ASCETIC CULTURE

Essays in Honor of Philip Rousseau

edited by

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and

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for

PHILIP
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**Abbreviations**

**BIBLE**

Follow NRSV abbreviations.

**PAPYRI AND OSTRACA**

Papyri and ostraca (signaled by “P.” or “O.”) are abbreviated according to the American Society of Papyrologists’ *Checklist of Greek, Latin, Demotic and Coptic Papyri, Ostraca and Tablets*, compiled by J.F. Oates et al. Latest version (January 2013) at http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/papyrus/texts/clist.html.

**MODERN WORKS**

- **Lampe** *Patristic Greek Lexicon*. 

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SERIES

ACW: Ancient Christian Writers
AW: Athanasius Werke
CCSL: Corpus Christianorum–Series Latina
CS: Cistercian Studies
CSCO: Corpus scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
CSEL: Corpus scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
DOPM: Dakhleh Oasis Project Monographs
GCS: Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller
FC: Fathers of the Church
LCL: Loeb Classical Library
NPNF: Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church
PG: Patrologia Graeca
PO: Patrologia Orientalis
PTS: Patristische Texte und Studien
SC: Sources chrétiennes
TCH: Transformation of the Classical Heritage
TU: Texte und Untersuchungen

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### Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CH</td>
<td>Church History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HTR</td>
<td>Harvard Theological Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JECS</td>
<td>Journal of Early Christian Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JTS</td>
<td>Journal of Theological Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REG</td>
<td>Revue des études grecques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SM</td>
<td>Studia monastica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>Studia patristica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP</td>
<td>Theologie und Philosophie</td>
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<td>VC</td>
<td>Vigiliae Christianae</td>
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Introduction

Like the children of Israel, Philip Rousseau has spent forty years in the desert. During that time, the monks of early Christianity have been both his companions and his subjects, and they have accompanied him from Oxford to New Zealand and to the United States.

From the date of his completion of the doctoral thesis at Wolfson College, Oxford, in 1972, to his present occupancy of the Mellon Chair of Early Christian Studies at the Catholic University of America, he has forged a new path in the scholarship of early Christian monasticism — a path that has allowed him, and his readers, to spy out the social world of these odd new inhabitants of the empire, a world that shaped and qualified their theological ideas and their spiritual ambitions. As Rousseau himself has noted, he did not intend to inhabit that land, the marginal and imagined territory where monastics dwelt, and in his daily life he is just as much a man of the city as the subject of his splendid biography, Basil, bishop of ancient Caesarea, and beyond that, a paterfamilias.

The desert Rousseau has made his own is, of course, the wilderness exurbs of the fourth and early fifth centuries, where the single men...
and women—deliberately segregating themselves from the obligations of marriage and the household—imagined and created new institutions among the Christian assemblies in the late ancient Mediterranean world. Beginning with Ascetics, Authority and the Church in the Age of Jerome and Cassian, he belonged to, and help shape, a new movement in scholarship. The study of ancient asceticism has not flagged since he started to write.

Philip Rousseau was born on November 3, 1939, the son of a British naval officer and his wife; he has vivid memories of the family’s posting to Washington, D.C., during World War II. Later, as beneficiary of the Jesuits’ mighty ratio studiorum, he gained his first postsecondary degree in 1962, at Heythrop College in Oxfordshire. Thus, when Rousseau came to Wolfson College, Oxford, for his master’s and doctoral degrees, he was already familiar with the neighborhood of the university. He had earned his licentiate in philosophy, had lived for a time in Maria Laach, a Benedictine monastery in Germany, and had taught in Africa. It was in Africa that Philip met another teacher, an extraordinary young woman named Thérèse, who would become his life’s companion.

At Wolfson, Rousseau joined a circle of scholars from whom he learned the craft of the historian, and was by his own account charmed by the company of Isaiah Berlin, then president of Wolfson College. As his companions, he names John Matthews, Timothy Barnes, and Peter Brown—all scholars who, then young men, by now have shaped the study of late antiquity for the past four decades and have trained their own students. The eminences Arnaldo Momigliano, Richard Southern, and Ronald Syme were present in Oxford, along with Geoffrey de Sainte Croix, Michael Wallace Hadrill, and Karl Leyser. As he himself attests, he was both part of, and simultaneously on the edge of, a historiographical movement that produced two new generations of scholars who continue to pursue the study both of late antiquity and of monasticism and asceticism in the period.

In 1972, after the completion of his thesis, Rousseau joined the faculty of the University of Auckland in New Zealand. In 1978 his thesis had appeared as Ascetics, Authority, and the Church, and in 1985 he published Pachomius, a study of the first monastic legislator. In an essay that serves as his retractationes, Rousseau avers that the shortcoming of the first book was its relative neglect of Pachomius and that the mistake of the second
was its acceptance of the term desert as a literal, instead of a textualized — that is to say, ideal — space. But Rousseau was moving in the direction of studying the episcopal office as it emerged in the fourth century, and the result was *Basil of Caesarea*, published in 1994.

During these years, Rousseau continued to teach at Auckland; but he also migrated among the research centers of the academic world, as a Senior Fellow at Dumbarton Oaks (1981–82); as a Visiting Professor at the University of California, Berkeley (1985); as an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Exeter, England (1990); as a Member of the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton (1990); as a Visiting Scholar at his alma mater, Wolfson College, Oxford (1995); and as a Bye Fellow at Robinson College, Cambridge (1996).

In 1998, Rousseau decided to leave New Zealand for the United States and a position as the Andrew W. Mellon Distinguished Professor in the Program of Early Christian Studies at the Catholic University of America, in Washington, D.C. The three daughters he had raised with Thérèse were now back in England, and the Rousseaus took up residence in the city of Washington. For Philip, the position at Catholic meant the directorship of a strong program in the study of early Christianity, distributed among several departments. For the first time, he was able to direct master’s and doctoral students himself, and he turned the program into a thriving Center for Early Christian Studies that not only trained students but also provided scholars in the field with a place for discussion and study.

Since coming to Catholic, Rousseau has continued to converse eagerly with other scholars, both in Washington, D.C., and nearby cities, and farther afield, as Distinguished Scholar in the Senter for Høyere Studier, Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters (2003); and as Visiting Scholar at the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, University of California, Los Angeles (2010).

At Catholic, Rousseau has continued to develop his thinking on both asceticism and early Christianity. In 2002, he broadened his scope as he published *The Early Christian Centuries*, a thematic treatment of movements and important personages in the various constellations of Christian groups from the first through the fifth centuries. In 2009, *A Companion to Late Antiquity* appeared under his sole editorship; he coedited a Festschrift for Peter Brown and a collection on studies on Gregory Nazianzus. He is currently working on a book he will call *The Social Identity of the Ascetic*.
Master in Late Roman Christianity. He will also publish a collection of his essays as Essays on Jerome and Some Contemporaries.

To list Rousseau’s books and monographs is not, of course, to exhaust the list of his publications. Each year has seen reviews and articles that prepare the way for the monographs. In addition, he has lectured annually, as Mellon Professor, on more recent construals of early Christianity and the social setting of the scholars who constructed those interpretations.

As all know who have had the good fortune to converse with Philip Rousseau, his curiosity is insatiable and his industry steady. The diverse essays collected in this volume necessarily engage his rich and wide-ranging scholarship. They reassess the self-presentation and legacy of prominent monastic figures, explore the impact of the rules, consider the role of ancient educational and literary models, investigate the relationship between ascetic master and disciple, and trace the evolving legacy of scholarship.

The first group of essays discusses Egyptian monastic reading programs and the circulation of texts. Joel Kalvesmaki explores the significance of Pachomius’s use of letter symbolism. It functioned, he argues, as a means of converting prognostication and other theurgic activities into a Christian form, and of prodding readers to higher spiritual reflection. Janet Timbie’s essay reexamines the use of scripture in early Egyptian monasticism. Although scripture is not used in the early rules of the Koinonia or of the White Monastery, these rules are themselves written to sound like scripture. In later legislation (the Rule of Horsiesius and the Canons of Shenoute), Timbie finds not only allusions but actual quotations of scripture to reinforce or defend monastic practice.

The essays of both Malcolm Choat and Samuel Rubenson focus on the Life of Antony. Malcolm Choat investigates the popularity of the Life of Antony in its Egyptian context. He finds that, by the second half of the fourth century, the Life of Antony was not widely known in Pachomian circles; Athanasius’s prescriptions on the behavior of virgins, as well as Anthony’s own Letters, exerted more influence. Samuel Rubenson’s essay draws attention to the overlooked but sustained contrast between Anthony and Pythagoras and argues that an apologetic agenda drives the Life of Antony. Prompting this rivalry, Rubenson argues, is the figure of Porphyry, whose attack on Christianity gained renewed currency in the late fourth century with the ascension of Emperor Julian.
Rounding out this section, Georgia Frank’s essay explores Athanasius’s treatment of the Psalter in his *Letter to Marcellinus*. Noting the unusual completeness of Athanasius’s treatment, his careful deployment of the canons of classical rhetoric, and the fragmentation of the Psalter into various thematic lists, she argues that the letter was designed to guide Marcellinus in his memorization and subsequent recollection of the psalms as a strategy for the formation and knowledge of the self.

The second group of essays engages the topic of disciplinary culture in a variety of ascetic contexts. The first two essays focus on institutional discipline: its modalities and ends. Daniel Caner’s essay explores the emergence of penance and mourning as dominant goals in early Byzantine monasticism by focusing on John Climacus’s arresting description of “the Prison,” a penitential monastery outside Alexandria for monks who had “stumbled into sin.” While the spectacular nature of these public penances did not pass without criticism, abbots increasingly incorporated such displays within monasteries as a means of stimulating and sustaining a spirit of contrition. The goal, Caner argues, was to sharpen the monks’ awareness of their participation in the drama of heavenly judgment and redemption, to create, in effect, what Heussi calls a *Sonderwelt*.

Catherine Chin reexamines the categories of the individual and the collective in Cassian’s *Institutes* by drawing on the idea of “distributed cognition.” Cassian’s starting point, Chin argues, is the person embedded in a specific material system that extends outside the boundaries of the body. Through the common life, the ascetic person is reconfigured in terms that evoke the Origenist doctrine of the *apokatastasis*. The aim of the group, in which reunification happens, is the production not of perfected individuals but of Christ, understood as “a person produced by an interlocking network of ascetic contributors who serve as his ‘interior.’”

The following two essays turn to the household and the city as disciplinary spaces. Virginia Burrus’s essay sets Macrina’s household within the evolving history and practice of education, sexuality, and the family. A close reading of Gregory’s *Life of Macrina*, she argues, reveals an erotically charged “feminine community of pedagogical formation,” over which Macrina presides and into which she allows Gregory to enter.

Susanna Elm reexamines the common portrait of Gregory Nazianzen “as a self-centered recluse” by focusing on Gregory’s turbulent relationship with Maximus the Philosopher in the period between Theodosius’s
proclamation of *cunctos populos* in 380 and the emperor’s arrival in Constantine in November of that same year. While *Oration 25* eulogizes and *Oration 26* vilifies Maximus, both forcefully present the characteristics of the ideal ascetic and ecclesiastical leader — characteristics that Gregory himself abundantly displays — and represent an astute bid on the part of Gregory “to regain and solidify his control.”

The third cluster of essays engages the topic of imaginary landscapes and ascetic self-fashioning. The essay by James Goehring examines the cultural myth of the desert as the product of selective and purposeful memory. When Athanasius came to write the *Life of Antony*, for example, he “forgot” the urban ascetics, who had been so instrumental in protecting him, and tied ascetic renunciation firmly to the physical practice of withdrawal. The stature of these desert dwellers, already enhanced by their rugged surroundings, was further bolstered by a narrative process that re-drew these heroes in the powerful but simplified likeness of biblical figures and erased the complex confessional diversity of early monasticism. The myth of the desert was thus “both a product of the emerging Christian culture of orthodoxy and an important player in its success.”

Robin Darling Young’s essay explores the theme of *xeniteia* in the writings of the great monastic theoretician Evagrius. Arguing that it should be translated as “exile,” rather than “wandering,” Young suggests that it provided a way for Evagrius to imagine himself and his ascetic readers. Deeply informing his presentation of the monastic life is the figure of Odysseus, besieged with temptations and beset with difficulties on his journey home.

Patricia Cox Miller analyzes the relationship of Adam to the “cascade of animals” that accompanies him on an ivory diptych dating from the turn of the fifth century. Instead of seeing this image as an expression of Adam’s dominance over irrational beasts, Cox Miller reads these animal bodies as signs of carnality and desire. As such, they provided a means of self-discernment, or, what Foucault has called a technique of the self. Because humans shared “not only the body but also behavior” with animals, animal stories could be used, as they were in Basil’s *Hexaemeron*, “to craft an ascetic self.”

The ascetic impact of John Chrysostom’s use of nature imagery is the focus of Blake Leyerle’s essay. The countryside emerges from his writings as a place of healthful and pleasurable simplicity as well as or-
derly bounty; and nature teaches observers about the majesty and providence of God as well as the necessity of restraint. While much of this picture is derived from classical traditions of bucolic poetry and the Golden Age, the typical inhabitants are no longer farmers but rather monks and martyrs. Chrysostom even presents himself as either a noble farmer or a piping shepherd. This bucolic imagery, Leyerle argues, was designed to mitigate the growing divide between ascetic and nonascetic Christians.

The final group of essays examines how the culture of nineteenth-century scholarship, first in Germany and then in North America, shaped the emerging picture of early Christianity. Claudia Rapp shows how Adolf Harnack rehabilitated Christianity — its history, theology, and material culture — as a scholarly discipline within academic circles in the late nineteenth century. Influenced by contemporary science, especially recent discoveries in geology and biology, and by his friendship with Edwin Hatch of Oxford, Harnack developed a periodization of Christianity. His own interest lay in what he termed the “palaeontological layer” of church history, the period from the mid-second through the third century, when Christianity forged a synthesis with Hellenism that led to a consolidation of identity through doctrinal development, ritual stabilization, and ecclesiastical organization. For Harnack, it was thus “not the external political circumstances created by the Emperor Constantine that determined the triumph of Christianity but the religion’s own inner forces.”

Tracing the emergence of church history as a discipline in America, Elizabeth Clark focuses on the divergent assessments of Eastern and Western asceticism. Influenced by German historiography, their own religious formation, and their conviction that western lands — and America in particular — represented progress, nineteenth-century scholars viewed Eastern asceticism as degenerate and fanatical. In their eyes, Symeon Stylites stood as the epitome of “insane devotion,” whereas Western monasticism was to be lauded for its service and industry and proto-Protestant concentration on “inward spirituality.”

Taken together, these essays bear witness to the vitality of ascetic culture in late antiquity. Culture seems an especially apt term for this defining phenomenon. Lexically rooted in the world of agriculture, its meaning was indissociably tied to the reality of bodily labor consistently expended over time. In this sense ascetic culture verges on the redundant, as asceticism is defined by a series of sustained bodily practices.
Already in Augustine, we find the self figured as a field that must be worked (Conf. 10.16). Later, culture came to designate the ideals of high literary and aesthetic sensibilities, the possession of which served, in turn, to mark the elite. This more rarified meaning captures the prestige of ascetic lifestyles in the philosophical and religious climate of late antiquity and the elevated social status of asceticism’s most prominent practitioners. In our own day, of course, culture is used more often to refer to an inclusive set of social characteristics, institutions, and beliefs that, when taken together, define a group. This broad definition points to the crucial contribution both of the context in which early Christianity took shape and of asceticism in defining Christian identity.

To talk of culture is, finally, also to return to the honoree of this volume. Philip Rousseau is a man of culture in the broadest sense of this generous term: a scholar of wide erudition, whose deep knowledge of late antiquity is the product of intense labor sustained over many years and pursued on almost every continent; whose keen aesthetic appreciation for literature, music, and art informs his many books and numerous articles; and whose gift for nurturing friendship has enriched our separate lives, created contexts for shared conversation, and helped define the community of scholars of late antiquity. It is thus to Philip that we offer these essays in admiration and gratitude for the many ways in which his distinctive scholarly vision has shaped our field and his exemplary, generous friendship has supported our common life.

NOTES

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