



THE PRACTICES OF MONASTIC PRAYER: ORIGINS, EVOLUTION, AND TENSIONS



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Egyptian monks were known for the commitment to unceasing prayer, but what did this really mean? This paper will explore forms of monastic prayer from historical, theological, and ascetic perspectives, challenging our assumptions about how early monastic men and women actually prayed and what their own experience of prayer may have been. Both textual and archeological evidence will be considered. Major issues will include the role of biblical texts in monastic prayer, tracing fault lines between different theological understandings of prayer, and establishing foundations for later development of prayer practice.

What can we know of how Egyptian monks prayed? There are the usual kinds of evidence, textual and archaeological, as well as the enduring effect of Egyptian monastic prayer practice on later—and even non-monastic traditions, down to the present day. We can derive a basic pattern of prayer with a distinctive character. But before describing this pattern, we need to reckon with some of the features of Egyptian monasticism that made it both so unusual and so powerful in the later monastic imagination, and which contributed to its spectacular development in the centuries leading up to the establishment of the White Monastery and the transition to a typically cenobitic pattern for Egyptian monastic life.

First there is the desert. This was not simply a topographical feature of the Egyptian monastic experience, but the backdrop against which the drama of classic monastic idealism was enacted. Much has been, and continues to be, written about the monastic conception of the desert, with varying degrees of romantic coloration. We know that most Egyptian ascetics did not in fact live in the deep desert,¹ and as time passed even those in the more remote outposts benefited from the protection of companions, patronage, and income from cultivated lands in more hospitable regions.²

The *Life of Antony* is the classic depiction of the monastic “invasion” and occupation of the demons’ homeland.³ There, the geographic progression from village to remotest desert plays an essential role in the development of Antony’s monastic vocation. Largely because of this extraordinary work of monastic hagiography, the Christian monastic tradition has cherished the notion of desert, real or metaphorical, as a place of intense focus and struggle.

The literary sources remind us that whatever we may think of the desert, monks didn't rhapsodize about its savage beauty or roseate dawns. Their desert, encountered without the security of Land Cruisers and expedition outfitters, was truly fearful. Even in the earliest stages of monastic settlement, the small hermitages were typically surrounded by a low wall providing some protection against animals interested in crops or food stores. But these low walls also signified enclosure or cloister, the monastic commitment to remain in place, hunkered down against any force, animal or demonic, intent on dislodgment.⁴ It was a place where terror and death easily insinuated themselves into human imagination. When Evagrius Ponticus wrote about the obsessive "thought" of gluttony or avarice, he wrote not so much about pleasure or greed as about anxieties about illness and failing strength.⁵ When we think of Egyptian monasticism in its "Golden Age" of the fourth century, we must remember that the desert was more dangerous then, with predatory wildlife still abundant and the few native human inhabitants ill-disposed toward newcomers who took over water sources and introduced cultivation, on however limited a scale, to the nomads' territory. The repeated and often murderous devastations of monastic settlements led in time to the abandonment of some sites or their transformation into fortress-like cenobia.⁶

It also becomes clear from reading Evagrius and others that the monastic "city" established in the desert was no Utopia. Anxieties about health and survival were exacerbated by the tension that arose between monks, as their preoccupations led them to perceive others as competitors for scarce resources. The real grind of monastic life seems not to have been the asceticism, which tends to capture our attention, but the continual effort to be patient and hospitable towards other people. Theirs was the challenge familiar to us from other accounts of human beings placed in deeply inhospitable surroundings. The struggle for kindness, patience, and charity becomes all the more intense when the stakes are so high.

The greatest monastic writers continually remind us that true asceticism is of the heart, resisting the forces that would pull against desire for God and love of neighbor. These forces could be externally described as demons or internalized as *logismoi*, "thoughts." Later, Saint Benedict would prefer "self-will." However characterized, this adversarial mentality explains some of the particular emphases of Egyptian monastic prayer practice. The monk was a person under siege, and the desert was the terrain, real or imaginative, where the siege was laid. Both asceticism and prayer were responses to besiegement.

Prayer in the Desert

If the experience of monastic life was often of assault by thoughts or demons, this helps us to understand how the traditional Christian exhortation to "pray without ceasing" assumed its typical monastic form. Egyptian monastics developed a euchological practice that responded to both the ascetic and the mystical imperatives of their lives. The form was simple, consisting of the recitation of memorized biblical texts with periodic pauses for vocal and possibly silent prayer, accompanied by ritual gestures and changes of posture.

This form was adaptable to both liturgical and individual use. The canonical prayer of the hours was celebrated by both anchorites and cenobites. These morning and night prayers consisted largely of psalmody, with intervals between the psalms for personal prayer. During times of vigil, work, or travel, recitation could range more widely over the Bible but with the same basic pattern of text and prayerful response. The vocabulary for monastic prayer reflected this structure. Recitation was typically called “meditation” (*melete*), while the pause for reflection and response received the label of “prayer” (*euche*). Thus when the classic textual sources speak of a certain monk’s practice of 50, 100, or more “prayers” in the course of a day, they mean 50, 100, or more units consisting of both recitation and prayer. Evagrius, for example, is claimed to have “done 100 prayers” each day, which one reader has estimated to mean that he would stop for “prayer” (in the narrower, technical sense) every ten minutes.

The dynamics of Egyptian monastic prayer can be represented schematically in this manner:

[prelude: (reading/hearing→memorization→)]
 practice: *melete*/ psalmody→ vocal prayer (→ wordless prayer)→ return to
melete/ psalmody

This form of monastic prayer is amply described in the sources, ranging from simple individual practice to elaborated liturgical varieties. A story from the *Apophthegmata* about Antony the Great depicts him requesting help from God on how to escape accidie and the cloud of besetting thoughts. He is sent an angelic visitor who offers an illustration of ideal monastic practice: the angel, who for pedagogical purposes takes on Antony’s own appearance, sits down to work. After a while he stands up to pray, then sits back down to his weaving. Later he rises again to pray, and then returns to work. “Do this,” the visitor tells Antony, “and you will be saved.” So he did, and so he was.

This is the first of the *Apophthegmata* about Antony that one encounters in the standard Alphabetical Collection of *Sayings*, and because it is about Antony, foremost of monks, it comes first in the “alpha” section. It is a banner headline: the imperative to “do this” was directed to everyone undertaking the monastic life. The universal application of this ideal is evident in the cenobitic as well as anchoritic literature. Pachomian monks were expected to recite while working, on their way to and from church, when sounding the signal for the Synaxis, and even when distributing candies after supper.

The clearest instruction on the practice comes from the Letters of Barsanuphius and John. Though written from Gaza, these early sixth century letters reflect the application of traditional Egyptian monastic teaching. One of the questions asked of John comes from a monk trying to make sense of Palladius’ reference to “doing 100 prayers.” In his reply, John describes the practice in Scetis as consisting of “manual labor, meditation (*melete*), and occasional prayer.”

All work was to be accompanied by meditation of psalms or other biblical texts, which were recited aloud if no one else was present. The “prayer” involved standing up, kneeling, and then standing again to offer spontaneous prayer about a particular struggle, or to pray the “Our Father,” or both.

John cautions his inquirer against unnecessarily prolonging the prayer interval or praying too frequently. He should keep to his work and recitation. At the end of each psalm, rather than standing to pray, he should simply say, “O God, have mercy on me, the miserable one!” If his thoughts are especially troublesome, he should add, “O God, you see my affliction, help me!” Standing for more extensive prayer should come only after completing three rows of weaving. John’s obvious concern is to establish a harmonious rhythm of the three elements of work, meditation, and prayer. The key point is to avoid becoming over-anxious about demonic assault or overly enthusiastic about prayer performance. Paralyzing fear and unrealistic exultation were equally problematic. John wants his correspondent to stay with the practice. He is to acknowledge difficulties when and as appropriate, and to recite and pray with body, voice, and mind.

John notes that the canonical prayer of evening and early morning (Vespers and Vigils) fixes its own rhythm through a taxis of 12 psalms, each followed by a doxology and opportunity for “prayer.” In the cenobium, of course, these prayer times were celebrated communally. The Pachomian sources suggest a more developed version of the same basic pattern of text and prayer. The psalms (or other biblical texts) of the liturgical office were recited or chanted by a soloist while the brothers did their weaving. At the superior’s signal, all would rise, make the Sign of the Cross, kneel, and then prostrate themselves for silent prayer. After a brief time, the superior would give a signal, they would stand, pray the Lord’s Prayer with outstretched arms (the classic orans position), make another Sign of the Cross, and then sit down to hear another text from a soloist.

John’s balanced and practical counsel, typical of these extraordinary letters, provides his correspondent with both structure and flexibility in his prayer. His portrayal of Scetiotte spiritual practice suggests three kinds of vocal prayer responses to the biblical meditation: spontaneous personal prayer; use of a familiar Christian prayer (the Our Father); and brief formulae expressing a need for God’s help.

The second of these options reminds us that monastic prayer would naturally echo broader liturgical practice, making use of familiar formulations such as the Lord’s Prayer, doxologies, the Trisagion, etc. just as monastics constantly relied upon the Church’s premier book of prayer and praise, the Psalter. At the same time, John notes that the monks of Scetis excluded from their celebration of the hours the non-scriptural hymns and odes of the larger Church, preferring the pure biblical text.

John's third option, using a brief prayer formula akin to a psalm verse, alerts us to another distinctive element of monastic prayer, the use of brief, so-called "monologistic," prayers as a way to focus intention. John suggests one such prayer for all-purpose use and another for times of particular struggle against the thoughts. He thereby reflects the tradition of using a prayer formula both as an anchor point and as a response to spiritual distress.

John Cassian gives us the fullest exposition of monologistic prayer in his *Conference* 10, where the presenting problem is the mind's natural tendency to wander, especially while reciting biblical texts. The formula Cassian proposes, taken from Psalm 69 (70), "God, come to my assistance; Lord, make haste to help me," is suggested in the first instance as a means to recall the mind to essentials, especially when one is confronted with the rich fare of Scripture or enticed by distractions. In his *Institutes*, Cassian had already cautioned against prolonging the prayer intervals between the psalms of the communal liturgy lest the lazy monks of Gaul fall prey to insalubrious thoughts or sleepiness while prostrate. Cassian's concern underlies Benedict of Nursia's later dictum that "prayer in community always be brief." Sometimes interpreted by later Benedictines as a command that the Divine Office should not be unduly lengthy, Benedict's injunction is in fact an echo of Cassian's concern about overly extended pauses between psalms.

John of Gaza's advice to his spiritual inquirer included a special prayer formula for use when obsessive or distracting thoughts were especially fierce. Cassian, too, presents his prayer formula as a powerful device against the various destructive thoughts. He provides a series of vignettes depicting when and why those particular words can repel noxious suggestions. The tradition of using biblical formulae to confront demonic assault was ancient. Origen referred to the use of Scripture as a "charm" against demons, and the *Life of Antony* depicts him singing Psalms against the demons who were trying to deflect him from his ascetic purpose. It was Evagrius Ponticus, the great systematician, who took this "antirrhetic" use of Scripture to its most advanced form in his massive compilation of biblical verses keyed not only to the principal obsessive thoughts (in his scheme there were eight of these), but to specific presenting issues under each of the eight. The whole work runs to something close to 500 scenarios of distraction or temptation, each with its own biblical response. About half are from the Psalms. Evagrius' *Antirrheticos* offers a fascinating glimpse into the anxieties of monastic life in Kellia at the end of the fourth century (although sometimes the depictions are tantalizingly, and frustratingly, allusive). Perhaps most intriguing are the references to troubled interpersonal relations among the monks. It becomes obvious that slander, envy, disputes, rivalry and self-centeredness afflict even the most austere and proficient desert monks, as they evidently distressed Evagrius himself.

Curiously absent from most sources are references to what we might characterize as "mystical," or wordless prayer. In the Pachomian cenobium the monks prayed silently while prostrate, but probably formulated verbal petitions or continued the *melete* in their minds.

John of Gaza allowed for inaudible *melete* if others were present, but that, too, was verbalization. Was there a fear about wordless silence? The focusing and prophylactic functions of the standard monastic prayer practice suggest anxiety about unstructured physical and mental activity. Where biblical words were absent, demonic suggestions and daydreams could seep into the mind. Evagrius identified the struggle of *accidie*, a restless roaming of the mind, as emblematic of monastic life, and in one vivid description associated it particularly with resistance to reading.²⁵ Cassian compared the heart to a grain mill, constantly grinding away. Unless biblical *meditatio* is fed into the ever-turning mill, thoughts of worldly cares and temptation will fill it instead.²⁶ The ascetic imperative of monastic *melete* and *euche* comes home in the wistful observation of one anonymous monk, who observed: “The prophets made books, and our fathers came and put them into practice. Those after them learned the books by heart, but then came this generation, who wrote them out and put them away in cupboards unused.”²⁷ The desert was meant to be a surprisingly noisy place, but filled with biblical noise rather than the babble of tongues or thoughts.

The exception to monastic avoidance of absolute silence was wordless, ecstatic prayer. The monastic writers are unanimous that such prayer was not generated by even the most faithful practice, and must not be sought in its own right. Evagrius described a kind of “pure” or “true” prayer in which one sees the sapphire blue “light of the mind.” But he vigorously warned against deceptive experiences of luminous prayer generated by demonic manipulation of the nerves and brain.²⁸ Cassian described a “prayer of fire” that can occasionally arise while using the prayer formula, though other forms of prayer can also be springboards to such experiences. Cassian regarded fiery prayer as rare and ephemeral. As the gift of the Holy Spirit, it cannot be acquired or prolonged by human effort.³⁰ When he wrote about tears as a sign of spiritual proficiency, he reminded his readers that tears are not themselves the point of it all, and should not be artificially induced.³¹ Fire and light are extraordinary foretastes of the beatific life of heaven. Tears, more multivalent, are nonetheless also beyond rational control. The value of monastic prayer lay not in dramatic outcomes but in slow transformation of the will. Just as the ascetics soaked palm branches in water to make them pliable for weaving, so mind and heart were steeped in the biblical Word until they, too, could be bent to God’s purpose.

Even *melete* was not an end in itself, but a spur to virtue. Even in this most central monastic practice there lurked the possibility of confusing means with end. The literature is always alert to this danger, and cautionary tales abound. Three brothers went to see an old man in Scetis. The first said, “Abba, I have learned by heart the Old and New Testaments.” The Abba replied, “You have filled the air with words.” The second said, “And I have written out the Old and New [Testaments] by myself.” The Abba answered, “You have filled cupboards with sheets of papyrus.” The third monk said, “As for me, grass is growing in front of my door.” The Abba replied, “You have driven hospitality from you.”³² On the other hand, there were stories about those whose lives were truly changed by their years of *melete* and *euche*.

A monk at Kellia studied the Bible night and day for twenty years, and then one day sold his books, took up his goatskin and headed off into the deeper desert. He told Abba Isaac, “For 20 years, Abba, I heard only the words of the Scriptures, and now I want to devote myself to the work that I heard from them.” Even Evagrius, the greatest intellectual and philosopher of the desert, quoted with approval the brother who sold his only book, a Gospel, and gave away the proceeds, saying: “I have sold the very word that tells me: ‘Sell your possessions and give to the poor’ (Matt 19:21).”³⁴

Gesture

Enacted assimilation of the text points us beyond the mind and heart to consider another dimension of monastic prayer, the use of the body. We know from all of the monastic literary sources that bodily postures and gestures were integral to the practice of prayer. The typical posture was standing,³⁶ with kneeling or prostration regularly practiced to emphasize humility, penance, and adoration. The typical gesture was to pray with outstretched hands, and to make frequent use of the Sign of the Cross, traced simply on forehead, lips or breast rather than in the later form of a larger cross made by touching forehead, breast, and shoulders.

In these practices, Egyptian monastics simply followed the standard Christian custom of the early Church as described by Origen and other writers.³⁷ Everyone used these gestures. The Pachomian communal choreography described earlier had its individual counterpart in John of Gaza’s summary of Scetiotic practice handed on to monks in Gaza. Anyone familiar with later Byzantine monasticism or, indeed, contemporary monasticism in the eastern Christian churches, knows the importance attached to prostrations. Whereas the early monastic traditions reckoned the number of text + response units by calling them simply “prayers,” later traditions used another synecdoche to describe spiritual practice by referring to the number of prostrations (of course accompanied by prayers) to be done in the course of a day.

The intensity of monastic practice has been underscored by recent work at St Stephen’s basilica in Jerusalem (the church at École Biblique). Although the burial vaults at the basilica date back to the Iron Age, they were reused by monks associated with the church and monastery built in the fifth century by the Empress Eudocia to commemorate the martyrdom of Saint Stephen alleged to have occurred on that spot. A unique collection of thousands of monastic bones was preserved in these vaults and has recently been analyzed by a team from the University of Notre Dame. The most surprising feature of the skeletal remains of these well-nourished ascetic men, most of whom lived into their 40s and 50s, was evidence of severe arthritis of the lower limbs, explainable only by repeated genuflection and/or prostration over decades of monastic life.³⁸

The athleticism of early Christian prayer cannot be over-emphasized in a modern western context like ours where prayer tends to be associated with stillness, sitting or kneeling, and closed eyes. Early monastics, like their Christian brothers and sisters, prayed with the whole body and typically with eyes open. Catechesis on prayer emphasizes the importance of raising the eyes to heaven as a sign of beseeching and confidence; Origen regarded this as part of the body's iconic expression of the proper state of the soul at prayer.³⁹ Archaeological evidence from Egypt suggests that the visual aid of a painted cross was standard in monastic cells.

Place

This brings us to the issue of place. Though ascetics could pray anywhere (and if they were to pray always, they had to be able to pray anywhere), there were privileged places to pray. Extensive excavations of monastic cell complexes at Kellia in Egypt have suggested that even the oldest and simplest cells dating from the fifth century had a separate oratory, or prayer room.⁴⁰ Manual labor with its accompanying *melete* and periodic response in *euche* would be done in another room or outdoors, but the canonical prayer of the hours twice a day and other devotions with accompanying gestures would have been done in the oratory. On the walls of these oratories, archaeologists have found painted crosses. Some are quite simple, others are more elaborately developed to appear as if they were fashioned from palm trees, or are ornamented with the geometric playfulness familiar from later Coptic art.⁴¹ One well-known example from a communal oratory dated to the seventh or eighth century superimposes on the standard cross a haloed figure of Christ in blessing.⁴² In the same room was found an inscription justifying and explaining the use in monologistic prayer of the name of Jesus, a valuable witness to the monastic origins of the tradition of the Jesus Prayer in eastern Christianity.⁴³ On the eastern wall of the oratory a niche was typically carved into the wall to indicate orientation for prayer. Facing east to pray was another distinctive marker of early Christian prayer, typified most powerfully in the Vigil of Easter, when the catechumen turned west to renounce the dying sun of sin and then east to profess faith in the new life found in the Risen Christ.

Inscriptions are everywhere in the excavated cells of Kellia,⁴⁴ and can be seen today in other ancient monastic complexes such as the Red Sea monasteries of Saint Paul and Saint Antony,⁴⁵ and the White and Red Monasteries near Sohag. There are not only the formal inscriptions that one finds accompanying wall paintings in the monastic churches, but also the graffiti, the prayers, and requests for prayers, written by individual monks. The power of these simple, heartfelt messages is dramatically (and mysteriously) evident in one of the anonymous *Apophthegmata* about a monk who comes to the monastery at Sinai. Trained as a scribe, he finds in his cell a wooden tablet with this inscription: "Moses to Theodore: I am present, and I witness." Each day he would look at it, and ask, "Where are you now, you who say 'I am present and I witness'? In what world are you now?"⁴⁶

Where is the hand that wrote this?'. He became obsessed with the inscription, which became for him a constant *memento mori*. He wept continually, and despite being given scribal commissions and bundles of papyrus, he never wrote a thing except a brief note he would send back to his customers with their unused papyrus: "Pardon me my Lords and brothers, for I have a little business with someone and because of that I did not have time to write for you."

Conclusion

This rapid overview of Egyptian monastic prayer suggests that their "contemplation" was primarily reflection upon biblical texts, expressed in verbal response and accompanying gestures. Visual meditation upon the Cross provided another dimension of reflection, and the use of gesture and special places for prayer shaped a physical environment that reinforced intention and practice. The emphasis upon repetition of brief, monologistic, prayer formulae laid the foundations for later monastic prayer traditions such as the Jesus Prayer and is the background for analogous forms of devotion in Latin Christianity such as the Hail Mary and Rosary. Let us not forget that the major spiritual figures of medieval Latin piety knew the *Apophthegmata* in translation and had read their Cassian. The famous "Nine Ways of Prayer of St Dominic" illustrates the universality of the gestures prescribed in the Egyptian monastic texts.

The practice of prayer in Egyptian monasticism, and its later development, raised theological questions that haunted eastern Christianity for centuries after the "Golden Age" of Egyptian monasticism had passed. Evagrius, formed in the traditional practices of the Egyptian tradition, taught an ideal of "imageless prayer" that was in tension with the image-laden texts he and other monks pondered day and night.⁴⁷ Another aspect of his teaching on advanced stages of prayer, noted earlier, which Evagrius held in common with venerable Egyptian monks such as John of Lycopolis, was the appearance of a blue luminosity in prayer that both Evagrius and John interpreted as either a glimpse of God's imageless presence or the natural light of the mind reflecting its divine Creator. This problem of human access to the divine essence would preoccupy much Byzantine theological reflection and culminate in the Hesychast controversy of the fourteenth century with its definitive distinction between the accessible divine energies and the utterly unknowable Godhead. Such disputes may seem recondite to us, but their impact on eastern Christianity was immense. Fundamental to all such controversy was the question confronting any serious Christian practitioner trying to make sense of an untidy sacred text and a God who seemed to insist on meeting human beings in time and place. It should be little surprise, then, that the monks of early Christian Egypt took on this challenge. Immersed in biblical texts, hallowing natural rhythms of day and night, attentive to body, senses, and surroundings, fully cognizant of the painfulness of charity and the allure of self will, they stand before us even now as the Sign of Contradiction promised by their Divine Master.

Endnotes

1. James Goehring has helped us to understand better the mythology that surrounded the desert both in the fourth century and today; see particularly the essays collected in *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert. Studies in Early Egyptian Monasticism* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1999).
2. See Rodolphe Kasser, "Sortir du Monde. Réflexions sur la situation et le développement des établissements monastiques aux Kellia," *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie* 26 (1976): 120-24.
3. Athanasius, *Life of Antony* 8 and 41, ed. G.J.M. Bartelink, SChr 400 (Paris: Cerf, 1994), 156 and 246.
4. Antoine Guillaumont, "Histoire des moines aux Kellia," *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 8 (1977): 202-03.
5. *Praktikos* 7 and 9, ed. A. and C. Guillaumont, SChr 171 (Paris: Cerf, 1971), 508-10 and 12; *Antirrhetikos* 1.3, 1.14, 1.19-1.22, 1.25, 1.33-35, 1.38, 1.42-45, 1.47, 1.56-57, 1.59, 1.65 and 3.2, 3.5, 3.17, 3.22, 3.24, 3.27a, 3.28, 3.43, 3.56, ed. Wilhelm Frankenberg, *Euagrius Ponticus*, Abhandlungen der königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, Philologisch-historische Klasse, Neue Folge, 13/2 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1912), 474-484 and 494-502.
6. See H.G. Evelyn-White, *The Monasteries of the Wâdi 'n-Natrûn*, vol. 2 (New York: Metropolitan Museum, 1932), 154, 162-67, 249-51.
7. See the references to the desert as "city" in the *Life of Antony* as in note 3 above.
8. See Evagrius Ponticus, *Antirrhetikos* 3.3, 3.5, 3.10, 3.14-15, 3.26, 3.27b, 3.35, 3.37-40, 3.43, 3.49, 3.57-58 as in Frankenberg, *Euagrius Ponticus*, 494-502.
9. See Columba Stewart, "Evagrius Ponticus and the "Eight Generic Logismoi," in Richard Newhauser, ed., *In the Garden of Evil: The Vices and Culture in the Middle Ages* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2005) 3-34.
10. E.g., *Rule of Benedict* Prol. 3, chs. 4.60, 5.7, 7.19, 7.31, ed. Adalbert de Vogüé, SChr 181 (Paris: Cerf, 1972), 412, 460, 466, 476, 480.
11. See Columba Stewart, *Cassian the Monk* (New York: Oxford, 1998), 100-113.
12. Palladius, *Lausiac History* 38.10, ed. Cuthbert Butler, *The Lausiac History of Palladius*, vol. 2, Texts and Studies 6.2 (Cambridge: University Press, 1904), 120. The modern reader is Gabriel Bunge, in *Das Geistesgebet. Studien zum Traktat De Oratione des Evagrius Pontikos* (Köln: Luthe-Verlag, 1987), 31-32.
13. *Apoph. Alph. Antony* 1 (PG 65:76AB).
14. On Pachomian practice, see Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 103.
15. *Ep.* 143, ed. François Neyt and Paula de Angelis-Noah, SChr 427 (Paris: Cerf, 1998), 520-24.
16. See also *Ep.* 165 (SChr 427, pp. 562-64).
17. Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 103.
18. Cf. *Apoph. Anon.* N 758 as in Lucien Regnault, *Les sentences des Pères du desert. Série des anonymes* (Solesmes/ Bellefontaine, 1985), 325-27, on Pambo's disciple who spent time in Alexandria and came back asking why the monks didn't sing canons or troparia. Pambo points out the danger of abandoning "the word of the Holy Spirit" for hymns and tones. Monks are not in the desert to sing, wave their hands, and dance, but to offer prayers with tears and sighs. "I predict, my child, that the time will come when Christians will corrupt the books of the holy apostles and divine prophets, when they will erase the Holy Scriptures in order to write troparia and Hellenistic treatises. Their spirit will scorn the former and delight in the latter. That is why our fathers have told us that those who dwell in this desert must not write the Lives and the Words of the Fathers on parchment, but on papyrus, for the generation to come will erase the Lives of the Fathers in order to write whatever they want in their place. Great will be the calamity to come."
19. *Inst.* 2.7.1-3, ed. M. Petschenig, CSEL 17 (Vienna: Tempsky, 1888), 23-24; cf. 2.10.1-2, pp. 25-26.
20. *Regula* 20.5 (SChr 182, p. 538).
21. *Conf.* 10.10.3-13, ed. M. Petschenig, CSEL 13 (Vienna: Geroldus, 1886).

22. C. Celsum 1.6, ed. Marcel Borret, SChr 132 (Paris: Cerf, 1967), 90-92; cf. *Homilies on Joshua* 1.7, ed. Annie Jaubert, SChr 71 (Paris: Cerf, 1960), 110-14.
23. *Life of Antony* 9.3, 13.7, 37.4, 39.3, 39.6, 40.5, 52.3 (SChr 400, pp. 158, 170-72, 236, 240, 241, 244, 276).
24. See note 8 above, and Books 5 and 7 of the *Antirrhetikos*, on anger and vainglory, passim (Frankenberg, 512-20 and 530-36).
25. *Eight Spirits* 14 (PG 79:1160BC); cf. *Praktikos* 12 (SChr 171, pp. 520-26).
26. *Conf.* 1.18 (CSEL 13, p. 27).
27. *Apoph. Anon.* N 228 (Regnault, *Les sentences*, p. 361).
28. *On Prayer* 73-74, ed. Simon Tugwell (Oxford: Faculty of Theology, 1981), 14-15; see Columba Stewart, "Imageless Prayer and the Theological Vision of Evagrius Ponticus," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9 (2001):194. Chs. 67-76 of Evagrius' *On Prayer* (Tugwell, 13-15) are about the dangers of deception in prayer.
29. *Conf.* 10.11.6 (CSEL 13, pp. 305-06); see Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 117-18.
30. *Inst.* 2.10.1 (CSEL 17, p. 25) and *Conf.* 9.26 (CSEL 13, p. 273); see Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 118.
31. *Conf.* 9.28-30 (CSEL 13, pp. 274-76); see Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 128-29.
32. *Apoph. Anon.* N 385 (Regnault, *Les sentences*, p. 143).
33. *Apoph. Anon.* N 541 (Regnault, *Les sentences*, p. 199).
34. Evagrius, *Praktikos* 97 (SChr 171, p. 704). Cf. Palladius, *Lausiac History* 68.4 (Butler, 164) on the "compassionate monk" who sells any book given him so that he can give alms: "how can I convince my Teacher that I have mastered his art unless I sell that very thing [i.e., the book] for the sake of perfecting the art?"
35. For an overview by a knowledgeable scholar, see Gabriel Bunge, *Earthen Vessels. The Practice of Personal Prayer According to the Patristic Tradition* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2002), 138-86.
36. E.g., Palladius, *Lausiac History* 18.14-15 (Butler, 52) on Macarius of Alexandria's standing throughout Lent, without bending the knee or lying down; 19.7-8 (Butler, 61), on Moses' night vigil without lying down or bending the knee; 31.2 (Butler, 87), on the nun Piamoun who prayed throughout the night, not bending her knees.
37. See Origen's *On Prayer* 31-32, ed. Paul Koetschau, GCS (Leipzig, 1899), 395-401, on postures and places for prayer.
38. See Michael S. Driscoll and Susan Guise Sheridan, "Every Knee Shall Bend: Liturgical and Ascetical Prayer in V-VII Century Palestine," *Worship* 74 (2000):130-37.
39. *On Prayer*, 31.2 (p. 396).
40. Pierre Corboud, "L'oratoire et les niches-oratoires: les lieux de la prière," in Philippe Bridel, ed., *Le site monastique copte des Kellia. Sources historiques et explorations archéologiques. Actes du Colloque de Genève 13 au 15 août 1984* (Geneva: Mission Suisse d'Archéologie Copte de l'Université de Genève, 1986), 85-92.
41. See M.K. Blocka, G. Gardet, A. Leman, "Qouçoûr 'Isâ Kôm Sud 1," in *Kellia 1965* (Geneva: Georg, 1967), 30-33; Marguerite Rassart-Debergh, "La décoration peinte," in Pierre Corboud, ed., *Le site monastique des Kellia (Basse-Egypte). Recherches des années 1981-1983* (Louvain: Peeters, 1984), 29-38; numerous examples are in Massimo Capuani, *Christian Egypt. Coptic Art through Two Millennia* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), 61.
42. See Frédéric Dumas' description in *Kellia I. Kom 219. Fouilles exécutées en 1964 et 1965* (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1969), 1:24-25; the image is reproduced in Plate 39 of vol. 2.
43. The Coptic text with French translation is in *Kellia I. Kom 219*, 99. For analysis, see Antoine Guillaumont, "Une inscription copte sur la 'Prière de Jésus,'" *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 34 (1968): 310-25; rpt. in *Aux origines du monachisme chrétien. Pour une phénoménologie du monachisme*, Spiritualité orientale 30 (Bégrolles en Mauges: Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1979), 168-83.

44. See M.K. Blocka, G. Gardet, A. Leman, "Qouçoûr El-'Abîd Kôm I," in *Kellia 1965* (Geneva: Georg, 1967), 45-46; Antoine Guillaumont and Rodolphe Kasser in *Kellia I. Qom 219*, 99-111; Rodolphe Kasser, Sébastien Favre, Denis Weidmann, *Kellia. Topographie* (Geneva: Georg, 1972), 85-88, 98-101, 144; Jan Par-tyka, "Les inscriptions des Kellia," in *Le site monastique des Kellia (Basse-Egypte)*. Recherches des années 1981-1983, 39-46.

45. On the inscriptions at the Monastery of Saint Antony, see Sidney H. Griffith, "The Handwriting on the Wall: Graffiti in the Church of St. Antony," in Elizabeth S. Bolman, ed., *Monastic Visions. Wall Paintings in the Monastery of St. Antony at the Red Sea* (Cairo: American Research Center in Egypt/New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 185-93.

46. Apoph. Anon. N 519 (Regnault, *Les sentences*, p. 190).

47. See Stewart, "Imageless Prayer and the Theological Vision of Evagrius Ponticus."