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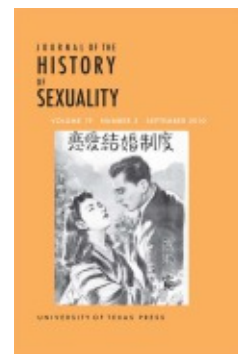
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Between Monks: Tales of Monastic Companionship in Early Byzantium

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See, what is better and more beautiful than when brothers dwell together?
—Psalm 133:1 [LXX 132:1]

THE LATIN VERSION OF JOHN MOSCHOS'S *Spiritual Meadow* preserves a story narrated to John and his companion Sophronios by Abba Stephen the Cappadocian while they visited Mount Sinai. Stephen was in church on the Thursday of Holy Week, the feast of the Lord's Supper, when in his words "as the holy sacrifice was being offered and all the fathers were present, I looked and saw two anchorites enter the church. They were naked, yet none of the other fathers perceived that they were naked except me." After communion, as the two monastic brothers left the church, Stephen followed them and begged them to take him with them. They refused, saying, "It is not possible for you to be with us; stay here; this is the place for you." The men offered prayer on his behalf, and then in Stephen's words, "before my eyes, they went onto the water of the Red Sea on foot and departed across the sea."¹

I presented earlier versions of this essay at meetings of the American Academy of Religion and the Byzantine Studies Conference, at the Duke Center for Late Ancient Studies, the University of Illinois, the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and the Marco Institute for Medieval and Renaissance Studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. I am grateful to many readers and interlocutors who offered comments, corrections, and additional examples, particularly Harry Maier, Georgia Frank, Virginia Burrus, Claudia Rapp, Susanna Drake, Kristi Upson-Saia, Luk van Rompay, and Tina Shepardson.

¹ John Moschos *Spiritual Meadow* [*Pratum spirituale*] 122; *Patrologiae cursus completus: Series graeca*, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris, 1857–66) (hereafter *PG*), 87:2983–86; *The Spiritual Meadow of John Moschos*, trans. John Wortley (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian, 1992), 100. Despite the preliminary work of Philip Pattenden ("The Text of the *Pratum Spirituale*," *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s., 26 [1975]: 38–54), the *Spiritual Meadow* still lacks a critical edition. The corpus of surviving manuscripts is relatively large, but, more significantly, their content varies. The Greek text in Migne (*PG* 87:2851–3116) reproduces the 1681 edition by Jean-Baptiste Cotelier together with a facing Latin translation emended from that executed by the fifteenth-century Florentine humanist Ambrose Traversari ("Fra Ambrogio") appar-

This strange narrative inhabits a liminal space between the erotic and its sublimation, between ascetic chastity and monastic desire. Its fantasy of naked monks, utterly unashamed of their nakedness, reveals the perfection of their ascetic practice. Naked, they receive the Eucharist; naked, their bodies are joined to Christ's at the Last Supper. That they can walk on the water of the Red Sea confirms their conformity to Christ, and like the Israelites fleeing Egypt, they pass over into redemption. They have recovered the natural state in which God intended humanity to remain, as Antony had when he emerged from the fortress in Athanasios's account, perhaps the best known of early monastic biographies.² As their nakedness also indicates, the brothers have attained the presexual purity of the Garden of Eden. They are like Adam and his companion Eve before the fall into corruption, and yet they are also significantly different, for they are a pair of men.

The vision of these two naked men is framed by Stephen's gaze, as he saw them, and he alone saw them naked. His ability to see their undressed bodies is an ambiguous charism. He was worthy to see them, while the others were not. And yet his clarity of vision exposes his desire. This brother—who no doubt prayed daily not to be led into temptation and to be delivered from evil—wanted to go with these naked men, to make it a threesome. The brothers denied him. Was it because he was unworthy of this next step? He was perfected enough to see them but not enough to join them. Was it because monks should come in twos, and three is a crowd? Or was it because Stephen continued to desire, while the naked men of his vision transcended the homoerotic desire that they represented? Each of these possibilities remains in play, for within the *Spiritual Meadow* the story is told to another monastic pair, to Moschos and his friend, Sophronios, two clothed monks who were also traveling together and sharing the monastic life.

ently from a more complete manuscript or manuscripts unavailable to Cotelier and no longer extant. The story of Stephen the Cappadocian derives from this Latin version of the text. More work would have to be done on manuscripts and versions to determine why this story was deleted from some branches of the textual tradition. For the history of the text of the *Spiritual Meadow*, see also Henry Chadwick, "John Moschus and His Friend Sophronius the Sophist," *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s., 25 (1974): 41–46; and Wortley, *Spiritual Meadow*, x–xiv. Throughout this essay I have employed available English translations of late ancient texts, occasionally modified to highlight aspects of the underlying original. In accord with emerging trends in Byzantine studies, I have employed the transliterations used in the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* rather than Latinizing proper names, even if this produces some inconsistencies.

² See Athanasios *Life of Antony* 14, 20 (*Athanasie d'Alexandrie, vie d'Antoine*, ed. G. J. M. Bartelink, Sources chrétiennes 400 [Paris: Cerf, 1994]), on the natural state that can be achieved through rigorous asceticism. On these passages David Brakke (*Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1995], 243) writes: "[The] restored relationship between body and soul appears in the body itself as an immunity to corruption. . . . Antony's body anticipates the incorruption to be acquired fully in the resurrection."

John Moschos completed the *Spiritual Meadow* shortly before his death in Rome in 619 (or perhaps 634).³ He was a particularly mobile, even gregarious monk. Moschos had entered the cenobitic Monastery of Saint Theodosios in the Judean desert at some point in the 560s before moving a few kilometers away to spend ten years in the remoter Paran Monastery. It was probably here that he met the younger and better-educated Sophronios the Sophist, a man of higher social status who in 634 would become the patriarch of Jerusalem. In his own writings, Sophronios referred to Moschos as his “spiritual father and teacher,” while in the *Spiritual Meadow* Moschos termed Sophronios variously “my companion Sophronios” (ὁ ἐταῖρός μου; 111, compare 113), “brother Sophronios” (ἀδελφός; 92, compare 102, 135), and occasionally “Lord” or “my Lord Sophronios” (κύρις or κύριος; 69, 77, 110). In his preface he addressed his “sacred and faithful child Sophronios [ιερόν και πιστόν τέκνον Σωφρόνιε].” As Henry Chadwick observes, Moschos “was evidently responsible for Sophronios’ spiritual formation.”⁴ They spent more than forty years of their lives in each other’s company, dwelling and traveling together, crossing both land and sea. Together they journeyed to Alexandria and throughout Egypt. They spent ten years at Sinai before traveling to Jerusalem, the New Lavra of Saint Sabas, Syria, and eventually Rome, where Moschos put the finishing touches to his text, a rich account of anecdotes and sayings heard and collected during their travels. According to Moschos’s introduction, he gathered up the stories like flowers into an anthology, to work “the finest flowers of the unmown meadow” into a garland to present to his faithful disciple, and through him “to the world at large [τοῖς πᾶσι].” A literary posy, the text is a gift exchanged between two members of a monastic pair, both a chronicle and a token of their years together.

In its textual context, the story of Abba Stephen and his vision of the naked brothers is not only about the potential for the perfection of monks but also about the power of their pairing. In Stephen’s vision the goal of the monastic life, to the extent that it is a recovery of the state that God intended for humanity, is a state not simply of solitude or singleness, being a monk/alone in the original sense of the word *monachos*, but rather of chaste companionship. Within the narrative Moschos and Sophronios also are left behind, beholding this vision of the monastic life that exposes the tension between perfection and desire. Through the composition and publication of his text, Moschos became another conduit for such visions,

³ For Moschos’s biography, see Chadwick, “John Moschos,” 49–59. The date of Moschos’s death remains in some dispute; see Andrew Louth, “Did John Moschos Really Die in Constantinople?” *Journal of Theological Studies* 49 (1998): 149–54, refuting Enrica Follieri, “Dove e quando morì Giovanni Mosco?” *Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Neellenici*, n.s., 25 (1988): 4–39.

⁴ Chadwick, “John Moschos,” 59. See also José Simón Palmer, *El monacato oriental en el “Pratum Spirituale” de Juan Mosco* (Madrid: Fundación universitaria española, 1993), 46–47.

dazzling his audience with images of monasticism that both inspired eros and constrained it.⁵

Only a few decades later, writing in the 640s, Leontios of Neapolis offered an emotionally charged portrait of monastic companions in his *Life of Symeon the Fool*.⁶ Symeon and his companion John met as adolescents while on pilgrimage to the holy places; the two quickly formed a friendship and “would no longer part from each other.”⁷ They dwelled together as hermits in the Judean desert for twenty-nine years, until Symeon decided to leave John to go to the city of Emesa and convert the populace to a more moral life. The scene of their parting depicts John’s perplexity and grief: “We agreed not to be separated from each other. Remember the fearful hour when we were clothed in the holy habit, and we two were as one soul [καὶ ἡμεν οἱ δύο ὡσπερ μία ψυχή], so that all were astonished at our love [ἀγάπη].”⁸ The mention of monastic garb underscores that theirs was a union of two monks; nevertheless, the verbal echo of the description of marriage in Genesis 2:24, where “the two become one flesh” (καὶ ἔσονται οἱ δύο εἰς σάρκα μίαν), would be unmistakable.⁹ The trope of two monks having a single soul had already entered the literature of monastic friendship, but Leontios continued to underscore the tightness of their bond. In the end, John understands that “nothing would separate them except death, and perhaps not even that.”¹⁰ They prayed together for many hours, and “kissed each other’s breast and drenched them with their tears.” John’s “soul would not let him be separated from him, but whenever Abba Symeon said to him ‘Turn back, brother,’ he heard the word as if a knife separated him from his body [σῶμα].”¹¹

⁵ On the ability of hagiography to create and shape readers’ desires, see also Virginia Burrus, *The Sex Lives of Saints: An Erotics of Ancient Hagiography* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

⁶ Leontios of Neapolis *Life of Symeon the Fool*; *Léontios de Néapolis: Vie de Syméon le Fou et vie de Jean de Chypre*, ed. Lennart Rydén and A. J. Festugière (Paris: Geuthner, 1974), 1–222; *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius’s “Life” and the Late Antique City*, trans. Derek Krueger (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 131–71.

⁷ Leontios of Neapolis *Life of Symeon the Fool*; ed. Rydén, 58; trans. Krueger, 134. Describing their friendship, the Greek says that they “had . . . love for each other [τὴν ἀγάπην ἀλλήλων].”

⁸ Leontios of Neapolis *Life of Symeon the Fool*; ed. Rydén, 77; trans. Krueger, 148.

⁹ The Greek does not echo the Septuagint text of 1 Samuel 20:17, where Jonathan “swore an oath to David for he loved the soul of him who loved him [ὅτι ἠγάπησεν ψυχήν ἀγαπῶντος αὐτόν].” A similar passage in 1 Samuel 18:1–3 is lacking in the early transmission of the Septuagint.

¹⁰ Leontios of Neapolis *Life of Symeon the Fool*; ed. Rydén, 77; trans. Krueger, 148.

¹¹ Leontios of Neapolis *Life of Symeon the Fool*; ed. Rydén, 78; trans. Krueger, 149. For another example of monastic companions whose parting causes great emotional pain for one of the men involved, see the sixth-century *Life of Paul of Qanetos and John of Edessa*; the partial Greek text appears in A. Papadopoulos-Karameus, *Analekta Hierosolymitikēs stachyologias*, 5 vols. (1891–98; Brussels: Culture et civilization, 1963), 5:368–83. An edition of a more complete Syriac text is currently in preparation by Hans Arneson, Christine Luckritz-Marquis, and Kyle Smith. For a synopsis and study, see Kyle Smith, “Dendrites and Other Standers in the *History of the Exploits of Bishop Paul of Qanetos and Priest John of Edessa*,” *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 12 (2009): 117–34. I thank Luk van Rompay for first mentioning to me this text, which merits further consideration.

This remarkable literary description of John's anguish would seem to offer proof that John had not yet achieved the monastic perfection of his companion. If so, then, the ideal monastic pair would be one where the monks did not care if they were separated. But the failure of impassability is hardly the point of the sentiments that John expressed: the pathos of this passage, in which a monk's beloved companion parts from him, indicates Leontios's interest in valorizing John's love for and commitment to Symeon. In the two men's tearful parting, Leontios illustrated the emotional ties that might develop between celibate monks who have shared the monastic life over many years while playing on conventions for depicting parting lovers in ancient literary romances. His text stirs up the audience's sympathy, framing an affective response to the moment when a monastic pair bond seems to break.

These two great monuments of seventh-century Greek Christian hagiographical literature, the *Spiritual Meadow* and the *Life of Symeon the Fool*, give evidence for literary and cultural interest in male monastic companionship at the end of antiquity. In exploring this theme, the authors of these texts were not alone; as early as the fourth century the literature of Christian monasticism celebrated long-term friendship and cohabitation between two male monks. Tales of monastic companionship raise a number of related questions. The first group is unabashedly positivist: Did monks live in committed long-term pair bonds in late antiquity? And if so, what was the nature of such relationships? Did they receive institutional support or sanction? What can these stories tell us about monastic realities? The second group of questions pertains to literary and cultural history: How did the composition and dissemination of such stories deploy authorial power in the formation of monastic desire? How did the stories create and sustain idealized fantasies of monastic love, indeed of monastic life itself? What was the effect of such stories on readers and listeners? What did the idealization of such relationships in early Byzantine monastic literature and culture mean? Yet these two sets of questions are interrelated and must be treated together. As textual models, these writings promote same-sex domestic pairings as a possible and perhaps even ideal pattern for those pursuing the ascetic life. Moreover, these literary accounts of monks living in pairs must to some extent have represented monastic realities, offering to their audiences plausible and possibly common forms of early Byzantine monastic life. While my primary interest is in the narrative representation of monastic couples, the sources offer sufficient evidence that some male monks (and some female monks also) did in fact live in committed and stable partnerships in late antiquity and early Byzantium and that such modes of monastic domestic organization were familiar in Egypt, Palestine, and Syria as well as in the western Mediterranean.

A third set of questions is broader in scope: Where do such stories and the forms of life they purport to describe fit into the history of sexuality, especially the emerging scholarly narrative of the history of desire? In his book *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* David Halperin calls for a “modified constructionist approach to the history of sexuality” that acknowledges both the social construction and historical contingencies of sexuality and the existence of some transhistorical continuities.¹² Halperin adds that “the history of discourses pertaining to forms of male intimacy may be especially revealing, because such discourses have been extensively and complexly elaborated over time.” Among the topics whose importance he underscores is the history of “friendship or male love.”¹³ Although the stories in question predate the nineteenth-century invention of homosexuality, a decoding of Moschos’s and Leontios’s idealizations of same-sex monastic companionship reveals a powerful erotic substrate even as it assumes and endorses shared chastity and celibacy. What can the *Spiritual Meadow*, the *Life of Symeon the Fool*, and their historical context tell us about an early Byzantine, prehomosexual homoerotic discourse? These monastic companionships contribute to our understanding of the organization of sexual desire not so much in confirming that monasticism provided a mechanism for the eradication or sublimation of desire but rather in presenting a form of monasticism that was predicated on the desire for stable and loving partnership with a member of the same sex. Some monks wanted lifelong relationships with other monks, and some of their literature valorized this desire.

MONASTIC COUPLES IN THE *SPIRITUAL MEADOW*

The *Spiritual Meadow* provides multiple portraits of monks living and traveling together in pairs while at the same time stressing stock virtues that monks can practice together. Within the *Spiritual Meadow* Moschos and Sophronios themselves featured as characters in the narration, but more often they functioned as the narrative’s internal audience, as those listening to the myriad stories of ascetic achievement and ascetic failure. Both the individual stories and the text as a whole reinforced the formation of monastic companionship; indeed, a significant number of the episodes address themes of monastic cohabitation and the creation and maintenance of ascetic pair bonds.

In a scene in the *Spiritual Meadow* that consciously recalled the tradition of the earlier *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, or *Apophthegmata patrum*, stories

¹² David M. Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 106. The relevant chapter was first published as “How to Do the History of Male Homosexuality,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 6 (2000): 87–124.

¹³ Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality*, 106, 109, 117–21.

and sayings about the monastic life, Moschos and Sophronios consulted an elder for advice on how to conduct their paired monastic life:

I took my lord [τὸν κύριόν μου] Sophronios and we went in search of a particularly distinguished elder, an Egyptian, at the lavra [a collection of monastic cells along a path] that is located eighteen miles from Alexandria. I said to the elder: “Give us a word [Ἐἶπον ἡμῖν λόγον], Lord Abba, about the way in which we ought to live with each other [μετ’ ἀλλήλων καθίσαι] for my lord the sophist here has a desire to renounce the world.”¹⁴ The elder said: “Well done indeed, my child, if you renounce the world and save your soul. Settle yourselves [καθίσατε] in a cell. Where does not matter: only that you live there in sobriety [νηφαλέως] and maintaining quietude [ἡσυχία], praying unceasingly.”¹⁵

His advice regarding monks dwelling together conformed to instructions for the monastic life in general. The terse charge to avoid wine, to keep restful silence, and to engage in constant prayer even reproduced the tripartite form of the sayings of the founders of the Egyptian monastic tradition.¹⁶ The elder did not dissuade them from cohabiting but rather instructed them to settle (in the plural) together in a cell. This teaching is ironic in retrospect, since although they did live together for a long time in the Sinai, Moschos and Sophronios did not remain in their cells but rather traveled extensively. Indeed, the subsequent teachings of the same elder underscore this irony: “Children, if you wish to be saved, flee from people. Today there is no end of our knocking on doors, our traveling around all the cities and countryside.”¹⁷ The advice would seem to be that pairs of monks should withdraw together from the world and then stay put.¹⁸

¹⁴ On the significance of asking for a “word” (either ῥῆμα or λόγος) in the apophthegmatic traditions, see Douglas Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 76–85; and William Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 171–73.

¹⁵ John Moschos *Spiritual Meadow* 110; trans. Wortley, 91.

¹⁶ The classic discussion of the earliest forms of the *Apophthegmata* is Jean-Claude Guy, “Remarques sur le texte des *Apophthegmata Patrum*,” *Recherches des Sciences Religieuses* 63 (1955): 252–58; but see also the revisionist approaches of Graham Gould, “A Note on the *Apophthegmata Patrum*,” *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s., 37 (1986): 133–38; and Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*, 81–85.

¹⁷ John Moschos *Spiritual Meadow* 110; trans. Wortley, 91.

¹⁸ On attitudes toward peregrinating monks, see Daniel Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks: Spiritual Authority and the Promotion of Monasticism in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); and Maribel Dietz, *Wandering Monks, Virgins and Pilgrims: Ascetic Travel in the Mediterranean World, A.D. 300–800* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005).

Moschos's text similarly emphasizes paired monks' commitment to mutual fidelity. When Moschos and Sophronios visited John the Red, who lived on an estate some twenty miles from Jerusalem, that anchorite related a story of two brothers in the Monastery of Saint Theodosios. "There were two brothers [ἀδελφοί] who had sworn an oath to each other that they would never be separated from each other, either in life or in death."¹⁹ On account of this promise, they were "a source of edification for all." In time, however, one of the brothers was attacked by an urge for fornication. He asked his brother to release him from his vow so that he could return to the world to live a secular (and frankly debauched) life. Rather than separate from him, the other followed him while maintaining his asceticism. When the first brother entered a brothel, the other remained outside, throwing dust on his head in self-reproach. Remaining together in the world, they worked as day laborers building a monastery for a certain Abba Abraham. While the first brother squandered their money on "riotous living," the other fasted all day long. When Abraham asked the faithful brother about himself, he answered: "It is because of my brother that I put up with all this, in the hope that God will look upon my affliction and save my brother."²⁰ In answer to his prayers and substitutionary penance, Abraham responded: "The Lord has granted you the soul of your brother too," and the fornicating brother asked his companion to take him back to the desert "so [he could] be saved." They went to a cave near the Jordan River where "he locked him up" (the Latin version says "they shut themselves in"), and the repentant monk made great spiritual progress until he died.²¹

Even in the absence of vows or oaths, this form of life implied a commitment to remain together. Moschos told also of two monks who were grazers (βοσκοί), practicing a form of asceticism involving foraging for food in the open. These men, who Moschos said "had a great love for each other [ἀγάπην ἔχοντες πολλῶν πρὸς ἀλλήλους]," visited a stylite near Petra regularly, "over many years, both together. The one never came without the other." The narration stresses their constant companionship; indeed, it is the

¹⁹ John Moschos *Spiritual Meadow* 97; trans. Wortley, 78. The term *brother* here is ambiguous and could mean "natural brothers"; however, a literal understanding is not necessary, and in any case these men were (also?) brothers by virtue of being monks in the same monastery.

²⁰ John Moschos *Spiritual Meadow* 97; trans. Wortley, 79.

²¹ In the immediately previous chapter a monk expressed concern about taking communion in a monastery that contains schismatics and in which there is the taint of fornication. He asked what he ought to do about "a brother who is a fornicator and the one who swore an oath to him" (Moschos *Spiritual Meadow* 96; trans. Wortley, 77). This last concern seems out of place in the chapter, although the swearing of oaths between brothers is the link to the following chapter just discussed. On monastic couples sharing the burden of penance, see Claudia Rapp, "Spiritual Guarantors at Penance, Baptism, and Ordination in the Late Antique East," in *A New History of Penance*, ed. Abigail Firey (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 121–48; and Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony and Aryeh Kofsky, *The Monastic School of Gaza* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 145–56.

point of the story. When, after many years, one of the grazers attempted to visit this pillar stander alone, without the knowledge of the other, the stylite refused to allow him to enter the compound and pronounced judgment against him for breaking the patterns of companionship: “God rejects him . . . and I cannot receive him.”²²

In both these tales there is trouble in the paradise of the desert. In the first a monk remained true to his vow, and his companion was redeemed. In the second a monk was condemned for desiring to be separate from his companion, even for a short and stealthy visit to a stylite. In each case Moschos’s stories emphasized the importance of fidelity within these relationships, encouraging the selfless love of one monk for the other and valorizing the central agreement not to be separated. The moral emphasis on fidelity and the goods of endurance articulated many of the same virtues romanticized mostly between men and women in the Greek novels of the second to fourth centuries.²³

One aspect of such a bond involved a commitment to bury the other, a truly familial obligation. In one story, when the disciple of an elder who was committed to traveling around naked in the wilderness died, the elder went down to the sea and asked a shipmaster and his crew to help him bury his companion. After they buried the monk, a strapping sailor named Thalilaios, “very impressed with the virtue of the elder,” asked if he could be the elder’s new disciple. After a novitiate of one year and another two and a half years as a full-fledged monk, the younger one, Thalilaios, perceiving that he, in turn, would soon die, begged his elder that they should travel together to visit the holy sites in Jerusalem. The two were baptized in the Jordan River, and three days later Brother Thalilaios died. The elder buried his second disciple at the Kopratha Lavra, the location of which is uncertain but probably nearby, and there he himself remained until his death. He was buried by the monks of the same lavra. In addition to presenting a model of serial same-sex companionship, the story illustrates the elder monk’s

²² John Moschos *Spiritual Meadow* 129; trans. Wortley, 107. Symeon the Fool and his John also lived together as grazers; see Leontios of Neapolis *Life of Symeon the Fool*; ed. Rydén, 67. John Moschos told another story of a group of three grazers (*Spiritual Meadow* 21). On this practice, see John Wortley, “‘Grazers’ (ΒΟΕΚΟΙ) in the Judean Desert,” in *The Sabaite Heritage in the Orthodox Church from the Fifth Century to the Present*, ed. Joseph Patrick (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2001), 37–48.

²³ For critical perspectives on the themes of ancient romance, see Kate Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride: Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996); Simon Goldhill, *Foucault’s Virginité: Ancient Erotic Fiction and the History of Sexuality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and Virginia Burrus, “Mimicking Virgins: Colonial Ambivalence and the Ancient Romance,” *Arethusa* 38, no. 1 (2005): 49–88. Achilles Tatius’s second-century novel *Leukippe and Klitophon* also applied a similar model to a pair of men.

responsibilities for instructing and baptizing the younger monk as well as the mutual obligation in such relationships for burial after death.²⁴

The *Spiritual Meadow* leaves the impression that same-sex monastic pairs were common in the landscape of late sixth- and early seventh-century ascetic practice. Elsewhere the text portrayed pairs of monks as visiting other coupled monks, both reinforcing this quasi institution of monastic pairs and suggesting that paired monks sought out the company of other pairs. Abba Zosimos the Cilician, a resident of Mount Sinai, told of the time he and his disciple, John, went to Porphyreon to dwell together, found another pair of anchorites there, “and settled near them [ἐμείναμεν πλησίον αὐτῶν] about two stades apart.”²⁵ Later, Zosimos and John moved together to Sinai. However, the internal structure of these spiritual friendships varies. Some of the stories of monastic cohabitation conformed to a master/disciple dynamic and suggest a Platonic/pederastic context through which to understand these celibate pairings, such as Moschos himself and Sophronios. Other stories, however, depicted monastic brothers of similar ages and lengths of profession, like Symeon the Fool and his companion John, and thus suggest a context grounded in late antique ideals of friendship, where symmetry characterized the context for affection.²⁶ It is unclear whether we are witnessing one phenomenon or many. In any case, Christian models for celibate monastic companionship transformed ancient patterns both for friendship between men of equal standing, who were often married to women or expected to marry women, and for relations in educational contexts between a master and a disciple.

Within the collection of narratives that makes up the *Spiritual Meadow*, Stephen the Cappadocian’s vision of the pair of naked monks serves as a distracting cipher, drawing the reader’s prurient attention to the perfection of monastic virtues in the context of perfecting monastic love. As such, it gives the lie to convenient propositions, made by modern scholars and premodern theologians alike, that there might be a firm distinction between eros, or desire, and agape, or “brotherly love.”²⁷ One monk’s agape might

²⁴ John Moschos *Spiritual Meadow* 91; trans. Wortley, 73–74. For a parallel example of a master carrying out a promise to bury his disciple, see *Historia monachorum in Aegypto* 10.9, ed. A. J. Festugière (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1971); *The Lives of the Desert Fathers*, trans. Norman Russell (London: Mobery, 1980), 83.

²⁵ John Moschos *Spiritual Meadow* 124; trans. Wortley, 101–2.

²⁶ For equal status as an aspect of ancient friendship, see Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality*, 117–21. On Christian ideals of friendship in late antiquity, see David Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 149–73.

²⁷ The classic argument is Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip S. Watson (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953). For a critique of Nygren’s distinction, see Virginia Burrus, “Introduction: Theology and Eros after Nygren,” in *Toward a Theology of Eros: Transfiguring Passion at the Limits of Discipline*, ed. Virginia Burrus and Catherine Keller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), xiii–xvi; and Daniel Boyarin, “What Do We Talk about When We Talk about Platonic Love,” in Burrus and Keller, *Toward a Theology of Eros*, 3–22.

be another monk's eros. Moschos prompted his readers to share Stephen's eros, to develop desires for pairs of monks, whether to emulate them or merely to see them—a desire reproduced and partially fulfilled in the descriptions of monastic pairs scattered throughout the text.

EARLIER EVIDENCE FROM THE EGYPTIAN DESERT AND BEYOND

The practices of monastic companionship and cohabitation described in the *Spiritual Meadow* had emerged long before the late sixth century. The practice of cohabiting monks first developed in the course of the fourth century, in the early years of the Christian monastic movement in Egypt. One of the earliest Christian saint's lives, Athanasios's *Life of Antony*, includes the story that after this great founder of the monastic life emerged from living in a tomb on the outskirts of his native village at about age thirty-five, he approached an older ascetic and "asked him to dwell [οικησαι] with him in the wilderness." The elder declined "because of his advanced age and because this [practice] was not yet the custom."²⁸ Only then did Antony set out alone. Athanasios's remark indicates that already by the time he was writing in the 350s, monastic cohabitation had become one of a variety of styles of monastic life. Antony's politely refused request might even have had the effect of licensing such an arrangement for those hearing Athanasios's text.

A variety of evidence from the mid-fourth century on attests monks living in pairs, particularly in the Christian East. Moreover, the literature of monasticism in late antiquity provides ample evidence for the idealization of monastic companions, where they frequently became vehicles for portraying key monastic virtues. The various collections of early Egyptian monastic lore known as the *Apophthegmata patrum* relate anecdotes about fourth- and fifth-century monks but were redacted and disseminated in the late fifth and early sixth centuries, probably in Palestine. They provide access to literary and oral traditions that would have been familiar to Moschos and his readers.²⁹ The section "On Charity" in the *Anonymous Series* of the *Apophthegmata* includes stories of monks living together in the Egyptian desert intended to articulate Christian ideals of love.³⁰ In one account "two

²⁸ Athanasios *Life of Antony* 11.1, 2.

²⁹ Quotations without attribution in the works of Cyril of Skythopolis from the *Alphabetical* and *Anonymous Collections* confirm the presence of manuscripts of the *Apophthegmata patrum* in Palestinian monasteries, including in the library of the Great Lavra of Sabas, in the first half of the sixth century. See Bernard Flusin, *Miracle et histoire dans l'œuvre de Cyrille de Scythopolis* (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1983), 54–60; and John Binns, *Ascetics and Ambassadors of Christ: The Monasteries of Palestine 314–631* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 57–66.

³⁰ The critical edition for this section of the *Anonymous Series* is F. Nau, "Histoires des solitaires égyptiens," *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 12–14 (1907–9) and 17–18 (1912–13); I have cited these according to Nau's numbering below. A translation of the relevant passages appears

old men [who] had lived together for many years” attempted and failed to have a fight even when they placed a brick between them; neither claimed it as his own, and they were thus “unable to find an occasion for argument.”³¹ In another an elder brother (who is said to be pure) asked a younger one to dwell with him. “Brother let us dwell together [μείνωμεν ὁμοῦ].” The younger one replied: “I am a sinner. I cannot live with you, Abba.” But the senior monk “insisted on it, saying ‘Yes, we can do it.’” The younger one requested a week to think about it, during which time he entered the village on an errand and “sinned with a woman.” When the younger repented, the older monk said that he would bear half of the sin. Apparently, this offer proved persuasive, and the younger one consented to live together “until they died.”³² The elder’s offer of companionship includes the sharing of the burden of celibacy but also the burden of repentance for sexual sin. Within the collection this tale exemplified love and portrayed the love of the elder monk as truly virtuous. As in Moschos’s tale of the monk from the Monastery of Saint Theodosios who followed his lustful brother back into the world, the bearing of another’s sin recalls Christ’s willingness to bear the sin of humanity. But this is also an erotic tale, one that ends in a consummation that is not genital. As the elder achieved his goal of having the younger monk as his companion, one desire repented because another desire fulfilled.

An additional story from the *Anonymous Series*’ section “On Lust” confirms the risks that envisioning monks together might entail and provides a counterpoint to the vision of Stephen the Cappadocian. The demon Lust (Porneia) was one of the eight evil thoughts or “passions” that regularly attacked monks in the wilderness and against which they engaged in spiritual combat.³³ Here, Lust formed unchaste thoughts about two other monks in the mind of an onlooker: “A brother was attacked by a demon

in *The Wisdom of the Desert Fathers: The “Apophthegmata Patrum” (the Anonymous Series)*, trans. Benedicta Ward (Oxford: SLG, 1986), although with a different numbering system. For background on the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, see Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 167–86.

³¹ Nau, “Histoires,” no. 352; trans. Ward, 60 (here numbered 221).

³² Nau, “Histoires,” no. 346; trans. Ward, 58–59 (here numbered 215). Another example of a monk sharing his companion’s penance for fornication can be found in the *Systematic Collection* of the *Apophthegmata patrum*; the Greek text is in Jean-Claude Guy, *Les apophthègmes des pères: Collection systématique*, 2 vols., Sources chrétiennes 387, 474 (Paris: Cerf, 1993, 2003), 5.31 (cited by book and saying number). There is no English translation of the Greek text, but an English translation of the Latin version is in Owen Chadwick, *Western Asceticism: Selected Translations with Introductions and Notes* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1958), 67–68 (here numbered 27).

³³ The best discussion of the evil thoughts in Egyptian monasticism is David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006).

and went to a certain old man, saying: ‘Those two brothers are with one another [οἱ δύο ἀδελφοὶ ἐκεῖνοι μετ’ ἀλλήλων εἰσὶν].’ And the old man learned that he was mocked by a demon, and he sent to summon them. And when it was evening, he placed a little mat for the two brothers, and covered them with a single spread, saying: ‘The children of God are holy.’ And he said to his disciple: ‘Shut up this brother in the cell outside, for he has the passion [πάθος] in himself.’”³⁴ For the monk suffering the demon’s onslaught, contemplating the pair’s intimacy gave way to erotic fantasy. The phrase “they are with one another” is a common euphemism, indicating that the troubled monk believed that the pair were engaging in sexual activity. This pornographic image—which on some level the monk knew was a bad thing—led him to accuse the brothers of unchastity. The elder’s actions demonstrated disapproval of such suspicions and confirmed a more appropriate way to imagine two monks together, sleeping chastely side by side on the same mat and under the same blanket. While it is unclear in the nearly arid spareness of the text whether these two brothers dwelled together, their intimacy sufficed to generate suspicion and possibly even envy. In contrast to Stephen’s enticing and blessed vision of two naked monks, this poor man’s thoughts, under the influence of passion or temptation, produced a demonic vision of two monks together. Beyond revealing that close friendships between monks provided occasions for rumor or gossip, the story employs the elder’s authority to reshape the monastic gaze, to see two monks sleeping together as holy, a sign of monastic perfection.

While nearly all the surviving accounts of monastic cohabitation tell of men, a chapter in Theodoret of Cyrrhus’s *Religious History*, a work of the 440s, confirms that women also could exhibit an ideal pattern of paired celibates. He related the story of his contemporaries Marana and Cyra, two natives of Berroia (modern Aleppo) in Syria who “display[ed] the same zeal as men and free[d] their sex from its ancestral disgrace.” Living in a domestic compound outside of the city, the women had closed up the gate with clay and stones. Marana and Cyra “embrace[d] the open-air life” with “neither house nor hut.” Marana alone spoke when, during the season of Pentecost, many women came to see them and conversed with them through a small window in the gate. For forty-two years they lived there, wearing elaborate iron weights and practicing rigorous and prolonged fasts. During this time they “contemplated the beauty of the Bridegroom . . . the Beloved.” (Once they went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem together, eating nothing on the way

³⁴ Nau, “Histoires,” no. 181; trans. Ward, 15–16 (here numbered 49); but here I have employed the translation of Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, 276. A slightly different version of the story appears in the Latin version of the *Systematic Collection* (but not in Guy’s edition of the Greek); see Chadwick, *Western Asceticism*, 68 (here numbered 29).

there or back but only while in the city. And they made a similar fasting journey to the shrine of Saint Thecla in Isauria.) Theodoret, who presented them as models for other women, concluded that “divine yearning ha[d] driven them to frenzy . . . and divine love [θεῖος ἔρως] for the Bridegroom ha[d] driven them mad.”³⁵

Theodoret’s literary representation of Marana and Cyra illustrates another aspect of the relationship between eros and asceticism. The women’s starkly embodied and shared disciplines deployed physicality in the practice of love. Themes of binding and longing also recalled the depiction of eros not only in novels but also in magical formulae and love spells that have survived from antiquity.³⁶ This tale of celibate cohabitation celebrated a notably prolonged and deferred delight in restraint.³⁷ In contrast to the example from the *Apophthegmata*, where two monks dwelled together to keep the younger one from erotic involvement with the village women, Marana and Cyra’s pairing supplemented rather than substituted for another desire. Instead of using the pair bond to deflect desire from a third, this pair opened to include a third, in this case, the erotically constructed Christ, the object of their frenzied desire and yearning.³⁸

A different sort of yearning received investigation in stories where one brother in a monastic pair left his companion, a theme present in monastic literature long before the tearful parting of Symeon the Fool and John. The theme of the departing brother featured in two paired anecdotes in the section “On Lust” in the *Systematic Collection* of the *Apophthegmata patrum*. In one story a monk complained to an elder, “My brother leaves me and goes away hither and yon, and I am distressed [θλίβομαι].” The elder counseled him: “Bear with him [βάσταξον], brother, and God, seeing the suffering [κόπος] of your patient endurance [ὑπομονή], [will] return him [to you].” And in the second anecdote one of two brothers in the Thebaid region of Egypt came under the influence of the demon of fornication and decided to leave his companion to return to the world. His companion would not allow him to go alone and on the advice of an elder determined to accompany his brother so that God, “for the sake of his suffering [κόπος],” would not allow his companion to fall. And indeed,

³⁵ Theodoret of Cyrrhus *Religious History* 29; *Théodoret de Cyr, histoire des moines de Syrie*, ed. Pierre Canivet and Alice Leroy-Molinghen, 2 vols., Sources chrétiennes 234, 257 (Paris: Cerf, 1977–79); Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, trans. R. M. Price (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian, 1985).

³⁶ For examples of binding in erotic magic, see John G. Gager, ed., *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 72–115.

³⁷ On the representation of the pleasures of discipline in late ancient hagiography, see Burrus, *The Sex Lives of Saints*, 9–11, 14–15.

³⁸ That one woman might desire another to teach her strict discipline also featured in an amusing episode of John Moschos’s *Spiritual Meadow* 206; trans. Wortley, 185.

when he followed him, God saw the “suffering of his love” and “he won the war against his brother.”³⁹ In both cases the saying reinforced the value of patient endurance of the wayward brother. A commitment to abide with each other remained implicit.

The literary function of these narratives of shared ascetic practice conforms to the broader aims of early Christian hagiographic literature, presenting models for emulation and reverence. These stories both illustrated and encouraged the virtues of love, chastity, fidelity, patience, and endurance. In valorizing a shared ascetic life, they offered Christian models for friendship and mutual responsibility. Yet their emphasis on the renunciation of sexual relations depended in large part on alternate and no less passionate desires for companionship and shared devotion, and in this they presented new perspectives on the regulation and shaping of desire in the monastic life.

THE REALITIES OF MONASTIC COMPANIONSHIP? INSTITUTIONS AND AUTHORITIES

What can such stories of monastic companionship tell about actual practice? The literary accounts of monks living in pairs offer evidence for an underattended type of Christian monastic life in late antiquity. On the basis of the evidence presented here, there should be no doubt that some—or even many—monks dwelled together in same-sex pairs in the Egyptian desert in the fourth century and that this sort of practice was replicated elsewhere as monasticism spread throughout the Mediterranean basin. At the same time, paired monastics have not generally featured as a recognizable type in either ancient or modern accounts of Christian asceticism in late antiquity. Indeed, even José Simón Palmer’s otherwise exhaustive study of monastic life and organization in Moschos’s *Spiritual Meadow* fails both to note and to account for the lifelong monastic partnership that Moschos himself engaged in.⁴⁰ Additional literary and documentary evidence offers new insight into the formation and organization of affective ties between pairs of monks. In turn, and in an admittedly circular fashion, consideration of monastic realities provides a broader context for understanding these literary accounts.

Both Jerome and John Cassian, Latin witnesses to eastern Mediterranean monasticism in the late fourth century, offered strict typologies of monastic forms, distinguishing cenobites who dwelled in communities from hermits who dwelled alone. Both also recognized a looser form of organization of smaller groups. In a letter to a Roman virgin composed in 384, Jerome

³⁹ Guy, *Les apophthèmes des pères*, 5.32, my translation. Compare Chadwick, *Western Asceticism*, 68 (here numbered 28).

⁴⁰ Palmer, *El monacato oriental*.

explained that in Egypt there was a third class of monks whom he called “remnouth” and “who live[d] in twos and threes.”⁴¹ He registered a low opinion of them because they lacked a rule. He chided them for visiting virgins, sneering at clergy, and engaging in gluttony on feast days. Even so, his description reveals that these monks worked for their livelihood, pooled their resources, and tended to dwell in cities and strongholds. Significantly, this view from the outside suggests that monastic pair bonds may have appeared to others simply as small monastic groupings. But it is also possible that Jerome directed his opprobrium not at the desert pairs that we have been considering here but rather at a yet looser and more urban form of monasticism.

Cassian, writing for an audience in southern Gaul early in the fifth century, termed his third type of Egyptian monasticism “Sarabaites” and complained that they “cut themselves off from the monastic communities and take care of their own needs.” He charged that they exhibited “no interest in monastic discipline[,] . . . do not submit to the direction of elders and they do not learn their instruction in how to overcome their own desires.”⁴² They lived two or three to a cell, without the authority of a superior. (Cassian also identified a vague fourth group of extreme hermits.) In the *Rule of Saint Benedict*, composed for the monastery at Monte Cassino between Rome and Naples around 540 and which subsequently served as a standard Western model for understanding the varieties of monastic life, Benedict identified cenobites, hermits, sarabaites, and a fourth category of wandering monks, or “gyrovagues.”⁴³

These Western authors, writing for audiences far removed from the Egyptian context, failed to represent accurately the tremendous variety of monastic forms actually practiced in the Egyptian desert. James Goehring observes that monasticism more likely existed on a “complex continuum from the fully solitary monk to the fully communal monk.”⁴⁴ Our

⁴¹ Jerome *Epistula* 22.34 (to Eustochium); *Select Letters of St. Jerome*, ed. and trans. F. A. Wright, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), 136–37. Both Jerome’s and Cassian’s terminology for their “third” type of monasticism poses a number of philological problems; see Monica Blanchard, “Sarabaitae and Remnouth: Coptic Considerations,” in *The World of Early Egyptian Christianity: Language, Literature and Social Context: Essays in Honor of David W. Johnson*, ed. James E. Goehring and Janet A. Timbie (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 49–60.

⁴² John Cassian *Conferences* 18.7; *Patrologiae cursus completus: Series latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris, 1844–80), 49:47–1321; trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist, 1985), 188–89. See also Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 420–22; and Dietz, *Wandering Monks*, 88–95.

⁴³ *Rule of Saint Benedict* 1; R B 1980: *The Rule of Saint Benedict in Latin and English with Notes*, ed. and trans. Timothy Fry (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1981). On travel and monastic typologies, see Dietz, *Wandering Monks*, 69–105.

⁴⁴ James E. Goehring, *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert: Studies in Early Egyptian Monasticism* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity, 1999), 54.

monastic pairs would seem to fall somewhere in the middle of this continuum. Neither Jerome's nor Cassian's opinions toward deviants from the categories of hermit and cenobite are likely to have reflected attitudes current among the monks of the East. The more indigenous evidence for monks sharing cells or traveling together in Egypt and Palestine is ordinarily very positive; clearly, the authors attesting this form of life did not regard the monastic pairs as the same sort of monk as the "most detestable" sarabaites. Stable monastic companionship, therefore, seems to have constituted a recognizable form (or group of forms) outside of the standard typologies.

As it appears in the *Apophthegmata patrum*, this cooperative ascetic arrangement between two monks formed a variety of the solitary life. Within these texts instances of monks dwelling together seem to develop when two men already living as hermits determined to share quarters in order to support each other in the practices of asceticism and prayer. There appears to be no overarching ecclesiastical support for such a mode of life, although the presence of these stories in the lore suggests its general sanction. Indeed, the story of the two monks told to sleep together on a mat and under a single blanket indicates a tradition of defending monastic intimates even while implicitly acknowledging the risk of sexual activity. It remains an open question to what extent this alternative monastic form received institutional support beyond these literary endorsements and caveats.

Later evidence suggests, by contrast, that in some instances monastic pairs emerged from the cenobitic life, leaving monasteries with the approval or blessing of the abbot. When Symeon the Fool and his companion John first met and became friends while on pilgrimage, they determined together to join the monastery of Gerasimos. The abbot Nikon referred to them as "brothers," and Claudia Rapp observes that their subsequent "declaration of everlasting commitment to each other and its confirmation through prayers is strongly reminiscent of the *adelphopoiesis* ritual," the making of brothers found in later liturgical manuscripts.⁴⁵ She sees this episode within the history of fictive kinship in Byzantium, although it is unclear whether such rites were available to monks. In later centuries canon law specifically excluded monks from entering into such brotherhoods.⁴⁶ One reasonable possibility is that the form for vows that monastic companions might take to each other reflected vows that secular men might also take.

⁴⁵ Leontios of Neapolis *Life of Symeon the Fool*; ed. Rydén, 64; trans. Krueger, 139. On this rite, see Claudia Rapp, "Ritual Brotherhood in Byzantium," *Traditio*, no. 52 (1997): 285–326, at 297; Rapp offers a thoughtful and appreciative corrective to John Boswell, *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe* (New York: Villard, 1994). We await her forthcoming monograph on *adelphopoiesis* in Byzantium.

⁴⁶ See Rapp, "Ritual Brotherhood," 290, 320–22. Rapp adds that originally canon law objected to monks engaging in the rituals with laymen, as it might lead to feasting.

After seven days at the monastery, Symeon and John determined to leave the monastery to pursue ascetic life together alone in the desert. They did so with the abbot's extensive blessing, which may or may not be read as a ritual of consecration. At the end of his prayer, "amazed at the affection [στοργή] which [Symeon] held for his brother" and "astounded by the love [ἀγάπη] both had for each other," Nikon made the sign of the cross "upon their breast and the whole of their body" before the two made their way out of the monastery and into the desert.⁴⁷ However, their companionship could only be stabilized after the death of Symeon's mother and John's fiancée, their other primary human attachments. The connection between early Byzantine rites for the "making of brothers" and expectations of same-sex monastic cohabitation remains unclear. Nevertheless, in this case the narrative progression toward long-term domestic stability included both the ritual consecration of a fictive kinship and the shedding of other kinship obligations. The two engaged in the shared monastic life with their abbot's blessing. Finally, early in their life together the same abbot appeared to Symeon in a dream and sprinkled holy water below his navel, thus eradicating his sexual desire, constructing ideal monastic cohabitation as the antithesis of sexuality, the highly desiring and desired opposite of sex.⁴⁸ As the emotionally intense scene of their parting, described above, made clear, John longed for and expected the endurance of their shared celibacy.

An excerpt from the early sixth-century correspondence of Severos of Antioch, preserved in Syriac, describes a less successful transition from the cenobitic life to a life of paired monasticism. In a letter to Severos, John Scholastikos of Bostra had written: "A *rishdaira* [head of a monastery, abbot] clothed two men with a habit, and either together or in different times through his mediation made them deacons. Afterwards they cleaved [*ethnaqaf*] to one another and departed from the monastery." After they departed the abbot complained that "their joining together [*kenishouthā*] with one another was in a mutually blameworthy manner, and he sent the anathema through a man to them that they should not be together [*nethkanshoun*] at all and not speak with one another and drink wine. But they despised the sentence and on the same day they were together [*ethkanash*]," eating and drinking.⁴⁹ Severos was concerned with the legal ramifications of the case, that is, whether the two men fell under the jurisdiction of the abbot or the local bishop after

⁴⁷ Leontios of Neapolis *Life of Symeon the Fool*; ed. Rydén, 71; trans. Krueger, 144.

⁴⁸ Nikon's sprinkling of Symeon's genitals also functions in the narrative to prevent a misinterpretation of some of Symeon's antics once he left the desert to play the fool in the city of Emesa, where he entered the women's bathhouse naked and cavorted with dancers and prostitutes. See Krueger, *Symeon the Holy Fool*, 49.

⁴⁹ Arthur Vööbus, *The Synodicon in the West Syrian Tradition I*, 2 vols., Corpus scriptorum Christianorum orientalium 367–68/Scriptores Syri 161–62 (Louvain, Belgium: Secrétariat du Corpus SCO, 1975), 1:197–98 (text) and 2:185 (trans.).

they left the monastery. The ruling hangs on whether the men were already misbehaving before they left the monastery. If they were, and the abbot had already reprimanded them before they left, then his subsequent anathema was also valid.

John of Bostra's description of the couple is enigmatic. What does it mean to cleave to one another? The word *ethmaqaf* means to be "conjoined" or "united," but it can also have marital or sexual overtones. The simple form of the verb *negef* appears in the Syriac version of Genesis 2:24, where the "man cleaves to his wife." More likely, however, the cleaving of monks to each other was sufficiently commonplace, and the text conveys that within the monastery they became inseparable.⁵⁰ Even so, one wonders whether these monks were doing more than carousing and drinking wine together, especially once they were on their own together and behaving in a "mutually blameworthy manner." Severos reminded John that "it is lawful for everyone who wishes to depart from the monastery" to do so, but did these men leave the monastery with the abbot's approval or even his ritual blessing? Indeed, unless these monks were already reprimanded before they left the monastery, Severos ruled, their penance and absolution became the responsibility of the bishop, not the abbot. In the end, neither the *Life of Symeon the Fool* nor the correspondence of Severos gives clear evidence of abbatial oversight of monastic companions after they leave a monastery.

A documentary papyrus from early sixth-century Egypt (Trinity College Dublin Pap. D 5) augments our understanding of the practical and potentially thorny matters attending two monks sharing a cell. From a group of three extant deeds of sale governing the transfer of a monastic property at Arsinoe in the Egyptian Fayyum region, this document, whose date should probably be read as 24 August 511, specifies the conditions on which a certain Aioulios's *monastērion* will pass to Eulogios, who dwelled with him.⁵¹ The agreement, written in rather irregular Greek, was witnessed by six priests, some orthodox and some Melitian.⁵² In this case, the word *monastērion* seems to retain its original meaning, namely, "a cell in which

⁵⁰ A similar concept could be conveyed in Greek with the verb κολλάω; see below.

⁵¹ See Brian C. McGing, "Melitian Monks at Labla," *Tyche: Beiträge zur alten Geschichte, Papyrologie, und Epigraphik* 5 (1990): 67–94; McGing provides an edition, translation, and critical notes. The other relevant documents are SB I 5174 and 5175. I thank James Goehring for bringing this text to my attention.

⁵² Melitios, bishop of Lycopolis in the early fourth century, had objected to the terms under which those who had lapsed under persecution were readmitted to communion. His followers remained a small schismatic sect in Egypt until the eighth century. For a broader sense of the relations between Melitian and Orthodox monks in the region, see Goehring, *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert*, 200–208. This chapter, entitled "Monastic Diversity and Ideological Boundaries in Fourth-Century Christian Egypt," was originally published in *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 5, no. 1 (1997): 61–84.

a monk dwells.” The cell that Aioulios and Eulogios shared was part of a group of independent monastic dwellings known as Labla. Aioulios willed that “after my death my cell will belong to Eulogios. And whatever I have in my possession whether liability or asset, will belong to Eulogios.” Furthermore, the document made provision for the potential dissolution of their association in a way that protected Eulogios’s interests: “If I [Aioulios] leave Eulogios during my lifetime, my cell will belong to Eulogios, or if I bring any layman or monk to be senior to (?) Eulogios into my cell without the permission of Eulogios, my cell will belong to Eulogios.” In response, Eulogios contracted: “And I on my part acknowledge, I Eulogios, to my brother Aioulios that it is not lawful for me to cast you away from me while you live, until you die, as aforesaid.”⁵³ Although it may be surprising that monks in Egypt could own property, even the cells in which they lived, the document presents evidence for two monks of previous and possibly long-standing association entering into a contractual agreement to transfer the property from one to the other regardless of what might happen to them in the coming years. The catalyst for the contract seems to have been Aioulios’s previous promises to leave his cell to a certain Isak. Aioulios stated that “whatever letter of mine he [Isak] produces is invalid.” It is unclear whether Eulogios had replaced Isak as Aioulios’s cellmate or whether Aioulios had attempted to introduce Isak as a third monk into the living arrangement. Similarly, it is difficult to reconstruct the emotional content of the dispute to which this legal contract is the solution, but Aioulios essentially promised not to bring any third party into the cell to take precedence over Eulogios, and Eulogios promised not to throw Aioulios out. Even though the document is unique among extant papyri, the priestly witnesses seem to confirm that the basic arrangement of monks living together with rights of survivorship was not unusual and that their promises to persist with each other until death could receive some ecclesial sanction; Aioulios and Eulogios might even have benefited from some pastoral mediation.

If the endorsement of abbots, elders, and priests gave monastic companions quasi-institutional license, a greater foundation for shared monastic life lay in the promises that monks might make to each other. As noted above, in the *Spiritual Meadow* two brothers from the Monastery of Saint Theodosios “had sworn an oath to each other that they would never be separated from each other, either in life or in death.”⁵⁴ In the *Life of Symeon the Fool* John reminded his companion: “We agreed not to be separated from each other.”⁵⁵ It is unclear whether these events should be understood as “making” vows

⁵³ McGing, “Melitian Monks,” 89. The name Labla is likely a corruption of the word *lavra*.

⁵⁴ John Moschos *Spiritual Meadow* 97; trans. Wortley, 78.

⁵⁵ Leontios of Neapolis *Life of Symeon the Fool*; ed. Rydén, 77; trans. Krueger, 148.

or as “taking” vows, that is, whether they registered as private and perhaps informal promises or as institutional and even sacramental forms. The former seems more likely, yet this possibility does not diminish the earnestness with which such vows were pronounced or the intensity of emotion that they might come to represent. By exchanging these vows, pairs of monks were able to make an institution of their domestic partnership. Certainly, this is one way to read Eulogios’s contract with Aioulios.

Although the affective structure of these relationships is likely to have been various, John Cassian’s writings offer a firsthand, if idealized, account that opens a window onto how a monastic couple might have understood their own partnership. Even though Cassian did not include monastic pairs in his typology of the monastic life, he himself presented a classic valorization of two monks living and traveling together. Cassian, who would later found monasteries in Gaul, left his native Scythia Minor (now Romania) together with his friend Germanus in the early 380s to travel first to the Holy Land and then to Egypt. Of Germanus, Cassian wrote: “Both of us had been together since our days as recruits fighting the first of our battles of the spirit. We had been together in community life and in the desert, and, to show our close friendship and our common purpose [*significandam sodalitatatis ac propositi nostri parilitatem*], each of us would say that we were one mind and one soul living in two bodies [*unam mentem atque animam duobus inesse corporibus*].”⁵⁶ While in Egypt they sat at the feet of the great monastic teachers of the day; and Cassian later produced a literary record of these conferences that would become a foundational text for Latin monasticism. Cassian’s works were also quickly epitomized and translated into Greek.⁵⁷

Cassian’s sixteenth conference reconstructs a conversation that he and Germanus had with Abba Joseph of Thmuis about friendship. Cassian related

⁵⁶ Cassian *Conferences* 1.1; trans. Luibheid, 37. On Cassian, see Philip Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority, and the Church in the Age of Jerome and Cassian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 169–234; and Columba Stewart, *Cassian the Monk* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). Cicero’s treatise *De amicitia* (*On Friendship*) provided Cassian with some of his vocabulary for understanding affective bonds between male friends.

⁵⁷ The *Rule of Benedict* 42 recommends that Cassian’s *Conferences* be read aloud during meals or, on fast days, after vespers. The *Alphabetical Collection* of the *Apophthegmata patrum* included eight sayings attributed to Cassian, showing that he was part of the oral tradition among Greek-speaking monks. Writing at the Monastery of Mount Sinai in the first half of the seventh century, John Klimax (*The Ladder of Paradise*, Step 4, On Obedience; PG 88:717; *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, trans. Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell [New York: Paulist, 1982], 114) cited “the great Cassian” and his “marvelously philosophic and sublime chapter on discernment,” referring to Cassian *Conferences* 2.10. John Klimax probably knew Cassian in a Greek translation, most likely an epitome. Photios (*Bibliotheca* 197) attested epitomes of Cassian *Institutes* 1–4, 5–12, and *Conferences*, 1–2, 7; but John Klimax may have had access to more of Cassian’s texts. See Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 158–59nn238–45.

that, upon meeting the monastic companions, Joseph inquired whether they were brothers by birth (*germani fratres*). Cassian and Germanus explained that “we were united in a tie of spiritual and not carnal brotherhood [*non carnali, sed spirituali essemus fraternitate devincti*], and that from the first commencement of our renunciation of the world we had always been joined together in an unbroken bond [*quam in coenobii studio individua semper conjunctione sociatos*] as well as in our travels.”⁵⁸ Whereupon Joseph began to teach about the nature of friendship, particularly the ideal companionship between two ascetics who have “been joined together in companionship out of their burning love of Christ,” who “mortify their own desires” and are united in zeal, purpose, and spirit (16.3). Such friends “never, or at any rate hardly ever, disagree” (16.5) and practiced together virtues of humility and contrition, love, the effective dissipation of anger, and the repression of lust. This love did not negate love for others, although it was a love for a specific person. Joseph cited, as an example of a particular friendship, the love of Jesus for John the Evangelist, “‘that disciple whom Jesus loved’ [John 13:23] though certainly he embraced all the other eleven.” Indeed, John the Evangelist merited this love as “the prerogative of virginity and the purity of his flesh” (16.14). Joseph’s discourse shows real insight into the strain of living together in community with another, and he warned against harboring anger, withholding forgiveness, and giving your companion “a sullen silence” (16.18) that was really a form of anger and that did injury to the other. At the end of the conference, John concluded that Joseph’s talk on friendship “fired us with a more ardent desire to preserve the love of our fellowship as a lasting one” (16.28). Less a historical record of how Cassian and Germanus might have lived together, the conference served as a spiritual guide for a monastic pair. Indeed, Cassian clearly offered the teaching to assist others who, like him and his companion, were persisting in lifelong celibate partnership.

As a didactic text, the sixteenth conference thus endorsed the creation and maintenance of monastic companionships and gives a glimpse of the place of such bonds in monastic ethical reflection in Egypt and beyond. And at this point we have perhaps left monastic realities and returned to monastic ideals.

REGULATING HOMOSEXUAL ACTIVITY

The literary and documentary evidence describing and endorsing lifelong companionship between two celibate men must be read against the pervasive

⁵⁸ Cassian *Conferences* 16.1; *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, trans. Edgar C. S. Gibson, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (New York: Christian Literature, 1890–1900), ser. 2, 11:30 (hereafter cited in the text). See also Adele Fiske, “Cassian and Monastic Friendship,” *American Benedictine Review* 12, no. 2 (1961): 190–205.

and more familiar concern about homosexual desires and homogenital activity in late ancient and early Byzantine monastic literature. The idealization of the chaste love between equals or between two adults of different status contrasted with efforts taken to prevent erotic desire that might plague senior monks in the company of much more youthful ones. The corpus of saints' lives composed by the sixth-century monk Cyril of Scythopolis reveals a persistent anxiety about the desires that monks might have for beardless adolescents. Apparently, it was safer, both for the older monks and for the youths, for such pubescents and prepubescents to dwell in the more regulated environment of a cenobitic monastery. According to Cyril, when Euthymios, the great Palestinian monastic founder of the fifth century, began to accept disciples, he counseled his first students, "take care not to let your youngest brother come near my cell, for because of the warfare of the enemy it is not right for a feminine face to be found in a lavra."⁵⁹ This concern echoed a saying in the *Alphabetical Collection of the Apophthegmata patrum*, redacted early in the sixth century, likely in Palestine: "Abba Eudemon said this about Abba Paphnutios the Father of Sketis: 'I went down there while I was still young, and he would not let me stay, saying to me, "I do not allow the face of a woman to dwell in Sketis, because of conflict with the enemy."'"⁶⁰ The loose structure of authority within the lavra or among the cells at this Egyptian community increased the monk's vulnerability to homoerotic longing for beardless youths in the absence of an abbot's oversight. When the young Sabas arrived at the same lavra, Cyril presented this stricture as a particular concern for Euthymios. Euthymios said to Sabas: "It is not right, my child, for you, being but a youth to live in a lavra. It is more beneficial for youths to be in a cenobium." Whereupon Cyril supplied: "The truth is that the great Euthymios was very much on his guard against accepting an adolescent in his lavra because of the activities of the evil one."⁶¹

In subsequent years Sabas himself allowed only "men who had advanced to eminence in the monastic life" to dwell in the informal setting of the lavra. According to Cyril, Sabas believed that "a monk enclosed in a cell must be

⁵⁹ *Kyrrillos von Skythopolis*, ed. Eduard Schwartz, *Texte und Untersuchungen* 49, no. 2 (1939): 26; Cyril of Scythopolis, *Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, trans. R. M. Price (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian, 1991), 21. On the archaeology of the Palestinian lavras, see Joseph Patrich, *Sabas, Leader of Palestinian Monasticism: A Comparative Study in Eastern Monasticism, Fourth to Seventh Centuries* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1995), 57–137.

⁶⁰ Eudemon 1; *PG* 65:176; *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, trans. Benedicta Ward (London: Mowbray, 1975), 64.

⁶¹ *Kyrrillos von Skythopolis*, ed. Schwartz, 50; trans. Price, 46. Cyril repeated this episode in his *Life of Sabas* (*Kyrrillos von Skythopolis*, ed. Schwartz, 91). See also the account of Euthymios's reception of Kyriakos (*Kyrrillos von Skythopolis*, ed. Schwartz, 224). It should be noted, however, that Euthymios himself had a lifelong disciple named Domitian, who "served the holy father for over fifty years" (ed. Schwartz, 61; trans. Price, 57).

gifted with discernment and zealous, a combater, sober, self-controlled and disciplined, a teacher not needing teaching, capable of curbing all the members of this body [τά . . . μέλη πάντα τοῦ σώματος] and keeping a secure watch on his mind.”⁶² Like Euthymios, Sabas “would never allow an adolescent to live in his community who had not yet covered his chin with a beard, because of the snares of the evil one.”⁶³ Over the course of his life, Cyril himself lived in the monastery of Euthymios, the Great Lavra of Sabas, and Sabas’s New Lavra, all in the Judean desert; thus his report of the masters’ rules undoubtedly reflects practice into the 550s. Furthermore, John Moschos received his tonsure at the Monastery of Saint Theodosios on the road between Bethlehem and the Great Lavra of Sabas in the 560s and spent time in other Palestinian monasteries, including the New Lavra in the subsequent decade.⁶⁴ Moschos would have been very familiar with Euthymios’s and Sabas’s rules regarding youths, then, even as he celebrated companionship between adult men.

It is worth remarking that the desire of an older man for a younger one follows standard governing models for sexuality in antiquity and the early Middle Ages, in which it was assumed that social superiors penetrated—or desired to penetrate—social inferiors.⁶⁵ Fear of such pederastic desires recurred in monastic literature and reflected widespread concerns about the workings of the demon Lust (Porneia).⁶⁶ David Brakke has drawn attention to the frequency with which a monk’s pederastic desires manifested

⁶² *Kyrrillos von Skythopolis*, ed. Schwartz, 113; trans. Price, 122. See also Patrich, *Sabas*, 262–63. For concern regarding the genitals among “all the members” of the body in middle Byzantine monastic literature, see Derek Krueger, “Homoerotic Spectacle and the Monastic Body in Symeon the New Theologian,” in Burrus and Keller, *Toward a Theology of Eros*, 99–118, 399–403.

⁶³ *Kyrrillos von Skythopolis*, ed. Schwartz, 113; trans. Price, 123. Compare *Kyrrillos von Skythopolis*, ed. Schwartz, 171, where Sabas also forbade eunuchs at the Great Lavra (later the Monastery of Mar Saba).

⁶⁴ Chadwick, “John Moschos,” 49. For Moschos at the Monastery of Euthymios, see John Moschos *Spiritual Meadow* 21.

⁶⁵ This literature on antiquity is now vast. On the conventions for the structure of homoerotic desire in antiquity, see Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 3, *The Care of the Self*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1988), 189–232; David M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 15–40; Craig A. Williams, *Roman Homosexuality: Ideologies of Masculinity in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). Work remains to be done on homosexuality in Byzantium; see Dion C. Smythe, “In Denial: Same-Sex Desire in Byzantium,” in *Desire and Denial in Byzantium*, ed. Liz James (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 1999), 139–48; Krueger, “Homoerotic Spectacle.”

⁶⁶ For sayings that reveal knowledge of and concern with monks’ desire for boys within the *Alphabetical Collection*, see Eudemone 1 (*PG* 65:176); John the Persian 1; Poemen 176 (*PG* 65:236). Isaac of Kellia warned: “Do not bring boys [παῖδιά] here. Four churches in Sketis are deserted because of boys” (5; *PG* 65:225). See Graham Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 125.

themselves in the appearance of black Ethiopian boys.⁶⁷ And indeed, Moschos's text was not entirely free of what one might now call homosexual panic. None of the adult brothers developed or expressed a specifically sexual desire for another, and yet two grouped stories about demons introduced the specter of the troubling desire for young boys that is familiar from the *Apophthegmata patrum* and the *Life of Antony*. In the first, a monk weaving baskets in his cell and singing the psalms in sequence saw "what looked like a Saracen youth wearing a bread-basket." The youth came through his window, stood before the monk, and began to dance. "As I continued singing psalms," the monk recorded, "he said to me, 'Elder, do I dance well?'" The monk did not answer. The dark boy then pointed out that the elder had made mistakes in his recitation of the psalms. Then the monk prostrated himself before God, and the boy disappeared.⁶⁸ The lack of mindfulness during prayerful labor left an opening for pederastic desires.

The second story connected lustful thoughts with feelings of frustration and inwardly directed anger that disrupted a monk's focus on prayerful labor. Isaac the Theban had engaged in handwork for fifty-two years near Lycopolis when he made a mistake while assembling a mosquito net. "I was upset about that mistake because I could not find it. Whilst I was so distraught, a youth came in through the window and said to me, 'You have made a mistake. Give the work to me and I will put it right.'" In the conversation that ensued the monk tried to send the boy away. But the youth explained to the monk: "You compelled me to come here, and you are mine." Thoughts of boys certainly distracted monks, but here the story deflected from the problem of erotic thoughts during work to friction between adult monks. When the monk asked how it could be that he brought the youth's visit upon himself, the boy revealed: "For three Sundays running you have received holy communion while hating your neighbor [ἐχθραίνων τῷ γείτονί σου]." Apparently, this monk bore a grudge against another on account of a plate of lentils, and this boy was in fact the demon in charge of grudges. So the monk went to his brother (ἀδελφός) and prostrated himself before him and was reconciled with him (ἐποιησάμεν ἀγάπην).⁶⁹

Thus the story shifted from one of lust for boys to one of proper love between monks. The inappropriate erotic desire emerged as displaced anger, both with the self and with the intimate.⁷⁰ The narrative's final line emphasized the sorting of love and lust. When the monk returned to his cell, he reported: "I found that my visitor had burned the mosquito net and that mat on which

⁶⁷ Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, 155–75.

⁶⁸ John Moschos *Spiritual Meadow* 160; trans. Wortley, 132.

⁶⁹ John Moschos *Spiritual Meadow* 161; trans. Wortley, 132–33.

⁷⁰ For more on the role of Ethiopian demons in articulating problems in relationships between monks, see Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, 168–71.

I had prostrated myself, because of his jealousy concerning our love.”⁷¹ In this cautionary tale the demon inserted himself precisely because of the rupture in the monk’s love for his brother. Although it is unclear whether these two were paired as closely as others were, the point carried for all monks dwelling with or near others. Moreover, the effect of placing this story right after the story of the dancing Saracen boy suggests that for Moschos, the desire for boys was a symptom or sublimation of other problems. On the one hand, the text distinguished between pederasty and the desire for companionship between two monks; on the other, it seems to understand pederasty and the love between two monks to be complexly related.

Another tradition within the *Alphabetical Collection* of the *Apophthegmata patrum* indicates that boys were not the only objects of homoerotic desires and that mature monks might have experienced sexual desires for other mature monks. A saying of Abba Achilles, himself a senior monk, relates that “a great old man” came to the Thebaid to see him and said: “Father, you are a temptation to me [πολεμοῦμαι εἰς σέ; more literally, “I am at war with myself about you].” Whereupon Achilles responded with some surprise: “Come, even you, old man, you are still tempted because of me?” Achilles regarded the other’s confession as a practice of humility and replied: “This is not fornication [πορνεία], but hatred of evil demons,” but his deflection of the feeling implicitly acknowledged the possibility and the dangers of homosexual desire between adult men.⁷²

The communal life of the cenobium did not erase these desires (or other homoerotic desires, for that matter); it merely provided structure and oversight to keep these desires in check.⁷³ Shenoute of Atripe (died 465), superior of the White Monastery in middle Egypt (near modern Sohag), railed against sexual misconduct, including fornication in general, homosexual activity, pederasty, and masturbation. “Some of those among you are devils: the ones who defile your sons and your daughters, those who became effeminate [*malakos*] among you, and those who sleep with men.”⁷⁴ Elsewhere he declared: “God is not the God of the effeminate [*malakos*],

⁷¹ John Moschos *Spiritual Meadow* 161; trans. Wortley, 133.

⁷² *Alphabetical Collection* of the *Apophthegmata patrum*, Achilles 6; trans. Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 30

⁷³ Albrecht Diem (“Organisierte Keuschheit: Sexualprävention in Mönchtum der Spätantike und des frühen Mittelalters,” *Invertito: Jahrbuch für die Geschichte der Homosexualitäten* 3 [2001]: 8–37) provides an excellent survey of monastic rules designed to deter homogenital activity, with particular attention to the Latin West.

⁷⁴ Shenoute of Atripe *Canon* 1 90.27–29; *Manuscripts coptes: CGC nos. 9201–9304*, ed. Henri Munier (Cairo: Imprimerie de l’Institut français d’archéologie orientale, 1916), 103–4; quoted in Caroline T. Schroeder, *Monastic Bodies: Discipline and Salvation in Shenoute of Atripe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 36, see also 37–38. For additional sources and broader context, see Heike Behlmer, “Koptische Quellen zu (männlicher) ‘Homosexualität,’” *Studien zur altägyptischen Kultur* 28 (2000): 27–53.

those who lie down with males, thieves, and defilers of boys and girls.”⁷⁵ Brakke argues that homoerotic activity “became for Shenoute the archetypal sin, the most extreme violation of categories.”⁷⁶ It is important to note, however, that Shenoute distinguished between effeminacy, same-sex sexual relations between adults, and sexual relations with children as separate, even if related, problems.⁷⁷ Significantly, Shenoute, who also oversaw a monastic enclosure for women, also rebuked his female charges for engaging in homoerotic activity.⁷⁸ In a letter he meted out severe punishment for two women, Taēse and Tsansnō, for “running after” other women in “friendship and physical desire.”⁷⁹ Meanwhile, Horsiesios, the second superior of the complex of Pachomian monastic communities located up the Nile from Shenoute’s monastery, devoted one of his “instructions” to the problem of “evil friendship.” He asserted that he was not teaching monks to practice enmity with their neighbors; rather, he was concerned with homogenital activity and its precipitating desires: “You anxiously glance this way and that, you watch until you have found the opportune moment, then you give him what is (hidden) under the hem of your garment, so that God himself, and his Christ Jesus, will pour out the wrath of his anger on you and on him.”⁸⁰ In contrast to John Cassian’s celebration of chaste friendship between two monks, these Egyptian monastic leaders demonstrated constant concern to identify and root out both homosexual activity and desires.

⁷⁵ Shenoute *Canon* 1 90.24; *Sinuthii Archimandritae vita et opera omnia*, ed. Johannes Leipold, 3 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1906–13), 3:203; quoted in Schroeder, *Monastic Bodies*, 38.

⁷⁶ Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, 101, see also 206–8 with additional references.

⁷⁷ On the meaning of *malakos* in early Christian Greek, see Dale B. Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 43–47. Effeminacy was generally regarded as evidence of excessive cross-sex sexual desire. See also Halperin, *How to Do a History of Homosexuality*, 110–13.

⁷⁸ Rebecca Krawiec, *Shenoute and the Women of the White Monastery: Egyptian Monasticism in Late Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 37–38; Bernadette J. Brooten, *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 348–50.

⁷⁹ For the text and extended discussion, see Terry G. Wilfong, “Friendship and Physical Desire: The Discourse of Female Homoeroticism in Fifth-Century CE Egypt,” in *Among Women: From the Homosocial to the Homoerotic in the Ancient World*, ed. Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz and Lisa Auanger (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 304–29.

⁸⁰ Horsiesios *Instructions* 7; *Œuvres de S. Pachôme et de ses disciples*, ed. L. T. Lefort, *Corpus scriptorum Christianorum orientalium* 159/*Scriptores Coptici* 23 (Louvain, Belgium: Imprimerie orientaliste L. Durbecq, 1956), 75–80; trans. in Wilfong, “Friendship and Physical Desire,” 314; also trans. in Armand Veilleux, ed., *Pachomian Koinonia*, vol. 3, *Instructions, Letters and Other Writings of Saint Pachomius and His Disciples* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian, 1982), 145–52.

Monastic leaders in the West also sought regulation to deter sexual activity. The *Rule of Benedict* famously charged that “monks should sleep in separate beds,” either all in the same room or in groups of ten or twenty, “under the supervision of older monks. A candle must be left burning all night in the room until morning.” The monks were also expected to sleep clothed with a belt or cord around their waist. “The younger brothers’ beds must not be next to each other but interspersed among those of the older monks.”⁸¹ These provisions aimed at preventing both homogenital activity and masturbation and were predicated on the assumption that younger monks were less able to control their lustful desires than older and more experienced ascetics.

Close friendships within the monastic community called for constant vigilance. In the monastery at Mount Sinai in the mid-seventh century, John Klimax in *The Ladder of Paradise* praised the discernment of senior monks who could perceive and thwart the homoerotic associations between other monks by sowing dissension between them: “Blessed are the peacemakers [Matthew 5:9]. No one will deny this. But I have seen foemakers who are also blessed. Two monks once developed a lascivious [πορνική] fondness for one another. But a discerning and very experienced father brought them to the stage of detesting each other. He made them enemies by telling each man he was being slandered by the other, and by this piece of chicanery he warded off the demon’s malice, and by causing hatred he brought an end to fornication [πορνεία].”⁸² The panopticon of the monastery thus, ideally, held homogenital activity in check. John also revealed that close friendships between monks might generate rumor within the monastery even when the men were chaste, and he provided an example of how to avoid such concern, again justifying the use of deception: “I have known young men who were bound to each other in accord with God [κατὰ Θεὸν νέους ἑαυτοῖς προσκειμένους], but who, to avoid harm to the conscience of others, agreed to avoid each other’s company for a time.”⁸³ The intimacy between these young monks did not pose a risk to them, but it could cause trouble for onlookers. Indeed, the passage recalls the story from the *Apophthegmata patrum* of the two chaste monks placed under the same blanket. The participle *proskheimenoi* in the passage above, which can be translated “were bound (to each other),” literally means “were lying beside

⁸¹ *Rule of Benedict* 22; *The Rule of Benedict*, trans. Carolinne White (London: Penguin, 2008), 43. On the dissemination of this regulation in later monastic rules, see Diem, “Organisierte Keuschheit,” 13–15.

⁸² John Klimax *The Ladder of Paradise*, Step 26, On Discernment; PG 88:1065; trans. Luibheid and Russell, 250 (with modifications).

⁸³ John Klimax *The Ladder of Paradise*; PG 88:1065; trans. Luibheid and Russell, 250 (with modifications).

(each other),” and thus John might have been indicating that the two young monks regularly “slept together in a godly fashion.” Maintaining physical distance prevented moral damage to others. The evidence of *The Ladder* confirms that monastic companions, whether blameless or blameworthy, remained the objects of an external monastic gaze.

Only a few decades earlier and in the same monastery in which John Klimax wrote, John Moschos and his friend Sophronios had themselves spent ten years living as a monastic couple.⁸⁴ It was there that they encountered Stephen the Cappadocian, whose humble confession of his vision of naked monks illustrated a monastic ideal of pure companionship. Why did Stephen tell his story to them? What did Stephen see before him in Moschos and Sophronios? Why did Moschos include this story in the middle of his account of years traveling and dwelling with Sophronios? The *Spiritual Meadow*'s portraits of monastic companionship must be read as one side of a debate within the monastic world about the viability, status, and moral value of such long-term close relationships between male celibates. Moschos's narratives implicitly championed monastic pair bonds; they gave evidence that same-sex monastic cohabitation and companionship had become one of a number of possible options in the ascetic life. Like Cassian, Moschos presented chaste friendship as an attractive form of that life, ideally separate from homogenital activity and homosexual desire.⁸⁵ Klimax also acknowledged the possibility of such bonds but worried about their risk to other monks as well as to themselves. The confession of Stephen the Cappadocian clarified that for many monks, a truly chaste friendship was both desirable and beyond reach.

HAGIOGRAPHY AND THE MONASTIC COUPLE

It is the work of hagiography to present dazzling visions of holy people. Narrative representations of monastic companionship are perhaps most dazzling when they depict these relationships in crisis. In the dramatic parting of Symeon the Fool and his companion, John, Leontios revealed the shared basis of a saintly life together. When Symeon first decided to leave their cell for the city of Emesa, he asked John to join him: “What more benefit do we derive, brother, from passing more time in the desert? But if you hear me, get up, let us depart; let us save others. For as we are, we do not benefit anyone except ourselves, and have not brought anyone else to salvation.”⁸⁶ Symeon quoted scripture to justify abandoning the monastic cell for the sake of others. But John could not leave the desert, sensing that

⁸⁴ Chadwick (“John Moschos,” 57) dates their time at Mount Sinai to 580/81–590/91.

⁸⁵ On monastic formulations that distinguished between friendship and homosexual desire, see also Diem, “Organisierte Keuschheit,” 28–32.

⁸⁶ Leontios of Neapolis *Life of Symeon the Fool*, ed. Rydén, 76; trans. Krueger, 148.

he had not yet reached the “level of perfection” that would be necessary for him to abandon the strict asceticism possible only in the wilderness. John attempted to dissuade Symeon from leaving him, saying: “For the sake of Him who joined us [δι’ αὐτὸν τὸν ζεύξαντα ἡμᾶς], do not wish to be parted [ἀποζευχθῆναι] from your brother. You know that, after God, I have no one except you, my brother, but I renounced all [πάντας ἠρνησάμην] and was bound to you [πρὸς σὲ ἐκολλήθην], and now you wish to leave me in the desert, as in an open sea.”⁸⁷ Rapp writes of these two men: “Their parting speeches are testimony to the intimacy of their relation,” and she sees it and other passages in the same text as the representation of the emotional context possible in Byzantine ritual brotherhood.⁸⁸ I suspect, however, that the story provides witness even more to the emotional context of early Byzantine monastic partnership. Moreover, the discourse points also in another direction. In retrospect, and in an attempt to keep Symeon from leaving, John described his bond with Symeon in a semantic range that overlaps with marriage. Both the words for joining and parting derive from the verb *zeugnumi*, “to yoke,” and they most often meant, respectively, “to join in wedlock” and, with the prefix *apo-*, “to separate” or “to divorce.” The word translated as “bound,” from the verb *kollaō*, can mean “joined fast together” or “united”; a closely related form of the verb appears in Genesis 2:24: “A man shall leave his father and his mother and shall cleave [LXX: προσκολληθήσεται] to his wife.”⁸⁹ The language also recalls the Syriac *ethnaqaf* found in the letter of John Scholastikos of Bostra about the two monks who left the monastery and “cleaved to one another.” Clearly, this cleaving was part of the vocabulary for describing and understanding the intimacy of a monastic couple. Invoking such language, Leontios called on shared cultural assumptions about monks who were bound to each other. While the context militates against understanding the relationship between Symeon and John as a sexual one, Leontios’s narration played on tropes of parting spouses or lovers familiar in the late ancient novels. We have entered the world of melodrama.

Like the patient brothers of the *Apophthegmata* and the *Spiritual Meadow* who waited for their wayward companions, John received his reward. At the end of the *Life of Symeon the Fool* Symeon returned to John for a brief visit. Symeon related: “I found him to have made great progress, and I was overjoyed.” In a moment of clairvoyance Symeon saw upon John’s head a martyr’s crown with the inscription: “Crown of patience in the desert.” Shortly thereafter, Symeon and John died, and within a few days of each other: “For

⁸⁷ Leontios of Neapolis *Life of Symeon the Fool*, ed. Rydén, 76–77; trans. Krueger, 148.

⁸⁸ Rapp, “Ritual Brotherhood,” 296–97.

⁸⁹ In fact, some manuscripts of the *Life of Symeon* have the variant προσκολληθῆναι σοι, using the vocabulary of Genesis outright. See the critical apparatus in Leontios of Neapolis *Life of Symeon the Fool*, ed. Rydén, 77, line 2.

during these three days, the Lord will receive His most humble Fool and John, his brother. For I myself went to say to him, ‘Brother, come, let us go, now is the time.’”⁹⁰ In accordance with John’s earlier prediction that perhaps not even death could separate them, Symeon and John were reunited in death and within the communion of the saints. Leontios thereby raised the possibility that monastic companionship might last into eternity.

Like Abba Stephen the Cappadocian, we might follow the fantasy of the monastic couple far across the sea and into another world. A similar eschatological association of monastic friends appeared not long after in traditions from Anglo-Saxon England. The *Anonymous Life of Cuthbert*, composed between 699 and 705, related how the anchorite Herbert, who dwelled “on the islands of a western lake,” met the monk and bishop Cuthbert in the city of Carlisle, after having made previous visits to him. Cuthbert told Herbert, “We shall never see each other again in this world.” With lamentation and tears, Herbert begged Cuthbert to ask “the Holy Trinity not to leave me in this present world bereaved of you after death, but receive me with you into the joy of the eternal kingdom.” Cuthbert prayed, and the request was granted: “The bishop and the anchorite died according to the bishop’s promise, and they reign together with Christ for ever and ever.”⁹¹ Reworking and expanding this text around 721, the Venerable Bede elaborated on the incident, fleshing out details that reveal, in part, the influence of John Cassian. Bede introduced Herbert thus: “Now there was a priest of reverend life named Herebeht who had long been bound to Cuthbert the man of God by the bonds of spiritual friendship [*spiritualis amicitiae foedere copulatus*]. . . . He used to come to Cuthbert every year and receive teaching from him concerning his everlasting salvation.”⁹² Herbert asked that “we may journey together to the skies and see His glory.” They did not see each other again in the flesh, but “they departed from the body at the same moment of time and their spirits were straightaway united in the presence of the blessed vision.”⁹³ Through such visions the Christian audience was taught to celebrate the eternal union of monastic friends.

CONCLUSIONS

In late antiquity and early Byzantium some men pursuing the monastic life sought and achieved enduring and lifelong companionship with other men.

⁹⁰ Leontios of Neapolis *Life of Symeon the Fool*; ed. Rydén, 100–101; trans. Krueger, 168–69.

⁹¹ *Anonymous Life of Cuthbert* 4.9; *Two “Lives” of Saint Cuthbert: A Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede’s Prose Life*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave (1940; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 124–25 (with modifications).

⁹² Bede *Life of Cuthbert* 28; trans. Colgrave, 248–49.

⁹³ Bede *Life of Cuthbert* 28; trans. Colgrave, 250–51.

The literary accounts confirm that the practice of monks living and traveling in pairs was widely known and occurred with sufficient regularity throughout the monastic centers of the eastern Mediterranean as to be worthy of remark in literary texts without seeming outside a range of possible norms. At the same time, the tales considered here did not present a single form or model for monastic companionship, suggesting that monks formed these bonds in a variety of circumstances. Some men forged partnerships with men of similar age and status, while others paired with men of different status, especially when a master shared his dwellings with a disciple. Both patterns altered paradigms for male bonding derived from pagan antiquity. These various Christian arrangements received some level of sanction from other monks, who looked to monastic pairs as possible ideals for the solitary life. In some cases, these companionships received ecclesiastical endorsement from either bishops or—perhaps chiefly later—abbots. Some pairs, like John Cassian and Germanus or John Moschos and Sophronios, moved together in and out of monasteries and hermitages, suggesting a relatively free flow for these companionships within the bounds of cenobitic life. While it is unclear whether there were formal rites to consecrate these friendships, it was apparently common for monks in pairs to promise fidelity to each other, particularly to promise not to be separated from each other until they were parted by death. Such realities stand behind the literary texts and are confirmed by the occasional piece of documentary evidence.

The monastic literature composed in early Byzantium, however, had aims beyond the representation of monastic realities: authors and redactors strove to use narrative to illustrate virtues. The stories of monks living together in the *Apophthegmata patrum* presented these men as exemplars of charity or agape, a word sometimes translated as “brotherly love.” Within monastic culture and beyond, these tales of monastic companionship articulated ideals for friendship, mutual regard and assistance, fidelity, and peaceable living. They also inspired sentimental attachment; the literary accounts encouraged their audiences to be emotionally invested in the success of monastic partnerships and to suffer distress when these partnerships were threatened. Furthermore, Cassian’s writings confirm that the inner workings of monastic companionships provided opportunities for moral reflection.

Obviously, the history of celibacy and the technologies developed to support it are part of the history of sexuality, and modern scholars have recognized how early Christian monasticism regulated celibacy in community.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Michel Foucault, “The Battle for Chastity,” in Michel Foucault, *Religion and Culture*, ed. Jeremy R. Carrette (New York: Routledge, 1999), 188–97; Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 213–40; Schroeder, *Monastic Bodies*, 67–74.

The evidence considered here augments our understanding of the range of its communal forms. One viable option for men to practice celibacy together in early Byzantium involved maintaining a primary emotional commitment to one other man. In the *Apophthegmata* and in the *Spiritual Meadow* partnerships sometimes featured as mechanisms to help one of the companions avoid, overcome, and even atone for feelings and deeds of lust. Monastic companionship offered a stopgap for both cross-sex and same-sex desires, including pederastic desires for pubescent youths, confirming once again that heterosexual identity was not assumed in late antiquity and that men were routinely regarded as capable of desire for both men and women.⁹⁵ To the extent that community and shared life with other men might provide a structure for supporting celibacy, they were available not only in the broadly homosocial environment of the monastery but also in the homosocial pair bond. Indeed, the narratives of male monastic companionship celebrated the love of two celibates for each other.

The pairing of successful celibates, however, might also pose a moral and emotional danger for others. Ample evidence indicates concern that close monastic friendships could be easily misinterpreted by onlookers who themselves might be driven to lust and perhaps also envy at the thought or sight of two so closely bonded men. The pattern of cohabitation encoded desire even as it sought to compensate for it. Monastic companionship thus provided an occasion for vice on the part of others. John Klimax and monastic regulators also revealed what is easy to assume, namely, that some closely attached men indeed engaged in sexual activity with each other. Ironically, at the same time that narratives of men together made distinctions between the desire for monastic companionship and lust, they reflected worry that these two desires overlapped.

The narrative representation of monastic intimacy prompts further reflection on the manipulation of eros in ascetic literature. Stories of monastic companionship advance an understanding that the construction of ascetic ideals not only incorporated desire into the ascetic life but also incorporated desire into the texts in which the ascetics themselves were portrayed as desirable objects.⁹⁶ In Moschos's seventh-century *Spiritual Meadow*, for example, narratives of monastic pairs become desirable to a reading or listening audience, which then replicates the pleasure that Moschos and Sophronios took in hearing the stories for the first time and that Moschos offered again to Sophronios in presenting him with the anthology

⁹⁵ James A. Schultz, "Heterosexuality as a Threat to Medieval Studies," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 15, no. 1 (2006): 14–29; Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality*, 37–38, 130–34.

⁹⁶ Burrus, *The Sex Lives of Saints*, uncovers the erotic substrate running through a number of fourth- and fifth-century Christian hagiographical texts.

containing these stories. The stories themselves and the texts that contain them also further problematize the use of modern conceptions of sexuality as a paradigm for interpreting representations of eros in premodern and, specifically, early Byzantine texts. The companions in the text and their lifelong love become objects of readerly desire. As with Stephen the Cappadocian's vision of the naked pair, the gazing reader's desire is aroused and directed toward that monastic ideal: the gazer wants them to dwell together, and the gazer desires to dwell together with them. The monastic eros and the readerly eros at play in these accounts converge, seeking and sustaining fulfillment in companionship and cohabitation.