the city as far as their teacher could take them[442]. Education was therefore connected to the person's role in society.

This approach is very consistent with the way levels of education were described in Christian monasteries. The Pachomian Rules, for example, prescribed the level of education for a novice entering the monastery; rather than referring to a standard level of education as a prerequisite, St Pachomius listed the necessary skills for a novice, which included the fundamentals of a syllable (which may also mean the characters of

[441] Cribiore, 2001, p. 44.

[442] This overlap in levels of teaching is also attested to in school exercise papyrus, no. 379 Cribiore, 1996; for further reading on the topic, see Kaster, 1983, pp. 329-336.

the alphabet), the verbs, and the nouns, and this was for the purpose of reading. The aim of this custom-made syllabus, as put down by St Pachomius, was for every monk to be able to read and memorise the scriptures[443].

The Pachomian instruction is actually not very clear about whether the novice was required to learn writing as well as reading; it only mentions "the verbs and nouns shall be written for him". This conveys the sort of model to be used for a writing exercise rather than for learning how to read[444].

School Structure

Schools in late antiquity did not have the structure or the accommodation they enjoy today. The teacher could have met with his pupils for instruction at a street corner, under a tree or in a temple, or at a private house[445] and, for the purposes of our study, in a room in a monastery or in a monastic cell. From the excavation of the monastery

[443] *The Rules of St Pachomius:* 139, 140 Veilleux, 1981, p. 166. Besides the instruction of novices to read and write, there are also catechumen classes for non-Christians who wish to be baptised mentioned during the time of Pachomius, *The Bohairic Life of Pachomius*: 81 Veilleux, 1980, p. 104. And again during the time of Theodore, *Letters of Theodore:* 6 Veilleux, 1982, p. 124. For a discussion on the use of the term "catechumen" in the early Egyptian monastic tradition and the early Egyptian church, read Veillux, 1974, pp. 149-153.

[444] There is a debate among scholars of ancient education about whether reading was taught first followed by writing or vice versa, yet what is clear from the papyri is that learning to read required some degree of learning to write. Learning the alphabet, recognising syllables, and writing and memorising lists of words, were usually the primary building blocks for any student, whether he was pursuing his education for the purpose of reading or writing. Cribiore suggests that reading followed a stricter process of learning than writing, from letters and syllables to words and sentences. Each step of this rigid process built on the other Cribiore, 1996, pp. 8-9.

[445] Cribiore, 2001, p. 21.

of Epiphanius, we find a number of Greek and Coptic school exercises[446], mainly from cell A, which was located outside the monastery walls and was inhabited or used by a certain Moses. In this cell, there appears to have been a great deal of scribal activity and miscellaneous correspondence taking place but, more importantly, this is also where most of the school exercises originated[447]. This evidence suggests that this room might have been used by a scribe for copying manuscripts and writing correspondences, or it might have been used as a classroom. Also, cell B, which seems to have been occupied by a number of monks over time, shows that at least one of the occupants did some teaching of some sort, as seven school pieces were found around the cell[448].

In the monastery of St Phoebammon, which was built on the ruins of a pharaonic temple near Epiphanius's monastery, there were a number of school exercises consisting of letters from the alphabet that were painted in red ochre on the southern Hall of Offering of the ancient temple[449]. This leads us to conclude that this space was possibly used as a teaching classroom[450]. In other monasteries also, such as deir el-Gizaz and the monastery at Naqlun[451], there are a number of texts of the Coptic alphabet or syllables, which are typical to a school setting, written on ostraca, papyri or parchment.

[446] From Cribiore, 1996 nos. 66, 67, 122, 123, 168, 225, 226, 227, and 319.

[447] Winlock et al., 1926a, pp. 42-43; school exercises in Winlock, Crum, & Evelyn-White, 1926b no.s, 615 and 621.

[448] Winlock et al., 1926b nos, 571, 573, 611-614, 618.

[449] See Cribiore, 1996 nos. 19, 20, 21, 22, 61, 163, 164.

[450] Cribiore, 2001, p. 25.

[451] Cited from Derda, 1995, p. 49 note 37.

While the archaeological evidence may lead us to think that the space was used for a classroom, there is nothing to suggest – at least at the monastery of Phoebammon – that it was for children, as Cribiore suggests[452]. Adult education was not uncommon in late antiquity, therefore it should not be excluded as a possibility that these school exercises could have been used by adult monks who lived in the monastery. Of course, there is also the possibility of children living in the monastery as child donation was practised in antiquity[453].

Scribal Education

As stated earlier, the education system in antiquity did not have firm boundaries between differing levels of education as it does today. For many adults in antiquity it was sufficient for them to be able to write their names to enable them to sign contracts[454]. Others learned writing to be able to write contracts or letters for illiterate villagers. While this job seems to require good writing skills, we know from the different papyri that contracts and private letters had a few standard formulas, and therefore did not demand elaborate skill from the scribe. Others mastered the art of writing to be able to work as scribes in a village, for a government official or for a wealthy patron.

[452] Cribiore's imagery Cribiore, 2001, pp. 23-24 "the voices of children learning Greek syllables – *ba-be-be-bo-* and so on – must have echoed amid the silence of a glorious past" may not be as accurate as she suggests or at least there is no archaeological evidence to suggest the presence of children. This argument is fully developed in Bucking, 2007, pp. 37-40. Bucking also explores the various ways of interpreting the archaeological evidence.

[453] See Bucking, 2007, p. 38 note 61

[454] Bagnall, 1993, p. 242.

Carr suggests, without sufficient evidence, that being titled a scribe did not necessarily mean someone who spent most of his time copying codices, but it was rather a "badge of graduation"[455] that allowed a person to function in an elite society. While there is evidence that elite men and women were expected to be able to write well[456], there is no evidence that they copied texts themselves[457]. Their ability to write was primarily used to maintain their status quo[458], their writing activity was often limited to signatures and private letters, especially those addressed to close relatives, intimate friends and social superiors[459]. All other mundane writing activities, such as the writing up of letters, business contracts, and the copying of whole codices, was left to trained slaves who usually worked there full-time so that they would not have to use a scribe from town whom the peasants and villagers relied upon. The lack of the practice of writing in this elite group is also evident in the unpractised hand that some of them exhibited[460].

We can at least hold a great degree of certainty that a scribe in the monastic literature always referred to someone who spent most of his or her time copying texts from scripture, the lives of saints or the sayings of the fathers. In the *AP*, for example, Mark, who was a scribe, showed great obedience to Abba Silvanus when he stopped

[455] Carr, 2010, p. 21.

[456] As Quintilian laments "the ability to write well and quickly is not irrelevant, though it is generally neglected by respectable persons." *Inst* 1.1.28 Cited from McDonnell, 1996, p. 473. A fragmentary text from Oxyrhynchos of an edict by a prefect in Egypt forbids illiterates to be government officials, see Bagnall, 1993, p. 246, note 80.

[457] Bagnall, 1993, p. 247.

[458] Brown, 1992, pp. 35-71 I am conscious of the generalisations made in the level of literacy between social groups but this variation has no bearing on the conclusions of my argument.

[459] McDonnell, 1996, p. 474.

[460] Bagnall, 1993, p. 247.

writing as soon as he heard his Abba's knock on the door[461]. Also in the *AP,* Abba Abraham tells the story of a man who is said to be a scribe, and when one of the brothers complained to him that the book he wrote was missing punctuation and words, the old man told him to go and practise what is written first[462]. Palladius in the *Lausiac History* also narrates a story about a notable businessman named Apollonius who was too old to "learn a craft or to work as a scribe"[463], which portrays being a scribe as one of the normal activities of a monk. Evagrius, who was educated before becoming a monk, is said to have worked as a scribe after going to the desert, earning enough money to buy food for himself[464]. Elsewhere Palladius mentions Philoromus, who did not stop writing from a young age[465]. At St Pachomius's monastery, being a scribe was one of the ascetical works set out for the monks, along with animal husbandry, baking, and weaving, among other tasks[466]. We can also conclude from the extensive writing and editing of St Shenouda's work that a lot of writing took place in the White monastery, not only during his lifetime, but up until the twelfth century[467]. Being a scribe in a monastic circle sometimes meant that the person was well educated before joining the monastery or, in some cases, he was even taught the trade in the monastery, as was the case in the monastery of Epiphanius. But regardless, what is clear is that the title of scribe always referred to someone who

[461] *Mark, Disciple of Abba Silvanus:* 1, Ward, 1984a, pp. 145-146.

[462] *Abraham:* 3, Ward, 1984a, p. 34.

[463] *Apollonius:* 13.1 Meyer, 1965, pp. 48-49.

[464] *Evagrius:* 38.10 Meyer, 1965, p. 113.

[465] *Philoromus:* 45.3 Meyer, 1965, p. 122.

[466] *Pachomius and the Tabennesiotes:* 32.12 Meyer, 1965, p. 95; for other examples of female scribes outside of Egypt, see Rousseau, 1995; and Haines-Eitzen, 1998.

[467] Orlandi, 2002, p. 220; and Emmel, 2004a, p. 13.

practised the trade rather than just being a badge or a title for an educated person, as Carr suggests[468].

We further notice that working as a scribe was one of the jobs that a monk could perform in the monastery, similar to weaving and baking, and was therefore considered as an ascetical work. Although we cannot assume that every monastery had their own team of scribes, it is evident that at least in monasteries such as St Epiphanius's, St Shenouda's, St Pachomius's federation and the Naqlun monasteries where scribal activity is evident, there were a number of scribes whose main job was copying the various codices. Not only did the monks work as scribes in these monasteries but they even hired a group of scribes who copied codices for their monastery as well as for smaller monasteries and sometimes for wealthy patrons[469].

We also learn from some private letters that were found in monasteries that the monks were involved in all stages of book production. In a Coptic letter on parchment from the fifth or sixth century, the sender requests that the book be decorated in a certain way:

> Flesh side:
>
> So now, the book which I have sent you, be responsible for decorating it, be busy with its plates. Choose only those that are good. Do not cut into them as I said to Hylias. Give it to somebody who does the job well, so that he decorates it,
>
> Hair side:

[468] Outside monasteries, the title 'scribe' is in fact incredibly multi-valent, and did not always mean someone was employed to copy things.

[469] L. S. B. MacCoull, 1993, p. 450.

Tell the illuminator to add some ornaments to it, either a gate or a wheel. [Rubbed out:…….][470].

The overwhelming majority of the books found in archaeological excavations are Christian books. The presence of wealthy patrons also explains the vast number of classical writings found in different Christian libraries, as many Egyptians of the upper class who became Christians maintained their interest that they grew up with in the classical writings[471]. Kotsifou further suggests that "the lack of evidence for pagan scriptoria in Byzantine Egypt also suggests that a large number of the six hundred copies of pagan books that have survived from that period were copied by monks"[472].

Scribal activity in monasteries provides us with some strong attestations to the monastic use of short prayers in their daily practice. The evidence for this practice comes from the archaeological and papyrological findings in the monasteries of Epiphanius and the el-Naqlun monastery. In the monastery of Epiphanius, we have in cell A different sherds containing writing by the same hand of a monk named Moses who was believed to occupy the cell. Some of these sherds are liturgical, as in P. Mon. Epiph. 46,47,48, where there are three ostraca with verses from the psalms (P. Mon. Epiph. 15,16,19), with special reference to no 16 which contains a concordance of psalm verses. In the same cell, but by a different hand, there are several extracts from the psalms (P. Mon. Epiph. 11,12,13,18,14). Similarly, in the Naqlun

[470] *P.Köln* inv. 10213 a Coptic parchment letter from an unknown province, published by Weber, 1973, plates 7&8. I used the English translation from Kotsifou, 2007, Kotsifou, makes a special reference to the way the translation fits into a monastic setting.

[471] Kotsifou, 2007, p. 52.

[472] Kotsifou, 2007, p. 55.

Monastery, among other things, incipits of psalms 103-135 written on papyrus were found in Hermitage 25 (P. Naqlun I, 1-5).

There has been a more recent discovery at the Moharak monastery in modern day Assiut of a fourteenth-century manuscript containing a passage from the teaching of Abba Philemon about the Jesus Prayer[473]. What is interesting about this discovery is the fact that throughout this manuscript there are various short prayers to Jesus written in the margins that are not a part of the text.

These extracts provide us with some evidence for two possible conclusions. The first is the presence of extensive scribal activities at least in these monastic communities. Or secondly, they attest to the possibility that these extracts were a part of a memorising exercise that the monk who occupied this cell or hermitage practised, and it should not necessarily be assumed that the monk worked as a scribe in the monastery but rather as a result of his personal devotion. What gives strength to this argument is the fact that these texts were found as extracts, lists of psalms, concordance of psalm verses, or incipits, and never in a full text. This points to the possibility that these texts were used as a memorisation aid for the monk who lived in the cell[474]. Another supporting argument is the fact that half of the biblical texts found were from the book of psalms and that the psalms have always been popular in their use in devotional prayers in monastic circles.

[473] Khalil, 1993.

[474] Other uses are also possible, such as being a model text for students to copy, yet the text cannot be harmonised to be for this purpose. For other possible uses, consult Bucking, 2007, pp. 34-35.

Interestingly, though, most of the above-mentioned groups of texts, such as the first verses of the four gospels and random verses from scripture, especially the psalms, have been categorised by the editors as amulets[475]. While the presence and use of amulets has been strongly attested to in papyri as well as literary texts, there are cases when the text does not correspond to the criteria for an amulet. Kruger, in his analysis of P. Oxy 840[476], gives five very useful, yet not definitive, criteria that are common in amulets. The two most decisive criteria in my opinion are, firstly, the external factors, which means that they are small enough to carry around, and that they are folded or have signs of folding, and sometimes a string or a hole for a string is attached. The other criterion is the content of the text, which usually contains a special prayer for healing or for keeping someone safe, which would be found between the passages of scripture.

Other cases where papyri are categorised as an amulet based merely on the content of the text being incipits or psalms without the two criteria above do not give sufficient evidence to categorise such a text as an amulet, since there are many school exercises and memory exercises that use verses from scripture, especially the psalms[477]. Another example is the writing of the incipits from the gospels, which again is very common not only in papyri[478] but can also be found in a codex, which obviously

[475] Many examples in Jones, 2016 and Sanzo, 2012.

[476] Kruger, 2002, pp. 85-89.

[477] For example BP 740, which is an ostraca which has a verse from the psalms copied 12 times as a school exercise, see Winlock et al., 1926a, p. 192 n16.

[478] For example, P. Mich. Inv 1559, which contains the first words of the four gospels and is classified as a school text. There is also *P. Naqlun* Doc. no. 242b/89, which contains incipits of the psalms 103-135. This papyrus is believed to be used for devotional purposes, since the spelling mistakes are due to phonetical errors, which suggests that is was written from memory rather than copied from another codex. Sanzo, 2012 deals with the topic at a greater extent.

could not have been used as an amulet. A good example of this is the Coptic museum MS Bibl. 90 from the fourteenth century containing the four gospels in Arabic.[479] This manuscript has a table containing the first verse of each chapter of the gospels but, more interesting than whatever the function of this table was, it looked very similar to those found in the fourth- and fifth-century papyri.

A very interesting group of texts that sometimes comes up in archaeological excavations are those that contain a few verses from the beginning of one of the books of the Bible, followed by a gap then another few verses[480]. While most of these texts come in codices rather than on scraps of papyri or pieces of ostraca, they are usually in the setting of a school text with pages, in the same codex, containing the alphabet and lists of words. The exact function of these verses is not very clear, yet there are two strong factors that we should take into consideration: 1) they have all been written in an experienced hand, therefore they are not the work of a student learning to write; and 2) they do not write the whole text, but omit some verses, and the passages quoted are too brief to be of any use, which is consistent with some ancient theories of memorisation that will be discussed in the next chapter, which speak of having markers to aid in the memorisation of a text.

Another group of texts that is very interesting in our investigation and has not attracted much scholarly attention are concordance tables and indices. Two manuscripts, one from Leiden (Ms. Ins. Nr. 2) and the other from the *Bibliotheca*

[479] Hunt, 2009.

[480] For example, *P Mich Inv* 926, which contains Romans 1:1-7,12-15, Job 1:1; *P. Cotsen* 1, from (Cotsen inv. No. 40543) (fols. 73v, line 5-74, line 10), containing Romans 8,28-32; *P. Mon. Epiph* 3, 7-9, 11, 12, 13+18, 14 ,15,19, 31-32, containing verses from the Old Testament; *O. Naqlun Inv*. 64/86 and 53/88 containing Matthew (7, 18-20) & (7, 29-8,4).

Naniana in Venice[481], contain lists of psalm verses with the same word. Similarly, in the monastery of Epiphanius, there is an ostracon (P. Mon. Epiph 16) with a list of verses from the psalms containing the word "hand" in them. Another three concordance lists from the psalms published by W.E. Crum, are found on small ostraca and papyrus[482]. In another manuscript (P. Cotsen 1, from Cotsen inv. No. 40543), we have three lists in Sahidic, one of the names of the cities of Judah from Josh 15,21-62, the other a list of the names of people defeated by the Israelites from Josh 12,8-24, and the third a list of the Chiefs of Edom [483]. What is very interesting to note is the fact that these manuscripts were either described by the editor as an educational manuscript or were found in a monastic setting, or sometimes they were both.

Concordances in antiquity have often been used as memory tools for students. Jerome in the fourth century made good use of a concordance of the Hebrew Old Testament that he had made for himself[484]. Although most of the studies I am aware of were conducted on Medieval Latin manuscripts, this does not suggest that memorising theory did not have earlier roots[485], or perhaps that it grew separately from that of the West[486]. The way it works is very similar to the way we index books today. A letter of the alphabet is used as a primary key, the words starting with this letter then form the

[481] For details of the Mss, consult Derda, 1995, p. 88.

[482] Crum, 1921 no.s 7,10, and 28.

[483] Bucking, 2006.

[484] Lampe, 1975, pp. 91-101.

[485] The use of concordance is found in Quintilian's reference to orderly arrangement of text into partitions as being a great aid to memory Quintilian, *institutio Oratoria, IV.V.3.*

[486] Carruthers, 2008, pp. 129-130.

second key[487]. These keys then act as hooks that help in the recollection of the memorised text.

There are many aspects in the education system in antiquity that shed light on how education has affected the way in which the ancients thought and processed information, which is very different from our way today. This was not specific to late antiquity but it had its roots in ancient Egyptian education systems. There is much evidence from the Middle Ages that the practice of writing was often used as a method of memorisation[488]. Many scribal errors that were usually believed to be as a result of mishearing the dictation are now believed to be the result of a writer who writes from a text that he is trying to memorise rather than through dictation, where "the ultimate goal, however, was memorised mastery of the cultural tradition, not necessarily the production of textual experts"[489]. This is illustrated in numerous aspects that characterise these texts, for example, the red marks of separation that divide sentences or by having the first word of every section written in red[490].

Thus, writing, which was looked at as a threat to memory as will be discussed in the next chapter, developed to be an important tool for memorisation, as has been demonstrated. It also had its own markers and mnemonic systems, such as

[487] Carruthers, 2008, p. 144.

[488] Carruthers, 2008, p. 195.

[489] Carr, 2005, p. 75.

[490] Quintilian in the first century AD further stresses the importance of the use of books or tablets as an aid to memory. "There is one thing which will be of assistance to everyone, namely, to learn a passage by heart from the same tablets on which he has committed it to writing. For he will have certain tracks to guide him in his pursuit of memory, and the mind's eye will be fixed not merely on the pages on which the words were written, but on individual lines, and at times he will speak as though he were reading aloud." (*Quintilian* 11, 2, 32).

concordances and tables of incipits, that aided the reader to not only read the text but to memorise it.

We now have a clearer understanding of the reason why early monks, especially in cenobitic monasteries, insisted on the education of their members. Education not only provided the monks with the literacy to read and write, but it was used as a technique that aided the monks to memorise passages of scripture that in turn provided the monks with not only a way of ascetical practice in their daily life but also as a way of devotion that permeated their everyday life.

PART THREE

MAPPING THE PRACTICE OF

THE ARROW PRAYER

6- Memorisation

Memorisation was one of the most fundamental aspects of the education system in the ancient world that influenced every aspect of life, especially in cultures that were predominantly oral. Many ancient educators and philosophers wrote about the importance of memorisation. For example, Quintilian, the first century (AD) Roman rhetorician, said that memory was the "storehouse of education"[491]. Cicero before him also writes, "only people with a powerful memory know what they are going to say and for how long they are going to speak and in what style, what points they have already answered and what still remains"[492].

Memory in the Greek world was so important that it had its own god, Mnemosyne. It was a god because it kept oral poetry and tales for eternity. In a predominantly oral culture, where authors and composers could not record their creation in writing, they had to preserve their composition through the use of formulas and frequent repetition. The way formulas worked, as we will discussed below, was by forging the information to be memorised into a metrical pattern familiar to the person memorising them, allowing them to reproduce the information again. These features of oral composition explain their paratactic nature, which to a modern reader might sound non-poetic.

[491] *Quintilian*: 1.1.19.

[492] Cicero's *De Oratore:* II, Ixxxvii, 355. Translation cited from E.W.Sutton & H.Rackham, 1988, p. 467.

Memory in oral cultures has two functions: the first is static, that is, to keep in memory diverse texts and lists. Yates's explanation of the static memory as impeding the free movement or creativity of the mind[493] has been strongly challenged by Carruthers as she argues that static memory or "inventory" is not a random storage of information but "inventoried materials are counted and placed in locations within an overall structure which allows any item to be retrieved easily and at once"[494].

The other function of memory in an oral culture is creativity[495]. A poet who has no way of recording his thoughts must rely heavily on memory to enable him to not only create new material but, more importantly, to remember the material he created days after he composed it. To do that, a poet must think in a formulaic way that allows him to retrieve the information from memory. In an oral composition:

> the verse is created on the basis of a vast complex system of formulas which the poet had to memorize as part of his craft. Before he could compose he had to memorize a vast number of word-groups which would serve as the basis of his improvisation. Without keeping in memory all these formulas, which are the oral diction out of which his poetry is made, no oral poetry could be possible. Memory is the means by which the poet creates orally[496].

[493] Yates, 1980, p. 7.

[494] Carruthers, 2000, p. 11.

[495] Carruthers, 2000, pp. 10-11.

[496] A. Notopoulos, 1938, p. 472.

This is not any less creative than anything we have today, after all, the mind needs some material to work with, even in a literate culture[497]. The oral poet in his creativity cannot do without memory, as we in a literate culture cannot do without books and writing.

These two functions of memory are expressed in the way the Latin word "*inventio*" gave rise to two separate English words, "invention" or the creation of something new and, "inventory" or the categorised storage of objects. Both meanings are connected to one another, as Carruthers states:

> Having "inventory" is a requirement for "invention." Not only does this statement assume that one cannot create ("invent") without a memory store ("inventory") to invent from and with, but it also assumes that one's memory-store is effectively "inventoried," that its matters are in readily-recovered "locations"[498].

Many educators and rhetoricians of the ancient world gave different metaphors for how memory works and formulated mnemonic systems that aided their students in their memorisation. Although these techniques were formulated in the West, they formed the basis of the techniques used by educators and orators throughout the ancient world until well into the middle ages. Among these metaphors is the storage rooms or pigeonholes into which a labelled topic can be placed and retrieved when needed[499]. The other metaphor ancient writers used was the wax tablet[500]. This

[497] Carruthers, 2008, p. 1.

[498] Carruthers, 2000, p. 12.

[499] Carruthers, 2008, pp. 42-43.

[500] Carruthers, 2008, pp. 24-25.

metaphor appears in the work of many ancient writers, but it is best explained by Socrates, who said:

> …whenever we wish to remember something we see or hear or conceive in our own mind, we hold this wax under our perceptions or ideas and imprint them on it as we might stamp the impression of a seal ring. Whatever is so imprinted we remember and know so long as the image remains; whatever is rubbed out or has not succeeded in leaving an impression we have forgotten and do not know[501].

Memory not only involves the storage of information, but also both recollection and creativity. Another common imagery technique used for memorisation in antiquity besides the wax tablet was the "storage room". This storage room contained all the learning and passages one memorised throughout their different levels of education. The clever student was not the one who could recite a passage word for word, but was the one who could retrieve the relevant passages that complemented his argument from the storage room of text he kept in his memory[502].

This skill was acquired earlier on in the life of the student by using the technique discussed earlier in chapter five. When a student learned to memorise the alphabet in its different sequences, he developed a way of sorting his memorised text in his storage room in order that he could retrieve a passage from the middle of a text without going through the whole text in his mind[503]. The student reciting the argument also had the freedom of altering the text to suit his argument. This is, as will

[501] Plato, *Theaetetus:* 191 D-E, cited from Carruthers, 2008, p. 24 note 22.

[502] Carruthers, 2008, pp. 37-38.

[503] Yates, 1966, p. 16.

be discussed below, the reason why the desert fathers often used passages from scripture with a great degree of freedom. This freedom in using biblical passages explains the variation in the count of the number of biblical citations, as will discuss in chapter eight.

Yet the metaphor that is used most often, especially in monastic writings, is the architectural metaphor[504]. The architectural metaphor was first recorded after an unfortunate event in history when the roof of a function hall in Thessaly caved in, crushing all the guests so badly that the relatives of the guests had trouble identifying the bodies. Fortunately, Simonides, who was a poet performing at the event, happened to leave the hall minutes before the roof collapsed and was able to remember the order in which the guests were sitting in the hall. This incident inspired Simonides to formulate the requirements of good memory, which was to "select places and form mental images of the things that they wish to remember and then to store these images in the places, so that the order of the places will preserve the order of the things, and the images of the things will denote the things themselves"[505]. If one is to memorise a large text, one must have a large number of rooms to store this text. Yet one must also use mental anchors throughout the house to be able to recall the text in order. The anchors also allow the mind to skim throughout the text backwards and forwards from the anchor point without having to start from the beginning of the text[506].

[504] Carruthers, 2008, p. 89.

[505] This incident was recorded in Cicero's *De Oratore:* II, Ixxxvi, 351-4. The translation used is cited from Yates, 1966, p. 2.

[506] For further reading on the different metaphors of memory, read Carruthers, 2008, Chapter 1 and Yates, 1966, Chapter 1.

The relationship between architecture and memory lies deep in some of the Old Testament books. In Ezekiel's vision (Ezek 40), God asked him to be attentive and measure a building, which contains windows, doors and thresholds, and to declare it to the house of Israel. This building and the measurements have symbolic meanings of what was to become of Israel, but presenting it in an architectural scene would have made it easier for Ezekiel and his listeners to remember it[507].

St Paul developed this concept into an imagery that relates to the *ekklesia*[508] or the congregation as the body of Christ (1Cor 12: 12, 27-8). However, later writers used this imagery in its architectural sense, that is, as being the body of Christ as well as the body of the believers. This metaphor was skilfully used in early church catechetical instructions to instil in the listeners an embodied mnemonic to remind them of their obligation as new Christians[509]. Furthermore, the church building was commonly adorned with relics of saints in key areas of the church, for example, in St Sophia's church in Constantinople we are told that the builders inserted relics of saints in the arch of the dome. In Egypt, the relics of saints are placed under the altar, the focal point of the liturgical service[510].

The architecture metaphor was very commonly used by ancient monastic writers in various contexts. One of these monastic writers is St Shenoute of Atripe, whose seventh canon was wholly dedicated to the building of the monastery's new church, known today as the White Monastery church, in upper Egypt. This great basilica,

[507] We find similar imagery in Revelation: 11.

[508] This can be understood as the congregation at St Paul 's time and, later, as the church building as well.

[509] Georgia Frank, has expanded on this in her article Frank, 2001, pp. 630-633

[510] Davis, 2008, pp. 184-185.

whose walls and some basic structure remain standing today, was for St Shenoute an important reminder for the monks of the monastery of their ascetic renunciation. Caroline Schroeder has dedicated a chapter in her book about the way in which the saint developed the church architectural theme of the newly built basilica into a tool for his rhetoric about ascetic theology.

In the third chapter of her book, Schroeder[511] demonstrates that, for the saint, the architecture of the church building held more meaning than wood, bricks and stones. For the monks, it was a reminder of the ascetic responsibility of each monk in the monastery towards the rest of the community. The saint develops this idea through his interpretation of St Paul's concept of the church as the body of Christ, in his letter to the Corinthians, and the monastics (male and female) are all part of this body, in the same way that the church building is also a part of this body. Therefore, the monks held the responsibility of keeping their bodies holy and pure, which in turn made the building holy and pure[512].

While the saint does not develop the metaphor further to emphasise the memorisation of scripture or specific practices of prayer, his use of the church building functions as a reminder or a cue for monks and nuns, who attend prayers daily at this church building, to remember their ascetic responsibilities, which include continuous prayers[513] and memorisation of scripture.

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[511] Schroeder, 2007, pp. 90-125.

[512] On the use of the terms of Holy and Pure in St Shenoute
's writing, see Schroeder, 2007, pp. 105-106.

[513] St Shenoute included the practice of continuous prayers as an ascetic practice that Christians should observe along with fasting, keeping the holy days and the integrity of marriage in his eighth discourse, *I Have been Reading the Holy Gospels*. For study and translation, read Moussa, 2010, p. 131.

The use of the church building as a cue for memory is also evident in the Pachomian *Paralipomena*, which is a collection of writings about St Pachomius that were written after his death. In this collection of writings, there is a story of the saint ordering his monks to pull the pillars of the newly built church at Pbow and to make them crooked, so that the monks would not concentrate their attention on adoring the work of their hands[514] and be distracted from their prayers.

In Hugo Lundhaug's study of the function of memorisation in Pachomian and Shenoutian monasticism, he makes the distinction between individual and collective memory while keeping in mind that they are "highly interrelated and intertwined phenomena"[515]. He further concludes: "certainly the controlled reading and memorisation practices were important parts of the overall monastic program of refashioning the selves of the individual monks and would ideally create a highly uniform body of shared scriptural memory among the monks"[516]. Therefore, memorisation also played a unifying role in the community through the individual and collective practice of daily memorisation and recitation of scripture. Lundhaug adds that this memorisation practice entailed cultural tools such as books, scribal practices, and libraries[517]. In light of the importance of the architectural design of the church just discussed, I would like to add the architecture of the church to Lundhaug's list.

[514] *Paralipomena:* 32 Veilleux, 1981, pp. 55-56.

[515] Lundhaug, 2014, p. 114.

[516] Lundhaug, 2014, p. 107.

[517] Lundhaug, 2014, p. 107.

St Shenoute was not the first Christian writer to make the connection between the architecture of the church and the personal holiness of the congregation. Two centuries earlier, Origen used the Old Testament's tabernacle as an architectural structure on which he constructed his metaphor[518]. In his homilies on the book of Exodus, Origen made the relationship between the structure of the tabernacle and memory. He explained the reason for the repetition of the details of the measurements of the tabernacle and its content throughout the book of Exodus and other books of the Old Testament to be "because of what they bring to mind"[519], namely that the gold, silver, bronze and the other materials used for building the tabernacle were allegories for different virtues. He then admonished his listeners, saying that it would be shameful for a Christian to have no "*memorial* of your own in God's tabernacle"[520] linking the architectural design with the memory of the Christian's practice of virtue or ascetical responsibilities.

In an earlier homily on Exodus, Origen, developed the metaphor specifically for the purpose of memorising the scriptures. In his allegorical interpretation, he used Philo's interpretation of the tabernacle in its cosmic sense[521] and applied it to the human person who is, according to Origen, an image of the cosmos. In this homily, Origen interpreted the architecture of the tabernacle as a reminder for keeping the Word of God in our hearts:

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[518] Before Origen, Clement of Alexandria wrote about the tabernacle, yet he followed Philo's interpretation of the tabernacle in the cosmic sense. For further reading on the development of the Christian exegesis of the tabernacle, see Holder, 1993.

[519] *Homily on Exodus:* 13 Heine, 1981, p. 375.

[520] *Homily on Exodus:* 13 Heine, 1981, p. 380 Emphasis is mine.

[521] Philo followed the Jewish method of interpreting the tabernacle as the cosmos, it was not until Origen who developed this method to the human person.

> Let him have an ark of the covenant in which are the tablets of the Law, that "he may *meditate on the Law of God* day and night." (Ps 1: 2) and let his *memory become an ark and library of the books* of God because the prophet also says those are blessed who hold his commands *in memory* that they may do them (Ps 105: 3)[522].

Towards the end of the fourth century, another monastic writer used the imagery of the tabernacle and its content as a model for memorisation. In Cassian's fourteenth conference, Abba Nesteros tells the young novice John, who committed parts of the scripture to memory, that memorisation of scripture is not an end in itself; but one must prepare *a sacred tabernacle* in his heart by cleaning it from every vice and must strip himself of every worldly care, in order for him to remember these sacred readings[523]. Therefore, he made the person's spiritual observance a condition for remembering scripture.

Further on in the conference, Cassian utilised the content of the tabernacle as an allegory for the meditation of sacred scripture: "Give yourself assiduously and even constantly to sacred reading. Do this until continual meditation fills your mind and, as it were, forms it in its likeness, making of it a kind of Ark of the Covenant"[524]. He further used the two tablets as a symbol of the steadfastness in God's law of the two testaments and the golden jars as a pure and sincere memory[525].

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[522] *Homily on Exodus:* 9 Heine, 1981, p. 343.

[523] *Conferences:* IX.1.3 Ramsey, 1997, p. 512.

[524] *Conferences* X.1.2 Ramsey, 1997, p. 514.

[525] Many medieval western monastic writers expanded on the use of the content of the tabernacle as a metaphor for memory in their writing. For further reading, see Carruthers, 2000, pp. 7-24; and Roth,

The Cell

In addition to the use of the church building as an architectural metaphor for memory, we even see the very cell of the monks as being a cue for the monks' practice of continuous prayer. The monastic abodes vary from organised groups of cells to random caves in the mountain, or sometimes even unused pharaonic temples, as long as this space was dedicated to ascetic living, however abandoned or deserted the area was. The relationship between the temporal and the spiritual realm was very important to early monastics. The attachment of the monks to their cell and the cell's function in the spiritual growth of a monk cannot be ignored[526].

When Abba Moses was asked for advice, he said "go, sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything"[527]. In another saying by Abba Hierax, when asked for a word, he said: "sit in your cell, and if you are hungry, eat, if you are thirsty, drink; only do not speak evil of anyone and you will be saved"[528]. Another advised to "sit in your cell and give your body in pledge to the walls of the cell"[529]. Abba Anthony also said: "Just as a fish dies if they stay too long out of water, so too does the monk who loiters outside their cell… we must hurry to reach our cell, for fear that if we delay

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1953. For the use of the tabernacle as a metaphor for the church building in medieval Arabic Christian literature of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, see Bolman, 2006, pp. 109-118.

[526] Brooks Hedstrom, 2007, p. 368.

[527] *Moses:* 6 Ward, 1984a, p. 139.

[528] *Hierax:* 1 Ward, 1984a, p. 104.

[529] *Anonymous: 73*, Ward, 1986, p. 24.

outside we will lose our interior watchfulness"[530]. The aim of the exercise was to keep the monk's thoughts from distraction by keeping the body in that space. Even if a monk eats or drinks and performs no ascetical exercises, his thoughts will eventually starve from not seeing many images outside the cell. Though this struggle was as fierce as "the furnace of Babylon"[531], yet it is there that the three children saw the Son of God and indeed were able to speak with God like Moses. For Paul of Tamma the cell was the place where the monks sees God, "you reign with God in the cell"[532], "The glory of God will appear to him inside it."[533]

The process of building the cell in itself was used to remind the monk of his responsibility to attain virtues, as Abba Poemen said: "When a man prepares to build a house, he gathers together all he needs to be able to construct it, and he collects different sorts of materials. So it is with us; let us acquire a little of the virtues"[534]. St Shenoute also used the church building metaphor in explaining how some monks are "humble and perfect in all righteousness… through labour and skill" also "a house that is perfect… through labour and skill". He further reminds them that "the ones who are in it (the church building), will thrive and show forth righteousness"[535].

[530] *Anthony the Great:* 10 Ward, 1984a, p. 3. There are numerous similar sayings that advocate that the monk stay in his cell, for example, *Arsenius:* 11 Ward, 1984a, p. 10 and *Anonymous:* 70 Ward, 1984a, p. 23.

[531] An old man said, 'The monk's cell is like the furnace of Babylon where the three children found the Son of God, and it is like the pillar of cloud where God spoke with Moses.' *Anonymous:* 74 Ward, 1986, p. 24.

[532] *De Cella:* 53b-59a Suciu, 2017, p. 27.

[533] *De Cella:* 59b-64a Suciu, 2017, p. 28.

[534] *Poemen:* 130 Ward, 1984a, p. 185.

[535] Cited from Davis, 2008, p. 186.

Not only was building a cell a reminder to the monks to gain virtues, but also the destruction of cells, as in the case of a monk whose roof was destroyed as he escaped from having a cup of wine. As he was being reprimanded by his brothers for risking his life and destroying the building, the Abba ordered that "the roof… never be repaired as long as [he lived], so that the world may know that at the cells a roof fell in for the sake of a cup of wine"[536].

The above incident shows that the cell was considered by the monk as a sacred space[537] where he undertook his spiritual work, which included handiwork; battled with his thoughts and prayed continuously; and which eventually led the monk to be united with God.

The architecture of the building itself was constructed to be a continuous reminder of the monk's vocation. In the excavation work done in the monastic settlement at Bawit, there is a cell that was found to be built with architectural features reminiscent of the tomb chapels present at a different site in Egypt, which led the archaeologist Jean Cledat to initially think that they had found a necropolis rather than a monastic cell. Peter Grossmann later suggested that the site contained tombs that were later reused by monks[538]. In both cases, the architecture of the building served the monks living in this cell as a constant reminder of their metaphoric death to the world and of their life in Christ.

[536] *Anonymous:* 16 Ward, 1986, p. 4.

[537] On the way, the monks considered the cell as sacred space, see PhD Dissertation, Brooks Hedstrom, 2001.

[538] Bolman, 2001, p. 44.

As a sacred place, the cell was perceived by the monks as the designated place for the monk's spiritual struggle and the place where the monk encountered God in prayer. It was therefore vital to keep the cell free of any distraction, according to ascetic writings such as the *AP* and the writings of Evagrius and Paul of Tamma[539]. After hearing an argument between two brothers, Abba John the Short walked around his cell three times before he entered. When he was asked about what he had done, he said: "My ears were full of that argument, so I circled round in order to purify them, and thus I entered my cell with my mind at rest"[540].

The means by which the monk collected his thoughts in his cell and used it as a memory device for constant prayer can be explained through the elaborate wall paintings found inside cells. These wall paintings vary from biblical motifs to monastic figures, as well as depictions from the sayings found in the *AP.* Elizabeth Bolman argues that these elaborate paintings were not for decorative purposes, but served as a focusing device for the monk's pursuit of seeing the face of God in continual prayer[541]. By seeing the holy fathers who preceded them depicted in these icons, the monk recalled their sayings and was able to imitate them[542]. The other popular image found in monastic cells (Cell 709 in the monastery of Abba Jeremiah) is the image of Christ enthroned and surrounded by the four incorporeal beings. This image, as Bolman suggests, was used as a reminder of the practice of constant prayer, especially since these creatures are described as being in a state of constant prayer:

[539] For the English translation of the text, see Vivian, 1997.

[540] *John the Dwarf*: 25 Ward, 1984a, p. 91.

[541] Bolman, 2001, p. 41.

[542] For images from the *AP*, see Bolman, 2001, pp. 418-421.

"attempting to pray constantly, he (the monk) would have his models the four incorporeal beings supporting the mandorla of Christ"[543].

Another common feature of the monastic cell in antiquity was wall inscriptions. Wall inscriptions in general functioned very differently from the way they do today. The act of inscribing on a wall of a temple or a monastic cell was not a work of art or an act of vandalism, as it is seen in modern-day graffiti. Nor was it limited to buildings that had fallen out of use. The ancient practice of graffiti functioned primarily as a way of remembering. Inscriptions found in funerary stelae and walls of tombs were a way of perpetuating the memory of a deceased person. Meanwhile, inscriptions on walls of monastic cells contained short prayers or bible verses that were memorised by the monk living in the cell. The best evidence for this is found in the wall inscription of the monastic cells in Kellia[544] where there are numerous inscriptions for prayers for the remembrance of either Jesus, or God. Other times it is to remember to pray for other monks in the community[545].

Among these inscriptions is the twenty-nine line inscription discovered during the excavation in 1965 of monastic cells at Kellia[546]. These wall inscriptions were of prayers that advocate the use of the name of Jesus against those who object to the separation between the persons of the trinity. This prayer has an interesting parallel with the controversy that St Shenoute was involved in at Akhmim regarding praying

[543] Bolman, 1998, pp. 72-73, note 28.

[544] Kasser, 1983 There is also evidence in Quibbell, 1909.

[545] They mostly come from room QR306.

[546] See page 73 of this thesis.

to Jesus centuries earlier[547]. These inscriptions, as Antoine Guillaumont describes, were found in the wall of a room that was the oratory of the cell 548. He was unable to date the inscription itself, but from the context of the other findings at the site, he was able to date it to between the middle of the seventh to the middle of the eighth century. This inscription attests to the fact that the monk who lived in the cell fervently practised some primitive formula of the Jesus Prayer. Moreover, it emphasises the important function that icons and wall inscriptions played as memory markers for the monastics living in these cells, and for their practice of continuous prayer.

Memorisation in practice

Before I examine the memorisation practices in some monastic texts I need to clarify that while some of the anecdotes refer to the memorisation of long texts which is outside the scope of the definition of the Arrow Prayer as being short and brief yet it is implicit in the memorisation practice of the time that for a student or a monk to memorise such long pieces of text they would have had to memorise and frequently repeat a number of short formulas from the text to help them recollect the longer text.

In the monastic communities, memorisation was an essential part of the monastic praxis. The Pachomian and Shenoudian monks, as we have seen, put a lot of emphasis

[547] As I discussed in an earlier chapter "The Sources".

[548] Guillaumont, 1974. The results of the exaction on the site can be found in, *Kellia I, kom 219. Fouilles exécutées en 1964 et 1965*, sous la direction de F. Daumas et A. Guillaumont, avec la collaboration de MM. J.C. Garcin, J. Jarry, B. Boyaval, R. Kasser, J.C. Goyen, J.L. Despagne, B. Lenthéric et J. Schruoffeneger, Le Caire, « Fouilles de l'Institut français d'Archéologie orientale », t. XXVIII, fasc. I (cm. 32 x 24,5, 156 p., 33 pl.) et II (cm. 46 x 33, 57 pl.).

on the memorisation of texts. From other monastic texts, we see the same kind of emphasis on the memorisation of scripture. For example, Abba Psote, the bishop of Psoi, in his final speech before being martyred, testifies that "from my childhood upwards, the angel of the Lord has appeared unto me several times while I was pasturing my father's sheep, and he never ceased to recite the Scripture to me in my abode until I knew them all by heart"[549]. In another text, St Pisentius is said to have "learned with great readiness all knowledge of the scriptures, and learned by heart twelve books [of the scripture], and continued reciting them without breaking his fast"[550] while only seven years old. The "History of the Patriarchs" also tells us that at St Macarius's monastery in the seventh century, the monks memorised the psalms by heart in order to recite them during the synaxis[551].

The group of Coptic and Greek ostraca from the monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes[552] contains a number of short biblical passages, one or two verses long (table below). It is not clear what these short verses would have been used for but it is highly probable that it was a tool to aid in memorising longer passages of scripture[553].

P.Mon.Epiph.	*Contents*	*Location*
2	Genesis 28: 13, 20	Unnumbered Tomb
4	Exodus 22: 2, 3	Room 6
	Exodus 23: 2, 3	
	Leviticus 23: 5	
5	1 Chronicles 18: 16, 17	
	2 Chronicles 6: 20	
6	Deuteronomy 34: 1-3	
10	Psalm 16: 3	Rubbish Heaps

[549] *The Teaching of Apa Psote*: Fol 2b Budge, 1915, p. 726.

[550] *The Arabic Life of St Pisentius*: 18 O'Leary, 1930, p. 330.

[551] *History of the Patriarch* O.H.E. KHS-Burmester, p. 134.

[552] Winlock et al., 1926b.

[553] Wipszycka, 2017, p. 217.

	Psalm 25: 2	
	Psalm16: 3	
	Psalm 26: 9	
11	Psalm 18: 8	Cell A
13	Psalm 33: 22	Cell A
	Psalm 34: 1	
14	Psalm 11: 1,2	Cell A
18	Psalm 105: 47,48	Cell A
22	Proverbs 13: 7, 13	
25	Isaiah 26: 10	Room 3
	Isaiah 64: 4	
26	Isaiah 42: 18, 19	Rubbish Heaps
	Isaiah 45: 25, 26	
27	Isaiah 40: 1, 2	Room 3
	Isaiah 50: 4, 5	
	Isaiah 57: 1, 13, 14	
	Isaiah 59: 21	
	Isaiah 62: 10	
	Isaiah 64: 4, 5	
29	Isaiah 41: 28, 29	
33	Joel 1: 1,2	Cell A
580	Psalm 14:10-11	Cell A
582	Daniel 3:57	Cell A
583	Matthew 17:1-3, 6-7	Tombs 65,66
	Matthew 18: 15-17,19	
	Matthew 25: 8-10	
	John 10: 8, 10-11	
	John 9: 3-5	
	John 12: 17-18	

In our culture, we rely heavily on written text. It is very uncommon today to find much emphasis put on memorisation, especially in our school systems. Memorisation in our text-based culture is often looked at as a non-creative way of learning or teaching. These written-culture biases should not be projected back on our historical studies of antiquity. Many scholars, such as Raffaella Cribiore[554], have recently studied and debated at length the nature of the education system in antiquity and how memorisation played a vital part in the education system. What is interesting about Cribiore's research is the number of school exercises that either came from monasteries or had Christian content, which emphasises the importance of education in monasteries and therefore the practice of memorising biblical texts by monks.

[554] Cribiore, 1996.

There is also Mary Carruthers's[555] groundbreaking work on memory in its literary, social, and cognitive aspects. Though much of her sources come from the Middle Ages, many of these findings are rooted in Antiquity and earlier. In her book, she not only sheds some light on the purpose and function of memorisation in antiquity, but she also gives us an understanding of how memorisation exercises developed from the classrooms of secular education to scriptural memorisation exercises that were widely practised in cenobitic and eremitic communities. These memorisation exercises were a fundamental aspect of the education system[556] of the time and it was the way that people in an oral culture processed information. Therefore, as I will demonstrate, there is good reason to believe that the memorisation techniques used in classrooms, and which were implemented in the monasteries, were an important agent in the development of the multi-formulaic technique of the Arrow Prayer that was dominating the Egyptian desert in late antiquity.

One of the first monastic writers who brought to our attention this relationship between the secular classroom and the practice of continuous prayer is John Cassian. In his tenth conference, after Abba Isaac gave a long analysis of the anthropomorphist controversy; he advised Abba John about the practice of continuous prayer, likening it to the wax tablet used by children at school by meditating on a specific formula:

> The formula for this discipline and prayer that you are seeking, then, shall be presented to you. Every monk who longs for the continual awareness of God should be in the habit of meditating on it ceaselessly in his heart… this, then, is the devotional formula proposed to you as absolutely necessary for

[555] Carruthers, 2008.

[556] Cribiore, 1996, pp. 42-43.

possessing the perpetual awareness of God: "O God, incline unto my aid; O Lord, make hast to help me"[557].

Although this comment refers to the single formula of prayer that was prescribed by Abba Isaac (i.e. Psalm 70:1), we must also consider that this is probably the first time the use of the Arrow Prayer is reduced to a single formula. However, from the context of the conference, it does not suggest that this is the normal use of the prayer. It is clear from the conference that the single formula was used as a way around the loss of concentration during prayer, especially after Bishop Theophilus condemned the use of images of God during prayers in his festal letters of 399AD[558]. Therefore, the single formula served as another option to help the monks concentrate during prayer alongside the use of images of God during prayer particularly for educated monks[559]. What the above passage shows is that to memorise and recite, one must have an image, letters on a wax tablet (as the image he uses) or, in the case of Abba Isaac, a verse from the psalms. While

Carruthers further notes that the tenth conference as a whole contains vocabulary that is predominantly used in classrooms:

[557] *Conferences:* 10.X.2 Ramsey, 1997, p. 379. The same relationship between wax tablet and memory is made by Cicero in *Partitiones oratoriae:* 26; Plato, *Theaetetus:* 191 D-E, cited from Carruthers, 2008, p. 374, note 22.

[558] While Theophilus changed his mind, the same year, about the use of images during prayer, William Harmless points out that Cassian continued to expound on his preferred mode of prayer, being imageless prayer Harmless, 2004, p. 360, John McGuckin further points out that Cassian was not against the use of anchors to concentration but rather that a verses from the psalms is another alternative to images. McGuckin, 1999, p. 198.

[559] McGuckin, 1999, p. 201.

> The language of elementary schooling permeates this entire Conference. The words that are translated into English as "formula" and "method" include, most frequently, *materia* and *formula*. Neither of these words means in Latin what modern English speakers might assume, especially in the context of the classroom, which is Cassian's context. Latin *formula* is not an abstract mathematical rule but a little *forma*, a word which continued to be used in classrooms throughout the middle ages to refer to various schemata that were used to present material in a memorable way to students[560].

When we test this against the educational practices of the day, we discern a great degree of consistency. From her study of a number of school exercises from antiquity, Cribiore noticed that memorisation of the alphabet was not only an exercise of rote memorisation, but the students were actually required to know the sequence of the alphabet in many patterns, including forwards, backwards and by skipping letters[561]. The purpose of these exercises was not just to memorise the letters, but it was a cognitive method to allow the brain to process memorised information easily. Similarly, the letters were grouped into two- or three-letter syllables that were also memorised to allow the student to recognise words. The next step was to memorise words that allowed them to finally memorise maxims and larger pieces of writings[562].

A very interesting relationship we observe in oral cultures is the dynamic relationship between memorisation and the written text. This is important to observe in Christian communities, especially since Christianity relied heavily on the written text and

[560] Carruthers, 2000, pp. 75-76.

[561] Cribiore, 1996, pp. 38-39.

[562] Cribiore, 2001, pp. 165-166.

encouraged literacy amongst its members. Yet, as I will demonstrate, these written texts were written to be memorised.

In an oral culture, especially in the ancient Egyptian culture, the written text was perceived as a means of accurately preserving the ongoing memorisation and oral performance of the culture and sometimes as an aid to someone who wanted to memorise a certain text. This is evident in the use of the word used for reading in the ancient Egyptian language (*sdj*), which referred to oral performance rather than reading for one's self. It is even more interesting to note that reading referred to both recollection from memory or from a written text[563]. Thus, writing did not necessarily eliminate orality, as we will identify some of the characteristics that classify a text that was written in a predominantly oral culture.

The first characteristic to consider is that, unlike predominantly written cultures that had little influence from surrounding oral culture, words are not a separate entity. In a written culture, such as today's, words are separate entities and we can count how many words there are in a sentence, yet the smallest entity in an oral culture is not so much the word as the syllable. This aspect of the written text can be seen in the earliest Greek manuscripts when orality had a predominant influence, where the words were not separated but the text tended to just run, sometimes with dots or bars separating phrases or for ease of reading[564]. Furthermore, in papyri containing school exercises, we see word separation markers that divide word groups, that is, words

[563] Carr, 2005, p. 72.

[564] Carr, 2005, p. 4.

connected to articles, propositions and other articles. These markers were added to the text as a teaching technique for students learning to read[565].

A puzzling question arises – why did it take the ancient writers seven centuries to make use of the idea of word separation? Especially when we consider that word separation was the norm in early Roman literary texts[566], which confirms the fact that the Greeks were familiar with the idea of word separation, yet they intentionally avoided using it.

Once we consider the fact that the written culture was highly influenced by memorisation techniques of the time, and that reading and writing systems interrelate, we quickly realise that we are asking the wrong question. William Johnson in his research suggests that some characteristics of an ancient manuscript, such as having two equally divided columns with 15-29 letters per line; having each line ending but not necessarily corresponding with the end of a word but with the end of a syllable; and having equal margins separating the texts; all result in not only a piece of art work rather than a literary text but, more importantly, result in a system of writing that is compatible with the eye of an ancient reader. Therefore, it is possible that while the Greeks knew about word separation, they chose not to use it but rather used a familiar system that made use of syllables rather than words.

Johnson further notes that the outline of ancient manuscripts matches modern physiological analysis about how the eye scans a page of written text. Rather than the

[565] Cribiore, 1996, p. 75.

[566] Cribiore, 2001.

eye move across the line of the text at an even rate, in a two-column layout of the ancient manuscripts:

> The eye moves… in a series of fixations and jumps called "saccades." At each ocular fixation, the parafoveal vision, about six degrees to either side of the point of acute focus, or roughly fifteen to twenty letters in most printed texts, is able to keep track of what comes before and after, and begins (or finishes) processing this data prior to the next saccadic movement. A similar span of fifteen-plus letters marks the amount of text that the eye keeps ahead of the voice when reading aloud (this is the "eye-voice span")[567].

This is in contrast to modern reading, where the eye fixation starts at the beginning of the word and the reader relies on his ability to recognise sequences of words[568].

Therefore, we see a relationship between the shape of the text, the number of letters in a line and the natural fixation of the eye. This means that the page layout was in itself a memorisation technique applied to written texts. It further shows how these manuscripts were written with the purpose of reading aloud in mind. Similarly, Johnson observes another memorisation marker in written papyri, which is usually written by a professional scribe for another, where it often had a highly formulaic character: "the cursive script often deems adequate a clear initial letter or two followed by squiggles, incomprehensible in themselves, but obvious once one has sufficiently reconstructed the formulaic context"[569].

[567] Johnson, 2000, p. 610.

[568] Johnson, 2000, p. 610.

[569] Johnson, 2000, p. 610.

These building blocks were very important for memorising texts in antiquity. Memorising was not just mere repetition of texts, but was undertaken by using letters and syllables as markers that aided the student to recognise words, maxims or formulas. These markers helped the mind to concentrate and to retrieve information when needed. This is the "instruction for children" that Abba Isaac was referring to in the *Conferences*. Since the process of thinking and memorising is not a disembodied skill, as Carruthers suggests "there is no thought without matters to think with"[570], then the idea of imageless prayer was a difficulty, as illustrated by Abba Serapion "who after being told of the patriarch's letter cried out 'Woe is me, wretch that I am! They have taken my God from me and I have no one to lay hold of, nor do I know who I should adore or address'"[571]. The issue at hand is not only a theological one; the Abba's cry was because the images he used while praying were a necessary tool for him to be able to concentrate.

Germanus's question to Abba Isaac about the incident with Abba Serapion further confirms this explanation, where he says:

> we want to have explained to us how this awareness of God may be conceived in the mind and perpetually maintained there. Thus, when we notice that we have slipped from it, we shall have this before our eye, and when we come to our senses again we shall have the wherewithal to return there[572].

[570] Carruthers, 2000, p. 89.

[571] *Conferences:* 10, III.5 Ramsey, 1997, p. 373.

[572] *Conferences:* 10, VIII.4 Ramsey, 1997, p. 377. Cassian and Germanus express no sympathy towards Serapion as they go on to explain a different method of keeping your mind focused on God through praying a short prayer from psalm 69 Casiday, 2007, p. 193.

He further emphasises that "this confusion certainly besets us because we do not keep something special fixed before our eyes as a kind of a formula to which the errant mind can be recalled after numerous detours and divagation"[573].

Another aspect we need to consider is the relationship between literacy and the use of images. From the way Abba Serapion was described in this incident, where he had strayed into the anthropomorphic practice "on account of his ignorance and rustic naivete"[574], we can assume that he was an uneducated man. This assumption is further evident towards the end of the conference where John Cassian clearly makes the distinction between giving multiple formulas for the educated and single formulas for the uneducated. This therefore also explains his use of images rather than letters and formulas as markers for his thoughts. The assumption that Abba Serapion was illiterate explains the reason for Abba Isaac prescribing a single formula to be memorised and used to recollect the thoughts during prayer, rather than the multiple formulas that were commonly used by the earlier and contemporary desert fathers.

In his conclusion to the conference, Abba John expresses his fondness of this formula and that it is "considerably more difficult to observe than that practice of ours by which we used to run through the whole body of Scripture, meditating here and there, without being bound by any preserving application"[575]. He further makes the contrast that "no one is ever excluded from perfection of heart because of illiteracy, nor is simplicity an obstacle to attaining purity of heart… if only they would, by continually

[573] *Conferences:* 10, VIII.5 Ramsey, 1997, p. 377.

[574] *Conferences:* 10, III.4 Ramsey, 1997, p. 373.

[575] *Conferences:* 10, XIV.3 Ramsey, 1997, p. 387.

meditating on this verse, keep the mind whole and the entire attention fixed on God"[576].

Memorisation is an essential tool in an oral culture as, without it, one cannot think or be creative. To be able to memorise, oral people had to use cues and markers from common things that they encountered, such as buildings, pictures on walls of cells, graffiti on walls, and the use of fixed formulas. However, for a monastic, memorisation had a much deeper function. It was a tool for the monk to internalise words and texts from scripture, and this practice was commonly known as meditation.

[576] *Conferences:* 10, XIV.3 Ramsey, 1997, p. 387.

7- Meditation

The correct understanding of meditation and its use in philosophical schools is critical for our understanding of the development of the Arrow Prayer, as it constitutes the backdrop for the practice of the prayer in antiquity. The word 'meditation' has many connotations in different uses of the word at different times and in different languages; to make it more difficult, some of these connotations are joined at different milieus to give the word a new meaning. For instance, the Greek word *Melétē*, usually translated as 'meditation', can mean 'take thought for', 'attend to', 'study', 'pursue exercise', 'practise speaking', 'practise dying', 'practise oratory', and 'military exercise'[577]. Many studies have been done on the topic of meditation, yet because of the multiple connotations of the word, it is difficult to reduce to a single meaning.

Paul Rabbow[578], one of the first scholars in modern times to study the historical background of the practice of meditation through the lens of St Ignatius of Loyola's *Exercitia spiritualia*, tried to make a direct link between the concepts of *spiritual exercise*[579] of the Stoics and Epicureans in antiquity[580], and St Ignatius's in the sixteenth century. In doing so, he opened up a whole new window of research on the subject, yet one which was not without its shortcomings. One of the major limitations

[577] Liddell & Scott, 1996, p. 1096 b.

[578] Rabbow, 1954.

[579] The list of spiritual exercises according to Philo included, among other things, reading, listening, and meditation.

[580] Rabbow, 1954, pp. 17-18.

in his analysis is that the practice of spiritual exercise and therefore meditation as adapted by St Ignatius was directly influenced by the philosophical writings of antiquity. In doing so, he ignored the fact that early Christian writers from the second and third centuries, as well as monks from then onwards, have adopted these philosophies into their own writings and everyday practice. This opens the possibility that these Christian and particularly monastic writings may have been another source of influence on St Ignatius, in addition to the philosophical writings of antiquity.

In his review of Rabbow's work, Pierre Hadot argues that from as early as the second century we have Christian writers, such as Justin the Martyr and Clement of Alexandria, who did not shy away from identifying Christianity as a 'philosophy'. However, they did not consider it as just another philosophy among many others, but they considered it as *the* philosophy. This allowed them to embrace many of the other philosophies, considering them to have some of the truth, yet Christianity was in possession of Truth itself through Jesus Christ[581]. Hadot concludes his argument by saying that the "Christian ideal was described, and, in part, practiced, by borrowing models and vocabulary from the Greek philosophical tradition"[582] and it was through the agency of these philosophies that "the heritage of ancient spiritual exercises was transmitted to Christian spirituality: first to that of the Middle Ages, and subsequently to that of modern times"[583].

In his conclusion, Hadot made the link between early Christian writers and those of the middle ages and later, yet because of the lack of scholarship at the time, which in

[581] Hadot, 1999, p. 128.

[582] Hadot, 1999, p. 140.

[583] Hadot, 1999, p. 140.

turn misinformed his conclusion, he failed to demonstrate the continuity of embracing developed Christian philosophies and practices by the monks of antiquity, blaming it on their lack of education:

> Generally speaking, we can say that monasticism in Egypt and Syria was born and developed in a Christian milieu, spontaneously and without the intervention of a philosophical model. The first monks were not cultivated men, but Christians who wanted to attain to Christian perfection by the heroic practice of the evangelical prescriptions, and the imitation of the Life of Christ. It was, therefore, natural that they should seek their techniques of perfection in the Old and the New Testament[584].

The level of education of monks has been widely contested among scholars today[585], as was discussed in chapter five of this thesis. We know today that monastic levels of education in antiquity are much higher than once thought and there is no reason to believe that they did not have any access to early Christian writers who embraced and integrated philosophical language and terminology into Christian philosophy and practice[586]. In fact, there is ample evidence that early monks read early writers such as Origen[587]. That is not to say that the monastic practices had purely philosophical motives, it is very clear when reading monastic writings that their motives were purely biblical yet, like their predecessors (i.e. early Christian writers), they were influenced by their philosophical learning. In fact, the monastic life from the fourth century onwards was described as *philosophia* by some of the church fathers, such as

[584] Hadot, 1999, p. 140.

[585] The most recent work on the topic is by Lund University Early Monasticism and Classical Paideia project.

[586] Bay, 2014, p. 335.

[587] Lundhaug & Jenott, 2015, p. 168, Clark, 1999, p. 54.

Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom and as early as Evagrius[588], who was a disciple of St Macarius.

Meditation as a spiritual exeresis, in its Greek philosophical sense, was as other philosophical teachings taught in schools to enable the student to internalise certain text or teaching. The meaning of the word 'meditation' in different languages carries a strong relationship to education. As we have seen earlier, in Greek the word *Melétē* carries meanings such as study, practise speaking, practise oratory. In the Hebrew Scripture, the word *hagal*, from where the word *Melétē* in the LXX was translated, carried the meaning of studying in a meditative manner[589].

Furthermore, Heinrich Bacht[590] noticed in his review of the use of meditation in the monastic writings how St Athanasius in his *Life of Anthony* does not always use the term *Melétē* like many of the other monastic texts, but uses the term *philologiu* meaning 'love of learning', to mean meditation. This is an interesting link between the practice of meditation and education, especially when we consider that the *Life of Anthony* is a monastic writing and was written for a monastic audience.

The most recent review of the practice of *Melétē* in monastic writings was made by Per Rönnegård. In his work, he draws clear parallels between the practice of *Melétē* in its philosophical school context and the monastic context from two main texts, the *AP*

[588] Hadot, 1999, p. 129.

[589] Wortley, 2006, pp. 316-317 note 310 Wortley further points out that the word in this meaning frequently required in Psalm 118/119.

[590] Bacht, 1972, p. 257.

and the letters of Barsanuphius and John[591]. He summarises the three steps of philosophical education as follows: "the first step is to learn something (*matheín*), the second is to imprint it in the being of the person through mental exercise (*melétē*), the third step is putting it into practice (*áskēsis*)"[592]. From reading some of the monastic texts, we see these three steps emphasised, though not in a systematic process. Yet the element of repetition of phrases from scriptures or from a saying of one of the elders for the purpose of imprinting them into their everyday life and to train the monk's heart or his spiritual consciousness to direct its attention to God, is prevalent in the monastic teaching[593]. He further concludes, "The parallels between the use of the terms in Stoic philosophy and in the ascetic texts, such as those from Gaza, are too great to be dismissed"[594].

Melétē in Monastic Literature

In reading monastic literature, we realise the importance of the practice of meditation as an ascetic practice along with prayer, fasting, psalmody, and manual labour. In the *AP* we find countless variations of this list; Abba Poemen described sitting in one's cell as consisting of "manual work, eating only once a day, silence, meditation"[595]. Abba Lot also described his discipline to Abba Joseph, saying "I say my little office, I fast a little, I pray and meditate"[596]. An anonymous elder said that the life of a monk

[591] I am grateful to Per Rönnegård for providing me with a draft of both articles. The Bible and *Melétē* in the Letters of Barsanuphius and John, and *Melétē* in early Christian ascetic texts.

[592] Rönnegård, 2013, p. 89.

[593] McGuckin, 1999, p. 80.

[594] Rönnegård, 2013, p. 88.

[595] *Poemen:* 168 Ward, 1984a, p. 190.

[596] *Joseph of Panephysis:* 7 Ward, 1984a, p. 103.

consists of "obedience, meditation, not judging, not slandering, not complaining"[597]. Another anonymous elder said that the key to fighting against the devil is to "Practise silence, be careful for nothing, give heed to your meditation, lie down and get up in the fear of God, and you will not need to fear the assaults of the impious"[598]. Another elder lists the foundations of the monastic life to be "meditation, psalmody, and manual work"[599]. St Macarius advised a monk who was attacked by thoughts, saying: "Practice fasting a little later; meditate on the Gospel and the other Scriptures"[600]. It is also said of Abba John the Dwarf that, after he returned from harvest, "he gave himself to prayer, meditation and psalmody until his thoughts were re-established in their previous order"[601].

The connection between meditation as repetition of verses from scripture, the internalising of the words that are being meditated upon, and the practice of unceasing prayer can be demonstrated in one of Abba Amoi's saying. It was said that Abba Amoi taught Abba John the Short that while walking to church, which was far from him, to give himself "to meditating on the scriptures inspired by God, ruminating on them in his heart with unceasing prayer [1 Thess 5:17] like a spiritual sheep, drawing the spirit to him through the sweetness of their meaning"[602].

In another instant, the same Abba Amoi, after kicking Abba John out of his cell to test his patience, came to Abba John's cell and found him audibly repeating verses from

[597] *Anonymous:* 93 Ward, 1986, p. 30.

[598] *Anonymous:* 142 Ward, 1986, p. 40.

[599] *Anonymous:* 36 Ward, 1986, p. 9.

[600] *Macarius the Great:* 3 Ward, 1984a, p. 127.

[601] *John the Dwarf:* 35 Ward, 1984a, p. 92.

[602] *Bohairic Coptic life of John the little:* 8 Vivian, 2010, p. 76.

the scriptures that would calm his soul against Abba John's harsh treatment: "endure every lesson, 'for what son does not have his father instruct him?'" [Heb 12:7] And again, "by your endurance you will gain your souls" [Matt 24:13; Luke 21:19], and again, "The one who endures to the end will be saved" [Matt 24:13]"[603].

The aspect of digesting and interiorising the repeated text of the scriptures in an audible voice is an important aspect and should not be overlooked as merely a mental exercise. Recent scholars have called this process "praying the Scriptures" or consuming the Word of God".[604] I have already mentioned numerous examples of loud recitation in the *AP* as well as St Pachomius and St Shenoute's monasteries.

In the case of St Shenoute, his *Life* records that he saw his disciples reciting the Old Testament prophets,[605] hence highlighting the emphasis on memorisation and recitation of scripture within the Shenoutian community. The practice of meditation is further attested to in the rules of St Shenoute, which commands the practice of meditation day and night and also while walking, working, or simply passing time[606].

Palladius, in his *Lausiac History*, portrays how this was the general practice of the desert monks, at least in Nitria, when he said: "about the ninth hour one can stand and hear the divine psalmody issuing forth from each cell and imagine one is high above in paradise"[607].

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[603] *Bohairic Coptic life of John the little:* 10 Vivian, 2010, p. 78.

[604] Breck, 2001, p. 69.

[605] *Life of Shenoute:* 94-97 Bell, 1983, pp. 70-71.

[606] Monastic Rules: 333, 495 Layton, 2014, pp. 231, 285.

[607] *Lausiac History:* 7.5 Meyer, 1965, p. 41.

Numerous sayings testify to the centrality of the practice of scriptural meditation in the life of a monk. In the *AP*, when Abba Betimes and Abba Ammonas visited Abba Achilles, they "heard him meditating this phrase: fear not Joseph to go down to Egypt [Gen 46:3]; and he went on meditating this phrase for a long time"[608]. From this saying we learn two things: the first is that the Abba's meditation was audible enough for someone outside the cell to hear; and secondly, that it involved the repetition of the same phrase, over and over.

Therefore, the practice of *Melétē* in monastic circles involved the repetition of a verse or a phrase from memory for an extended period of time for the purpose of internalising the meaning of the text, which in turns dictates the person's mindset and behaviour. These key elements of *Melétē* neatly line up with the key elements of the practice of the Arrow Prayer. Instead of repeating memorised poetry and maxims, the monks used verses from the scriptures.

Silent or Loud Meditation

The practice of silent versus loud prayer was a topic that was widely discussed and commented on in antiquity by Christian and non-Christian writers alike. In his seminal work on the topic, Pieter van der Horst has shed light on the different motivations for the practice of silent prayer in Graeco-Roman pagan religions; for example, preventing the enemies from hearing your prayer, mentioning the names of some gods may evoke their noxious powers, feeling embarrassed about what you would pray about, because of the criminal character of the petition, or the most

[608] *Achilles:* 5 Ward, 1984a, p. 29.

commonly mentioned motivation in the ancient sources is for the practice of magic[609]. What is interesting to note is that silent prayer was often looked at as an exception to the rule and not the general practice[610]. What lay behind these motivations is practical reasons, namely not wanting others who are present to hear it[611]. But this has no bearing on the power or the acceptance of the prayer. There were also the Gnostics who constructed a whole theological, religious and philosophical system that formulated the concept of silence into their belief system[612]. It was not until the later Platonists that we came to hear of an exalted view on everything immaterial, therefore adding a philosophical dimension to silent prayer[613]. Therefore, we can conclude that for early Greek philosophers, silent prayer was another mode of prayer, and they did not suggest silence to be superior to the spoken words. Yet, for Gnostics, silence was an essential consequence of their belief system that hinges on the transcendence of anything non-materialistic.

In Christianity, we have references that advocate the practice of silent prayer as early as the second century. Clement of Alexandria devotes an entire chapter in his work *Stromateis* to explain how God hears our silent prayers[614]. Clement's arguments for

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[609] Horst, 1994, p. 2.

[610] Hadot, 1999, p. 20.

[611] With the exception of the second reason, i.e. mentioning the names of some gods may evoke their noxious powers which, as will be discussed, proves the power of the spoken words in prayer.

[612] As Raoul Mortley puts it: "The Gnostics clearly have a great deal to say about silence, and the transition from silence to language is every bit as crucial as the transition from nothing to matter, in the Gnostic chain of being. Just as matter has to be transcended in the pursuit of one's spiritual source, so has speech to give way to silence. And in the case of Marcus, the two processes are one: to transcend material reality *is* to transcend speech." Mortley, 1986b, pp. 123-124.

[613] For some quotes and examples, see Mortley, 1986b, p. 10.

[614] "God does not possess human form in order to hear nor does he need senses, as stoics think" *Stromateis:* VII 7,37,3; "Prayer is then, to speak more boldly, conversation with God. Though

silent prayer seem to come from an apology against Stoic philosophy rather than stipulating a superior mode of prayer. As Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony argues, Clement advocated both modes of prayer since, in his argument for silent prayer, he did so "without disclosing his preference and without creating a specific concept of silent prayer"[615].

In a similar vein, Origen argues that, philosophically, God, who is transcendent to human form, does not need language or voice in order for him to hear our prayers yet, unlike the Platonist's understanding, He is not limited to silent prayer but His power also extends to the materialistic world, otherwise he would not be Divine[616]. More interestingly Bitton-Ashkelony argues that when Origen interpreted the Scripture, he preferred to emphasise other aspects of prayer and not its silent dimension[617].

It is important to consider that these Christian writers were writing with two extreme points of views in mind: the Stoics who, according to Clement (*Strom* 7.37.1), believed that God can only be understood by the senses; and the Platonists and the Gnostics, who believed that God transcends matter and can only be communicated silently, not vocally.

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whispering, consequently, and not opening the lips we speak in silence, yet we cry inwardly. For God hears continually all the inward converse" *Stromateis:* VII 7,39,6; "God does not wait for loquacious tongues, as interpreters among men, but knows absolutely the thoughts of all; and what the voice intimates to us, that is what our thoughts, which even before the creation He knew would come into our mind, speak to God. Prayer then may be uttered without the voice" *Stromateis:* VII 7,43,4.

[615] Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, 2012, p. 312.

[616] Mortley, 1986a, pp. 62-84.

[617] Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, 2012, p. 315.

Silent reading also had its fair share of scholarly debate regarding whether reading was practised aloud or silently[618]. Carruthers argues that one cannot argue for one against the other; both were practised in antiquity in different situations. While reading aloud was a more common practice, there is evidence from antiquity for silent reading, which is usually looked at by scholars who are favouring reading aloud as uncommon and an exception to the rule[619]. Both modes of reading functioned in a particular way in different circumstances. The famous incident by Augustine who saw St Ambrose reading, "his eyes would travel across the pages and his mind would explore the sense, but his voice and tongue were silent"[620], is often used by both sides of the debate to prove silent reading on one side, or to prove that is it was an exception because it caught Augustine's attention on the other. Or, as Augustine speculated, Ambrose "dreaded lest if the author he read should deliver anything obscurely, some attentive or perplexed hearer should desire him to expound it, or to discuss some of the harder questions; so that his time being thus spent, he could not turn over so many volumes as he desired; although the preserving of his voice might be the truer reason for his reading to himself"[621].

In the Egyptian monastic communities, loud recitation was the normal practice in the private cell of the monk[622], although this was not because of their inability to recite silently. Rather, loud recitation was an aid for the monk to internalise the text through processing it through the eyes, mouth and ear of the reader. However, when he had company, the monk, out of humility, preferred to pray silently as in the case of Abba

[618] A good review of the scholarly debate can be found in Johnson, 2010, p. 7.

[619] Carruthers, 2008, pp. 212, note 57, Johnson, 2010, p. 5.

[620] *Confessions of St Augustine:* VI, 3.

[621] *Confessions of St Augustine:* VI, 3.

[622] Layton, 2007, p. 71.

Marcellinus, who out of humility "stood in silence, prayer in his mouth, palm-leaves in his hand"[623]. Humility in this context may be a way of hiding the monk's prayer rule from the visiting monk. It might also be the fact that orators and poets who performed publicly were highly praised for their ability to recite large portions of text. The longer the text and the more confident the orator presents himself, the more praise he would gain from the audience[624]. Yet, for the desert monks it was not an exercise in oratory or in public recitation, but a practice that prolonged their encounter with the Word of God, which would eventually lead to the continual presence of the word of the scripture in their hearts.

An exception to this rule is the practice in the communal monasticism where reciting aloud was a requirement rather than a sign of piety. For example, in Layton's study of St Shenoute's canons, he emphasised the vocal nature of recitation of scripture: "there is no silence in this monastery, but rather a constant buzzing sound like flight of bees, as everyone continually mumbles prayers and passages of scripture in a low voice"[625]. Essentially, this is the practice of meditation or the Arrow Prayer.

Metaphors for Meditation

- Eating.

Meditation in antiquity, as we have discussed, was an essential tool that was learned at a young age, and which was used for memorising and interiorising ideas. Late antique monks made use of some of these techniques of memorisation and meditation

[623] *Lausiac History:* 18.15, Meyer, 1965, p. 62.

[624] Johnson, 2000, p. 623.

[625] Layton, 2007, p. 71.

to aid them in their practice of constant prayer through the recitation of scriptures. In describing the process of meditation and recitation, many monastic writers used various metaphors to denote the way the text they were meditating on was processed in their mind. One of the metaphors that was commonly used in the monastic writings was the metaphor of digestion, eating, or rumination. This metaphor had its origins in the secular education system; Quintilian used it as imagery for the frequent repetition of words, or meditation:

> we do not swallow our food till we have chewed it and reduced it almost to a state of liquefaction to assist the process of digestion, so what we read must not be committed to the memory for subsequent imitation while it is still in a crude state, but must be softened and, if I may use the phrase, reduced to a pulp by frequent re-perusal[626].

Late antique writers usually considered reading to be eating, and meditation digesting. This metaphor has some strong biblical roots, for example in Ezekiel 3:3 and Revelation 10: 9-10, in which the prophet and the disciple are given a book to eat and it was found to be sweet in their mouths; the same metaphor is used in Psalm 33:9. Origen, in his interpretation of Lev. 11: 4, uses this metaphor to explain the phrase "Chew the cud and part the hoof". The one who chews the cud is the one who "pays heed to knowledge and 'meditates day and night on the law of the Lord'"[627]. Philo used the metaphor before him on the same verse. He interpreted "chewing the cud" to

[626] *Quintilian:* 10.1.19.

[627] *Homilies on Leviticus*: 7.1,2 Barkley, 1990, p. 148, Similar imagery can also be found in *Homilies on Genesis*: 7.4; 16. 3-4; *Homilies on Leviticus*: 4.6; 4.10; 5.7.

mean meditating on what one has learned; "dividing the hoof" means separating good aspects of memory from evil[628].

Later, in one of the Macarian texts, St Macarius vividly recalls a childhood experience that elaborately describes the metaphor:

> I know that when I was a child I used to observe that the old women and the young people were chewing something in their mouths so that it would sweeten the saliva in their throats and the bad breath of their mouths, sweetening and refreshing their liver and all their innards. If something fleshly can so sweeten those who chew it and ruminate it, then how much more the food of life, the spring of salvation, the fount of living water, the sweet of all sweets, our Lord Jesus Christ! If the demons hear his glorious name blessed by our mouths, they vanish like smoke. This blessed name, if we persevere in it and ruminate on it, opens up the spirit, the charioteer of the soul and the body and drives all thoughts of evil out of the immortal soul and reveals to it heavenly things[629].

St Pachomius also describes the words of the scripture as sweet and the word of an angry person as bitter[630]. Elsewhere an Abba is described to be "twisting ropes, whilst meditation floweth on as running water"[631]. Just as the words of the scripture were a sweet taste in the mouth of the monk, slanderous words were blood in his mouth that needed to be spat out. Abba Achilles was once seen by an old man spitting blood;

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[628] Clark, 1999, pp. 96, note 163; *Philo, De agricultura:* 131–35.

[629] *The Virtues:* 13 Vivian, 2004b, p. 96.

[630] *The Bohairic Life of Pachomius:* 187 Veilleux, 1980, p. 228.

[631] Winlock et al., 1926a, pp. 155, note 6.

when asked why he explained that "the word of a brother grieved me, I struggled not to tell him so and I prayed God to rid me of this word. So it became like blood in my mouth and I have spat it out. Now I am in peace, having forgotten the matter"[632].

The use of eating and digesting as metaphors for reading and meditating was a particularly popular metaphor in the Roman culture. Carruthers argues that the use of such metaphors "are so powerful and tenacious that digestion should be considered another basic functional model for the complementary activities of reading and composition, collection and recollection"[633].

The monastic practice of reading parts of the scriptures while eating has also attracted the attention of commentators, such as St Jerome, who made the connection between eating and reading when talking about reading during meal time: "so that while the body is fattened with food, the mind should be filled with reading"[634] It seems, however, that this practice was brought to Egypt later, while their usual practice was to remain silent[635].

In his research on the sociology of reading in antiquity, Johnson argues that reading aloud during meals was a practice for those of elite status, either for the purpose of entertainment or as a way of promoting a wider group discussion of the text, which

[632] *Achilles:* 4 Ward, 1984a, p. 29.

[633] Carruthers, 2008, p. 207. Using the digestion metaphor for meditation is also a popular theme in the writings of the first-century Roman writer Quintilian, see, for example, *Inst Orat* XI.II,4.

[634] Carruthers, 2008, p. 208, note 41.

[635] For a description of the source of reading during meals, read (Cassian's, *Institutes:* IV, 17). For the practice of silence in the Pachomian monasteries, see *Lausiac History:* 6 Veilleux, 1981, p. 127.

was usually of a philosophical nature[636]. These social aspects of reading during meals were the exact opposite of what the goal of reading during meals would have been in a communal monastic setting, since they did not see themselves as an elite group and did not perceive reading scripture as entertainment, yet they emphasised in the rules to avoid any small talk Therefore, it seems quite strange for early monks not to use scriptural reading during their mealtime. We have already seen how they have integrated recitation and meditation into their everyday activity, so it seems inconceivable to think that they did not think of scriptural reading during mealtime as an option, especially as the practice of reading during meals was not unknown in Graeco-Roman culture.

- Breathing

Another metaphor that is less prominent in early monastic writing, yet gains more popularity in later Athonite monastic text, is the breathing metaphor. There is an allusion to breathing in Christ in the face of demonic attacks in the *Life* of Anthony[637], which is interesting as it conveys the language of the philosophical school[638]. The Rules of St Theodore, one of Pachomius's successors, refers to scripture as being the breath of God[639]. Later, John Climacus refers to the practice of breathing in the context of the continuous repetition of verses and the remembrance of Jesus:

[636] Johnson, 2000, pp. 615-624.

[637] *Greek Life of Anthony*: 91, Vivian & Athanassakis, 2003, p. 251.

[638] Johnsén, 2013, p. 99.

[639] The metaphor is repeated in *The instructions of Theodore:* 35, 38 Veilleux, 1982, pp. 114-115.

> Take in with your very breath the word of Him who said: "he that endureth to the end shall be saved"[640].
>
> "Let this cleave to your breathing, thee word of him who says: 'But as for me, when demons trouble me, I put on sackcloth, and humbled my soul with fasting, and my prayer hath cleaved to the bosom of my soul'"[641].
>
> "Let the remembrance of Jesus be present with each breath, and then you will know the value of stillness"[642].

As we can see from the three quotes above, St John did not only use the Jesus formula but also other verses from scripture for the practice of meditation. There is also no clear indication of using breathing techniques; rather it is a metaphor. In the eighth century text, St. Macarius had used the prayer in the language of breathing: "It is not easy to say with each breath Lord Jesus have mercy on me, I bless you my Lord Jesus"[643]. This is evident in the fact that St Macarius, who is reported in the *Virtues* to have used breathing as a metaphor, is also said to have taught meditation using the metaphor of food and eating[644].

Another point of consideration are biological understandings of breathing in antiquity which held that the breath goes through the lungs to the heart[645], which is the centre of the human being, therefore implying by this metaphor that the words are repeated for the purpose of internalising them into the person's core (the heart). This is consistent

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[640] *Step:* 4.112 Luibheid & Russell, 1982, p. 51.

[641] *Step:* 14.32 Luibheid & Russell, 1982, p. 102.

[642] *Step:* 27.61 Luibheid & Russell, 1982, p. 207.

[643] *The Virtues of Saint Macarius of Egypt:* 42 Vivian, 2004b, p. 117.

[644] *The Virtues of Saint Macarius of Egypt:* 13, 34 Vivian, 2004b, pp. 95, 111.

[645] Johnsén, 2013, p. 99.

with the philosophical understanding of internalising the text as the purpose of its repetition. Therefore, while breathing was used as a metaphor for meditation, it was only intended to be a metaphor rather than a description of a specific practice. Further evidence of the fact that breathing used as metaphor, is the fact that meditation was almost always associated with work.

Meditation and work

There is enough evidence in the monastic writings to indicate that meditation in antiquity was associated with the whole body. For someone to recite or meditate the scripture did not only mean an internal exercise of the heart but it had an active, vocal and bodily dimension[646]. In the three texts relating to the life of St Macarius[647], he teaches using the hands[648], lips[649], lungs[650], and the mouth[651]. In St Shenoute's writings, there is also a great emphasis on the use of short prayers during every action in the daily life of a monk, while he is coming in and out of his cell, while he is lying down to sleep or getting up, when he blesses or prays[652]. He likewise gives the same advice to lay people during their everyday activities, when they are joyful or distressed, when they are drawing water, running away from barbarians or wild beasts, or those who are taken as prisoners of war[653].

[646] Stewart, 2003, p. 121.

[647] The three texts, "The Sayings of St Macarius", "The Virtues of St Macarius", and "The Life of St Macarius of Scetis", are translated in Vivian, 2004b.

[648] *Macarius the Great*: 19, Ward, 1984a, p. 131.

[649] *The Virtues of Saint Macarius of Egypt:* 41 Vivian, 2004b, p. 117.

[650] *The Virtues of Saint Macarius of Egypt:* 42 Vivian, 2004b, p. 117.

[651] *The Virtues of Saint Macarius of Egypt:* 13 Vivian, 2004b, p. 96.

[652] *I am amazed*: 802-803 Davis, 2008, pp. 283-284.

[653] *I am amazed*: 821 Davis, 2008, pp. 285-286.

The Latin *meditare* has many connotations to a physical activity. It can refer to a physical exercise or to train oneself – accordingly, *meditatio* denotes preparation, exercise, or training[654]. In the Greek, Liddell and Scott note that *meletan* can have the meaning of some kind of military drill or exercise[655]. This connotation is evident in Jerome's Latin translation of the *Rules* of St Pachomius, as meditation is almost always connected to physical work, such as when the monks are instructed to "recite something from the scripture while going either to his cell or to the refectory"[656]. Also, when the houses are gathered, the monks "shall not speak to each other but each one shall recite something from the scriptures"[657]. Similarly, in St Shenoute's canons, we read that the monks were required to meditate on scripture while performing their handiwork six times a day. Special instruction was given for times when they were not required to do handiwork while praying for reason of weariness of fasting or those who are coming from their job, especially during Lent[658].

From the beginning of monasticism, prayer and work went hand in hand, "the combined practice of unceasing prayer with manual labor formed the essence of the prayer culture in early Egyptian monasticism" [659]. When St Anthony was afflicted with a severe case of depression at the beginning of his monastic life, he prayed to God, "What shall I do in my affliction? How can I be saved?"[660] After a while, he

[654] Graham, 1987, p. 134.

[655] Liddell & Scott, 1996, p. 1096 b.

[656] *Rules of Saint Pachomius:* 28 Veilleux, 1981, p. 150.

[657] *Rules of Saint Pachomius:* 59 Veilleux, 1981, p. 156.

[658] Layton, 2007, p. 51, note 34.

[659] Eshagh, 2016, p. 53.

[660] *Anthony:* 1 Ward, 1984a, p. 2.

went out and saw an angel in the form of a man "sitting at his work, getting up from his work to pray, then sitting down and plaiting a rope, then getting up again to pray"[661]. From this incident can be traced the rule among monks that manual labour was performed alternating with prayers or, in some cases, they were done simultaneously.

The practice of undertaking a relentless round of prayer and work is something we find not only in the beginning of St Anthony's monastic life but also in the beginning of the monastic life of St Pachomius. As he was learning the ascetic life under the guidance of St Palamon who taught him to "try him by vigils from evening to morning in prayers, recitations, and numerous manual labours"[662]. Later, Pachomius iterates the basic work of a monk to his disciple Theodore to be "unceasing prayer, vigils, reciting of God's law, and our manual labour"[663]. St Macarius also lists, among a list of monastic virtues, "…demonstrate a love of God and a love of people… with manual works, with vigils, with numerous prayers"[664].

We encounter the same relationship in the *Apophthegmata*. The two key phrases across the whole text are "speak a word to me that I may be saved" and "what should I do to be saved". Both of these phrases were used synonymously throughout the text, which points out the fact that speaking and doing were two sides of the same coin, one always accompanied by the other. This is also confirmed by the response of the elder, which often included a list of things to do and prayers to pray. We have

[661] *Anthony:* 1 Ward, 1984a, p. 2.

[662] *Bohairic Life of Pachomius:* 10 Veilleux, 1980, p. 32.

[663] *Bohairic Life of Pachomius:* 39 Veilleux, 1980, p. 59.

[664] *Virtues of Saint Macarius of Egypt:* 18 Vivian, 2004b, p. 102.

encountered earlier how St Shenoute prescribed the practice of the invocation of the name of Jesus during the everyday activity of the monks[665] and laity[666] alike. We may follow this relationship through to the eleventh century when the Jesus Prayer was prescribed to laity in place of the prayer of the hours[667].

John Cassian summarises the way the Egyptian monks integrated work and prayer as follows:

> The upshot is that it is hardly possible to determine what depends on what here – that is, whether they practice manual labour ceaselessly thanks to their spiritual meditation or whether they acquired such remarkable progress in the spirit and such luminous knowledge thanks to their constant labour"[668].

Therefore, the early monks summarised the monastic life to consist of work and prayer, and established no boundaries between the two. Yet the obvious question arises, how can work be treated at the same level as ceaseless prayer? Studying the sources further, we learn that work was not an end in itself, but a means by which a monk could achieve spiritual meditation, yet there was more to work than an aid to meditation. There were other virtues that manual labour aided the monk in achieving – self-sufficiency[669], giving to the poor[670], and warding off sleep[671].

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[665] *I am amazed:* 802-803 *(Orlandi, 58)*, Davis, 2008, pp. 283-284.

[666] *I am amazed:* 821 *(Orlandi, 58)*, Davis, 2008, pp. 285-286.

[667] Swanson, 2000, pp. 710-711.

[668] *The Institutes*: 2.14 Ramsey, 2000, p. 46.

[669] *Poemen*: 10 Ward, 1984a, p. 168; *Sisoes*: 16 Ward, 1984a, p. 215; *Silvanus*: 9 Ward, 1984a, p. 224.

[670] *The Greek life of Pachomious:* 6 Veilleux, 1980, p. 302; *Lucius:* 1 Ward, 1984a, p. 120.

[671] *The Institutes:* 2.14 Ramsey, 2000, p. 46.

Lisa Agaiby further draws attention to another role that manual labour played in monastic communities:

> To participate in a community's manual labours also served a sociological function. In settlements that brought together people of diverse economic backgrounds, the notion that all members should perform manual labour provided a means of leveling out social differences and fostering social harmony. Therefore, Antony explains that those who rely on the support of others instead of themselves have failed to fully renounce the world, and so the monk was losing the reward of his labours[672].

Therefore, manual labour became one of the major attributes that categorised and differentiated Christian asceticism from other forms of 'philosophy'[673]. Consequently, in Egypt, we find a monk who came from a senatorial background, working with his hands, side by side with an illiterate Egyptian peasant monk.

Yet the most compelling motive for the desert monks to practise manual labour is much more straightforward than we anticipate. It is basically to fulfil the commandment of the Gospel since, for Anthony and many of the desert monks, the monastic way of life is simply "the life according to the gospel"[674]. Hence, Anthony had "worked with his hands, having heard, 'Let the lazy person not eat'"[675]. Not surprisingly, the exhortation to work came in the same paragraph as the exhortation to pray without ceasing, both being in fulfilment of the scriptures. Similarly, St

[672] Agaiby, 2015, pp. 15-16.

[673] Rich, 2007, p. 86.

[674] *Life of Antony:* 2.3 Vivian & Athanassakis, 2003, p. 58; and *Basil of Caesarea*: Letter 207.2.

[675] *Life of Antony:* 3.6 Vivian & Athanassakis, 2003, p. 62.

Pachomius exhorted his disciple Theodore "to accomplish without fainting the things we are commanded to do, namely, unceasing prayer, vigils, reciting of God's law, and our manual labour about which we have orders in the holy scriptures"[676]. The fulfilment of the command of the scripture to do manual labour and to pray unceasingly[677] was usually divinely confirmed by experiencing divine revelations during these times, as Athanasius relates, "While Antony was sitting and working he had a vision"[678]. It is a phenomenon experienced many times by Pachomius[679] and Theodore,[680] as well as Macarius.[681]

In the monastic teaching and practice, work and prayer were the primary activity of the monk. The balance between the two was the important factor that monks tried to reach, and there is constant warning to those who favoured one over the other. To illustrate this point, the *Paralipomena* mentions the story of a monk who, becoming overzealous about his handiwork, completed two mats in one day[682]. Expecting to be praised by Pachomius, he proudly displayed the mats in front of his cell:

> Pachomius seeing that he had done this for display, and recognising the thought that had moved him to do it, groaned heavily and said to the brothers who were sitting with him, :See this brother; from morning till now he has given all his toil to the devil and has left nothing whatever of his work for the

[676] *Bohairic Life of Pachomius:* 35, Veilleux, 1980, p. 59.

[677] Rich, 2007, p. 86.

[678] *Life of Antony:* 82.4 Vivian & Athanassakis, 2003, p. 232.

[679] *Greek life of Pachomius:* 12, Veilleux, 1980, p. 305; *Bohairic life of Pachomius:* 66, Veilleux, 1980, p. 86; *Bohairic life of pachomius:* 113, Veilleux, 1980, p. 165; *Bohairic life of Pachomius:*17 Veilleux, 1980, p. 38; *Bohairic life of Pachomius:* 22 Veilleux, 1980, p. 45.

[680] *Bohairic life of Pachomius:* 34 Veilleux, 1980, p. 58.

[681] *Life of St Macarius:* 8 Vivian, 2004b, p. 158.

[682] *Paralipomena:* 15 Veilleux, 1981, p. 57.

> comfort of his own soul, because he has preferred the praise of men to the praise of God. And although he has worn out his body through labour he has made his soul empty of the fruition of the works"[683].

On the other side of the scale we have the monks who put more emphasis on prayer than they did on work, such as the example of the young John the Dwarf, who announced to his brother that he wanted to become like the angels who do not work but worship God without ceasing. So he wrapped himself in his cloak and wandered off into the desert. He returned a week later, exhausted, and suffering from thirst and hunger. He knocked on his brother's door but the brother did not open. Instead, he called out, "Who is there," to which John responded, "I am John, your brother." But the other responded, "John no longer lives with human beings, he has become an angel!" and so left him outside all night. In the morning, the brother opened the door and, teaching him a lesson in practicality, told him "You are a human being. To eat you must work"[684].

There are other examples of monks who made prayer without work as their way of life, such as the Messalians and Euchites, who took the literal interpretation of the verse, "Therefore do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat…"[685]. Lucius, one of the desert fathers mentioned in the *AP,* explained how the two, work and prayer, can be accomplished. When a group of monks went to visit him at his monastery in Enaton, the old man asked them about their manual labour to which they replied "We do not touch manual work but as the Apostle says, we pray without

[683] *Paralipomena:* 15 Veilleux, 1981, p. 57.

[684] *John the Dwarf:* 2 Ward, 1984a, p. 86.

[685] Matthew 6:25-34.

ceasing"[686]. The old man then tested the truth of their claim by asking them if they pray when they are eating or sleeping to which they answered in the negative. The old man then explained to them the way he fulfils this commandment, saying:

> …while doing my manual work, I pray without interruption. I sit down with God, soaking my reeds and plaiting my ropes, and I say, "God have mercy on me…" so he asked them if this were not prayer and they replied it was. Then he said to them, "so when I have spent the whole day working and praying, making thirteen pieces of money, I put two pieces outside the door for anyone in need and I pay for my food with the rest of the money. He who takes the two pieces of money prays for me when I am eating and when I am sleeping. That is how, by God's grace, I fulfil the precept to pray without ceasing"[687].

Abba Silvanus also taught one of the brothers who refused to do handiwork, using quotes from the Scripture: "Do not labour for the food which perishes" (John 6.27) "Mary has chosen the good portion" (Luke 10.42). When the Abba Silvanus intentionally ignored inviting him to the meal, he complained, so the Abba found the chance to teach him a lesson using irony: "Because you are a spiritual man and do not need that kind of food. We, being carnal, want to eat, and that is why we work. But you have chosen the good portion and read the whole day long and you do not want to eat carnal food"[688].

Yet there is also an example of someone who was able to perform both with all diligence. From the *AP*, we learn how Macarius the Alexandrian went to stay in a

[686] *Lucius:* 1 Ward, 1984a, pp. 120-121.

[687] *Lucius:* 1 Ward, 1984a, pp. 120-121.

[688] *Silvanus:* 5 Ward, 1984a, p. 223.

Pachomian monastery and exceeded the brothers in monastic *ascesis*. On a certain day, as the brothers were at their handiwork, they noticed how Macarius had completed three mats whilst they had only completed one, and being void of spirituality:

> The brothers rose up against their leader wanting Macarius to be thrown out. In order to teach them a lesson in humility and spirituality, the leader took one of Macarius' mats and threw it into the oven. After some time when the fire was put out, he saw that the mat had not burned at all, and so said to the brothers, "Manual work without ascetic practice is nothing"[689].

Therefore, the monastic fathers understood that a good balance between work and prayer was a vital recipe for a healthy monastic life; any unbalance in this diet proved to be ineffective. Work functioned as a means of keeping the body distracted from laziness and at the same time doing charity and relying on one's own handiwork. Meditation functioned as a tool to keep the mind from distraction, at the same time meditating in scripture internalised the words being meditated making them the monk's own. Both meditation and work were perceived as means to a greater goal, which is being continuously in the presence of God.

In an earlier chapter, we learned that monks memorised scripture as a daily exercise, and in this chapter we have seen how meditation was a daily practice that permeated the everyday activity of the monk. It should thus be safe to assume that they used verses from the Scripture and words from the Desert Fathers for this meditation, either as an exercise to memorise or as a spiritual exercise. In both cases, we know

[689] *Life of Macarius of Alexandrian:* 7 Vivian, 2004a, p. 147; *Sayings of Saint Macarius of Egypt:* 26 Vivian, 2004b, p. 69.

that they used small verses and repeated them throughout the day[690]. While monks in the *Life* of St Shenoute are reported as reciting whole books of the scripture, which is not consistent with my definition of the Arrow Prayer as being a short formula, they likely would have had to memorise a great number of short verses and repeat them daily to help them in reciting these books of the scripture. Therefore it would also be safe to assume that these verses were memory markers that a monk used as a mnemonic to memorise whole books of the scripture. It would be very hard to say for certain the reason behind the selection of certain verses to be used in meditation since we do not have a record of the use of a system as we have in the Latin west during the Middle Ages; nor can we deduce a system of memorisation from the scattered verses we have in the *AP* and other monastic writings.

We can further deduce that meditation was not limited to a single formula, nor was it limited to the invocation of the name of Jesus, but it was up to the monk to determine which verse was suitable in different situations. It is not until John Cassian that we hear of the first glimpses of the use of a single formula: even then, he seemed to be introducing a new practice, which is evident in the way he seemed to be trying to explain himself. What we may conclude is that monks meditated using passages from scripture and that these passages constituted what we formally call today the Arrow Prayer.

[690] Only in certain cases, such as St Shenoute seeing one of the monks reciting the whole book of the Bible, *Life of Shenoute: 94-97* Bell, 1983, pp. 70-71.

8- The Bible as Arrow Prayer

In previous chapters, I have discussed the way in which oral cultures and the education system provided a fertile ground for the development of the practice of the Arrow Prayer. I have further discussed how the practice of memorisation and meditation provided the technique for its practice. In this chapter, I wish to discuss the content of this prayer. By content, I mean the text where most of the formulas of the Arrow Prayer were inspired. In this chapter, I would like to demonstrate how the Bible was the predominant source of inspiration for reason of its excessive use.

From the earliest monastic texts, we see great emphasis on the way scripture not only influenced, but was the motivation for, the monastic life[691]. When young Anthony went to the desert to live the monastic life, St Athanasius made a note that it was a response to Anthony's attentive listening to the scriptures in church[692]. The author further confirmed that St Anthony committed the scripture to memory, in order to use it in prayer without ceasing: "He prayed all the time, having learned that it is necessary to pray without ceasing. Indeed he paid such close attention to what was read in Church that nothing in the Scriptures escaped his notice. He kept everything in his heart, with the result that in his heart, memory took the place of books"[693].

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[691] The question of the origins of monasticism has shifted in scholarship over the centuries from a group of reformers who withdrew to the desert as a result of the church's decline in spirituality to a group of fanatics who "lingered like a slow poison." For a concise survey of this development, read Burton-Christie, 1993, pp. 7-43 ,esp note 37.

[692] *The Life of Anthony*: 2 Vivian & Athanassakis, 2003, p. 59.

[693] *The Life of Anthony*: 5 Vivian & Athanassakis, 2003, p. 63.

Similarly, in reading the *AP* we can sense how much the desert fathers have constantly focused on the scriptures and how they used them in their words of wisdom:

> The *sayings* speaks often of the benefits of ruminating and meditating upon Scripture… such an approach to Scripture involved saying the words of a particular text, mulling them over in the mind, chewing on and slowly digesting the words. And it was a predominantly oral phenomenon… The discussion of meditation in the sayings suggests that it was a common, widespread practice in early monasticism and considered an indispensable part of the life of the monk[694].

Traditionally, scholarship has opposed the idea that the desert monks were scripturally literate. Even the practice of memorisation of scripture was seen by some as "nothing more than a superficial accomplishment,… the mechanical memorisation did not penetrate the heart; it gave indeed only the faintest biblical tinge to the world of ideas in which the monks lived."[695] Burton-Christie suggests that the views of some of the reformers, such as Wycliffe and Luther, who greatly influenced later scholarship, have come from their negative assessment of monasticism in Europe in their own day, which – as they viewed it– lost its simplicity and poverty[696].

[694] Burton-Christie, 1993, p. 122.

[695] This opinion was put forward by Hans Lietzmann, cited from Burton-Christie, 1993, pp. 13-14.

[696] Burton-Christie, 1993, p. 13.

Contemporary scholarship has shifted in recent years from great scepticism about whether the early monks knew any scripture at all, to the opinion that early monks had scripture as a predominant part in the their life. As Burton-Christie asserts, "the growing consensus on this issue suggests that primitive monasticism cannot adequately be understood apart from the consideration of the place of scripture in its formation and ongoing life"[697].

In recent years, the interest in the topic has increased. Probably the first publication that dealt with this subject in recent times is Burton-Christie's book *The Word in the Desert*[698]. In this book, Burton-Christie does well to answer many of the questions that dominated scholarship before him, as already discussed. The main thesis of his book was to show that the desert spirituality was biblically based. He argues that scripture permeated every aspect of the lives of the desert monks, their quest for holiness, their ascetical works and how this affected the way they did biblical hermeneutics. Unlike later research on the topic, he treated the text of the *AP* as a unified text. This approach to the text has been rightly criticised by later scholars for not critically scrutinising the *AP* as a collection of texts. Yet, as will be discussed later in this chapter, intentionally or not, he has highlighted a common scriptural spirituality consistent not only within the different traditions of the *AP* but also in other monastic texts that have since been critically studied[699]. The major advantage of this book is that it shifted the attention of later scholars to a new possibility of looking at the desert monks.

[697] Burton-Christie, 1993, p. 15.

[698] Burton-Christie, 1993.

[699] I will elaborate further on this point later in the chapter.

The most thorough research on the topic is the unpublished dissertation by Lillian I. Larsen titled "Pedagogical Parallels: Re-reading the Apophthegmata Patrum"[700]. In her dissertation, Larsen challenges the idea the most scholars traditionally perceive from Athanasius's portrayal of St Anthony as a simple illiterate man[701], as well as the hostility we read in many anecdotes in the *AP* towards reading are a proof of the opposite. She argues that these accounts act as a rhetorical tool that aims at persuading the reader against intellectual pursuit, but such a statement also implies that there are a number of educated monks to start with. As Larsen argues: "so strong reactions against certain behavior in fact quite often signal that it (the behavior) is in vogue. In simple terms, prohibitions address infractions. Why bother to call attention to a matter if it is not an issue?"[702]

Larsen further compared the *AP* with the contemporary rhetoric school of the time. She convincingly argues that the *AP* falls more accurately under the category of *Chreia* collections, which were common in the Roman and Greek antiquity rhetoric school exercises. In doing so, she places the *AP* in its historical context. She further poses the question suggestively:

> is it possible, however, that in some regard the early monastic contexts did indeed function as "universities of the desert" in more than a spiritual sense? Derivatively, could these monastic apophthegmata have served a pedagogical role on par with that accorded sayings in a more traditional setting?"[703]

[700] Larsen, 2006b, p. 411.

[701] Larsen is not the first to challenge the portrayal of St Anthony by St Athanasius, read Brakke, 1998.

[702] Larsen, 2006b, p. 61.

[703] Larsen, 2006b, p. 33.

What is implicit in her argument is that the *AP* collection is a result of a monastic school exercise rather than the actual words of the Abba.

The other significant work on the topic is Per Rönnegård's published PhD dissertation under the name *Threads and Images: the Use of Scripture in Apophthegmata Patrum*[704]. In his dissertation, Rönnegård takes a new approach to studying the use of the Scripture in the *AP*, as he is more concerned with "How the Bible text is contextualized, i.e., how the text is integrated with the teachings and ideals expressed in the saying of which it is a part"[705], especially as "the major concern for *AP* is not how to interpret the Bible but how to conduct one's life"[706]. In his study, he analyses thirty-two sayings that he categorises as having obvious reference to the Scripture. He then attempts to categorise the different ways the *AP* has made use of the scripture, while recognising the limitations of such an endeavour on such a complex collection of texts that were collected textually or orally from a large number of desert fathers.

Another very valuable work on the topic is Elizabeth Clark's *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity*[707]. Though the study is limited to only sexual renunciation and does not make any mention of the *AP*, it offers a broad look at the methods of some of the Christian patristic writers of the fourth and fifth centuries, such as Jerome, Athanasius, and John Chrysostom, and the way they have used the Scripture. In her study, Clark provided eleven modes of reading the patristic hermeneutic methods, some of which can be applied to the monastic texts. Despite the

[704] Rönnegård, 2010.

[705] Rönnegård, 2010, p. 23.

[706] Rönnegård, 2010, p. 2.

[707] Clark, 1999.

limited overlap between Clark's study and the present one, it still sheds light on how other Christian writers have used the Scripture, which in many ways is consistent with the monastic writings.

In light of the slow but significant progress on the topic from the scholarly work cited above, as well as other works that are no less significant but are limited in their scope, and which we will discussed below, I would like to further explore the relationship between the use of the Bible in the desert and its subsequent use in the practice of the Arrow Prayer. To do so, a few important questions must be answered.

Were the Desert Monks Against the Bible?

There seems to be a continuous conflict in early monastic literature regarding reading and the possession of books. Some texts required monks to read, others strongly opposed the idea. In the *sayings*, there is a story that discourages monks from possessing books, even if the monks derive profit from them:

> Abba Theodore of Pherme had acquired three good books. He came to Abba Macarius and said to him, "I have three good books from which I derive profit; the brethren also make use of them and derive profit from them. Tell me what I ought to do: keep them for my use and that of the brethren, or sell them and give the money to the poor?" The old man answered him in this way, "your actions are good; but it is best for all to possess nothing." Hearing that, he went and sold his books and gave the money for them to the poor[708].

[708] *Theodore of Pherme:* 1 Ward, 1984a, p. 73.

In another incident, Abba Serapion reprimanded another monk for having too many books in his cell: "A brother said to Abba Serapion, 'Give me a word.' The old man said to him, 'What shall I say to you? You have taken the living of the widows and orphans and put it on your shelves.' For he saw them full of books"[709]. In the two stories mentioned above, the books referred to were probably books of the scripture but, even then, their mere possession was not an acceptable practice. Abba Poemen, showed adamant resilience not to the possession of books but even speaking or interpreting the scripture[710].

At the other end of the spectrum we have the Pachomian rules where reading was an important element. The Pachomian monks were required to be literate enough to be able to read before they joined the monastery. This was not a novelty on behalf of the monk to be able to read but they were compelled to do so:

> Whoever enters the monastery uninstructed shall be taught first what he must observe and if he is illiterate, he shall go at the first, third, and sixth hour to someone who can teach and has been appointed for him. He shall stand before him and learn very studiously with all gratitude. Then the fundamentals of a syllable, the verbs and nouns shall be written for him, and even if he does not want to, he shall be compelled to read[711].

[709] *Abba Serapion:* 2 Ward, 1984a, p. 227.

[710] Despite this apparent resilience William Harmless has points out twelve examples of exegesis of scripture by the saint in his collection of sayings Harmless, 2000, p. 495.

[711] *The Rules of St Pachomius:* 139, Veilleux, 1981, p. 166. While Philip Rousseau suggests that these rules took effect in stricter form after the death of St Pachomius, it does not negate the fact that this practice must have taken place to a lesser extent during the life of the saint Rousseau, 1999, p. 70.

He later confirms, "there shall be no one whatever in the monastery who does not learn to read"[712].

Furthermore, borrowing books from the monastery's library was a frequent enough occurrence that it had a special rule to regulate it: "if they seek a book to read, let them have it; and at the end of the week they shall put it back in its place for those who succeed them in the service"[713]. While most of these books referred to were manuscripts of the Scripture, as evident in the Pachomian rules and other Pachomian-related texts[714], we must not limit these books to scripture as St Pachomious discourages the monks from reading Origen's works, which leads us to think that books of contemporary and past Christian writers were also a part of monastic libraries[715].

In these two opposing points of view towards reading, we can clearly distinguish the fact that the opposition was not directed against reading as such but rather was to the possession of books. When the books were the public property of the monastic community rather than the individual monk, as in the case of the Pachomian community, reading was not met with any hostility but was rather a condition for joining the community. Even in a communal setting, the books used were not luxurious in appearance, as those scorned by Jerome, "antique volumes as books

[712] *The Rules of St Pachomius:* 140 Veilleux, 1981, p. 166.

[713] *The Rules of St Pachomius:* 25 Veilleux, 1981, p. 149.

[714] Gamble, 1995, p. 170; Lundhaug & Jenott, 2015.

[715] Gamble, 1995, p. 170.

written on purple parchment in gold and silver ink… so that they are a burden rather than books"[716].

Another fact that supports the abundant use of books in monasteries is the practice of book donations in both the White Monastery, where the codices themselves provide information on the donor[717], and St Pachomius's monastery, where the evidence comes from the fact that some of the books date from before the beginning of the monastic order itself and some of these books did not contain Christian texts[718]. Another evidence from the Pachomian monastery is the presence of texts with varying production skills and methods, which also indicates that these texts must have been donated to the monastery from various provinces[719].

In addition to book donation, there is further evidence of monks possessing a great library of books that other monks would borrow from. For example, a certain lawyer named Cosmas possessed more books than anyone else in Alexandria and would "willingly supply them to those who wish"[720], yet he is described as a man of no possessions. Theodore the Philosopher, who memorised the Old and the New Testament by heart, and Zoilos the Reader, who lived a solitary life, the two friends of Cosmas, are also described by Cosmas as having no possessions except a philosopher's cloak and a few books[721], which illustrates that books were among the little possessions he owned. There is further evidence of an extinctive book-

[716] Williams, 2006, p. 181.

[717] Orlandi, 2002, pp. 211-219.

[718] Robinson, 1990, p. 5.

[719] Robinson, 1990, pp. 4-5.

[720] *The Spiritual Meadow:* 172 Wortley, 1992, p. 141.

[721] *The Spiritual Meadow:* 171 Wortley, 1992, pp. 139-140.

borrowing activity in the monastery of Epiphanius, which is evident from the collection of letters sent by monks borrowing and lending books from each other[722]. Other Coptic letters on ostraca also provide interesting insight into the practice of borrowing books, such as letters circulated between monks about the exchange of books[723]. Most of these books are books of the Bible, while others are medical books.

To blame the apparent hostility against books in some monastic sources entirely on the quest for voluntary poverty would not be a very accurate assessment. Burton-Christie suggests that it can be partly explained as "an expression of tension between oral and literate culture"[724]. Some instances of conflict between written and oral words occasionally surface in the sayings. Abba Arsenius, who knew Latin and Greek, is said to have gained much profit from a poor peasant monk[725]. Abba Euprepius is also said to have been pierced in his heart when he received teaching from an elder saying: "I have read many books before but never have I received such teaching"[726]. The transition from oral to written word was causing doubts as to whether the new medium was able to "reproduce the full life, power and meaning of the spoken word"[727].

This progress from oral to written word was not always seen by the desert fathers as a positive progression in spirituality. William Graham notes that the transmission from oral to written words:

[722] *Monastery of Epiphanius letters:* 380-97 Winlock et al., 1926b.

[723] *Ostraca* 250-253 Crum, 1902, p. 63; Derda, 1995, pp. 45-46.

[724] Burton-Christie, 1997, p. 145.

[725] *Abba Arsenius:* 6 Ward, 1984a, p. 10.

[726] *Euprepius:* 7 Ward, 1984a, p. 62.

[727] Gerhardsson, 1961, p. 157.

> …should not be taken as a necessarily progressive evolution in religious life, for it does not lead to uniformly positive developments in faith and piety. The fixing of the holy word in writing carries with it potential threats to the original spontaneity and living quality of the scriptural text, for it places it ever in danger of becoming only a 'dead letter' rather than a "living word"[728].

This negative progression was expressed by an elder in the anonymous collection of the sayings; he said: "The prophets wrote books, then came our fathers who put them into practice. Those who came after them learned them by heart, then came the present generation, who have written them out and put them into their window seats without using them"[729].

In both media, the oral and written, the intended goal was always applying the words rather than just knowing them from an elder or a book. In one of the sayings, an elder bluntly responds to a brother who boasted of having copied with his own hand the whole of the Old and the New Testaments, saying: "you have filled the cupboard with paper"[730]. In the same way also, Abba Theodore refused to give a word to a brother who begged him for three days and when his disciple asked him the reason for his refusal, he answered: "I did not speak to him, for he is a trafficker who seeks to glorify himself through the words of others"[731]. As Larsen argues, in monastic writings, "books, reading, and writing feature as routinized aspects of monastic life. It is allowing intellectual pursuits to infringe on the communal enterprise, or on

[728] Graham, 1987, pp. 59-60.

[729] *Anonymous Sayings:* 96 Ward, 2003, p. 31.

[730] *Discretion*: 97 Ward, 2003, p. 112.

[731] *Theodore of Pherme:* 3 Ward, 1984a, p. 74.

fulfilling one's ethical responsibility that is subject to critique"[732]. In other words, the desert fathers had spiritual progress as the aim of their ascetical life, regardless of what media were used to deliver the instruction for this progress; as long as it led to the same aim.

Larsen offers a different insight, suggesting that the conflict is not only oral versus written culture but also educated versus uneducated monks. In her thesis, she argues that this strong voice of anti-intellectualism is a proof of its abundant practice, not lack thereof, otherwise "why bother to call attention to a matter if it is not an issue?"[733]

How much scripture is in the monastic writings?

Scholars have long been in dispute over the number of biblical quotations and citations in the *AP*. These vary from 93 biblical references in Benedicta Ward's English translation to 485 biblical references according to Luciana Mortari's Italian translation[734]. This ambiguity can only attest to the difficulty of separating the word of the desert monks from the bible verses. As Ward rightly points out, "the language of the writings of the desert was so formed by the meditation of the scriptures that it is almost impossible to say where quotation ends and comments begin"[735].

[732] Larsen, 2006b, p. 51.

[733] Larsen, 2006b, p. 61.

[734] For a discussion of the ambiguity of the number of biblical quotations between scholars, see Burton-Christie, 1993, p. 97 ; For a correction of Burton-Christie's numbers, see Rönnegård, 2010, p. 13.

[735] Ward, 1984b; This practice is as old as the Apostolic Fathers, Trigg, 2003, p. 305.

The difficulty in determining and categorising biblical quotations in the *AP* has many levels. The first difficulty is the fact that the *AP* collection, unlike other exegetical work that was written at the same time or even later, is not a commentary on the Scripture. While the Scripture is an integral part of the *AP*, the *AP* does not attempt to interpret the Scripture but it is more concerned with how to apply the Scripture in one's life. Therefore, the criteria used for determining bible quotations in exegetical work does not always fit the *AP*. To add to the difficulty, as will be discussed below, a text like the *AP* is not a unified text, but a collection of writings put together over a long period of time and one that had been edited and re-edited many times, each edition with its own biblical manuscript tradition.

The other difficulty is the fact that we are not certain as to which bible translation, version or manuscript the authors of the *AP* or the desert fathers used. Even then, it would not be wise to simply assume that they had to consult a text before quoting it and were not just quoting the text from memory.

It is therefore difficult to set specific criteria to identify biblical quotations, paraphrases, or allusions in monastic texts; this becomes even more difficult in a collection such as the *AP*[736]. Yet there is internal evidence in the texts that strongly suggests that the early monks had a very high level of interaction with the Scripture. In the *AP*, there are many references made to monks possessing scripture or parts of the scripture for their personal use or for the profit of the brothers. Abba Gelasius is said to have "possessed a leather Bible which contained the old and new

[736] Some scholars have attempted to do so with varying degrees of success, such as Clark, 1999, pp. 104-152; and Rönnegård, 2010, p. 13; but what is obvious from their work is that there can be no set criteria that fit all.

testaments"[737]. St Theodore of Pherme is said to have acquired three good books, from which he and the brothers "derived profit"[738]. Abba Serapion is also said to have had the Psalter and a copy of St Paul's epistles[739]. For those who did not acquire books, the *AP* speaks many times of monks reciting the psalms or parts of the scripture in their cells while working.

These internal evidences of possession of bible manuscripts by many monks can partly testify to the extensive usage of the scripture in the daily life of the desert monks. This in turn shows that the Scripture was interwoven in every action in their life, as St Anthony advises a brother: "whatever you do, do it according to the testimony of the holy scripture"[740], which might presuppose that the brother has a very good knowledge of the scripture. Therefore, it is of no surprise that when they speak, it would be hard to distinguish their words from those of the Scripture.

Apart from the *AP*, there is other monastic literature that confirms the extensive use of scripture. In The *Life of Abba Shenoute*, the prophet Jeremiah was seen by the saint weeping over a brother who was reciting the book of Jeremiah without heartfelt ardour[741]. Another brother was praised by the prophet Ezekiel because "his recitation" said the prophet, "truly strikes home"[742]. Another brother was seen by Abba Shenoute sitting in the corner reciting the twelve Minor Prophets[743]. In the rules of St

[737] *Gelasius:* 1 Ward, 1984a, p. 46.

[738] *Theodore of Pherme:* 1 Ward, 1984a, p. 73.

[739] *Serapion:* 1 Ward, 1984a, pp. 226-227.

[740] *Anthony:* 3 Ward, 1984a, p. 2.

[741] *The Life of Shenoute:* 94 Bell, 1983, p. 70.

[742] *The Life of Shenoute:* 95 Bell, 1983, p. 70.

[743] *The Life of Shenoute:* 96 *Bell, 1983, p. 71.*

Pachomius, we see that recitation of the scripture takes place throughout the day, not only during the daily synaxis but also on their way to and from synaxis and meals[744].

In the writings of St Pachomius – as well as those of Abba Horisius and Abba Theodore, his successors – we come across a large number of quotations from both the old and new testaments that form an almost seamless web of scriptural allusions and citations[745]. The sixty-page biblical index in Armand Veilleux's translation[746], with citations from nearly every book of the Bible, attests to that.

In the above examples, we find a great deal of oral recitation of the scripture. Not only in situations where books are scarce but also in the Pachomian and Shenoutean monasteries, we find a great emphasis on memorising scripture by heart and reciting it. Books were a means to help monks memorise scripture. St Pachomius enforces this in his *rules* as follows: "there shall be no one whatever in the monastery who does not learn to read and does not memorise something of the scripture. [One should learn by heart] at least the New Testament and the Psalter"[747]. In his survey of the use of the bible in the Pachomian Koinonia, William Graham asserts that the pachomian writings and rules testify to the "presence of scripture in every facet of the life of Pachomius and his disciples"[748]

These anecdotes that briefly mention scripture reading in the desert portray the level of interaction of the monks with the Scripture. This opens up the possibility of this

[744] *Precepts:* 28 Veilleux, 1981, p. 150.

[745] Graham, 1987, p. 129.

[746] Veilleux, 1982, pp. 237-296.

[747] *The Rules of Saint Pachomius:* 139,149 Veilleux, 1981, p. 166.

[748] Graham, 1987, p. 129.

excessive use of the scripture affecting their everyday conversation, which in turn made the everyday language of these desert monks the language of the scripture. This explains the difficulty that faces scholars today in untangling this web of biblical quotations.

The use of Ergasia Patterns and Chreia in the monastic writings

A Chreia is a statement, a symbolic action, that is either spoken or performed by a person who is a teacher or a role model in one way or another, and which illustrates a practical life lesson. Ergasia Patterns are different patterns by which a student of rhetoric can expand on the Chreia using some predefined patterns and techniques. The use of these rhetorical tools was very common in rhetoric schools in antiquity and, as many scholars have shown, they have been used in monastic writings[749]. Parallels between the Chreia and the use of the Arrow Prayer, such as the use of short phrases and their repetition for the purpose of internalising the content, makes this an important aspect to consider.

To my knowledge, the first scholar to make the connection between the Ergasia Patterns of the rhetoric school and the *AP* was Kathleen McVey[750]. In her short paper, she was successful in drawing the attention of many subsequent scholars to the hypothesis that the way monks rephrase or recast verses from the scripture or liturgical verses and use them to meditate on them has many parallels to the practice of students of elementary school: "This process might then be repeated by the gatherers and revisors of early monastic traditions, those who culled the sayings or

[749] For an in-depth treatment of the topic, read Hock & O'Neil, 1986).

[750] McVey, 1998.

actions of the desert fathers and mothers, put them into written form to be handed down and cast and recast now in written form"[751].

Lillian Larsen later developed this hypothesis further, suggesting that the parallels between the rhetorical instruction and the text of the *AP* cannot be ignored. The malleability of some of the sayings and anecdotes that are sometimes found repeated for different desert fathers/mothers with varying details, as well as the structural similarities of these sayings and anecdotes and other sayings of civic school exercises led Larsen to pose the question, suggestively, if it is possible that the early monastic context of exercises could function as universities of the desert: "Derivatively, could these monastic *apophthegmata* have served a pedagogical role on par with that accorded sayings in a more traditional setting?"[752] This indirectly suggests that the *AP* are not necessarily authentic accounts of the events and teachings of the desert fathers, but a collection of sayings that "disclose less about the various figures they portray than about the preoccupations and affairs of the communities in which they served as vehicles of education and civic formation"[753]. This would mean that the sayings and anecdotes found in the *AP* were not necessarily the sayings of the elders, but rather the product of school exercises of some of the monks who combined their rhetorical education with the monastic ideals. As I will demonstrate, this hypothesis does not take account of the larger ascetic tradition out of which this collection was born.

[751] McVey, 1998, p. 247.

[752] Larsen, 2006b, p. 33.

[753] Larsen, 2008, p. 30.

Chreia to Arrow Prayer

Looking at the frequency and methods that the monastic writers used to quote scriptures, as well as the rhetorical tools used in their quotations, not only in the *AP* but across other monastic literature, we discern many points of contact with the development and practice of the Arrow Prayer. In the abundance of scriptural quotations and allusions that we see in the various monastic writings and in different genres, we see a consistency between the claims that monks made about their use of the Scripture in their liturgical as well as personal prayers and their frequent quotations of the Scripture in other monastic texts.

Like their counterparts from the Hellenistic rhetorical schools, the monastic writers made use of rhetorical tools, such as the use of the Chreia and Ergasia Pattern, to break down the text of the Scripture into bite-size sentences that had an edifying application or, in the case of Ergasia, a discernible pattern that could be easily memorised. Those sayings and anecdotes were then repeated and ruminated upon until they were internalised and eventually applied into their everyday life.

In conclusion, there is strong evidence that the early monks used the Scripture in their daily life in reading, reciting, copying or meditating on some of its verses. The extensive libraries in monasteries and the manner in which bible verses are woven into early monastic texts further attest to the influence the Scripture had on monks in antiquity. The way in which the scriptural verses are integrated into monastic texts shows close parallels to the way the Ergasia Patterns and Chreia were used in rhetoric schools in antiquity. These parallels, especially the repetition of verses for the purpose of internalising them, not only demonstrate great resemblance to the practice of the

Arrow Prayer, but further show that the Bible was the primary source of inspiration for the practice of the prayer.

9- The Arrow Prayer in Hagiography

> I believe that the words of the saints' prayers… goes forth from the soul of the one praying *like an arrow shot from the saint* by knowledge and reason and faith. And it wounds the spirits hostile to God to destroy and overthrow them when they wish to hurl round us the bonds of sin (Ps. 8:3; Prov. 5:22). *And he prays 'constantly'* (deeds of virtue or fulfilling the commandments are included as part of prayer) who unites prayer with the deeds required and right deeds with prayer. For the only way we can accept the command to "pray constantly" (1 Thess. 5: 17) as referring to a real possibility is by saying that the entire life of the saint taken as a whole is a single great prayer. What is customarily called prayer is, then, a part of this prayer[754].

Hagiography is one of the most popular styles of Christian writing in antiquity and beyond. This may come back to the fact that it is indirectly inclusive of many other genres, such as historical, liturgical, theological, monastic, epistolary, and creative writing. The ability to include multiple genres in the same text made it an attractive genre to propagate the many purposes that these genres served, such as educational, inspirational, liturgical, and historical. This also makes it very difficult for modern scholarship to accurately place some of these texts in a specific genre.

[754] Origen, *On Prayer:* XII Rowan, 1979, p. 104.

A classic example of this cross-genre usage of hagiography is the *Life* of Anthony. It is obvious from the introduction that it is cast in the form of a letter. Yet, as observed in recent scholarship, it is a highly theological text that St Athanasius used as a tool against the Arians[755]. While there is no hard evidence that it was used in a liturgical context, like the evidence from the *Life* of St Shenoute[756], we know that in the sixth century it was rewritten as a liturgical text by St John, Bishop of Shmun[757]. Meanwhile, the *Life* itself, along with other monastic writings such as the Sayings, has been used as a monastic educational text[758].

It is for this reason that scholars have a hard time defining the meaning and purpose of a hagiographical text. Hippolyte Delehaye has defined hagiography as a document which is "of a religious character and should aim at edification. The term may only be applied therefore to writings inspired by devotion to the saints and intended to promote it"[759]. Recently, Claudia Rapp has challenged this definition, arguing that hagiography should not be limited to full biographies but can also include documents that include text about the sayings and action of a saint or many saints, such as the *AP*. She further steers away from limiting hagiography to a certain structure of a text to its intended purpose. In other words, her definition differs from that of Delehaye in that "it is not the hagiographical author's primary aim to make a saint by celebrating the subject of his narrative, but rather *to make saints* out of those who encounter his

[755] Brakke, 1998.

[756] Lubomierski, 2006.

[757] Vivian & Athanassakis, 2003.

[758] Rapp, 1998, pp. 436-437, Clark, 1999, p. 131.

[759] Delehaye, 1907, p. 2.

work"[760]. This will become important when we consider the ways in which monastic hagiography functioned for its readers and listeners.

In this chapter, I will discuss the way in which hagiographical texts have been used as a teaching tool in antiquity and later to propagate the monastic virtues that were practices of the early monks, not only to later monastic communities but also to other lay communities who heard or read the life of the saint. To do so, many of these texts were written, and sometimes rewritten, as liturgical texts that were regularly used in the saint's shrine and on his feast day.

The Holy Man as a Praying Presence

Before I further discuss the function of hagiography as text, I would like to highlight the subject of hagiography or the saint, also known in contemporary scholarship as the Holy Man. It was the work of Peter Brown that introduced the question of the function of the Holy Man in his first work on the topic, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man"[761]. Since then, the topic has been a work in progress, with major changes to the way the image and function of the Holy Man was conceived. The most profound change in the image of the Holy Man was in Brown's later article, "The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity"[762]. In his earlier article, Brown presented the Holy Man as a rural patron who used his charismatic lifestyle to stand up for the rights of the poor villagers and often offered intercessory prayers on their behalf. Yet,

[760] Rapp, 2010, p. 130 emphasis is mine.

[761] Brown, 1971.

[762] Brown, 1983.

in his later work, he emphasised an important factor that distinguished the Christian Holy Man from his pagan predecessor:

> Judaism and later Christianity, brought to this Mediterranean-wide system of discipline the unprecedented weight of providential monotheism, which, in both cases, places an exceptional weight in the joining point between God and man, and which, in the case of Christianity, proposed as its central figure, the Exemplar of all exemplars, a being, Christ, in whom human and divine had come to be joined[763].

Only if we start from this point do we get a clearer image of the Holy Man. The ascetic life, the healing powers, and charisma of the Holy Man are not what identifies him as a Holy Man, but his imitation of Christ. The importance of looking at the Holy Man as a product of his imitation of Christ becomes apparent in the way he was traditionally portrayed as a patron who offers prayers on behalf of people. This does not do justice to the image of the Holy Man because it ignores an important factor, his *praying presence.* The holy man is not only offering prayers on behalf of people, but he himself is offering himself as a *praying presence* on behalf of his community and visitors. This is expressed in Origen's definition of the practice of continuous prayer: "For the only way we can accept the command to 'pray constantly' (1 Thess. 5: 17) as referring to a real possibility is by saying that the entire life of the saint taken as a whole is a single great prayer. What is customarily called prayer is, then, a part of this prayer"[764].

[763] Brown, 1983, p. 6.

[764] *On Prayer:* XII Greer, 1979, p. 104.

The way the monk's life was portrayed in the sayings and other hagiographic text adds weight to this argument: not as a person who prays but one whose whole life is made up of prayer. This perspective is consistent with the everyday practice of the monks, as it is evident from the *AP* that a monk should always be found in a state of prayer, just as Abba Bessarion was found standing in prayer for fourteen days[765]. Abba Lucius explained to some monastic visitors who opposed manual labour to fulfil the bible command to "pray without ceasing", which reveals that this was the primary state of a monk[766]. Abba Isidore describes his early monastic life as such: "[he] set no limit to prayer; the night was for me as much the time of prayer as the day"[767]. Macarius of Alexandria also found a monk undistracted in prayer for four months[768]. Abba Arsenius further emphasises this *praying presence* of the monk by using the Old Testament example of Daniel, how "no-one found anything in him to complain about except for his prayers to the Lord his God"[769].

Looking at it from this perspective makes it very consistent with the life of Christ that the Holy Man is imitating. In the four gospels, Christ is not only portrayed as praying for people and performing miracles, but it is noted numerous times that he went to pray both in private[770] and in public[771]. Reading the gospels, we do not have a clear prayer rule that was practised by Jesus, yet from passing comments we know that Jesus prayed very early in the morning (Mark 1:35), late at night (Matt 14:23), and

[765] *Bessarion:* 4 Ward, 1984a, p. 41.

[766] *Lucius:* 1 Ward, 1984a, p. 120.

[767] *Isidore the Priest:* 4 Ward, 1984a, p. 97.

[768] *Macarius of Alexandria:* 3 Ward, 1984a, p. 152.

[769] *Poemen:* 53 Ward, 1984a, p. 174.

[770] Luke 6:12, 9:18, 5:16, 22:41, 44; Matt 14:23, 26:36, 39, 42; Mark 1:35, 6:46; Jn 6:15, 17:1.

[771] Luke 3:21, 23:46, 23:34, 9:28.

spent the night praying (Luke 6:12); at times they describe how He "often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed" (Luke 5:16) or "as He was accustomed" (Luke 22:39) He went out to pray.

Similarly in the *AP*, the text does not often explicitly mention the prayer pattern of the Holy Man, which sometimes is a result of common knowledge; for example, we know that as monks visit each other they start by saying a prayer, as in the example of Abba Bessarion when he went to visit Abba John of Lycopolis: "After greeting him, we prayed, then the old man sat down to speak"[772]. Yet there is never detailed content or the length of this prayer. Abba Arsenius was known to spend his Saturday evening with "his back to the sun and stretch out his hands in prayer towards the heavens, till once again the sun shone on his face"[773]. One of the reasons we do not know exactly how the Holy Men prayed is because they went to great lengths to hide their prayer rules from visitors. The two young brothers, for example, waited until St Macarius went to sleep to start their prayer rule[774]. For Abba Tithoes, whenever he raised his hands at the time of prayer, his spirit would become rapt to heaven, so he made sure he lowered his hands whenever had visitors[775]. The monks went to great lengths to hide their prayer rules, even at the risk of not edifying others, as in the case of Abba Joseph and his disciples who hid their prayer rule from his visitors when his "visitors spent three days there without hearing them chanting or praying, *for the brothers laboured in secret*. They went away without having been edified"[776].

[772] *Bessarion:* 4 Ward, 1984a, p. 41.

[773] *Abba Arsenius:* 30 Ward, 1984a, p. 14.

[774] *Macarius the Great:* 33 *Ward, 1984a, pp. 134-135.*

[775] *Tithoes:* 1 Ward, 1984a, p. 236.

[776] *Eulogius the Priest:* 1 Ward, 1984a, pp. 60-61 emphasis is mine.

Phillip Rousseau has previously argued that the cenobitic monasticism, particularly in the Pachomian monasteries, has emerged because of the Holy Man's commanding and organisational presence and the "growing emphasis on stability, loyalty, and imitation"[777] of the leader. While this can be true in some sense, yet in reading the *life* of Pachomius we see the idea of the *praying presence* of Pachomius dominating every stage of the development of his monasteries. When he first went to see Apa Palamon, he explained to him his rule of prayer as such:

> …we always spend half the night, and often even from evening to morning, in vigils and the recitation of the word of God … As for the rule of the *synaxis*, it is sixty prayers during the day and fifty during the night, not counting the ejaculatory [prayers] we make so as not to be defaulters, since we are commanded to *pray without ceasing*"[778].

All-night vigil then became a regular practice in the *Life,*[779] sometimes using the expression used in Luke's gospel "according to his custom"[780]. He further received instructions regarding two vital stages of the community's life, the expansion of his monastery and another one regarding the future of the community, in a vision while praying[781].

Another important point that highlights Pachomius's role in his imitation of Christ as a praying presence is his role in explaining the scriptures to his monastic community.

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[777] Rousseau, 2010, p. 51.

[778] *The Bohairic Life of Pachomius:* 10 Veilleux, 1980, p. 31.

[779] *The Bohairic Life of Pachomius:* 15, 17,19, 22 Veilleux, 1980, pp. 38, 39, 41, 45 He further reveals the three ways that a monk can do vigil in *The Bohairic Life of Pachomius:* 59 Veilleux, 1980, p. 79.

[780] *The Bohairic Life of Pachomius:* 17, 22 Veilleux, 1980, pp. 39, 45.

[781] *The Bohairic Life of Pachomius:* 49, 66 Veilleux, 1980, pp. 71, 87.

As Mark S. Burrows puts it, "Pachomius gave voice to the *logos tou theou* in the *oikoumene*. As exegete and teacher, the holy man served as a channel of God by rendering the 'word' audible"[782]. This is critical when we consider that Theodore, his disciple, who was to later lead the community, was also first attracted to the Holy Man, St Pachomius, while he "spoke the word of God to the brothers"[783]. When Pachomius wanted to introduce Theodore to a leadership role within the community, he asked him to "stand here and speak to us the word of God"[784], therefore making a strong link between the Holy Man's giving voice to the word of God and prospective leadership of the community.

It is made clear in the *Life* that it was not Pachomius's leadership qualities that were emphasised at these key moments in his life and the life of the community. Rather, his imitation of Christ in being a *praying presence* to the community was the reason for its progress. The Greek *Life* makes a note of this powerful presence of Pachomius that sometimes replaced words: "even when he kept silent, they saw his conduct and it was for them a word."[785] On this point, Burrows further emphasises that:

> beyond his rules and his varied forms of teaching, his life also stood as a proclamation of the "word of God," providing those gathering around him with a poignant eruption of the holy within the early sphere. Like Christ his eloquence was one not only of word and deed but of "presence"[786].

[782] Burrows, 1987, p. 22.

[783] *The Bohairic Life of Pachomius:* 30 Veilleux, 1980, p. 53.

[784] *The Bohairic Life of Pachomius:* 69 Veilleux, 1980, p. 91.

[785] *The First Greek Life of Pachomius*: 25 Veilleux, 1980, pp. 312-313.

[786] Burrows, 1987, p. 22.

The concept of the Holy Man as being the imitation of Christ has continued in Arabic Christian hagiography, for example, in the *Lives* of St Barsoum the Naked and St Hadid[787]. In each stage of the life of the Holy Man, there are discernible parallels to the life of Christ. In the early years of the life of the saint, for example, we read that like Jesus in Luke 2 they both had early signs of interest in prayer and spending time at church. It was said of St Barsoum that his parents "brought him up in all righteousness and learned writing and memorised the Holy Books which is the breath of God"[788]. Also, Abba Hadid: "when he reached seven years old he was diligent in fasting and prayers and used to pray the morning and evening prayers."

As they got older and started their monastic lives, it is mentioned numerous times that they would pray day and night. In the *Life* of St Barsoum, for example, he stayed outside the city for five years, naked and performing many ascetical works amongst which he "Continues prayers without ceasing"[789]. The *Life* also highlights the importance of his *praying presence* at every place he goes to live in, by making a special mention of his practice of praying "day and night". When St Barsoum went to live in St Marcurius's church, on his way there he "Prayed the psalms till he reached the church" [790]. While living in a cave in that church, he would go after sunset, stand on the roof of the church and "pray until the morning"[791]. When he moved to the

[787] *The Life of St Barsoum the Naked*: Paris, Arabe 282; *The Life of Abba Hadid*: St Bishoy's Monastery, mimer 632. Translations from these texts cited below are my own.

[788] *The Life of St Barsoum the Naked*: Paris, Arabe 282, 3a.

[789] *The Life of St Barsoum the Naked*: Paris, Arabe 282, 4a.

[790] *The Life of St Barsoum the Naked*: Paris, Arabe 282, 4b.

[791] *The Life of St Barsoum the Naked*: Paris, Arabe 282, 9a.

monastery of Shahran, he chose for himself a "humble abode and he spent his time while he is diligent in prayer night and day"[792].

The power of St Barsoum's *praying presence* was often confirmed by its connection with God's presence with the saint. The visibility of God in the saint was clearly highlighted immediately after mentioning his practice of continuous prayer, therefore making the link between the two, his prayer life and the visibility of God in him. At St Marcurius's church, the *Life* mentions that "The grace of God multiplied in him and he became a temple and a dwelling place of the Holy Spirit"[793], and at the monastery of Shahran "he became all light and had nothing of darkness in him"[794]. In other words, the Holy Man's *praying presence* by his practice of continuous prayer had made God visible through him.

In the case of Abba Hadid, he "would go to church for both evening and morning prayers"[795] as well as "memorised by heart all the Old and New Testament books"[796] and his imitation of Christ is further highlighted by the use of the biblical expression "as was his custom" when it refers to his prayer habits[797], therefore making the connection between his continuous prayer life and the prayer life of Christ. As Brown concludes: "In Christ, the original beauty of Adam had blazed forth; and it is for that

[792] *The Life of St Barsoum the Naked*: Paris, Arabe 282, 12a.

[793] *The Life of St Barsoum the Naked*: Paris, Arabe 282, 9a.

[794] *The Life of St Barsoum the Naked*: Paris, Arabe 282, 12a.

[795] *The Life of St Barsoum the Naked*: Paris, Arabe 282, 4a.

[796] *The Life of St Barsoum the Naked*: Paris, Arabe 282, 4b.

[797] *The Life of St Barsoum the Naked*: Paris, Arabe 11b, 12a, 13a.

reason that the life of the Christian holy man could be treated as prolonged and deeply circumstantial 'imitation of Christ'"[798].

Only then, and as a by-product of the saint's continuous prayer life and imitation of Christ, is he able to perform miracles and act as a patron to his visitors. It is not that God is distant from His people but that the Holy Man made God accessible to humanity, in the same way that Jesus made God accessible to humanity. Therefore, to ask whether it is the saint who does the miracle or the prayer of the saint is, in effect, to separate the monk from his prayer life, as Tim Vivian eloquently affirms: "the question is undoubtedly a modern one. Phrased in this "either/or" manner, it falsely separates the miracle from the life of the holy man. It divides the singular act from the ongoing activity of prayer and contemplation, which was the monk's life"[799].

There is no denying that miracles are a major part of any hagiography and therefore cannot be neglected. Yet we notice in the format of most hagiography that they consist of a relatively short biographical introduction, then a number of miraculous works performed by the saint[800]. This again, in many ways, confirms the notion that the saint's miraculous works come secondary to his prayerful way of life and his transformation into being Christ-like. The biographer of St Barsoum affirms this similarity with Christ by quoting Jesus's words, "whoever keeps my commandments and does them, the works that I do he will do and will do greater than them"[801].

[798] Brown, 1983, p. 7.

[799] Vivian, 1996, p. 108.

[800] Swanson, 2011, p. 364.

[801] *The Life of St Barsoum the Naked*: Paris, Arabe 282, 25.

The lives of both aforementioned saints follow the same format above. It is probably coincidental that both lives start by the saints performing the same miracles: the first is blessing the bread at a time of need, and for the second miracle both saints raise dead women who were killed by their husbands. What is not coincidental are the details they give, especially in the first miracle, which links the miracle to the biblical account. In both accounts, the saint prayed, referring to Jesus's miracle of the five loaves and two fish and when everyone had finished eating, both accounts relate that there is much leftover food from the miracle[802], again pointing to Jesus's miracle.

This praying presence relationship between the Holy Man and the villagers is not only evident in hagiography but it is also vividly portrayed in other non-literary documents. In Claudia Rapp's article "For next to God you are my salvation: reflections on the rise of the holy man in late antiquity", she looks at the function of the Holy Man from the private letters that were sent to-and-fro between the Holy Man and some villagers. She successfully argues that the relationships between the Holy Man and his client are not limited to performing miracles. The Holy Man was the centre of a praying community, the community sent letters asking for his prayers and in turn they offered their prayers for the Holy Man: "the day-to day interactions between the holy man and his followers were centred on prayer and not the more spectacular miracles that were so artfully depicted by later hagiographers"[803].

What Rapp does not emphasise in her research is the Holy Man's perception as the image of Christ. Therefore, as an image of Christ, miracles become a natural part of

[802] *The Life of St Barsoum the Naked*: Paris, Arabe 282, 19A; *The Life of Abba Hadid*: St Bishoy's Monastery, mimer 632, Miracle 2, 8b.

[803] Rapp, 1999, p. 67.

the Holy Man's life. It is not at the forefront of the Holy Man's identity, but it is an expected outcome. From some of the letters that Rapp presents in her paper, we see this image of the Holy Man as an imitation of Christ. In one of the letters, a certain Ammonius writes to a monk Paphnutius asking not for a miracle but for intercession for the sins of the correspondent: "I always know that by your holy prayers I shall be saved from every temptation of the devil and from every contrivance of men, and now I beg you to remember me in your holy prayers; for after God you are my salvation"[804].

This letter highlights the two aspects of the Holy Man discussed so far. Firstly, his *praying presence* being the primary function of the Holy Man which can be confirmed in the fact that there is no request for a miracle, which is an important observation that Rapp makes, and it is common with many letters that only ask for prayers of the Holy Man and made no mention of a request for a miracle[805]. Secondly, that like Christ, the Holy Man offers intercessory prayer on behalf of the sins of the community and as the last sentence clearly states "After God you are my salvation." Given that the evidence from hagiography is consistent with the non-literary evidence, we can safely exclude any argument suggesting that the portrayal of the Holy Man in these two functions (i.e. being an Imitation of Christ and a Praying Presence) is a literary style that hagiographers used to present their hero.

[804] Cited from Rapp, 1999, p. 68.

[805] Rapp, 1999, p. 67.

Short Prayers on the Deathbed

There is one final feature of hagiography that highlights the Holy Man as a man of prayer not only during his lifetime but up to his deathbed. This literary style is common in Greek texts from antiquity as well as early Hebraic sources[806]. The final words of the model subject used by the writer to emphasis a certain teaching that makes the subject an example to emulate.

Like Jesus on the cross, the Holy Man is often recorded giving his last words to his disciples who are surrounding him. Abba Benjamin's last words to his disciples were: "Be joyful at all times, pray without ceasing and give thanks for all things"[807]. It is interesting that praying without ceasing was one of the few things he had to say before his death. In the life of St Barsoum the Naked, there is a vivid portrayal of the saint reciting the psalms on his deathbed:

وقال له يا شيخ الأسعد أعطنى سكينى أقطع بها اللسان فقاله يا أبانا لساناً يسبح الله كيف يقطع وأنه أخذ مقص وقطع طرف لسانه وأرماه وبدأ يتلو من المزمور قايلاً الرب نورى ومخلصى ممن أخاف وقال بعد ما أحسن وأبهج الأخوه إذا سكنوا جميعاً ثم رشم ذاته بعلامة الصليب المقدس وأسلم الروح[808]	Then he looked to his disciple Ibrahim the Scribe and said: "Old man give me a knife to cut my tongue off." He [the disciple] said to him: "our father, how can you cut a tongue that praises God." He then took scissors and cut the tip of his tongue and through it and started to recite the psalms saying "the Lord is

[806] Goehring, 2009, p. 21.

[807] *Abba Benjamin:* 4 Ward, 1984a, p. 44.

[808] *The Life of St Barsoum the Naked*: Paris, Arabe 282, 18A. The context of the saint cutting the tip of his tongue yet reciting the psalm is not clear but it could be a literary tool to emphasis the saints practice of the prayer audibly or silently.

	my light and my salvation whom shall I fear" and he said: "How pleasant and joyful for the brethren to dwell together" then he made the sign of the holy cross and gave up his spirit.

The reciting of the psalms, which coincides with Jesus quoting verses from the scripture on the cross, continued being a theme in the Bible as early as Stephen's martyrdom in Acts 7: 59-60. In the life of John of Scete, he is also recorded to have recited psalms.

، لما قرب ان يتنيح، لم يتخل قط عن ذكر الله، بل كان يتلوا فى كلامه مثل ما كان يصنع فى كل حين. ولما قربت الساعة التى يخرج فيها من الجسد، كان يقول هؤلاء الكلمات دفعة: " بنورك نعاين النور" ومرة: "نسير من قوة الى قوة"، ولم ينقطع ذكر المخلص من فيه الى ان اسلم الروح[809].	When he approached his death he did not stop remembering God. He kept reciting His words as was his custom. When the hour of his departure approached he used to say these words "with your light we see light" [36:9] another time "we go from strength to strength" [84:7] and the name of the saviour did not leave his tongue until he died.

It is important to note that the hagiographer made a special point in mentioning that the saint did not fail to say *the name of the saviour*. It is not clear if he was referring to a different prayer with the name of Jesus or if he considered reciting verses from the scripture to be equivalent to the name of Jesus, as was the practice in late antiquity.

[809] Zanetti, 1996, p. 361.

Thus, making the point that the saint is praying on his deathbed is an important detail that tells us more about the way the Holy Man was imitating Christ, even up to the time of his death. It is easy to see this in the martyrdom accounts as the martyr is killed while he is innocent in the same way as Jesus. Yet in the case of the monastic hagiography, the saint is imitating Christ by being a praying presence to his followers till death. This is portrayed by the Holy Man's instruction to his disciples to pray unceasingly or through his own practice of reciting scripture on his deathbed.

Hagiography as Paideia

This takes us to the main point of this chapter, the use of the hagiographical materials as a Christian form of Paideia that was at times challenging its Greek counterpart[810]. Hagiographical texts make the saint a subject of emulation, and the speech-action character of the text makes the hagiographical texts closely coincide with contemporary Greek Paideia. Paideia in antiquity was the practical learning by example of the morals and values that make up the society. This was not only through reading or memorising specific texts; it also had a strong emphasis on the practical side of these values, transforming them to the everyday life of the student. As scholars have argued, hagiography was the primary tool that the early monastics used to propagate the monastic teachings of their master, not only to later generations of monks, but also outside the boundaries of the monastery to non-monastic readers and listeners. In some other instances, the text acted as a recruiter to the monastic life,

[810] Urbano, 2008, p. 902.

such as in the case of Marcella who decided to become a nun after "hearing tales of the monastic monks"[811].

After the death of a Holy Man, his disciple or one of his admirers would write the life of the saint in one form or another. The main purpose of writing these texts was not only as a way of maintaining the legacy of the saint; it is often suggested by the author that the purpose is the emulation and imitation of the virtues of that Holy Man. This is made clear in many of the lives of saints. The *Life* of Anthony, for example, starts by stating the intention of the readers in knowing the manner of life of the saint "in order to emulate his zeal"[812]. If we use Rapp's definition of hagiography, which includes the *sayings*, then we should consider this statement that the text starts with:

> this book is an account of the virtuous asceticism and admirable way of life and also of the words of the holy and blessed fathers. They are meant to inspire and instruct those who want to imitate their heavenly lives, so that they make progress on the way that leads to the kingdom[813].

Later on, the editor of the text affirms the aim to be "to stir up future generations to emulate them"[814].

Recent scholarship has brought to our attention the way the writers or the editors of hagiography present their saint as an example to be followed. Derek Krueger has pointed out an important dimension, which is the imitation of the saint's life in his

[811] Cited from Bay, 2014, p. 28.

[812] Vivian & Athanassakis, 2003, p. 53.

[813] *Prologue* Ward, 1984a, p. xxxv.

[814] *Prologue* Ward, 1984a, p. xxxvi.

own writing. The hagiographer often presents himself as a model in sharing in the virtues of the saint by his effort in narrating the saints' life. As Krueger puts it:

> In producing hagiography, he [the hagiographer] works at writing in the hope of self-improvement: illustrating the saints is creative activity through which the author refashions himself. The author thereby produces a likeness of the saints, not only in his narration, but in himself[815].

Sheridan, in his research on the Coptic Encomium of the sixth century, has highlighted the similarity between its style and the style found in classical rhetoric. His main thesis was to show a higher level of education of some monastic figures than was previously assumed. For our purposes, it is interesting to note that the style of rhetoric mostly used in encomia was the epideictic or ceremonial, and its main objective was to praise the virtuous way of life of the person as an example to be followed[816]. This is evident in one of the encomia in this study, that of John of Shmun on St Anthony. In this encomium, John indirectly urges the listeners to follow the saint's example in practising what they are hearing, by using St Anthony's obedience to the scripture as an example:

> Going to church as was his custom and hearing the reading of the scriptures as was his habit, and listening, not merely listening, but listening attentively, and not only listening attentively, but also putting into practice what he heard, and even doing so before he heard it! In this way he heard and cried out like Israel of old: 'we will put into practice and obey the words that the Lord our God has

[815] Krueger, 2004, p. 97.

[816] Sheridan, 2011, p. 445.

spoken' (Det 5: 27) for when a person approaches the place where the word of God is spoken, he is ready to do the good that he will hear[817].

This leads us to an important dimension that we can clearly discern being the speech-action nature of the texts. The texts are not written as history, or for the preservation of a legacy, but were expected to be used as a model of Christian life that should be followed. The emphasis of the desert fathers on the speech-action nature of the Holy Man is emphasised by St Paphnutius: "for the faithful and good man must think the thoughts sent by God; he must speak what he thinks and act according to what he says"[818]. Therefore, the text took the place of the living words of the saint, which was also expected to be acted out in the listeners' lives, as discussed earlier in chapter four. By acting out the virtues of the saint, the readers or listeners would become a *praying presence* themselves in their own monastic circle and in society. We can thus see the way in which the text took the place of the Holy Man in his monastic community. Visitors who are used to meeting the Holy Man in person to ask for advice or a miracle can instead read the *Life* of the Holy Man, as in the example of St Augustine when he read the *Life of Anthony* when visiting the monastic community outside of Milan[819]. We also know from lists of book in ancient monastic libraries that they contained a good number of hagiographical texts[820] that must have been used by monks, not only for inspiration in their monastic calling but to act out the monastic virtues of these holy men in their lives.

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[817] *On Antony of Egypt by John of Shmun:* 12 Vivian & Athanassakis, 2003, pp. 15-16.

[818] *Lausiac History:* 47.13 Meyer, 1965, p. 129.

[819] *Confessions:* VIII, 6.15 nicene post nicene fathers.

[820] Orlandi, 2002, p. 215.

Rapp has further emphasised the speech-action character of hagiography in her search for the meaning of the verb *diegeisthai*, from which the nouns *diegesis* and *diegema* are derived, and which is commonly used in Greek and Christian hagiographical texts of the fourth until the seventh century to mean "to tell, to report"[821]. What is interesting is that when she compared the use of the verb and its derived nouns in classical Greek hagiography with the Christian literature of the time, it carries a different meaning. She argues that the noun in its Christian use denotes "an Anecdote or story that is of edifying character"[822]. The meaning of the word thus highlights the educational value of hagiographical texts in late antiquity.

Taking this aspect of hagiography into account gives it a much more prominent place in the life of the early monastic community and the church at large, as it highlights the continuity of the function of hagiographical text with the biblical text and the words of Jesus and the apostles with the readers and/or listeners themselves through the life of the Holy Man. This connection is made explicit in the ninth century text *Life* of Macarius, which starts off relating how the saint himself followed in the footsteps of the apostles and became their "companion in word and deed"[823]. At the conclusion of the *Life*, the hagiographer calls on the readers and/or listeners to practise the virtues of this saint in their own lives[824], therefore directly linking the teaching of the Bible to the saint's life, and finally to the readers. As Krueger argues in the case of the *Lausiac History*, "Palladius expected that the work of the hagiographer would stand in continuity with the work of the saints and even the Savior. While asserting that

[821] Rapp, 1998, p. 433.

[822] Rapp, 1998, p. 433.

[823] *The Life of St Macarius of Scetis:* 1 Vivian, 2004b, p. 152.

[824] *The Life of St Macarius of Scetis:* 138 Vivian, 2004b, p. 198.

teaching is not merely words, but rather 'consists of virtuous acts of conduct' (*LH, Epist 2*). Palladius included in such acts Christ's speaking to the disciples, thus invoking a paradigm for his own deeds of narration"[825]. Therefore, the hagiographers saw their text as a way of reliving the Bible story; the Holy Man or Woman was a typology of the prophets, apostles, and Jesus Himself; the writer was like the apostles and the writers of the New Testament; and the readers or listeners are expected to act out the virtuous life of the saint as they do in the Bible[826].

In recent scholarship, there has been much to say not only about the level of education of monks but also about the comparison between the monastic and classical paideia. As Carson Bay observes, the rejection by the monks of the classical paideia was not a rejection of learning, but a rejection of the social status that followed it. Being educated in antiquity came with a higher social and financial status that was the exact opposite of the monastic calling[827]. To compensate for the lack of classical mode of paideia, the monks had to develop their own system of paideia, therefore literacy became a skill learned not for the sake of a social and financial status but instead for the sake of "spiritual standing before God" and "Sanctification and self discipline"[828]. In doing so, they evidently used common techniques from classical paideia, but for different purposes. One of the most common aspects was the master-disciple relationship. This relationship was not limited to a living master; it could also be a relationship with a deceased master through the text of an inspirational life of a dead rhetorician or philosopher. Similarly, monastic paideia heavily relied on discipleship

[825] Krueger, 2004, p. 106.

[826] Krueger expands this argument at length in his second chapter of writing holiness Krueger, 2004.

[827] Bay, 2014, p. 13.

[828] Bay, 2014, p. 14.

to a master or sometimes to the life of a monastic hero[829]. Bay further affirms the pivotal role that hagiography played in this system of paideia: "A primary format of this education's object was hagiography. To be an educated monk was to understand and reify the wisdom contained in the lives of the ascetic heroes, both in the form of one's teacher and in monastic legends"[830]. This therefore makes hagiography a necessary teaching tool for those who aspire to the ascetic life.

Reading hagiography in light of the way a third-century Christian writer such as Origen (who perceived a saint as someone who takes the Bible command to pray without ceasing seriously enough to interpret the entire life of the saint as "*a single prayer*") is an important aspect to consider when studying the practice of the Arrow Prayer, which is the practical application of the bible command. Furthermore, considering the way a Holy Man was venerated for his *praying presence*, it would be reasonable to conclude that one of the main purposes of hagiographical texts was not only to teach the reader or listener how to pray, but to transform them into a life that is described as a *single prayer*.

[829] Kirschner, 1984, pp. 105-109.

[830] Bay, 2014, p. 14.

Conclusion

The practice of continuous prayer has been known in the Christian church as early as the first century AD, well before the beginning of Christian monasticism. One of the ways early Christians practised continuous prayer was through the repetition of short verses throughout the day. While this mode of prayer did not have any specific name until the twentieth century, its practice has always been characterised by the imagery of warfare and, more specifically, the use of arrows. It was probably this that gave rise to its name, the Arrow Prayer, on account of its brevity and its use to attack evil thoughts.

The practice of the Arrow Prayer is strongly attested in many sources from the third century to the present day yet to date it never had a specific definition that separated it from other modes of prayers. I have defined the Arrow Prayer with three specific characteristics. The first is that it was not specific to monks, but was used by monks and laity alike. Secondly, its content is fluid: it can include verses from the Scripture, personal prayer or, in the case of monks, a saying of one of the elders. Thirdly, it did not have a particular set time in which it was practised; rather, it was repeated throughout the day while performing everyday activities. These characteristics will help future scholars identifying the Arrow Prayer in other sources that I have not dealt with in this thesis.

In modern times there has been some confusion between the practice of the Arrow Prayer and the Jesus Prayer. Most, if not all, the scholarly work on the topic to date approaches the subject of continuous prayer from the context of the Jesus Prayer in its thirteenth-century Athonite tradition. Some of these researches, have more often than not started their research with the Jesus Prayer of the Athonite tradition, thus imposing later practices that developed over time onto the original practice of the prayer.

This thesis has approached the topic differently, starting by examining the sources that attest to any practice of continuous prayer, and the cultural backdrop that gave rise to these practices. In doing so, it became apparent that the tradition of the Arrow Prayer was the larger tradition which the Jesus Prayer is part of from the early years of its practice.

By studying different aspects of the late antique culture in which the Arrow Prayer first developed, such as the social and cognitive behaviour of people in an oral culture, which affected not only the way people processed information but also their way of writing texts, we can better appreciate the reasoning behind repeating short phrases or formulas. In an oral culture, the use of formulas was a common way of creating and recollecting information. This was apparent in the school system in antiquity in which students were expected to memorise short formulas or maxims that formed their personality and behaviour. This practice was also observed in the initial instruction of new monks, who were expected to memorise short verses to be able to fight different thoughts. Cognitive psychological research offers possibilities for further exploring this aspect of the question in the future.

Besides the memorisation that a monk was required to undertake in his cell, the church architecture and the wall paintings in their cells also reminded them of the practice of continuous prayer. To be able to memorise long texts, one must construct a list of formulas that make up the memory markers to the text, and repeat these formulas throughout the day. This practice is commonly called meditation. Therefore, for a monk to memorise the books of the Bible, he had to memorise hundreds of formulas to help him recollect the text on demand. Therefore the mention of monks or saints memorising scriptural text in the sources can implicitly assume the continuous repetition of short phrases to memorise the large text. It was this repetition of verses or formulas that, I argue, gave early Christians a way of practising the Arrow Prayer.

It comes as no surprise that the Scripture was the chief source of formulas that the monks used in their everyday practice of continuous prayer. This is evident not only in the number of biblical prayer formulas that are explicitly mentioned in the sources by monastic fathers, but also from the biblical quotations and allusions that can be found in monastic texts. These biblical formulas were used in the same way as Ergasia Patterns and Chreia were used in rhetorical schools in antiquity, with the purpose of not only memorising texts but internalising them.

To further contextualise the development of the Arrow Prayer, this thesis has examined the way the Holy Man was portrayed in hagiography. One of the central themes in hagiography was the saints' imitation of Christ, specifically in being a *praying presence*. Like Jesus, the saint prayed at all times of the day "as He was accustomed" (Luke 22:39). This theme is followed through throughout the life of the

saint until his deathbed, therefore emphasising the theme of continuous prayer in the saint's life. Arabic hagiography is a topic that is practically untouched by scholars today, further analyses of a number of these texts and common themes that run through them would shed light on the way saints were portrayed as Holy Men. In particular the theme of repeating bible verses on the saint's deathbed is frequent enough in hagiography that it requires further research.

Another area of research that I have touched on and should be a subject for further research is the practice of praying short prayers in a liturgical setting, and how this influenced the personal practice of continuous prayer.

This thesis has analysed the Arrow Prayer as it occurs in ancient sources down to the medieval period. We know, of course, that the Prayer is practiced in the Coptic Church in the present day. While it is poorly attested to in Arabic Christian literature, we can deduce that it was kept alive by its use in liturgical prayers. The publication of the book The *Way of a Pilgrim*, which advocates the practice of the Jesus Prayer in the Athonite tradition, and its translation into many languages early in the twentieth century, started a revival in the practice of the Jesus Prayer. Egypt was no exception to this revival and added certain elements onto an already existing Egyptian tradition, such as the emphasis on the Jesus Prayer formula. The impact of the revival of Eastern Orthodox hesychasm on twentieth century Coptic monastic practice would be a vital area for further study.

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