

CISTERCIAN STUDIES SERIES: NUMBER TWO HUNDRED FIFTY-TWO

Palladius of Aspuna

The Lausiac History

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Palladius of Aspsuna

The Lausiatic History

Translated by

John Wortley



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Scripture quotations are the translator's own work, with all quotations from the Old Testament based on the Septuagint.

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Abbreviations

AP	<i>Sayings of the [Desert] Fathers</i> [<i>Apophthegmata Patrum</i>]:
APalph	the Alphabetic Collection. See Introduction, n. 4.
APanon	the Anonymous Collection. See Introduction, n. 5.
APsys	the Systematic Collection. See Introduction, n. 6.
Bibliotheca	<i>Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca</i>
Butler	<i>The Lausiatic History of Palladius</i> , ed. Cuthbert Butler, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1898, 1904).
Conf	John Cassian's <i>Conferences</i>
HE	<i>Ecclesiastical History</i>
Monks	<i>The History of the Monks in Egypt</i> [<i>Historia monachorum in Ægypto</i>]. See Introduction, n. 7.
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
PG	<i>Patrologia Graeca</i>
PS	<i>The Spiritual Meadow</i> [<i>Pratum Spirituale</i>]. See Introduction, n. 8.
SynaxCP	<i>Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae</i> , ed. Hippolyte Delahaye, <i>Analecta Bollandiana</i> (Brussels, 1902).
Vita A	Athanasius's <i>Life of Antony</i> [<i>Vita Antonii</i>]. See Introduction, n. 2.

Translator's Introduction¹

In the earlier part of the fourth century of this era, about the time Christianity became a legal religion in the Roman Empire, a considerable number of men and some women abandoned their usual places and ways of life to practice Christianity more intensely in remote locations. This change happened first in Egypt, and those who undertook it were the earliest Christian monks. Antony of Egypt (ca. 250–356) is frequently cited as the pioneer of that movement, although in Athanasius's *Life of Antony* (Vita A),² which largely contributed to that idea, Antony is said to have learned spiritual discipline (asceticism) from an earlier practitioner (Vita A 3.2–3). Antony's motivation and no doubt that of many others was a passage in the gospel where, after giving various directions, Jesus says to his followers, "But, if you want to be perfect [τέλειος], go sell your property, give [the proceeds] to the poor (you will have treasure in heaven), then come and follow me."³ The surviving statistics must of course be treated cautiously, but it appears that a very substantial number of people heard and responded to this call, withdrawing either to share the life and teaching of a desert

¹ The translator wishes to express his sincere gratitude to his colleagues and mentors, Robert Jordan in Belfast and Rory Egan in Winnipeg, without whose generous cooperation this project might never have been realized.

² *Athanase d'Alexandrie, Vie d'Antoine*, ed. and trans. G. J. M. Bartelink, SCH 400 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1994) (hereafter Vita A); *The Life of Antony: The Coptic Life and the Greek Life*, trans. Tim Vivian and A. N. Athanasakis, CS 202 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2003).

³ Vita A 2; Matt 19:2; see Matt 5:48: "Do you be perfect [τέλειοι] just as your heavenly father is perfect."

guru (*abba*, “elder”) in Lower Egypt or to enroll in one of the more organized communities of the Thebaid.

A great deal of what is known about those early monks comes from one of two kinds of sources, both written in Greek. On the one hand, there are the so-called *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* (*Apophthegmata Patrum*), a somewhat misleading designation, for it covers not only sayings of but also tales about famous men and some women whose lives were devoted to spiritual discipline in the desert. Of the extant collections, the *Alphabetical*⁴ and its supplement, the *Anonymous*,⁵ were probably made a little before the year 500. Maybe a generation later, a selection from those collections was made. In this *Systematic Collection*⁶ the material (supplemented by some sayings of Isaiah of Scete) is arranged under twenty-one heads representing the *desiderata* of the monastic profession, for example, 9. On Not Judging Persons, 10. On Discretion, 11. About Always Being on Watch, 12. On Praying “Without Ceasing.”

One has continually to remind oneself when reading the *Apophthegmata* that their editors (possibly refugee monks in Palestine) were endeavoring to preserve in Greek an oral tradition in Coptic that had already been developing for a century

⁴ *Apophthegmata patrum, collection alphabetica*, ed. Jean-Baptiste Cotelier, Monumenta Ecclesiae Graecae, t. 1 (Paris, 1647); reedited by J.-P. Migne, PG 65:71–440 (hereafter APalph); *Les Sentences des Pères du Désert: Collection alphabétique*, trans. Dom Lucien Regnault (Solesmes: Bellefontaine, 1966); *Give Me a Word: The Alphabetical Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, trans. John Wortley (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2014).

⁵ *Les Sentences des Pères du Désert, Série des Anonymes*, trans. Dom Lucien Regnault (Solesmes: Bellefontaine, 1985) (hereafter APanon); *The Anonymous Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, ed. and trans. John Wortley (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁶ *Les Apophthegmes des Pères: collection systématique*, ed. and trans. Jean-Claude Guy, 3 vols., Sch 387, 474, and 498 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1993, 2003, 2005) (hereafter APsys); *The Book of the Elders: Sayings of the Desert Fathers; The Systematic Collection*, trans. John Wortley, CS 240 (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2012).

and a half in Egypt and elsewhere by their time. On the other hand, the travelogues (as we would call them today) are the direct memoirs of people who visited and even lived with the Desert Fathers. These may have been distorted in transmission, but they originate in precise Greek texts by specific authors. Of the three major examples, the earliest is *The History of the Monks in Egypt* (Monks).⁷ In it are recorded the experiences of a group of seven monks from the Mount of Olives at Jerusalem who visited anchorites and monastic communities in the Thebaid and in lower Egypt during the winter of 394–395. On their return to Palestine one of their number (his name is not known) produced this report ca. 397. He tells how they undertook the arduous tour of Egypt in order to see for themselves the amazing way of life and accomplishments of the monks of whom they had heard so much. He does not minimize the great perils and dangers to which the visitors were exposed in the course of their journey (Monks, Epilogue), but he places particular emphasis on the disciplines the Egyptian monks endured and the wondrous works they were believed to perform. The avowed purpose of his book was to bring back to Palestine something “to inspire the emulation and recollection of advanced monks and for the building-up and benefit of beginners in the ascetic life” (Prologue 12).

The third and longest extant monastic travelogue is *The Spiritual Meadow* (*Pratum Spirituale*) of John Moschos,⁸ who traveled the monastic world at the end of the sixth century and the

⁷ *Historia Monachorum in Ægypto*, ed. André-Jean Festugière, *Subsidia Hagiographica* 53 (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1971) (hereafter Monks); *Enquête sur les Moines d’Égypte*, trans. André-Jean Festugière, in *Les Moines d’Orient*, 4/1 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1964); *The Lives of the Desert Fathers*, trans. Norman Russell (Oxford, UK, and Kalamazoo, MI: Mowbray/Cistercian Publications, 1981).

⁸ John Moschos, *Pratum Spirituale*, ed. J.-P. Migne (after Fronto Ducaeus and J. -B. Cotelier), with the Latin translation of Ambrose Traversari, PG 87:2851–3112; *The Spiritual Meadow*, trans. John Wortley, CS 139 (Kalamazoo,

beginning of the seventh. Together with his friend (possibly his disciple: the relationship is not clear) Sophronios “the Sophist,” the future patriarch of Jerusalem (633/4–648), he collected monastic data wherever he went “and worked them into a crown which I now offer to you [Sophronios], most faithful child, and through you to the world at large” (PS, Prologue). While the *Pratum Spirituale* is rich in anecdotal matter and a happy hunting ground for those who seek to discover how life was being lived at the end of the antique era, it portrays a monastic society now grown rather old, one in which the world and the desert are not nearly so sharply distinguished from each other as in the earlier documents.

By contrast, the remaining monastic travelogue, with which this volume is primarily concerned, preserves something of the youthful vigor and exuberance of monasticism in the early years of its existence, when the memory of Antony was still very much alive: the so-called *Lausiaca History*, the work of Palladius.⁹ This may have come to be known as a *history* by association with *The History of the Monks in Egypt*, but it is unlikely that Palladius had any knowledge of the earlier work. He certainly picked up some of the tales the Jerusalem monk had recorded, but he records them in different versions. On the other hand, Palladius undoubtedly knew the *Life of Antony* that Athanasius of Alexandria wrote sometime between 356, when Antony died, and his own death in 373, for he refers to it directly (8.6), and there are certain passages that might well have come directly from its pages (e.g., 21.16; see Vita A 66.3–6).

MI: Cistercian Publications, 1992); *Fioretti des moines d'orient*, trans. Christian Bouchet (Paris: Migne, 2006).

⁹ Palladius of Hellenopolis / of Aspuna, *Historia Lausiaca*, ed. Cuthbert Butler, *The Lausiaca History of Palladius*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1898, 1904); *Palladio, La Storia Lausiaca*, ed. G. J. M. Bartelink, trans. Marino Barchiesi (Milan: Fondazione Lorenza Valla and Libri Mondadori, 1974); *Les Moines du désert*, trans. Les sœurs carmelites de Mazille (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1981).

Antony is mentioned far more often than any other person in the *Lausiac History* (about thirty-six times), and some of the most striking passages concern monks who cherished personal reminiscences of "the great one," as he was called (21.7, 8).

Of Palladius the man, we know not only the name but also a good deal else besides, because he did not hesitate to include a considerable amount of autobiographical material in his book, both physical and spiritual (see *Lausiac History* 23). Born in Galatia in the 360s, he enrolled as a monk on the Mount of Olives in his early twenties. He stayed there for about three years, during which time he encountered Rufinus of Aquileia and Melania the Elder. Possibly on their advice he left for Alexandria to learn the practice of Egyptian monasticism from a hermit named Dorotheos (2). He subsequently spent nine years living in the desert of Nitria and at The Cells, first with Macarius of Alexandria and then with Evagrius of Pontus, whose influence on him was very strong (38). In 399 Evagrius died, aged 53, and at about the same time Palladius fell ill. He says, "I fell sick with a sickness of the spleen and of the stomach. I was sent by the brothers from there to Alexandria after showing symptoms of dropsy. The physicians advised me to leave Alexandria for Palestine to take the air, for the air is light there and suitable for my condition" (35.11–12).

Arriving in Palestine, Palladius took up residence with Poseidon at Bethlehem; there he encountered Jerome (36). At some time he also lived with a famous hermit, Elpidius of Cappadocia, near Jericho (48.2). Then in 400 he was appointed to the Bythinian see of Hellenopolis by John Chrysostom, Patriarch of Constantinople since 398, whom he subsequently vigorously supported at the Synod of the Oak in 403. But faced with the hostility of the Augousta Eudoxia and accused of Origenism by Theophilus, the pope of Alexandria, Chrysostom was deposed and sent into exile.

Palladius then went to Rome to plead his case at the court of Innocent I (61.7), for which he was arrested when he returned to the capital. He was imprisoned for eleven months in a dark cell (35.13) and then sent into exile. For seven years he lived in the Thebaid, first at Syene (Aswân), then at Antinoë (or Antinoöpolis, now Shêkh 'Abâda). But with the accession of Theodosius II and his sister, the blessed Pulcheria, in 408, the opposition to John Chrysostom (who had died in exile the previous year) began to subside. In 413 Palladius was able to return to Galatia, where, in due course, he was appointed to the see of Aspuna. There he may have remained until his death, the date of which has not been established—possibly 425.

Palladius probably spent no more than twenty years as a monk before he became a bishop, and then only seven or eight years in exile in the Thebaid. No doubt this was sufficient time to gather the material for his book, but the number of his moves may seem inappropriate for one who had embraced the monastic calling.¹⁰ There are numerous warnings about the dangers for monks of moving around, for example, "In the same way that a frequently transplanted tree is incapable of bearing fruit, so neither can a monk who moves from place to place accomplish virtue" (APanon 204 / APsys 7.43). Palladius's repeated changes of location may explain why he relates a great deal about the persons he encountered but not very much of their teaching; see, for example, the section on John of Lycopolis in *History of the Monks in Egypt*. And yet, unlike most other monastic writers, he occasionally inserts an injunction more appropriate to persons living in the world than to those under spiritual discipline, for example: "[The devil] contrives for us to travail for affluence under the pretense of caring for our relatives. . . . prompted by divine motivation, one can give relief

¹⁰ He claims also to have "trod the streets of 106 cities and stayed for some time in most of them," maybe referring to monastic communities (*Lausiac History* 71.2 [see note]).

to one's relatives (if they are in need) without neglecting one's own soul. But when one tramples one's own soul under foot in caring for one's relatives, one falls foul of the law, counting the entire soul as worthless" (6.2–3).

Palladius lets it be known in various ways that he occupied no mean position in the social order. The elegance of his language alone suggests that claim to be true; of fourth- to sixth-century monastic writers, only his mentor Evagrius and Athanasius wrote Greek of similar sophistication. It is clear too that he habitually moved in exalted circles in the world, rubbing shoulders with persons of senatorial rank. His book has come to be known as *Lausiac* because he wrote it at the request of and dedicated it to one such person: Lausus, a eunuch in the imperial service.¹¹ He had been acquainted with Lausus since 391 (71.6); by the time Lausus received Palladius's book he had risen to the elevated position of chamberlain (*praepositus sacri cubiculi*) at Constantinople (420–422).

As Palladius well knew, this meant that Lausus was in an extremely advantageous position to influence their imperial majesties, Theodosius II and his sister, Pulcheria. When Lausus became chamberlain the emperor was not yet twenty; his sister, who was only two years older, had already more or less gathered the reins of power into her capable hands. Palladius makes no secret of the fact that he hopes to influence the sovereigns and the entire government through the minister: "May you be a guide for yourself, for those with you, for those under your authority, and for the most pious emperors, through whose good works all those who love Christ strive to be united with God" (Prologue 3). Thus Palladius's work is the only one of the major monastic writings not written for fellow monks to inspire them with models for their emulation but rather for

¹¹ "For it was not without the help of God that your mind was moved to charge me with the composition of this book and to commit to writing the lives of these holy ones" (71.5).

a man very much of the world, with the explicit intention of exerting *political* (albeit religious) influence. To what extent it contributed to the exemplary piety of the Augousta Pulcheria, who effectively ruled the Empire until her death in 453, we may never know.

Other features of the *Lausiaca History* also distinguish it from most other monastic writings, such as Palladius's making the point that he intends to speak of both male and female ascetics: "In this book I must also commemorate some courageous women whom God granted equality in prizes with men so as not to allege that they are less vigorous in the quest for virtue" (41.1). Similarly he advises Lausus, "Seek the acquaintance of holy men and women" (Prologue 15). He gives both the elder and the younger Melania comprehensive treatment while according several other women honorable mention, including Piamoun (31), Olympia (56), the anonymous ascetic (60), and Magna (67). He also includes a surprisingly large number of references to monasteries for women (e.g., 1.4, 29–30, 33–34, 45.5, 49.2, and 70.3), not to mention his amazing statements that "There are twelve monasteries for women in that city of Antioch" (59.1) and "In that city of Ancyra there are many other spinsters, about two thousand or more,¹² also some women distinguished by their continence and decency" (67.1).

Secondly, Palladius does not restrict himself to writing about shining models for emulation: "In order to praise those who lived well, I am not going to omit from the narrative those who have lived contemptuously [but will include them] as a warning to those who read it," he says (6.1). And after recounting the career of the indifferent Valens, he continues, "Just as among the sacred plants of Paradise there was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, I have to include the lives

¹² Statistics, of which Palladius gives several (see 7.1–2, 8.6, 18.13, 20.1, 32.8–9, 56, 67.1), must of course be treated very cautiously.

of people like that in this little book for the security against stumbling of those who read it, so that if ever some success befalls them, they do not become high-minded on account of that virtue" (*Lausiac History* 25.6). There follow a series of bad examples of various kinds. One concludes that Palladius encountered not a few unpleasant characters in the course of his travels. ("I traveled . . . all over the Roman territory," he says [Prologue 5].) Among these was the great Jerome at Bethlehem, of whom he says, "he was so jealous that his jealousy obscured his literary skill" (36.6; see also 41.2).

Palladius concludes his work with a few words about "the brother who has been my companion from my youth until today" (71.1). As he never uses the first person plural when describing his travels, one concludes that he did not have a traveling companion in the way of John Moschos, who was accompanied by the future patriarch Sophronius two centuries later. It is now generally (but not universally) agreed that Palladius is referring to himself when he speaks of "the brother who has been my companion from my youth until today," as is Saint Paul in the passage from which the quotation a little further on is taken: "On behalf of such a one I will glory" (71.4; 2 Cor 12:5).

A Brief Note on the Text

The text of *Lausiac History* has an unusually complicated history because in the transmission process it became conflated and confused with other similar works. It was rescued at the end of the nineteenth century by the English Benedictine scholar, Dom Cuthbert Butler, who succeeded in isolating (inasmuch as is possible) the text that Palladius actually wrote. He also succeeded in disassociating the work from various doubts about its veracity, concluding, "The Lausiac History does not at all present the characteristics of a 'Gulliver's Travels' or of a romance. Quite the reverse: its chronology holds well together, its geography and topography are minutely accurate; its statements accord with well ascertained history and with the general conditions of the time. In other words, it is found to possess the ordinary marks of an authentic and veracious document."¹ Today few would dissent from this conclusion, largely confirmed by the more recent edition of G. J. M. Bartelink, on which the present translation is based and from whose copious footnotes I have drawn great benefit.

A highly respected scholar of our own day has pronounced the *Lausiac History* "the principal document for the history of Egyptian monasticism."² It appears to have enjoyed a similar reputation almost from when it was published, for, writing ca. 440, the ecclesiastical historian Socrates concluded a brief mention of some early Egyptian monks thus:

¹ Cuthbert Butler, *The Lausiac History of Palladius*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1898, 1904), 1:191.

² Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (London: Penguin, 1963), 191.

Should any one desire to become acquainted with their history, in reference both to their deeds and experiences and discourses for the edification of their auditors, as well as how wild beasts became subject to their authority, there is a specific treatise on the subject, composed by the monk Palladius, who was a disciple of Evagrius and gives all these particulars in minute detail. In that work he also mentions several women who practiced the same kind of austerities as the men referred to above.³

³ Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 4.23, ed. G. C. Hansen, *Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1995).

Notes on Some Words

<i>Abba, amma</i>	father, mother
<i>Accidie</i> (<i>akêdia</i>)	"Sloth, torpor, especially as a condition leading to listlessness and want of interest in life" (OED), probably akin to depression
<i>Apatheia</i>	Literally "unfeeling"; indifference to physical conditions, a term largely associated with Evagrius, found rarely in the <i>Apophthegmata</i> but common in later monastic writing
<i>Archimandrite</i>	Literally "one in charge of a sheepfold." Here usually the superior of a monastery or (occasionally) a group of monasteries
<i>Ascetic</i> (<i>askêtês</i>)	One who practices <i>askêsis</i>
<i>Askêsis</i>	Literally a formation, usually meaning the practice of asceticism: the discipline associated with the monastic way of life, translated here as <i>spiritual discipline</i>
<i>Coenobion</i> (<i>koinobion</i>)	Literally "common life." A place or a community in which monks of either sex live together with shared worship, meals, and responsibilities. Sissinius (<i>Lausiac History</i> 49) may have had a monastery of men and women.
<i>Hesychia</i> (<i>hêsuchia</i>)	Not merely (or necessarily) silence (<i>siôpê</i>), but rather an interior silence characterized by a tranquil acquiescence in the will of God,

	producing a “profound calm and great peace within” (APsys 2.22)
<i>Higoumen</i>	The superior of a religious community
<i>Lord-and-master</i>	Translates <i>despotês</i>
<i>Monastery</i>	Any place where monks live, from the smallest hermitage to a vast coenobion of men or women; also called <i>askêterion</i> and <i>monê</i>
<i>Porneia</i>	All illicit sexual activity, mental and/or physical
<i>Spinster</i>	The word usually translated <i>virgin</i> (<i>parthenos</i>) is very confusing, because it has a variety of meanings in patristic Greek: <i>virgo intacta</i> , a young woman, a female monk (nun), a single woman of any age, a chaste person (of either sex), a religious widow, and so forth. As it is by no means always clear which meaning is intended, the word <i>spinster</i> has been resurrected to represent it. Sometimes the precise meaning can be discerned from the context, but not always.
<i>Spiritual discipline</i>	Translates <i>askêsis</i> , <i>q.v.</i>
<i>Spiritual gift</i>	Translates <i>charisma</i>
<i>Virginity</i> (<i>parthenia</i>)	E.g., “the yoke of virginity,” <i>Lausiak History</i> 57.3; see <i>Spinster</i>

The Lausiác History

PROLOGUE

1. Since at various times many persons have left behind in life multiple and divers writings, some of them (inspired by grace given by God from above) for the edification and security of those who with faithful intent follow the precepts of the Savior, some (with corrosive intent) to please humans, having run riot to console those who crave for vainglory, and yet others out of some madness and agency of the demon who hates what is good, with conceit and delusion for the ruination of light-minded people and for the defilement of the spotless catholic church, have gained an entry into the thinking of the mindless in enmity for the holy way of life,

2. I too, lowly though I be, in deference to your greatness's stipulation, oh great lover of studies that enhance the mind, being now in my thirty-third year in the brothers' way of life (hence of the monastic profession), the twentieth year of my episcopate, and the fifty-sixth of my life, and being aware of your desire for tales of the fathers (both male and female), both those I have seen and those of whom I have heard, the ones with whom I lived, too, in the Egyptian desert, Libya, the Thebaid, Syene (where the ones called Tabennesiotes are), then in Mesopotamia, Palestine, and Syria and in the regions of the west, Rome, Campania, and

thereabouts, have decided to produce this book for you in narrative form and afresh,

3. that you might have a souvenir, sacred and beneficial to the soul, a perpetual medicine against forgetfulness and, by this dispelling all drowsiness arising from an irrational desire, every hesitation and meanness of spirit that arise in a character, sudden anger, agitation, grief, and irrational fear, and the distraction of the world, you may make progress in your chosen path of piety with unfading zeal. May you be a guide for yourself, for those with you, for those under your authority, and for the most pious emperors, through whose good works all those who love Christ strive to be united with God while you expect day by day the release of your soul, as it is written,

4. "It is good to experience release and to be with Christ,"* and "Prepare your work for departure and make it ready for the field."* The person who is ever mindful of death as something inevitable and imminent will not greatly sin; such a person will neither disregard the counsel of the teachings nor despise the crude and unlovely nature of the wording. For to express itself in a sophisticated manner is not the task of godly teaching but to sway the mind with representations of truth, as it is written, "Open your mouth with the word of God,"* and also, "Do not go astray from the interpretation of the elders, for they too learned from the fathers."*

5. Accordingly I, oh man of God, great lover of studies, in part following this text, have visited many of the holy ones, not just indulging an inquisitive notion, for I traveled for thirty days and even twice that, going on foot, walking in my

journey all over the Roman territory in God's name, gladly accepting the inconveniences of traveling for a meeting with someone who loved God in order to acquire that which I did not possess.

6. And if Paul, who so far exceeded me in his way of life, in knowledge, conscience, and faith, undertook the journey from Tarsus to Judaea to meet Peter, James, and John and spoke of it as though boasting, itemizing his own sufferings to stir up the reluctant and the lazy, saying, "I went up to Jerusalem to inquire of Cephas,"* was not satisfied with the report of Cephas's virtue but desired contact with him face to face, how much more then was I who owe ten thousand talents* obliged to do likewise, not for their benefit, but for my own?

*Gal 1:18

*Mark 18:24

7. They who wrote the lives of the fathers, Abraham and so forth—Moses, Elijah, and John—did not give their accounts to glorify them but for the benefit of those who read them.

As you are aware of these things, Lausus, most faithful servant of Christ, and set your own standards, be patient with our prating in protection of a pious mind that is tossed hither and thither by various forces seen and unseen and can be stilled only by unceasing prayer and the cultivation of one's personal spiritual life.

8. For many of the brothers, by giving themselves airs for their labors and almsgivings and boasting about their celibacy and virginity, gained confidence through meditation on the divine oracles and their zealous pursuits and failed to attain *apatheia*¹

¹ A glossary to some of the words used in this text appears at the end of the introduction, pp. xxv–xxvi.

through lack of discretion, having fallen ill from certain meddling under the pretense of piety, whence arises officiousness and evil doing that distract from the doing of good deeds, which is the mother of the cultivation of one's personal spiritual life.

9. So, I beg of you, be courageous in not increasing your wealth, something that you have done in the past but then sufficiently diminished it by giving relief to those in need, and because of its service to virtue. Do not on an impulse or some irrational preconception fetter your resolution with an oath as a people-pleaser as some have done, in a competitive and audacious manner, enslaving their free will by the obligation of their oath not to eat or drink, only miserably through that oath to fall victim to the love of life, *accidie*, and delight, suffering the pains of perjury. If by reason you partake of something or by reason abstain from it, you will never sin.

10. For the reason behind our inner impulses is divine, excluding harmful elements and acquiring beneficial ones, for "the Law is not laid down for the righteous."^{*} It is better to drink wine rationally than to drink water with conceit. Consider the holy men who drank wine rationally and the profane ones who drank water without reason; it is not the substance itself that is to be blamed or praised but the mind that is to be blessed or cursed, depending on whether it makes a good or a bad use of the substance. Joseph would drink wine with the Egyptians, but he was not damaged in his mind, because his judgment was firm.

^{*}1 Tim 1:9

11. Pythagoras drank water, also Diogenes and Plato (the Manichees too and the rest of the band of

would-be philosophers), and they came to such a state of vainglory through intemperance that they denied God and worshiped idols. Those who accompanied the apostle Peter made use of wine, so that the Jews reviled the Savior, their teacher, for their partaking of it, saying, "Why do your disciples not fast as those of John do?"* And again, afflicting the disciples with reproaches, they said, "Your teacher is eating and drinking with publicans and sinners."* They would not have verbally attacked them in the case of bread and water, but clearly, their reference was to meat and wine.

*Mark 2:18

*Matt 9:11

12. The Savior too said to those who have an irrational admiration for water-drinking and who censure wine drinking, "John came on a path of righteousness* neither eating nor drinking," that is to say meat and wine, for he could not have lived without the other, "and they say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking and they say, 'Behold a glutton and a tippler, a friend of publicans and sinners' on account of eating and drinking."*

*Matt 21:32

*Matt 11:18-19

So then, what are we to do? Let us go neither with those who blame nor with the ones who praise, but let us observe a reasonable fast with John, even if they say, "They have a demon." Or, if the body is in need of it, let us prudently partake of wine like Jesus, even if they say, "Here are gluttons and tipplers."

13. For in truth neither food nor abstaining from it is of any account, "but faith deployed in deeds through love."* When faith accompanies every deed, the one who eats and drinks stands uncondemned on account of faith, for "whatever is not

*Gal 5:6

- *Rom 14:23 through faith is sin.”* But since all of the offenders with a conscience corrupted by an irrational conviction will affirm that they partake (or do anything else) in faith, the Savior made a distinction, saying, “By their fruits you shall recognize them,”* and the godly apostle declares that the fruit of those who lead a life according to reason and conscience is “love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, and temperance.”*
- *Matt 7:16
- *Gal 5:22-23

14. Paul himself said, “The fruit of the spirit is” etc., etc., because the one who is seriously concerned to have those fruits will not eat meat or drink wine irrationally or aimlessly or inopportunistly. Nor will such a one live with a bad conscience, for the same Paul also says, “Everyone fighting the good fight is temperate in all things.”* When the body is healthy, a person avoids things that fatten; when it is sick or suffering or subject to grief or affliction, the person uses food and drink as medicine to ease the things that are causing grief. And one abstains from the things that damage the soul: wrath, envy, vainglory, *accidie*, backbiting, and irrational suspicion, while giving thanks to the Lord.

*1 Cor 9:25

15. Accordingly, having discussed that sufficiently, I am bringing another appeal to your love of learning. For all you are worth, flee from acquaintance with persons who offer no benefit and who adorn their skin incongruously, even if they are orthodox. Avoid heretics especially, for their hypocrisy is damaging, even though they seem to be dragging out their old age with their white hair and wrinkles. And even though you suffer no hurt from them on account of your noble behavior, you will become puffed up and conceited through

laughing at them, which is hurtful to you. Seek the acquaintance of holy men and women as through a window that admits light so that through them you may be able distinctly to perceive your own heart too (as in a neatly written book) and, by comparison with them, be able to assay your own slackness or lack of application.

16. The skin of the faces flourishing with their white hair and the wearing of their clothing, the lowly nature of their discourse, the piety of their words, and the grace of their thoughts—all this will empower you, even if you fall into *accidie*, for people's attire, their footstep, and the laughter of their teeth will report on them, as wisdom says.

Now that I am beginning the narratives, I will not leave those in cities, in villages, or in deserts unknown to you in my discourse. It is not, however, the place where they lived that is being looked for, but the nature of their endeavor.



1. ISIDORE

1. When I first trod the streets of Alexandria {in the second consulate of the great Emperor Theodosius,*² who is now among the angels for

*the second
consulate of
Theodosius I
the Great,
370–395,
occurred in
388

² In spite of textual scholars' labors, there are still some passages in the *Lausiatic History* that are a little suspect, that is, that some scribe may have interpolated. These passages are indicated in the translation (as in G. J. M. Bartelink's edition) by being enclosed in curly brackets, thus: { . . . }. Words in square

his faith in Christ}, I encountered in the city a wondrous man endowed in every respect, both in morals and in knowledge: Isidore³ the priest, the guestmaster of the Alexandrine church. He was said to have accomplished the first struggles of his youth in the desert; I saw his cell at the Mountain of Nitria.⁴ He was an old man of seventy when I met him; he died in peace after living another fifteen years.

2. Until his death, Isidore never wore linen other than a headdress, never took a bath, and did not partake of meat. He had a body so constituted by grace that all those who did not know about his diet thought he lived in luxury. If I wanted to narrate the spiritual virtues of this man one by one, there would not be enough time. He was so charitably disposed and so peaceable that even his enemies, unbelievers though they were, revered his shadow on account of his great goodness.

3. He had such knowledge of the Holy Scriptures and of the divine beliefs that, even during the common meals of the brothers, he would go into an ecstasy and fall silent. When he was invited to explain his ecstasy he would say, "I wandered

brackets, thus [. . .], do not appear in the Greek text; they have been supplied to clarify the meaning.

³ This is not Isidore "the Great" (Cassian, Conf 18.15), whose nine apophthegms are in *APalph*, but the Isidore who took refuge with John Chrysostom together with the four "Long Brothers" in 402 (Sozomen, HE 8.13) just before his death. Other persons of this name are mentioned by Palladius: a priest at Scete (*Lausiac History* 19.9) and a monk at Nitria who became a bishop (*Lausiac History* 46.2).

⁴ The Valley of Nitria to the southwest of Alexandria extends for thirty miles and is six miles wide. It is enclosed by two mountain ranges, one of which is the Mountain of Nitria.

in my mind, rapt away by a vision." I was actually aware of this man's bursting into tears at table many times, and, on inquiring into the reason for the tears, I heard him saying, "I am ashamed to partake of the food of an irrational [beast] when I am rational and, by the power given to us by Christ, I ought to exist in a paradise of delight."

4. This man was known to the entire Senate at Rome and to the wives of the magnates from the time he first went there with Bishop Athanasius and afterward with Bishop Demetrius. Although he was affluent in wealth and in the abundance of his necessities, he did not write a will when he was dying. He did not leave one piece of gold or any property to his own sisters who were nuns; he committed them to Christ, saying, "He who created you will provide for your life, as he has for me." There was a community of seventy spinsters with his sisters.

5. When as a young man I visited him and besought him to instruct me in the monastic life, I being in the full flower of youth and not in need of words so much as of bodily toil, like a good colt-breaker he led me out of the city and took me to the place called Solitude, five miles away.

2. DOROTHEOS

1. He handed me over to Dorotheos,⁵ a Theban ascetic who was passing his sixtieth year in a cave, and he told me to stay with him for three

⁵ See Sozomen, HE 6.29.4. Other persons of this name are mentioned in *Lausiac History* 30, 58.2.