

CISTERCIAN STUDIES SERIES: NUMBER TWO HUNDRED TWENTY-FOUR

Bernadette McNary-Zak

Useful Servanthood

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A Study of Spiritual Formation
in the Writings of Abba Ammonas

Bernadette McNary-Zak

With the Greek corpus of Ammonas in English translation
by Nada Conic, Lawrence Morey, OCSO,
and Richard Upsher Smith, Jr.



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Preface

A brother asked Abba Ammonas, “Give me a word,” and the old man replied, “Go make your thoughts like those of the evildoers who are in prison. For they are always asking when the magistrate will come, awaiting him in anxiety. Even so the monk ought to give himself at all times to accusing his own soul, saying, ‘Unhappy wretch that I am. How shall I stand before the judgment seat of Christ? What shall I say to him in my defense?’ If you give yourself continually to this, you may be saved.”¹

By sharing stories like this one, Egyptian desert monks of the late fourth century preserved a collective memory of one of their best-remembered members, Abba Ammonas. Their primary intention, however, was less biographical than our modern sensibilities might imagine. Rather, their acts of preservation and transmission were shaped by deep convictions regarding the enduring tangibility of Abba Ammonas’ presence and the veracity of his words. This saying’s ability to capture so compactly the ethos of desert monastic practice through its teasing, compelling sense of transparency, and simplicity, posed a real challenge to its audiences. As in other forms of wisdom literature, much of the potency operative in this saying was found in what lay behind and beyond the words. Indeed, it was the unspoken reality of desert monastic practice that animated the imaginations of Christians of late antiquity and prompted their queries. For many contemporary historians of early Christianity, their questions remain relevant. What was the experience that supplied Abba Ammonas and his fellow monks with a worldview that rested on a radical overturning of commonly perceived notions of

happiness and judgment? How and why did Abba Ammonas know that this monk must adopt the same worldview? On what grounds was Abba Ammonas compelled to speak and the monk to listen?

Scholars have long addressed the nature, exercise, and role of spiritual formation in the context of desert monastic practice. This book applies the theoretical contributions of many of these studies to a presentation of the specific model of spiritual formation advanced by Abba Ammonas, a prominent fourth-century monastic leader whose extant writings remain largely unexamined. Given the nature of his monastic ties and the presence of a body of his writings, it remains striking that Abba Ammonas is an underrepresented figure in our study of early Christian monasticism. An examination of Abba Ammonas' writings illumines how discernment, a spiritual gift pervasive in early monastic circles, was discussed and cultivated in a local context and so provides another lens for considering the relationship between mystical experience and monastic practice in the life of the early Christian community.

The book falls into two parts. The first part situates Abba Ammonas in his historical and theological contexts. It begins with a brief discussion of the nature of spiritual guidance in fourth-century Egyptian desert monastic practice in order to locate Abba Ammonas' *Letters, Instructions, and Exhortations* and then proceeds to a systematic reconstruction of the model of spiritual formation found in these works. This is followed by a consideration of the contribution this model made in the contexts of Abba Ammonas' monastic network and the local church community.

The second part of the book contains English translations of Abba Ammonas' *Letters, Instructions, and Exhortations* as they survive in Greek. While there are French translations of these works, and an English translation of the Syriac *Letters*, the Greek manuscript tradition remains inaccessible to many readers; the translation of these texts is intended to add to the body of writings available.

Scholarship never takes place in isolation and I am grateful to many for their assistance in the construction of this book. I received gifts of funding and time at several critical periods. In a serendipitous sequence of events, a grant in the summer of 2003 from the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion enabled me to focus attention on writing, and to do so in the context of dialogue and fellow-

ship with colleagues whose contemporary work and lives were centered in one way or another on questions of discernment and community. I am especially grateful to Professor Susan Ashbrook Harvey and Rev. Dr. Paul O. Myhre for their help during this period. Further assistance was received in a course release in the fall 2004 semester through the generosity of a faculty development grant funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. I am especially grateful to my colleagues in the Religious Studies Department and in the Inter-disciplinary Humanities program at Rhodes College for their support at this time.

Public presentation of much of the scholarship in this book occurred in several forums. Audiences at annual and regional meetings of the American Academy of Religion, the Byzantine Studies Conference, and the International Congress of Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo, Michigan, challenged me to think with greater clarity and helped me to appreciate the value of Abba Ammonas' thought in a broader context. Students in my undergraduate courses, past and present, may recognize some of this material as well; they have been an invaluable audience as they continue to help me to hone my teaching about monastic practice. Dr. E. Rozanne Elder, Fr. Mark Scott, and the anonymous readers at Cistercian Publications provided insightful readings and comments on an earlier version of the manuscript and translations. My mother, Tusa McNary, first drew my attention to the cover image. I am especially grateful to her for the conversations that led to its eventual selection, and to Dr. Russell Hartman and those in the Department of Anthropology at the California Academy of Sciences who made its use possible. Finally, my deepest thanks go to David.

B. M. Z.

NOTES

1. Ammonas, *AP 1*, in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, trans. Benedicta Ward, Cistercian Studies Series 26 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1975).

Part One

*Understanding the Writings
of Abba Ammonas*

CHAPTER ONE

An Introduction to the Literature of the Desert

Abba Ammonas was asked, “What is the ‘narrow and hard way’ [Matt 7:14]?” He replied, “The ‘narrow and hard way’ is this, to control your thoughts, and to strip yourself of your own will, for the sake of God. This is also the meaning of the sentence, ‘We have left everything and followed you’ [Matt 19:27].”¹

As this saying records, Abba Ammonas articulates the belief of every monastic storyteller that the monastic practice is a specific form of Christian discipleship. The saying conveys a common depiction of spiritual guidance found among semi-anchoretic desert monks of the fourth century, whereby the monastic amma or abba imparts wisdom and insight to an eager visitor seeking counsel. In their descriptions of these encounters, the *Apophthegmata Patrum* illustrate how the receptivity of such visitors validated as legitimate a recognizable mark of holiness in late antiquity. Many visitors believed that “by departing from the flawed orbit of ordinary men, by waging heroic battle against the demons,” desert ammas and abbas “recovered the primeval perfection of Adam that existed before the fall from grace.”² As Peter Brown observes, desert ammas and abbas “had to work and to be seen to work. Charisma was the visible manifestation of an equally

visible ascetic ‘labor,’ whose rhythms and physical effect were palpable to all.”³ Such palpability was harnessed and contained in the oral and written sayings of these holy men and women. These sayings highlight the activity of spiritual guidance, the “sight and sound, observation and dialogue,”⁴ that shaped the relationship between holy persons and their disciples. Benedicta Ward writes that the sayings “are neither accounts of the way of life of the monks nor records of their teaching, but glimpses of them as they are known to their disciples.”⁵ Although idealized to some extent, the *Apophthegmata Patrum* provides evidence for a mode of teaching and learning about the spiritual life that forms the basis of our discussion.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE

As in philosophical and rabbinic circles, teaching and learning were highly personalized activities among the desert monks. Many times learning began with a request, “Give me a word, abba.” First and foremost, a disciple’s validation of the holiness of a desert amma or abba acknowledged the embodiment of those teachings and practices in Scripture and tradition from which such holiness derived. Texts like the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, the *History of the Monks*, and the *Lives* were explicit in creating spiritual ties between a desert abba or amma, former monastic guides, and prominent biblical predecessors in order to show how their wisdom was founded on Scripture. By preserving this “heritage of power”⁶ holy men and women grounded their words and practices in the framework of a tradition of interpretation recognized as holy, necessary, and true by early Christians.

The relationship of teaching and learning among the desert monks was also rooted in claims of a common experience. “No one could set himself up as a mere oracle of wisdom, but was expected to reflect in his own life the fruits of a vigorous and enduring regime of self-perfection.”⁷ Like his disciple, the desert abba had accepted a call to pursue the ascetic life and to strive for union with the divine, which brought him into solidarity with his fellow monks. The “ethical responsibilities associated with speaking and hearing were believed to have a profound

effect on one's capacity to interpret the words of Scripture and the words of power uttered by the elders . . . Verbal purity and integrity were felt to be indispensable for engaging in meaningful interpretation."⁸ These dimensions are illumined well in a saying that recounts one of Abba Ammonas' visits to Abba Antony. According to this saying, after watching Abba Ammonas beat a stone at his request, Abba Antony is said to have declared, "'Has this stone said anything?' Abba Ammonas replied, 'No.' Then Antony said, 'You too will be able to do that,' and that is what happened. Abba Ammonas advanced to the point where his goodness was so great he took no notice of wickedness."⁹

For many desert monks, teaching and learning required sustained oversight. This required geographic proximity and longer acquaintance with a desert abba. Graham Gould writes that teaching "takes place in the context of a personal relationship, which makes great demands on both parties involved."¹⁰ The process of learning required "self-disclosure, endurance, and obedience" on the part of the disciple.¹¹ Richard Valantasis has observed that teaching entailed training "the disciple in a way of perceiving and relating to the mental and emotional self, the religious community, and the wider world. The substance of the training revolved about the transmission of traditional material regarding the interior life."¹² Desert ammas and abbats often tailored their teaching to the specific needs of their disciples. For their part, the disciples were convinced that their elders were "able to identify and describe their personal problems, and to propose for them suitable solutions."¹³ On occasion, such specificity would have required the desert amma or abba to incorporate local imagery and personal experience into a teaching. So, for an audience whose lives were dependent on the behavior of the Nile River, Abba Ammonas' analogy describing the reception of lasting spiritual gifts from the Holy Spirit would have had a highly specific meaning: "For as with a ship when the wind is fair, her twin rudders are driven more and so she travels a great distance, and so also the sailors rejoice and are at ease, so is the second fervor, bringing calm in every way."¹⁴

For the desert amma or abba the relationship with a disciple was a means of "testing [one's] own endurance, submission, and integrity in teaching by example and by personal involvement with a disciple's problems and temptations."¹⁵ In this way, teaching was a product of and

a contributor to the interior formation of these holy men and women. Visitors and disciples believed that these spiritual guides had acquired that inner purity of heart possible in the monastic life and had been given the gift of discernment. Discernment was the distinguishing feature that separated the desert amma or abba from the disciple: it was precisely through the attainment of discernment that the desert amma or abba was able to serve and to be recognized. "This supposed inspiration by God was the essential basis of trust in the teaching of the fathers. An apparently intimate relationship with God, a complete dependence upon him, did more than anything else to give experienced ascetics a permanent standing in the eyes of other men."¹⁶ Discernment was also foundational to the process of spiritual formation. As William Harmless observes: "if a 'word of salvation' was a key specially fit to open a particular monk's heart, then the abba's ability to speak that word implied astute discernment."¹⁷

The centrality of discernment attests to the belief among the desert monks that the relationship between desert ammas and abbats and their disciples was "seen as a form of training through obedience on which a disciple's attainment of the virtues and qualities which are the aim of the monastic life was directly dependent—and which directly affects his standing before God as well."¹⁸ It was "the word of Christ and his example, seen in the light of the Holy Spirit" that "formed the guiding force" of teaching and learning among the desert monks.¹⁹ Hardly ends in themselves, teaching and learning were born of a divine call and so were consecrated, commissioned acts with the power to transform teacher and disciple. That is to say, desert ammas and abbats and their disciples shared a vocation that was "pre-eminently an imitation of Christ."²⁰ In this context, spiritual guidance was essentially about aiding the disciple in his quest as the divine was always the source of spiritual instruction. Hans J. W. Drijvers observes that in "the hard exercise of his will the holy man gains insight into God's saving thought—asceticism and acquirement of wisdom are two sides of the same *imitatio Christi*—and he displays this insight in his acts of power, which always aim at the salvation of men. The desert is the place of trial and hence preeminently the place for exercising the will: at the same time the desert is between servitude and slavery and the promised land."²¹

It is in this sense that the desert amma's or abba's public exercise of discernment was construed as a manifestation of the activity of the divine. For the desert amma and abba, such perception empowered the capacity for prophecy, what Tomas Spidlik describes as "being able to speak in the name of God."²² As desert monastic practice drew more public attention in the early decades of the fourth century, acts of intercession on behalf of faithful disciples and others increased accordingly and desert ammas and abbats served many through their exercise of the spiritual gift of discernment. These holy women and men were regarded as viable sources of wisdom, courage, and strength by those who came to the desert from their cities, towns, and villages seeking counsel and mediation. According to the sources from the period the involvement of these holy women and men was far-reaching in form and in content, as they addressed matters practical and esoteric. By way of example, we may consider the papyrus fragment from 324 CE that is evidence for the activity of a deacon, Antoninus, and a monk, Isaac, who intervened on behalf of a man who was being assaulted and later were asked to serve as witnesses to the attack.²³ Likewise, we can turn to the *History of the Monks*, in which we encounter Bes who, at the request of the local farmers, drove a wild hippopotamus from the area by invoking the name of Jesus Christ, and Theon who was said to have spent the greater part of his day healing many by stretching out his hand through the window of his monastic cell.²⁴

Among the desert monks, such acts of intercession were often identified as acts of prayer. Indeed, it was in humility and obedience before the divine that Bes and Theon exercised discernment and functioned as intercessors. Yet, it was left to their audiences, those unnamed observers and recipients, to accept their intercession as a means rather than an end. If such acts were, in fact, in accordance with the will of the divine, then intercession might also validate the process of spiritual formation advocated by the particular spiritual guide to whom they were attributed. In a highly visible way acts of intercession might distinguish the desert amma or abba as both a resource and as a marker for the activity of the divine. By identifying false thinking and proposing right thinking, the desert amma or abba could challenge her or his audiences *to see* rightly; by offering prayer on their behalf, the desert amma or abba could challenge

them *to be* accordingly. Clearly, the gift of discernment characterized in such acts entailed participation in the activity of the divine through intimate involvement with and engagement in the affairs of the world. Drawing on the writings of the desert fathers, Augustine Roberts, OCSO, writes that monasticism is a reformation, a conversion, for which “the beginning and the end of this conversion process is mystical, namely, the person of Jesus Christ, his way of life and his inner experience as the Son of the Father’s Love.”²⁵ For the desert monks, the gift of discernment was connected, then, to this mystical process of conversion.

It is for this reason that, in many regions of the eastern Roman Empire, the exercise of discernment by spiritual mothers and fathers like Abba Ammonas expanded existing concepts of patronage. Certainly, there is evidence that the relations between the desert abba and the local church community created tension between the charismatic authority of the desert monk and the institutional authority of the local bishop.²⁶ As Timothy D. Barnes concludes, with the rise and reforms under Constantine and his sons, the Christian bishop “possessed an ascribed status, his authority was inherent in his office, and he was at the centre of a web of local patronage. His position thus conferred on him a very real political power.”²⁷ Such power would, at times, conform to and, at times, compete with the popular authority of the desert monk.

As prophetic voices to the Christians of their day, many spiritual mothers and fathers by their renunciation were afforded a perspective for evaluating what they perceived as diluted piety and frivolous excess in their fellow Christians, including their bishops. The correspondence of Abba Ammonas provides a way for us to consider as complementary rather than competing the perspectives on the exercise of discernment as a ministry shared by monk and bishop in several fourth-century Christian communities.

OVERVIEW OF THIS STUDY

The first part of this book situates Abba Ammonas in his historical and theological contexts. Chapter 2 begins with a presentation and assessment of the source material for Abba Ammonas and his model of

spiritual formation. The monastic correspondence of Abba Ammonas is one of our primary sources. His *Letters, Instructions, and Exhortations* are chronologically placed in “the generation of pioneers,” that period during which Egyptian monasticism was exclusively Egyptian.²⁸ A sizeable number of sayings are attributed to Abba Ammonas and his practice is preserved as well on the pages of the *History of the Monks of Egypt*. These writings are distinct from the extant *Letters, Instructions, and Exhortations* in significant ways, yet their inclusion is necessary if we are to understand the impact of Abba Ammonas and of his teachings.

The process of spiritual formation defined by Abba Ammonas in these sources is presented in chapter three. For the purpose of discussion, I have chosen to refer to this process in terms of spiritual formation. While it is certainly plausible that Abba Ammonas would have found this designation foreign or insufficient, I intend its use to highlight the particularity of his vision of the monastic practice. For him, spiritual formation was a process of acquiring and maintaining righteousness. It required purification, a cleansing of the body and of the soul in order to become worthy to receive and retain a divine power. In his role as spiritual father, Abba Ammonas participated in a spiritual lineage of righteous men that included the Old Testament patriarchs, prophets, and Saint Paul. Like them, he sought to create relationships rooted in prayer and in love that cultivated a specific awareness of the presence and authority of the divine as abba and guide. For Abba Ammonas, the abba-disciple relationship was intentionally a heuristic, didactic device for the invisible yet wholly real paradigm of monastic practice: the relation between the monk and the divine. Operative in the abba-disciple relation as Abba Ammonas defined it was an implicit awareness of its ability and of its frailty to serve as a prototype for the relation between the monk as disciple and the divine as master. Because of this Abba Ammonas stressed that spiritual formation be situated in the context of the Christian monastic community, a spirit-centered community of righteousness rooted in love and hospitality in which the divine was both host and guest and into which the monk was invited, through the process of spiritual formation, to participate.

When his model of spiritual formation is examined in the context of his immediate monastic network it is possible to identify the specific

emphasis of Ammonian spirituality: the invitation to Christian discipleship and the ability to choose its pursuit through the creation of a hospitable body for prayerful service to the world and mystical union with the divine. According to Abba Ammonas, the reception of divine power was a sign of right relations between the desert monk and the divine and could lead, in turn, to the spiritual gift of discernment and so to a commissioning for service to others. For these desert monks, it was the will of the divine that they return to the world in order to assist others through their exercise of the gift of discernment.

Chapter 4 examines how Abba Ammonas, defined as a righteous one, exercised this gift. We will consider discernment from the perspective of his own practice in the context of his monastic network. Here, we can glimpse how his fellow monks legitimated this gift through specific forms and acts of intercession. Explication of the marks of true discernment contained in the writings of Abba Ammonas permits us to imagine the reception of discernment and to explore the development of teachings about discernment in the context of the monastic network and so discloses how Abba Ammonas might have functioned as a physician of the soul for his brothers. Because his teachings on discernment are tied to the call for useful servanthood, we can consider how these teachings contributed to the construction of monastic activity, and of Christian discipleship, in this period.

Chapter 5 explores the expansion of these teachings to the members of the entire Christian community. Abba Ammonas and the members of his monastic network, like many others in his day, cultivated their monasticism in relationship with their local church, and so they were intimately aware and integrally involved in the workings of a larger Christian community. In this way, their practice of renunciation and virtue participated in the piety of the broader community. From this position Abba Ammonas, as one of many prominent spiritual fathers and as a specifically Egyptian one, envisioned how the monastic practice might help to facilitate religious renewal and reform in this period. A brief epilogue concludes this part of the book.

Part 2 provides English translations of Abba Ammonas' *Letters*, *Instructions*, and *Exhortations* as they have survived in Greek. Like the writings of many other monks of his day, Abba Ammonas' writings are

found in a wide range of languages. The Syriac *Letters*, the earliest in date, have been accessible in English for over twenty-five years thanks to the work of Derwas Chitty and Sebastian Brock. The Greek *Letters, Instructions, and Exhortations* were printed in *Patrologia Orientalis* with a French translation by Francois Nau and have been unavailable in English.

This book is an introduction to the person and writings of Abba Ammonas and focuses on the model of spiritual formation he advanced in his historical, monastic, and ecclesiastical contexts. For this reason, it is not a prosopographical study, nor does it provide detailed analysis of his writings. As the state of scholarship on Abba Ammonas indicates, the need for such work remains. It is my hope that the narrow focus of this book will prompt others in the field to examine these writings for themselves and that future studies will assist the recovery and placement of this important early monastic thinker.

NOTES

1. Ammonas, AP 11, in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, trans. Benedicta Ward, CS 59 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1975), 28.

2. Robert Kirschner, "The Vocation of Holiness in Late Antiquity," *Vigiliae Christianae* 38 (1984): 114.

3. Peter Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 94.

4. Richard Valantasis, *Spiritual Guides of the Third Century: A Semiotic Study of the Guide-Disciple Relationship in Christianity, Neoplatonism, Hermetism, and Gnosticism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 3.

5. *The Lives of the Desert Fathers: The Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, intro. Benedicta Ward, trans. Norman Russell, CS 34 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications), 3. With regard to the act of reading the writings of the desert fathers, David Jasper writes: "we read not *through* the text, somehow consuming it in a search for its meaning, but read only by extending in ourselves the very existence of the text. In the oxymoronic text the saintly body becomes a

total presence only in its absolute self-forgetfulness, in pure kenosis, and thus the impossible imitation Christi, and impossibility which we therefore entertain in our reading" (*The Sacred Desert: Religion, Literature, Art, and Culture* [Blackwell Publishing, 2004], 29).

6. Philip Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority, and the Church in the Age of Jerome and Cassian* (Oxford University Press, 1978), 24.

7. Rousseau, 25. In "The Ascetic Impulse in Early Christianity: Methodological Challenges and Opportunities," Vincent Wimbush suggests that "Christianity, certainly up to the fifth century in many circles . . . can with profit be understood and interpreted as counter-cultural, or at least counter-critical, as a complex of movements in opposition to the 'world.' 'World' in ancient Christianity was referenced with ambivalence: sometimes it referenced Satan in opposition to God's reign; at other times it referred positively to humanity and the natural, physical order . . . the resistance impulse obtained most consistently" (Elizabeth A. Livingston, ed., *Studia Patristica XXV: Papers Presented at the Eleventh International Conference on Patristic Studies Held in Oxford 1991* [Louvain: Peeters Publishing, 1993], 464).

8. Douglas Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 135. See also John Breck, *Scripture in Tradition: The Bible and Its Interpretation in the Orthodox Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Press, 2001). Breck observes: "That is, the hermeneutic principles or rules of interpretation developed by the Fathers of the Church represent an extension and development of certain methods of interpretation that the apostles used to understand and proclaim the messianic significance of the Law and the Prophets" (34).

9. Ammonas, *AP* 8; Ward, 27.

10. Graham Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 26.

11. Gould, 27.

12. Valantasis, 3.

13. Rousseau, 20.

14. Ammonas, *Syr. Ep.* 10; Derwas Chitty, ed. and trans., revised and introduced by Sebastian Brock, *The Letters of Ammonas: Successor of St. Antony* (Oxford: SLG Press, 1979), 13. The translation of the Syriac letters that is used in this study is Chitty's.

15. Laura Swan, *The Forgotten Desert Mothers* (New York: Paulist Press, 2001), 87.

16. Rousseau, 29.

17. William Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 172. See also Tomas Spidlik, *The Spirituality of the Christian East: A Systematic Handbook*, Antony P. Gythiel, trans., CS 79 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1986), 284: "The great renown of the 'spiritual fathers,' the abbas, and the *startzy* (elders) in monasticism rests on the assumption that no one is any longer worthy to be enlightened directly by the Holy Spirit—although this would be in conformity with human nature—and especially, that not everyone is able to discern whether thoughts come from the Holy Spirit or not. . . . Spiritual direction is an obligation of the gnostic, 'the one who knows.' It is simply the discernment of spirits put into practice. Consequently, the gift of *diakrisis* (discernment) governs all others in the area of guidance. . . . The gift of discernment joined to that of 'prophecy,' being able to speak in the name of God, makes the perfect spiritual father." In addition, Laura Swan has aptly written that it was the task of the abba or amma to guide the disciple in the hope that he or she might obtain this gift too for "the amma journeyed and struggled alongside her disciple but maintained the detachment necessary for discernment" (Swan, 26).

18. Gould, 27.

19. Fulbert Cayre, *Spiritual Writers of the Early Church*, W. Webster Wilson, trans. (New York: Hawthorn, 1959), 82.

20. Kirschner, 112. In the same place he writes that by their "celibacy . . . identification with the poor . . . sufferings . . . confrontations with demons . . . night-long prayer vigils and miraculous healings" the monk conformed "to a highly specific model."

21. Hans J. W. Drijvers, "Hellenistic and Oriental Origins," in *The Byzantine Saint*, Sergei Hackel, ed. (San Bernardino, CA: The Borgo Press, 1983) 25–33, 25.

22. Spidlik, 284.

23. Edwin A. Judge, "The Earliest Use of *Monachos* for 'Monk' and the Origins of Monasticism," *Jahrbuch fur Antike und Christentum* 20 (1977): 72–89.

24. Bes, *HM* 4, and Theon, *HM* 6; Ward and Russell, 66, 68.

25. Augustine Roberts, *Centered on Christ: A Guide to Monastic Profession*, MW 5 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2005), 35. See also Boniface Ramsey, *Beginning to Read the Fathers* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 164–81. With regard to the ideal of constant prayer among some of the desert fathers, Ramsey observes: "Sometimes this prayer could be practiced while working, but only if the work were of such a kind as to permit it. Thus it had to be simple, allowing the mind to soar of itself: consequently the weaving of baskets and the plaiting of mats, which required only mechanical movements, were much in favor. A monk could sit in his cell the whole day through, weaving baskets

out of reeds and reciting Psalms" (169). See also Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003). Wilken draws specific attention to the significance of humility as a form of imitation in the thought of Gregory of Nyssa on pages 276–79.

26. See Timothy D. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); see also David Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

27. Barnes, 179. See also Peter Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (University of California Press, 1982). Brown writes that the language of patronage draws on an established tradition of usage, and was employed in this period "because it was the idiom with which to conduct an obscure but urgent debate on the nature of power in Late Antique society and the relation of power to mercy and justice" (14).

28. Susanna Elm, *Virgins of God* (Clarendon Press, 1994), 254.