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Attitudes towards Fasting in Constantinopolitan Monasticism (Fifth to Eleventh Centuries)

ABSTRACT: This article seeks to identify changes in attitudes towards fasting in Constantinopolitan monastic milieus. Exhaustive analysis of the surviving evidence shows that two frameworks existed side by side: fasting that went well beyond what ordinary human beings would undertake and led to competition between practitioners, and fasting that was moderate and did not allow a practitioner to stand out. Agonistic and competitive asceticism was prevalent in the fifth century and in the post-Iconoclastic era. By contrast, the alternative lifestyle of moderate asceticism was promoted in the sixth century, during Iconoclasm, and in the 11th and 12th centuries.

KEYWORDS: Byzantine monks, Constantinople, Asceticism

Not least among the inhabitants of Constantinople were numerous hermits and monastic communities. Our knowledge about these social settings comes mainly from hagiographical texts, which were produced in almost every century of Byzantine history. These texts not only tell us something about the interactions of the saints with the Constantinopolitan populace but also inform us about their lifestyles. The authors regularly assert that their heroes engaged in strenuous and agonistic fasting, staying without food for days on end, and outperforming other ascetics. Thus, one gets the impression that such fasting was an indispensable part of the life of every good monk. Yet this impression is deceptive. There existed an alternative understanding of the monastic calling, which put a premium on moderation and conformity. Here the best monk is the one who eats the same food as his fellow brethren and takes care not to stand out. Strictly coenobitic communities, which subscribed to this ideal, also existed in Constantinople. Unfortunately, however, it is very difficult to establish their relative importance and to chronicle how they fared over time. We only have the legislation of Emperor Justinian, the writings of Theodore of Stoudios, and a number of monastic rules from the 11th century. This makes it necessary to look for clues in hagiographical literature. In the sixth century no *Lives* of contemporary saints were produced, which may suggest that the alternative ideal was predominant. In the tenth and eleventh centuries the notions of moderation and conformity make an appearance even in *Lives*, thus challenging the traditional nexus between strenuous fasting and saintly status. This article offers an analysis of the available evidence and seeks to identify general trends within Constantinopolitan monasticism between the fifth and the 11th centuries.

PRELIMINARY REMARKS

The different ascetic regimes observed by Constantinopolitan monks and the ways in which these regimes were justified have so far not been the subject of sustained research. This is true even for the most comprehensive treatment of the topic of monastic fasting, the third part of Béatrice Caseau's recent monograph *Nourritures terrestres, nourritures célestes*¹. In the section about Late Antiquity

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¹ B. CASEAU, *Nourritures terrestres, nourritures célestes: la culture alimentaire à Byzance (Monographies du Centre de Recherche d'Histoire et Civilisation de Byzance 46)*. Paris 2015.

Caseau discusses sources from the East and pays scant attention to Constantinople². This approach is hardly surprising as the monks of the capital played no role in the formation of the discourse about fasting. In the much shorter section about the Byzantine period proper, Caseau's focus changes. Now Constantinopolitan sources take pride of place, which reflects the growing importance of the capital after the loss of the Eastern provinces. Yet she only discusses in any depth two sets of texts, the writings of Theodore of Stoudios, and the monastic rules of the 11th century³. The present study aims at a more comprehensive treatment of the topic. Most of the evidence presented in it has not yet been analysed in secondary literature.

Before we can delve into the discussion, however, it is necessary to make a few preliminary remarks. First, what is meant by Constantinopolitan monasticism? The city was bounded by the Theodosian walls. Yet evidence for monastic life is not so plentiful that we can focus on urban and suburban houses alone. In order to get a fuller picture, we need to extend the discussion to monasteries situated in the surrounding areas. Such an approach can be justified when we consider that their abbots had close connections to the capital and in many cases even came from there. Second, why the exclusive focus on fasting? To limit the intake of food and water is, of course, only one of a number of ascetic activities in which monks engaged. There is also staying awake during the night, standing upright for long periods of time, incessant genuflecting and sleeping on the ground. Ideally one would consider all of these activities. Yet fasting is an exceptional case. It is the only ascetic practice that appears in almost all texts. Thus, it becomes possible to create a coherent narrative, without getting side-tracked. This does not, of course, mean that the topic is always discussed in the same fashion. Especially in hagiography we encounter a broad range of options. We may be told what kind of food the saints ate, how much they ate, and how often they ate, and lastly also whether they ate more or less than others. Sometimes only one option appears, and sometimes a combination of several options. These differences can make comparison difficult. Third, how should the sources be approached? Monastic *Rules* are normative texts and thus reflect how their authors, for the most part abbots, wished their communities to be run. Although it cannot be excluded that some of them were successfully implemented, they are first and foremost evidence for a debate about what constitutes the proper monastic lifestyle. *Lives*, too, are not simply accounts of the actual behaviour of individuals. Hagiographers often availed themselves of already existing templates, which might influence the content of their narratives⁴. Moreover, they lived in particular social contexts which had specific ideas about what constituted a saintly lifestyle. Thus, it is always possible that the hagiographers improved on reality in order to promote the sanctity of their heroes. When we look at the texts from this angle, we can identify what was the predominant monastic ideology in a given period. Fourth, how should the sources be contextualized? For a proper understanding of the various accounts it would be necessary to establish where the texts were produced, who commissioned them, and for what audience they were intended. Unfortunately, this is not always possible. Sometimes even the precise date of a text is unknown. Moreover, even if a place of origin can be identified, there are few other sources that would allow us to supplement the information provided by the *Lives* or *Rules* in a meaningful way. Consequently, the introductions in the following will be kept short. The evidence will be discussed in chronological order, with the exception of works originating from the same monastic setting, which will be taken together when they are of roughly the same date.

² CASEAU, *Nourritures terrestres* 239–296.

³ CASEAU, *Nourritures terrestres* 296–302.

⁴ See E. PATLAGEAN, *Ancienne hagiographie byzantine et histoire sociale. Annales. Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 1 (1968) 106–126. See also M. VAN UYTFANGHE, *Le remploi dans l'hagiographie: une "loi du genre" qui étouffe l'originalité?*, in: *Ideologie e pratiche del reimpiego nell'alto medioevo (Atti della Settimana di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo* 46). Spoleto 1999, 359–411, who focuses mainly on the West, and Th. PRATSCH, *Der hagiographische Topos: griechische Heiligenlegenden in mittelbyzantinischer Zeit*. Berlin 2005, where fasting is not discussed.

‘EXTREMISTS’ VS ‘MODERATES’ IN LATE ANTIQUE MONASTICISM

Early Constantinopolitan monasticism cannot be seen in isolation. Many of the first monks in the city were not locals but had come from Syria where they had received their socialization. Syria was the homeland of the “holy men”, individuals who imposed on themselves gruelling hardships and were believed to have the power to perform miracles⁵. The most famous member of this group was undoubtedly Symeon of Telneshe (Symeon the Stylite) who lived in the first half of the fifth century and outdid earlier ascetics by standing on a pillar. By the end of his life Symeon was a universally recognized saint. Yet his behaviour had not always been beyond criticism. One of his hagiographers, Theodoret of Cyrus, informs us that as a young man when he lived in a monastery he engaged in such extreme asceticism that he was told to leave. The abbot was not only concerned that Symeon might kill himself; Symeon’s extravagant asceticism amounted to disobedience, thus constituting a threat to the abbot’s authority, and might have adversely affected the life of the community, engendering feelings of envy and frustration in the other monks. Significantly, this detail is omitted in Symeon’s *Syriac Life*, which was written by a member of his community. This demonstrates clearly that hagiographers could gloss over potentially problematic aspects of extreme asceticism⁶.

From the perspective of the “holy man” and his admirers, community life was irredeemably lax. Yet this does not mean that the coenobites saw themselves as second-class monks. On the contrary, they emphasized other aspects of monastic life such as obedience and humility⁷. This alternative model is reflected in the *Rules* of Basil the Great (d. 379), who was metropolitan of Caesarea in Cappadocia and one of the first members of the elite to engage with the new monastic discourse⁸. His *Rules* demand that all members of the community follow the same dietary regime⁹. Those who wish to abstain from food and drink can do so only with the permission of the abbot. Yet even their diet should not be so demanding that it might enfeeble the body¹⁰. The conceptual framework on which this form of monastic life was based is described by Basil’s brother Gregory of Nyssa (d. c. 395) in his treatise *On Virginity*¹¹.

Ὁ ἡμέτερος νοῦς ... τὸ ἐν ἐκατέρῳ ἄμετρον περικόπτων τῆς τοῦ ἐνδέοντος προσθήκης ἐπιμελήσεται καὶ ἐπίσης τὴν ἐφ’ ἐκάτερα τοῦ σώματος ἀχρηστίαν φυλάσσεται, μήτε δι’ ὑπερβαλλούσης εὐπαθείας ἄτακτον καὶ δυσήνιον τὴν σάρκα ἑαυτοῦ ἐπασκήσας, μήτε καὶ τῆς ἀμέτρον κακοπαθείας νοσώδη καὶ λελυμένην καὶ ἄτονον πρὸς τὴν ἀναγκαίαν ὑπηρεσίαν παρασκευάσας¹².

“Our mind ... will cut back a lack of measure in either direction and take care to add what is lacking, and it will likewise avoid the uselessness of the body in both respects, neither making its flesh

⁵ P. BROWN, *The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity*. *JRS* 61 (1971) 80–101.

⁶ See V. DÉROCHE, *Quand l’ascèse devient péché: Les excès dans le monachisme byzantin d’après les témoignages contemporains*. *Kentron* 23 (2007) 167–178, esp. 171. The reasons why monks engaged in extreme asceticism are discussed in S. ASHBROOK HARVEY, *The Sense of a Stylite: Perspectives on Symeon the Elder*. *Vigiliae Christianae* 42 (1988) 376–394, and in CASEAU, *Nourritures terrestres* 239–279. They will not be considered here because they are hardly ever mentioned in texts of Constantinopolitan provenance.

⁷ See Ph. ROUSSEAU, *Eccentrics and Coenobites in the Late Roman East*, in: *Conformity and Non-Conformity in Byzantium*, ed. L. Garland (*Byzantinische Forschungen* 34). Amsterdam 1997, 35–50, and G. CONSTABLE, *Moderation and Restraint in Ascetic Practices*, in: *From Athens to Chartres: Neoplatonism and Medieval Thought*, ed. H. J. Westra. Leiden 1992, 315–327, which is mainly about the West. This contrast was already highlighted by H. MUSURILLO, *The Problem of Ascetical Fasting in the Greek Patristic writers*. *Traditio* 12 (1956) 1–64, esp. 62.

⁸ See Ph. ROUSSEAU, *Basil of Caesarea*. Berkeley 1994.

⁹ See CASEAU, *Nourritures terrestres* 290–292.

¹⁰ See especially *Regulae brevius tractatae* (CPG 2875) 159 (PG 31, 1173A–1176A).

¹¹ See CASEAU, *Nourritures terrestres* 281.

¹² Gregory of Nyssa, *De virginitate* (CPG 3165) 22 (ed. J. P. CAVARNOS, in: *Gregorii Nysseni opera* 8, 1: *Opera ascetica*. Leiden 1952, 248–343, esp. 332–333).

unruly and ungovernable through excessive pampering, nor making it sickly and enervated and feeble for the necessary service through mortification without measure.”¹³

Gregory here applies to the new phenomenon of monasticism a value system that had for centuries informed the life of the Graeco-Roman elites¹⁴. This value system, which was opposed to any form of extreme behaviour, ultimately went back to Aristotle who in his *Nicomachian Ethic* defines virtue as the “middle between ... two evils of which one is excess and the other is deficiency” (μεσότης δύο κακιῶν τῆς μὲν καθ’ ὑπερβολήν, τῆς δὲ κατ’ ἔλλειψιν)¹⁵. Human nature is seen as hemmed in by strict bounds, which cannot be transcended without causing damage to the body. Fasting too much is considered as bad as fasting too little as it likewise deviates from the “golden mean”.

THE FIFTH CENTURY

After slow beginnings monasticism became firmly rooted in Constantinople and its hinterland in the fifth century¹⁶. This process led to the production of several hagiographical texts. Most of these *Lives* have been studied for what they can tell us about the public role of leading monks. It has been shown that abbots and hermits interfered in religious controversies, organizing public events that forced patriarchs and emperors to revise their policies¹⁷. Yet the texts also tell us something about the manner in which these figures conducted their lives. When one analyses them, one is struck by the strong focus on ascetic practices and, in particular, on fasting.

Auxentius (d. 473), a former soldier of Eastern extraction, left Constantinople to live as a hermit on Mt Scopus, on the opposite shore of the Bosphorus, where he made a name for himself as a wonder-worker¹⁸. In his *Life* we read that he engaged in extreme asceticism, first living in the open and then enclosing himself in a wooden cage¹⁹. His fasting regime was so demanding that he would remain without food for days on end²⁰. Daniel the Stylite (d. after 493), a monk from Mesopotamia who became so famous that even emperors and patriarchs went to see him, was also an extreme ascetic²¹. His hagiographer tells us that his behaviour aroused the curiosity of one of his visitors who tried to find out whether the saint ate and what he ate. Hiding behind the pillar and watching Daniel for seven days and nights, he never saw him eating or defecating. In the end he spoke to Daniel who explained to him that he was a human being, but that his faeces were like that of a sheep because he drank so

¹³ Translation by me.

¹⁴ See P. BROWN, *The Body and Society. Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*. New York 1988, 17–25. See also M. GLEESON, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome*. Princeton 1995.

¹⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachian Ethic*, II.6 (ed. I. BYWATER, *Aristotelis Ethica Nicomachea*. Oxford 1894 [reprint 1959], 1107a2–3).

¹⁶ See P. HATLIE, *The Monks and Monasteries of Constantinople, ca. 350–850*. Cambridge 2007, 30–132.

¹⁷ See G. DAGRON, *Les moines et la ville: Le monachisme à Constantinople*. *TM* 4 (1970) 229–276. See also H. SARADI, *Constantinople and its Saints (4th–6th c.): The Image of the City and Social Considerations*. *Studi Medievali* s. 3, 36 (1995) 87–110.

¹⁸ See M.-F. AUZÉPY, *Les Vies d’Auxence et le monachisme “Auxentien”*. *REB* 53 (1995) 205–236. See also S. EFTHYMIADIS – V. DÉROCHE, *Greek Hagiography in Late Antiquity (Fourth–Seventh Centuries)*, in: *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography, I: Periods and Places*, ed. S. Efthymiadis. Farnham – Burlington 2011, 58, and V. DÉROCHE – B. LESIEUR, *Notes d’hagiographie byzantine: Daniel le Stylite – Marcel l’Acémète – Hypatios de Rufinanes – Auxentios de Bithynie*. *AnBoll* 128 (2010) 283–295.

¹⁹ *Life of Auxentius* (*BHG* 199) 43 (*PG* 114, 1413A).

²⁰ *Life of Auxentius* 34 (*PG* 114, 1404CD).

²¹ See M. RAUB VIVIAN, *The World of Daniel the Stylite: Rhetoric, Religion, and Relationships in the Life of the Pillar Saint*, in: *The Rhetoric of Power in Late Antiquity. Religion and Politics in Byzantium, Europe and the Early Islamic World*, ed. E. De Palma Digeser – R. M. Frakes – J. Stephens. London 2010, 147–166. See also EFTHYMIADIS – DÉROCHE, *Greek Hagiography* 60–61.

little water²². This episode, which has a counterpart in Theodoret's account of the *Life of Symeon the Stylite*, is clearly intended to show that Daniel was a great faster²³.

Auxentius and Daniel were hermits, but this does not mean that extreme asceticism was limited to eremitic settings. In monasteries the situation was not much different. Dius, who had come from the region of Antioch, was quite possibly the first Constantinopolitan abbot²⁴. His late antique *Life* is lost and we only have a lengthy notice in a *synaxarium* and an *Encomium*, both dating to the Middle Byzantine period. The *synaxarium* tells us that at the beginning of his monastic career, when he was the disciple of two hermits, Dius already engaged in strenuous asceticism, "eating ... bread every other day of the week, and satisfying the need of the body with salt and water" (ἐσθίων ... διὰ δύο ἡμερῶν τῆς ἐβδομάδος ἄρτον καὶ ἄλατι καὶ ὕδατι πληρῶν τὴν χρεῖαν τοῦ σώματος). This detail is also found in the *Encomium* where we further learn that the saint gradually intensified his fasting, "eating every fourth day" (διὰ τεσσάρων ἐσθίων ἡμερῶν) and then only "eating once a week" (δι' ἐβδομάδος ἡμερῶν ἐσθίων). It is very likely that this information was already found in the original text. Dalmatus (d. before 451), like Auxentius a military man from the East, was called to the monastic life by the Syrian hermit Isaacius who had come to Constantinople during the reign of Emperor Valens²⁵. Although a monastery was founded that was to bear his name, he lived as a recluse. His *Life* contains no information about his regular fasting regime. Yet we are told that in one year he ate nothing during the Great Lent, took communion at Easter, and then fasted for another 43 days, all the while sitting on a stool, "comatose and only just breathing" (κατενεχθεὶς καὶ μόνον ὄτι ἀνέπνεεν)²⁶. In this state he is said to have been the recipient of visions.

The hagiographers of Dius and Dalmatus wrote without literary pretensions. Their texts consist of a small number of discrete episodes and are written in very simple Greek. This suggests that their communities were low-brow and had little interest in or even awareness of contemporary debates about what constituted proper monastic life. By contrast, the *Life of Hypatius*, the founder of a monastery in Rufiniana near Chalcedon (d. 446), is a comprehensive and well-structured narrative. Borrowings and allusions show that its author had knowledge of earlier hagiographical and spiritual literature²⁷. The topic of fasting is broached early on in the text when the hagiographer speaks about Hypatius' time as a simple monk in a great monastery.

Τοσοῦτον δὲ ἐφήψατο τῆς ἀσκήσεως ὁ Ὑπάτιος, ὡς ὑπερβάλλεσθαι πάντας, μικροῦ δεῖν καὶ τὸν ἡγούμενον, ἐν νηστεία καὶ ἀγρυπνία καὶ ψαλμωδία καὶ εὐχῇ καὶ ὑπακοῇ καὶ ἡσυχία καὶ ταπεινοφροσύνη καὶ ἀκτημοσύνη καὶ πάσῃ ἀρετῇ, ὡς πάντας ὠφελεῖσθαι παρ' αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸν Θεὸν δοξάζεσθαι, καὶ τὸν ἡγούμενον ἀγαπᾶν αὐτὸν καὶ χαίρειν ἐπὶ τῇ πολιτεία αὐτοῦ²⁸.

"Hypatius, however, took to ascetic practice to such a degree that he outdid all, and almost even the abbot, in fasting and waking and singing psalms and prayer and obedience and quietude and humility and poverty and every kind of virtue so that all profited from him and God was glorified, and the abbot loved him and rejoiced in his life-style."²⁹

²² *Life of Daniel* (BHG 489) 62 (ed. H. DELEHAYE, *Les saints stylites* [*Subsidia hagiographica* 14]. Paris 1923, 1–94, esp. 61).

²³ *Religious History* 26, 23 (ed. P. CANIVET – A. LEROY-MOLINGHEN, *Théodoret de Cyr. Histoire des moines de Syrie* [*SC* 234, 257]. Paris 1977–1979, II 206–208).

²⁴ For the following see D. KRAUSMÜLLER, *The Constantinopolitan Abbot Dius: his Life, Cult and Hagiographical Dossier*. *BMGS* 31 (2007) 13–31.

²⁵ See DAGRON, *Les moines* 231–234.

²⁶ *Life of Dalmatus* (BHG 482) (ed. A. BANDURI, *Imperium orientale sive antiquitates Constantinopolitanae*. Paris 1711, 697–710, esp. 698AB).

²⁷ See G. J. M. BARTELINK, *Callinicos, Vie d'Hypatius* (*SC* 177). Paris 1971, 33–41.

²⁸ *Life of Hypatius* (BHG 760) 3, 12 (84 BARTELINK).

²⁹ Translation by me.

This passage contains a catalogue of monastic virtues among which fasting takes pride of place. The hagiographer asserts that the saint ate less food than anybody else. This gives the impression that even for ordinary members of coenobitic communities there was not one single standard. Indeed, such focus on the agonistic aspect is not without parallel. Theodoret regards it as one of the advantages of community life that it provides an opportunity for competition³⁰. Information about how much food Hypatius actually consumed is only supplied in a later episode. There we are told that he stepped up his ascetic practice after he had moved to Rufiniana³¹, contenting himself with vegetables and a little bread, and that “often he ate at the end of the ninth hour and sometimes he postponed the meal even further, and during the forty days [of Lent] he ate every other day” (ἤσθειν δὲ πάντοτε εἰς τὴν βαθεῖαν ἐνάτην, πολλάκις δὲ καὶ ὑπερθέσεις ἐποίει, καὶ ἐν τῇ τεσσαρακοστῇ ὑπὲρ μίαν ἤσθειν)³². There can be little doubt that such a regime was more strenuous than that of ordinary monks who ate twice a day, at the sixth and at the ninth hour, and consumed more varied food. Yet it is also evident that Hypatius was not a match for extreme ascetics such as Dius. Significantly, the hagiographer does not draw attention to this fact but does his utmost to present his hero as a great faster from the very beginning of his monastic career. Possible negative consequences of unfettered competition within a community are not dwelt on. Only the reference to humility may be understood as a corrective.

The *Lives* of Auxentius, Daniel, Dius, Dalmatus and Hypatius show clearly that in the capital strenuous asceticism was considered a marker and a precondition for saintly status, just as it was in Syria, where most of these saints had come from. This raises the questions: are these texts representative of Constantinopolitan monasticism as a whole? Did all monks behave in this manner or at least accept the underlying value system? It is difficult to give a definite answer because we have no Constantinopolitan sources from this period that would explicitly promote alternative forms of monasticism. The only setting where matters may have been different was the community of the Acoemetes, which appears to have included learned members³³. Two texts have survived, the *Life* of the abbot Alexander and the *Life* of the abbot Marcellus. Alexander’s hagiographer speaks of the saint’s poverty, charity and worship, without mentioning a particular dietary regime³⁴. Yet it is difficult to gauge how significant this omission is. We are repeatedly told that Alexander and his followers suffered great hardship during their long wanderings in the East before they came to the capital, and did not even eat varied dishes when sufficient food was available³⁵. The same cannot be said for the *Life of Marcellus* (d. 485), which contains no reference to fasting or other ascetic activities at all³⁶. This may be an indicator that the ideal of moderation was important for the Acoemetes.

There is only one piece of evidence that may point to a debate between proponents of the different types of monasticism. It is found in the *Life of Auxentius*. When in 451 the saint fell foul of the ecclesiastical authorities, he was imprisoned in a monastery. There the following exchange is said to have taken place.

³⁰ Religious History 5, 4 (I 332–334 CANIVET–LEROY-MOLINGHEN).

³¹ Life of Hypatius 8, 9; 12, 1 (100, 114 BARTELINK).

³² Life of Hypatius 26, 1 (180 BARTELINK).

³³ See A. GRILLMEIER, *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche*, 2, 2: Die Kirche von Konstantinopel im 6. Jahrhundert. Freiburg – Basel – Wien 1989, 265–277.

³⁴ See D. F. CANER, *Wandering, Begging Monks. Spiritual Authority and the Promotion of Monasticism in Late Antiquity*. Berkeley 2002, 130–157.

³⁵ Life of Alexander (BHG 47) 32, 36 (ed. E. DE STOOP, *Vie d’Alexandre l’Acémète* [PO 6, 5]. Paris 1911, 658–701, esp. 682, 687).

³⁶ Life of Marcellus (BHG 1027z) (ed. G. DAGRON, *La vie ancienne de Saint Marcel l’Acémète*. *AnBoll* 85 [1967] 271–321). See DAGRON, *Les moines* 236–237.

Προσελθόντες δὲ αὐτῷ οἱ τοῦ μοναστηρίου, διότι οὐκ ἐσθίει ἐπηρώτων. ὁ δὲ πρὸς αὐτούς· ἐπειδὴ δοκιμὴν ζητεῖτε τοῦ ἐν ἐμοὶ λαλοῦντος Χριστοῦ, ὃς οὐκ ἀσθενεῖ ἀλλὰ δύναται ἐν ἡμῖν, πλὴν γέγραπται, οὐκ ἐπ' ἄρτων μόνων ζήσεται ἄνθρωπος, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ παντὶ ῥήματι ἐκπορευομένῳ διὰ στόματος θεοῦ³⁷.

“Those from the monastery approached him and asked him why he did not eat. And he said to them: ‘Since you wish to make a test of Christ who speaks in me, who is not weak but powerful in us³⁸, it is written: Man does not live by bread alone but by all words that issue from the mouth of God.³⁹’⁴⁰

What is interesting here is not only that monks ask the question but also that in his response Auxentius explains why he could go beyond what was possible for ordinary men⁴¹. He claims that he had supernatural help, an option that is not considered in texts that promote the concept of the “golden mean”.

THE SIXTH CENTURY

The *Lives* of Marcellus and Daniel were written during the reign of Emperor Anastasius (491–518)⁴², and the *Life* of Dalmatus appears to date to the reign of Emperor Justinian (527–565)⁴³. Thus, it is surprising that we possess no *Lives* of saintly monks who were active in the sixth century. This cannot simply be explained by the vicissitudes of transmission. In order to account for this striking discrepancy, it has therefore been suggested that the formative period of Constantinopolitan monasticism had come to an end and there were no heroic figures who could have become the subjects of *Lives*⁴⁴. Yet this argument is not entirely convincing since there is evidence that holy men continued to flock to Constantinople. John of Ephesus records that the stylite Zooras established himself there⁴⁵. Zooras was a Monophysite but one would expect that he had some Chalcedonian colleagues. The fact that their activities are not recorded begs an explanation. One way of tackling this problem is to turn to a set of normative texts, Justinian’s laws about monasticism⁴⁶. From these texts it is clear that the emperor tried to discipline the monks. He did not concern himself only with questions of monastic property as his predecessors had done, but also interfered in the inner workings of monasteries. He insisted that abbots should be chosen by the patriarch⁴⁷, and even stipulated that monks should not have cells of their own but should sleep in common dormitories⁴⁸. This shows that Justinian was in favour of strict coenobiticism. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that he could not also be impressed by a holy man. After all, we know that his wife, Theodora, provided material support for Zooras⁴⁹. Yet there can be little doubt that Justinian was strongly influenced by the monastic discourse of moderation, which chimed in with his controlling personality. Unfortunately, we do

³⁷ Life of Auxentius 34 (PG 114, 1404C4–10).

³⁸ Matthew 4:4.

³⁹ 2 Corinthians 13:3.

⁴⁰ Translation by me.

⁴¹ This exchange is not found in the other long *Life*, cod. Sin. gr. 515, f. 185v. See AUZÉPY, *Les Vies d’Auxence*, 214.

⁴² See EFTHYMIADIS–DÉROCHE, *Greek Hagiography* 57, 59, 61.

⁴³ See DAGRON, *Les moines* 269–270.

⁴⁴ See HATLIE, *Monks and Monasteries* 150–153.

⁴⁵ Life of Zooras (ed. and tr. E. W. BROOKS, *John of Ephesus. Lives of the Eastern Saints* (I) [PO 17, 1]. Paris 1923, 2–307, esp. 18–36). See HATLIE, *Monks and Monasteries* 143–150.

⁴⁶ See A. HASSE-UNGEHEUER, *Das Mönchtum in der Religionspolitik Kaiser Justinians I.: Die Engel des Himmels und der Stellvertreter Gottes auf Erden*. Berlin 2016, 110–157.

⁴⁷ Novella 123 (ed. R. SCHÖLL – W. KROLL, *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, III: *Novellae*. Berlin 1959, 618).

⁴⁸ Novella 5, 3 (31 SCHÖLL–KROLL).

⁴⁹ Life of Zooras (27 BROOKS).

same result, a darkening and confusion of the mind⁵⁶. It can be ruled out that Maximus hailed from the capital as is claimed in his tenth-century Greek *Life*⁵⁷. Yet we know that he spent time in Constantinople and it is possible that his works found an audience there.

For the period between the middle of the seventh and the middle of the eighth century, which has been dubbed a “dark age”, the evidence is even scarcer. The only Constantinopolitan biographies of monks that can be dated relatively securely to this period are the *Encomia* of Patapius and Therapon, which are written in the high style and may have been penned by Andrew of Crete⁵⁸. Unfortunately these texts are too brief and formulaic to be of much use. Patapius’ biography contains no reference to asceticism and Therapon’s monastic life is summed up in just one sentence: “and the monastic ascetic wrestling-ground was sacredly performed in a noble manner” (καὶ ἡ μονήρης ἀσκητικὴ παλαίστρα σεμνῶς ἱερούργητο), which makes it impossible to determine the author’s views on the topic of fasting⁵⁹. The Council in Trullo (692) sought to stamp out different kinds of misbehaviour and in particular sought to forbid monks from wandering⁶⁰. This suggests an affinity of the elite with the coenobitic ideal although it is impossible to determine what this may have meant for monastic diet. In the mid-eighth century Emperor Constantine V (741–775) was opposed to monasticism and is said to have forced monks and nuns to get married⁶¹. Yet we do not know which communities he targeted, or whether his actions had an effect on monastic life. It is, however, possible that fasting did not play an important role in contemporary monasticism. The *Life of Andrew of Crete* (d. 740) by the high state official Nicetas, which was probably composed in the third quarter of the eighth century, remains silent about the saint’s ascetic endeavours⁶². It focuses almost exclusively on Andrew’s charity, as a monk, as a deacon of St Sophia, and as metropolitan of Crete, which may be a conscious decision on the part of the author⁶³. Even the *Life of Stephen the Younger* (d. 764) by the deacon Stephen, which dates to the early ninth century, has little to say about the topic⁶⁴. It contains only a formulaic reference to the saint’s abstention⁶⁵. Here, however, other hardships are mentioned so that one should be careful not to put too much weight on this omission.

THE LATE EIGHTH AND EARLY NINTH CENTURIES

In the late eighth and early ninth centuries Byzantine monasticism experienced a stunning revival. Members of the Constantinopolitan elite entered existing monasteries or founded new ones on their estates. During the Second Iconoclasm most of them spoke out in favour of image worship, which earned them the title of “confessor”. This dual role is reflected in their *Lives*, which normally consist

⁵⁶ Chapters on Love (*CPG* 7693) IV 65 (ed. A. CERESA DE GASTALDO, Massimo Confessore. Capitoli sulla carità. Rome 1963, 222, 1–5).

⁵⁷ See S. BROCK, An Early Syriac Life of Maximus the Confessor. *AnBoll* 91 (1973) 302–313, and Ph. BOOTH, Crisis of Empire: Doctrine and Dissent at the End of Late Antiquity. Berkeley – Los Angeles – London 2014, 143–155.

⁵⁸ See J. HALDON, The *Laudatio Therapontis*: a Neglected Source of the Later Seventh or Early Eighth Centuries, in: From Rome to Constantinople. Studies in Honour of Averil Cameron, ed. H. Amirav – B. ter Haar Romeney. Leuven – Paris 2007, 263–278, and P. A. YANNOPOULOS, Saint Patapios: entre l’histoire et la légende. *Erytheia* 24 (2003) 7–36.

⁵⁹ Life and Miracles of Therapon (*BHG* 1797) 3 (ed. L. DEUBNER, De incubatione capita quattuor. Leipzig 1900, 111–134, esp. 121).

⁶⁰ See HATLIE, Monks and Monasteries 237–238.

⁶¹ See S. GERO, Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Constantine V, with Particular Attention to the Oriental Sources (*CSCO* 384, *Subsidia* 52). Leuven 1977, 111–142.

⁶² Andrew (*PMBZ* 362). See M.-F. AUZÉPY, La carrière d’André de Crète. *BZ* 88 (1995) 1–12.

⁶³ Life of Andrew (*BHG* 113) 3, 5, 7 (ed. A. PAPADOPOULOS-KERAMEUS, Βίος τοῦ ἐν ἁγίοις πατρὸς ἡμῶν Ἀνδρέου τοῦ Ἱεροσολυμίτου [*Analekta Hierosolymitikes Stachyologias* 5]. St. Petersburg 1898, 169–179, esp. 172, 174, 176).

⁶⁴ Stephen (*PMBZ* 7012). A discussion of text and author is found in the introduction to the edition. See next footnote.

⁶⁵ Life of Stephen (*BHG* 1666) 13 (ed. M.-F. AUZÉPY, La Vie d’Étienne le Jeune par Étienne le Diacre. Introduction, Édition et Traduction [*Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs* 3]. Aldershot – Brookfield 1997, 104, 16–17).

of two parts: an account of their activities as monks and abbots is followed by a section about their interrogation and punishment by the emperor, which closely resembles the *passiones* of martyrs.

One of their number was Hilarion, the abbot of Dalmatos, which seems to have maintained its position as the highest-ranking monastery of the capital⁶⁶. The *Synaxarium* reports that he served the community for many years, “pursuing quietude and obedience and great humility” (ἡσυχίαν καὶ ὑπακοὴν καὶ ταπεινώσιν πολλὴν μετιῶν)⁶⁷. No mention is made of fasting. This may well be significant, but in order to be certain one would need to consult the full-scale *Life*. Unfortunately, this text, which has only survived as a palimpsest, has not yet been edited⁶⁸.

Thanks to the *Lives* of its first two abbots, Nicephorus (d. 813) and Nicetas (d. 824), we are much better informed about the monastery of Medikion. Although it was situated in Bithynia it had close links with the capital. Nicephorus had come from there, and the congregation was under the direct control of the patriarch⁶⁹. From the texts it is clear that the leading monks questioned the ideal of the “holy man”. The anonymous *Life of Nicephorus* plays down the significance of miraculous healings⁷⁰; whereas Nicetas’ hagiographer, Theosterictus, does not accord supernatural abilities to his hero⁷¹. This raises the question: what role do the two texts accord to fasting? Nicephorus’ *Life* is an exceedingly rhetorical work, which gives no precise information about the saint’s ascetic practices⁷². By contrast, Theosterictus is more forthcoming with information on Nicetas. He chronicles the saint’s advance in the monastic life by checking his achievements against the chapter titles of the *Climax* (*Ladder of Divine Ascent*). When he gets to the fourteenth chapter, which bears the title “about the popular and evil mistress” (περὶ τῆς παμφίλου καὶ δεσποίνης πονηρᾶς)⁷³, he claims that Nicetas “subjected this mistress to such an extent that he provided her sparingly even with the necessities when she was shameless as regards that which sustains life” (τὴν δὲ δέσποιναν ταύτην οὕτως ὑπέταξεν, ὡς καὶ τῶν ἀναγκαίων μετ’ ἐνδείας πολλῆς χορηγεῖν αὐτῇ τὰ πρὸς τὸ ζῆν ἀναιδευομένη)⁷⁴. Later he returns to the topic, stating that during Nicetas’ time as abbot “his body was exceedingly withered, from vigils and not-eating, so that he could not even speak because of the extreme feebleness” (τὸ σωματεῖον αὐτοῦ ἐκτετηγμένον ὑπερβαλόντως, ἕκ τε τῆς ἀγρυπνίας καὶ τῆς ἀσιτίας, ὥστε μηδὲ προσομιλεῖν αὐτὸν δύνασθαι ἐκ τῆς ἄκρας ἀτονίας)⁷⁵. Such a passage would not be out of place in the *Life* of a “holy man”. It contradicts the claim of the champions of the “golden mean” that one should not unduly weaken one’s body.

We find a similar attitude expressed in the *Life of John the Psychaitē* (d. c. 825), another defender of icon worship⁷⁶. In a highly rhetorical passage the hagiographer extols “the struggles of his immeasurable contests” (τῶν ἀμέτρων ἀγώνων αὐτοῦ τὰ παλαίσματα) in the years following his entry into the suburban monastery of Pege, which are said to have impressed the abbot so much that he

⁶⁶ Hilarion (*PMBZ* 2584). See HATLIE, *Monks and Monasteries* 321–322.

⁶⁷ *Synaxarium*, Jun. 6, *synaxaria selecta* (Mc) (ed. H. DELEHAYE, *Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae [Propylaeum ad Acta Sanctorum Novembris]*, Brussels 1902, 731, 530).

⁶⁸ See T. MATANTSEVA, *La vie d’Hilarion, higoumène de Dalmatos*, par Sabas (BHG 2177). *RSBN* n. s. 30 (1993) 17–29.

⁶⁹ Nicephorus (*PMBZ* 5280), Nicetas (*PMBZ* 5443). See HATLIE, *Monks and monasteries*, 283–284.

⁷⁰ *Life of Nicephorus* (BHG 2297) 14 (ed. F. HALKIN, *La vie de saint Nicéphore, fondateur de Médikion en Bithynie* († 813). *AnBoll* 78 [1960] 396–430, esp. 420–421).

⁷¹ See D. KRAUSMÜLLER, *Diorasis Denied: Opposition to Clairvoyance in Byzantium from Late Antiquity to the Eleventh Century*. *JÖB* 65 (2015) 111–128.

⁷² *Life of Nicephorus* 6 (408–409 HALKIN).

⁷³ *Climax* (CPG 7852) 14 (PG 88, 864C1–2).

⁷⁴ *Life of Nicetas* (BHG 1341) 9 (ed. HAGIOGRAPHI BOLLANDIANI, *Vita S. Nicetae abbatis Medicii [Acta Sanctorum Aprilis I]*, Paris 1866, xviii–xxvii, esp. xx).

⁷⁵ *Life of Nicetas* 16 (xxi HAGIOGRAPHI BOLLANDIANI).

⁷⁶ John (*PMBZ* 3053). See E. VON DÖBSCHÜTZ, *Die vita des Johannes Psychaitēs*. *BZ* 18 (1909) 714–716.

appointed him steward⁷⁷. These are stock phrases, which have counterparts in other texts, such as, for example, in an *Encomium* of Ephraem, which most likely dates to the ninth century. There mention is made of “fasting and vigils that have no measure” (νηστεία καὶ ἀγρυπνία μέτρον οὐκ ἔχουσαι)⁷⁸.

References to moderation are much rarer. Moreover, they can be ambiguous. This is evident from a passage in the *Life of Macarius* (d. before 842), the abbot of the monastery of Pelekete in Bithynia, which, like Medikion, had close links with the patriarchate. Macarius, too, was the scion of a Constantinopolitan elite family and became a confessor of image worship during Second Iconoclasm⁷⁹. In one passage his behaviour is praised in the following manner.

Τίς γὰρ τὸ συμμαετρημένον αὐτοῦ τῆς πορείας, ἢ τὸ εὐτακτον τῆς κινήσεως προσόμοιον παραδείξει; Τίς τὸ βραχὺ τῆς σιτίσεως αὐτοῦ, μᾶλλον δὲ δίκαιον φῆσαι, τῆς ἀσιτίας, παρὰ τοῖς ἐπαιρομένοις⁸⁰ ἐν τούτῳ προσόσον ἀντιπαραστήσει, ὃ σταθμῶ μὲν ὁ ἄρτος, οὐκ ἄμετρος δὲ ἡ τοῦ ὕδατος ὑπουργία προσῆν⁸¹;

“For who will describe adequately the measuredness of his gait or orderliness of his movement? Who will present even to a degree the exiguousness of his nourishment, or more justly, of his not-eating, among those who puff themselves up in this matter, for whom the bread was measured, the use of water not without measure?”⁸²

In order to highlight the saint’s outstanding qualities, the hagiographer has recourse to the conceptual framework of the “golden mean”. In the case of walking, the application of this principle is straightforward. Here *συμμετρία* indicates the measured gait that is equidistant from foot-dragging on the one hand and hopping or running on the other. By contrast, the following statement about diet is much less clear. In this case we only find the negative term *ἄμετρος*, which is linked to excessive intake of food and drink. The complementary statement about excessive fasting is missing. As a consequence, the litotes οὐκ ἄμετρος does not equal *σύμμετρος*, but is compatible with the *ἀσιτία* with which the saint is credited. Thus the hagiographer is able to assert the traditional ideal of strenuous and agonistic asceticism. Indeed, he reassures his readers that Macarius outperformed all other members of the community, and in the end only had himself as a rival. And he claims that it was for this reason that his abbot appointed him steward⁸³.

To my knowledge there is only one hagiographical text dating to this period where the ideal of the “golden mean” is unequivocally expressed. It is Theodore of Stoudios’ *Encomium* of Theophanes the Confessor, the abbot of the Agros monastery in Bithynia (d. 816/818)⁸⁴. There we find the following list of the saint’s achievements.

Ἐνταῦθα μᾶλλον τοὺς ἀσκητικοὺς ἀγῶνας ὑποδύεται τεθωρακισμένος τῇ πίστει καὶ κατωχυρωμένος τῇ ἐλπίδι νηστείαν ἔλκων σύμμετρον προσευχὴν ἐπίμονον δάκρυον εὐκατάνυκτον ἐργόχειρον ἐπίπονον⁸⁵.

⁷⁷ Life of John (*BHG* 896) 4 (ed. P. VAN DEN VEN, La vie grecque de S. Jean le Psichaïte. *Le Muséon* n.s. 3 [1902] 103–125, esp. 110, 6–7).

⁷⁸ Encomium of Ephraem (*CPG* 3193, *BHG* 583) (*PG* 46, 820–849, esp. 825A).

⁷⁹ Macarius (*PMBZ* 4672). See HATLIE, Monks and Monasteries 402.

⁸⁰ Ed. ἐπαιρομένοις.

⁸¹ Life of Macarius (*BHG* 1003) 4 (ed. I. VAN DEN GHEYN, Sancti Macarii monasterii Pelecetes hegumeni acta graeca. *AnBoll* 16 (1897) 142–163, esp. 147, 4–9).

⁸² Translation by me.

⁸³ Life of Macarius 4 (147 VAN DEN GHEYN).

⁸⁴ Theodore (*PMBZ* 7574). See Th. PRATSCH, Theodoros Studites (759–826) zwischen Dogma und Pragma. Der Abt des Studioklosters in Konstantinopel im Spannungsfeld von Patriarch, Kaiser und eigenem Anspruch (*Berliner Byzantinistische Studien* 4) Frankfurt a. M. 1998.

⁸⁵ Encomium of Theophanes 7 (ed. S. EFTHYMIADIS, Le panégyrique de Théophane le Chronographe par S. Théodore Studite (*BHG* 1792b). *AnBoll* 31 [1993] 259–290, esp. 274).

“There he subjects himself to the ascetic struggles, armoured with faith and fortified with hope, engaging in measured fasting, intensive prayer, contrite tears, toilsome handiwork.”⁸⁶

This is a challenge to the traditional belief that extreme fasting was an indispensable marker of saintliness. There can be no doubt that Theodore chose the attribute *σύμμετρος* deliberately in place of the more usual *ἄμετρος* in order to signal his disapproval of the ideal of the “holy man”. In another hagiographical text, the *Encomium* of his maternal uncle, the abbot Plato of Sakkoudion (d. 814), who, like his father, had been an imperial bureaucrat, Theodore eschews such confrontational language⁸⁷. There he lists as an achievement of the saint the “withering of abstinence” (*ἐγκρατείας κατάτηξις*)⁸⁸, and records that as monk in the Symboloi monastery he did not eat the same food as his fellow-brethren, but imposed on himself a more demanding diet: “bread ... and beans in addition to vegetables and nuts, his flourishing daily nourishment without oil” (*ἄρτος .. καὶ κύαμος πρὸς λαχάνοις καὶ ἀκροδρύοις, ἢ καθ’ ἡμέραν εὐανθίζουσα ἀνέλαιος διατροφή*)⁸⁹. It is possible that Theodore’s account of Plato’s regime simply reflects the saint’s actual behaviour. Theophanes may be a different matter. From Methodius’ *Life* we know that he suffered from kidney stones, which could have been caused by dehydration⁹⁰. This would suggest a harsher ascetic regime, which Theodore chose not to mention.

Indeed, we can be sure that the ideal of moderation was near to Theodore’s heart because it appears frequently in the *Catecheses* that he addressed to his monks⁹¹. In one passage he offers a description of proper behaviour, which includes “feet that walk orderly, measured food and drink” (*οἱ πόδες εὐτακτα βαίνοντες, τροφή καὶ πόσις μεμετρημένη*)⁹². We have already encountered a similar statement in the *Life of Macarius*. Yet unlike Macarius’ hagiographer, Theodore makes it clear that the intake of food and drink should also be moderate. Such statements can be directed against those who wish to eat varied and plentiful food⁹³. Theodore reminds them that nobody can be a good monk if he has not trained his body “through the measuredness of the diet” (*τῷ συμμέτρῳ τῆς διαίτης*)⁹⁴. More often, however, we encounter warnings not to engage in “extended fasting” (*νηστείαν ἐπιτεταμένην*)⁹⁵, or, more specifically, not to eat only on every other, third or fifth day. In such contexts moderate food intake is presented as the ideal regime, “which neither oppresses the body excessively nor relaxes it completely” (*μῆτε ὑπερπιέζουσα τὸ σῶμα, μῆτε ἀνακουφίζουσα παντελῶς*)⁹⁶. Theodore explains that if one engaged in longer fasts the body would become “feeble and wiped out” (*ἔκλυτόν τε καὶ ἐξίτηλον*), which would prevent it from performing virtuous deeds⁹⁷.

⁸⁶ Translation by me.

⁸⁷ Plato (*PMBZ* 6285). See B. McDUGALL, Living Images and Authors of Virtue: Theodore of Stoudios on Plato of Sakkoudion and Gregory of Nazianzus on Basil. *BZ* 110 (2018) 691–712.

⁸⁸ Encomium of Plato 10 (*PG* 99, 812C12).

⁸⁹ Encomium of Plato 15 (*PG* 99, 817B14–C1).

⁹⁰ Life of Theophanes (*BHG* 1787z) 43 (ed. V. V. LATYŠEV, Methodii Patriarchae Constantinopolitani Vita S. Theophanis Confessoris [*Zapiski rossijskoj akademii nauk, viii. ser. po istoriko-filologičeskomu otdeleniju* 13, 4]. St. Petersburg 1918, 27).

⁹¹ See J. LEROY, Studitisches Mönchtum. Spiritualität und Lebensform. Graz 1969, 22–36, and R. CHOLLI, Theodore the Stoudite. The Ordering of Holiness (*Oxford Theological Monographs*). Oxford 2002. See also M. DEMBINSKA, Diet: a Comparison of Food Consumption between Some Eastern and Western Monasteries in the 4th–12th Centuries. *Byz* 55 (1985) 431–462, esp. 448.

⁹² Parva Catechesis 102 (ed. E. AUVRAY, Sancti patris nostri et confessoris Theodori Studitis praepositi *parva catechesis*. Paris 1891, 351).

⁹³ Megale Catechesis 33 (ed. A. PAPADOPOULOS-KERAMEUS, Τοῦ ἁγίου Θεοδώρου τοῦ Στουδίτου μεγάλη κατήχησις. St Petersburg 1904, 239).

⁹⁴ Parva Catechesis 123 (427 AUVRAY).

⁹⁵ Parva Catechesis 128 (447 AUVRAY).

⁹⁶ Magna Catechesis 106 (ed. J. COZZA-LUZI, Sancti Theodori Studitae sermones reliqui magnae catecheseos [*Nova Patrum Bibliotheca* 10, 1]. Rome 1905, 129).

⁹⁷ Parva Catechesis 55 (200 AUVRAY).

And he points out that it would not be right to go “beyond nature” (ὕπερ φύσιν) and disregard the legitimate needs of the body⁹⁸. This point of view, which Theodore illustrates with the metaphor of the “royal highway” (βασιλικὴ ὁδός), is thoroughly traditional⁹⁹. As we have seen it already appears in the *Life of John Bar Aphthonia*, and in the writings of Maximus. Yet it is the first time that it is securely attested in a Constantinopolitan setting.

This does not mean that Theodore’s position is completely coherent. At times he speaks of monks who engage in extreme asceticism against the orders of the abbot instead of practising the “excision of the will” (ἐκκοπή τοῦ θελήματος), which is the appropriate behaviour for a coenobitic monk¹⁰⁰. Moreover, he claims that it can have negative consequences for the life of the community because excessive fasters might induce feelings of frustration and depression in their fellow-monks who follow a more moderate regime¹⁰¹. These criticisms give the impression that such practices were not reprehensible in themselves, and indeed Theodore allowed his monks to eat every other or third day during the Great Lent¹⁰².

What made Theodore’s task so difficult was the fact that in other monastic milieus extreme fasting was seen much more positively. His monks were aware of hermits such as Joannicius who imposed on themselves great hardships. In order to tackle this problem he employs different strategies. Sometimes he concedes that hermits are free to engage in longer fasts, but that the measured intake of food is required by the “coenobitic rule” (τὸν κοινοβιακὸν κανόνα) to which his monks must adhere because they have once and for all committed themselves to it¹⁰³. Elsewhere he is more critical of the eremitic lifestyle, insisting on the superiority of the coenobitic way because only there the breaking of the will is practised¹⁰⁴.

Theodore had to contend not only with contemporary alternatives, but also with the past. His monks read or listened to texts which praised extreme forms of asceticism. In a *Catechesis* delivered during the Great Lent, he focuses on the example of Jesus, declaring that “even if he fasts for forty days as a human being, let us fast with him through a regime that consists of eating every day or at times also eating every other day” (κὰν νηστεύῃ ὡς ἄνθρωπος τεσσαρακονθήμερον, τῷ ἡμερησίῳ κανόνι ἢ καὶ τῷ ὑπερημερησίῳ ἐν καιρῷ συννηστεύσωμεν αὐτῷ)¹⁰⁵. Thus he denies that the Biblical account could become a precise model for behaviour. Hagiographical texts posed a similar problem because they often presented the saints as extreme fasters. In order to limit their impact on his monks, Theodore develops a sophisticated argument.

Εἴποι τις ἂν ἴσως, ὡς τὸ καθ’ ἐκάστην ἐσθίειν ἐλλειπές ἐστι τελειότητος. Ἄλλ’ οὐδαμῶς· ἢ γὰρ ἂν οὐκ ἂν ὁ Κύριος τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον ἐκάστοτε αἰτεῖν ἡμᾶς προσέταξεν· οὐκ ἂν Ἡλίας ὁ προφήτης καθ’ ἐκάστην ἐν ἐρήμῳ ὑπὸ κόρακος διετρέφετο· οὐκ ἂν Παῦλος ὁ πρὸ τοῦ θεοῦ Ἀντωνίου τὴν ἔρημον οἰκίσας ἡμερησίον τὸν ἄρτον θεόθεν ἀπεδέχετο· οὐδ’ ἂν αὐτὸς ὁ μέγας Ἀντώνιος τῆς ὑπερημερησίου καὶ ἐβδομαρησίου νηστείας τὸ καθ’ ἐκάστην ἡμέραν ἐσθίειν παρὰ μικρὸν τῆς χρείας προέκρινε¹⁰⁶.

“Somebody might say that eating every day falls short of perfection. By no means! For if that were the case, the Lord would not have commanded us to ask every day for our daily bread, the

⁹⁸ Magna Catechesis 60 (ed. I. COZZA-LUZI, Sancti Theodori Studitae sermones magnae catecheseos [*Nova patrum bibliotheca* 9, 2]. Rome 1888, 168).

⁹⁹ Magna Catechesis 65 (182 COZZA-LUZI).

¹⁰⁰ Parva Catechesis 128 (447 AUVRAY).

¹⁰¹ Magna Catechesis 74 (209 COZZA-LUZI).

¹⁰² Parva Catechesis 53 (191 AUVRAY).

¹⁰³ Magna Catechesis 60 (168–169 COZZA-LUZI).

¹⁰⁴ Parva Catechesis 128 (447 AUVRAY).

¹⁰⁵ Megale Katechesis 27 (191 PAPAPOPOULOS-KERAMEUS).

¹⁰⁶ Parva Catechesis 55 (200 AUVRAY).

prophet Elijah would not have been fed every day by a raven, Paul who settled in the desert before the divine Anthony would not have received bread from God on a daily basis, the great Anthony himself would not have preferred eating every day a little less than necessary to fasts that last two days and a week.”¹⁰⁷

Here Theodore claims that extended fasting is not an indispensable prerequisite for spiritual perfection and supports this claim with a list of authoritative figures: the Old Testament prophet Elijah, the hermit Paul of Thebes, and finally Anthony the Great¹⁰⁸. Whereas the first two examples are straightforward—both Elijah and Paul do indeed receive daily rations from God—the assertion that Anthony also preferred eating every day to longer fasts is startling because it seems to contradict Athanasius’ account in the *Life of Anthony*:

Ἦσθιέ τε ἅπαξ τῆς ἡμέρας μετὰ δύσιν ἡλίου, ἦν δ’ ὅτε καὶ διὰ δύο, πολλάκις καὶ διὰ τεσσάρων μετελάμβανεν¹⁰⁹.

“And he ate once a day after the setting of the sun, but he partook sometimes also every other day and often also every fourth day.”¹¹⁰

This passage would undoubtedly have been known to the monks who listened to the *Catechesis*, which raises the question how Theodore could go against the obvious meaning of such a seminal text. In order to find an answer, we need to turn to a saying in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*:

Ἠρώτησεν ὁ ἀββᾶς Ἰωσήφ τὸν ἀββᾶν Ποιμένα, πῶς χρῆ νηστεύειν. Λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ ἀββᾶς Ποιμὴν· Ἐγὼ θέλω τὸν ἐσθίοντα καθ’ ἡμέραν παρὰ μικρὸν ἐσθίειν, ἵνα μὴ χορτάζηται. Λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ ἀββᾶς Ἰωσήφ· Ὅτε ἦς νεώτερος, οὐκ ἐνήστευες δύο δύο, ἀββᾶ; Καὶ εἶπεν ὁ γέρον· Φύσει καὶ τρεῖς, καὶ τέσσαρας, καὶ ἑβδομάδα. Καὶ ταῦτα πάντα ἐδοκίμασαν οἱ Πατέρες, ὡς δυνατοί· καὶ εὗρον ὅτι καθ’ ἡμέραν ἐσθίειν, παρὰ μικρὸν δέ· καὶ παρέδωκαν ἡμῖν τὴν βασιλικὴν ὁδὸν, ὅτι ἐλαφρά ἐστιν¹¹¹.

“Abba Joseph asked Abba Poemen how one should fast. Abba Poemen says to him: ‘I want the one who eats to eat every day a little so that he is not sated.’ Abba Joseph says to him: ‘When you were young, did you not fast for two days, abba?’ And the elder said: ‘Indeed, and for three and for four and for a week. And all these the Fathers tested, since they were able to do so, and they found that it is best to eat every day but a little, and they transmitted to us the royal highway, because it is light.’”¹¹²

In this *apophthegma* the famous Egyptian monk Poemen is asked about his opinion on fasting. The similarity between his recommendation, “to eat every day but a little” (καθ’ ἡμέραν ἐσθίειν, παρὰ μικρὸν δέ), and Theodore’s statement that it is better “to eat every day a little less than needed” (καθ’ ἐκάστην ἡμέραν ἐσθίειν παρὰ μικρὸν τῆς χρείας), is immediately evident. It suggests strongly that Theodore adapted this earlier text. Indeed, a closer look reveals that this is not the only instance of intertextuality. Poemen also admits that as a young man he fasted “for two days” (δύο δύο), and “for three days and for four days and for a week” (τρεῖς, καὶ τέσσαρας, καὶ ἑβδομάδα), which not only compares with Theodore’s phrase “he preferred ... to the fast for two days and for a week” (ὑπερημερησίου καὶ ἑβδομαρησίου νηστείας ... προέκρινε), but also with Athanasius’ claim that Anthony “partook sometimes also every other day and often also every fourth day” (ἦν δ’ ὅτε καὶ διὰ

¹⁰⁷ Translation by me.

¹⁰⁸ See 3 Kings 17:6, and *Life of Paul (BHG 1469) 6* (ed. G. VAN HOFF, *Vita graeca S. Pauli Thebaei. AnBoll 2* [1883] 563).

¹⁰⁹ *Life of Anthony (BHG 140) 7* (ed. G. J. M. BARTELINK, *Athanase d’Alexandrie, Vie d’Antoine. Introduction, texte critique, traduction, notes et index [SC 400]. Paris 1994*).

¹¹⁰ Translation by me.

¹¹¹ *Apophthegma Poemen 31 (PG 65, 329)*. For later, more explicit references to this text, see below note 216.

¹¹² Translation by me.

δύο, πολλάκις καὶ διὰ τεσσάρων μετελάμβανεν). The point of the *apophthegma* is, of course, that these extended fasts are now considered by Poemen to be inferior to eating daily. Significantly, this conclusion is based not only on Poemen's personal experience but on the experience of the Fathers who had tried out all the different forms of fasting, but in the end settled for eating once a day. For Theodore, one of these Fathers would undoubtedly have been Anthony. This then allowed him to relativize Athanasius' statement early on in the *Life* about the saint's extended fasts and to claim that at that stage Anthony was still going through an experimental phase, but that he later came round to seeing daily eating as the best regime. In addition, the *apophthegma* of Poemen had one further advantage. It emphasized that the Fathers in general (and Anthony in particular) were well capable of fasting over long periods of time, but did not do so because they considered it improper. This permitted Theodore to claim that eating less was not necessarily a sign of lack of strength or lack of application, but that it was entirely reconcilable with the stage of perfection.

It needs to be pointed out, however, that Theodore's position is not always so clear. In one *Catechesis* he states that the famous saints of old could engage in extreme fasting, but that the present generation was no longer capable of doing so and should recognize this fact in humility¹¹³. It is evident that here moderate fasting has become a concession to human weakness, a position that clearly contradicts the view that eating every day is not a sign of imperfection.

The discussion so far gives the impression that Theodore was a lone voice. Only one other text, the *Life of Theophanes* by Methodius (d. 847), the later patriarch, contains a reference to the "golden mean"¹¹⁴.

... δικαίως διώκων τὸ δίκαιον καὶ τοσοῦτον ὑφαιρῶν τῆς σαρκὸς πάντοτε, ὅσον μὴ τυραννεῖσθαι ταύτῃ τὸ πνεῦμά ποτε, ἀλλὰ ποιεῖσθαι καὶ τὸν ἐκείνου λόγον, ὅσον οἰκέτου πρὸς κύριον, καὶ μὴ ἔαν αὐτὸ πάλιν εἰς τὸ παντελὲς ἀπρονόητον διὰ τὸ δι' αὐτοῦ κατορθοῦν τὰ τῆς ἀρετῆς παραγγέλματα¹¹⁵.

"... justly pursuing what is just and always taking away so much from the flesh that the spirit was never tyrannised by it, but even did its will, as a servant for a master, and again not letting it be completely unprovided because it performs through it the commandments of virtue."¹¹⁶

This passage establishes a link between the cardinal virtue of justice, which demands equal treatment, and the ideal of moderation. Unfortunately, it remains isolated in Methodius' hagiographical oeuvre. Therefore, it is impossible to determine its significance.

Yet this dearth of evidence in hagiographical texts should not be regarded as a sign that extreme and agonistic asceticism reigned supreme. It is entirely possible that other monastic leaders agreed with Theodore but expressed their views in letters and sermons that have not come down to us. Indeed, an episode in the *Life of Theodore's* contemporary Peter of Atroa (d. 837) suggests that abbots of coenobitic monasteries made common cause against extreme ascetics¹¹⁷. The hagiographer Sabas portrays the saint as a typical holy man who fasts rigorously and performs miracles. He does, however, admit that such behaviour incurred the criticism of others. According to him Iconoclast

¹¹³ Magna Catechesis 60 (168–169 COZZA-LUZI).

¹¹⁴ Methodius (*PMBZ* 4977). See B. ZIELKE, Methodios I., in: Die Patriarchen der ikonoklastischen Zeit: Germanos I.-Methodios I. (717–847), ed. R.-J. LILIE (*Berliner Byzantinische Studien* 5). Frankfurt am Main 1999, 183–260.

¹¹⁵ Life of Theophanes 26 (18, 8–13 LATYŠEV).

¹¹⁶ Translation by me.

¹¹⁷ Peter (*PMBZ* 6022). See V. LAURENT, La vie merveilleuse de saint Pierre d'Atroa († 837) (*Subsidia Hagiographica* 29). Brussels 1956, 18–61. For a discussion see DÉROCHE, Quand l'ascèse devient péché 173.

bishops and abbots regarded Peter as a “wizard” (γόης)¹¹⁸. Peter was so distressed by this accusation that he turned to Theodore of Stoudios who was then in exile in Asia Minor. Theodore asked Peter to give an account of his whole life. Peter obliged, stating that since his youth he had not partaken of bread, wine, cheese and oil but had contented himself with legumes, herbs and water, and that from Epiphany until Easter he had done altogether without food and water¹¹⁹. Theodore then “ordered his servants to prepare a rich table for him and forced the saint to partake of everything together with him” (τοῖς αὐτοῦ ὑπηρέταις κελεύει τράπεζαν αὐτῷ παραθεῖναι πλουσίαν καὶ πάντων σὺν αὐτῷ μεταλαβεῖν τὸν ὄσιον κατηνάγκασεν)¹²⁰.

The hagiographer Sabas does not tell his audience why Theodore behaved in this manner. There is, however, an obvious explanation: he wished to discipline the saint¹²¹. Indeed, such “force-feeding” was a traditional method of correcting monks who had become exceedingly prideful because of the harsh ascetic practices in which they engaged. It had already been used in Late Antiquity by the Egyptian abbot Pachomius¹²². According to the hagiographer Sabas, Theodore then took a further step. He wrote a letter in which he asked the bishops and abbots who had accused Peter of being a wizard to be reconciled with him. In the letter Theodore not only addresses these men as “friends” (φίλοι), but also expects them to heed his words¹²³. This casts doubt on Sabas’ contention that they were Iconoclasts. It is much more likely that they were Iconophiles just as Peter was. Indeed, it is quite possible that Theodore was not a disinterested arbiter, but rather one of the critics of Peter and that he acted as their spokesman. It is not difficult to see why Sabas was economical with the truth. By attributing the criticism to unspecified Iconoclasts he could give the impression that in this case, too, Peter suffered for his Iconophile beliefs. Yet one can also argue that this strategy would not have been convincing if Iconoclasts had not held similar views. This argument can be substantiated when we turn to a group of hagiographical texts from the early ninth century, which have been termed “Iconoclastic” since they contain no references to images. In these texts, too, little attention is paid to the ascetic exploits of the saints¹²⁴.

THE SECOND HALF OF THE NINTH CENTURY

Theodore’s *Catecheses* contain rich material, which allows us to put into perspective contemporary hagiographical literature where the ideal of extreme and agonistic asceticism is promoted. In the decades that follow the Triumph of Orthodoxy the situation is markedly different. We have only one comparable text, a collection of spiritual chapters, the so-called *Oiakistike*, which was written by Emperor Leo VI (886–912)¹²⁵. One passage defines the correct monastic diet as the happy medium between two extremes:

Ἀκρίζουσα νηστεία καὶ πλήρωσις σιτίσεως ἐπίμεμπα ὅτι ἡ πολλὴ καὶ ἐπιτεταμένη ἐγκράτεια καὶ ἡ τῆς τροφῆς πλησμονὴ φαῦλα· ἡ μὲν γὰρ ἄτονον ποιεῖ τὸν ἀγωνιστὴν καὶ παντελῶς πρὸς τὰς

¹¹⁸ Life of Peter of Atroa 37 (145, 1–9 LAURENT).

¹¹⁹ Life of Peter of Atroa 37 (147, 31–36 LAURENT).

¹²⁰ Life of Peter of Atroa 37 (147, 40–43 LAURENT).

¹²¹ See LAURENT, *La vie merveilleuse* 19.

¹²² Bohairic Life of Pachomius 64 (tr. A VEILLEUX, *Pachomian Koinonia, I: The Life of Saint Pachomius and his Disciples [Cistercian Studies Series 45]*. Kalamazoo, Mich. 1980, 84–85).

¹²³ Life of Peter of Atroa 38 (147–149 LAURENT).

¹²⁴ See I. ŠEVČENKO, *Hagiography of the Iconoclast Period*, in: *Iconoclasm*, ed. A. A. M. Bryer – J. Herrin. Birmingham 1977, 113–131, and M.-F. AUZÉPY, *L’analyse littéraire et l’historien: l’exemple des vies de saints iconoclasts*, *BSI* 53 (1992) 57–67.

¹²⁵ See J. GROSDIDIER DE MATONS, *Trois études sur Léon VI, II: Hippocrate et Léon VI. Remarques sur l’oïakistike ψυχῶν ὑποτύπωσις*. *TM* 5 (1973) 206–228, esp. 207–208.

πράξεις ἀνενέργητον, ἢ δὲ τὰ πάθη τῆς σαρκὸς ἐπὶ πλέον διεγείρει καὶ σφοδρότερον τὸν κατὰ τῆς ψυχῆς ἀνίστησι πόλεμον¹²⁶.

“Extreme fasting and fullness of nourishment are reprehensible because great and extended abstinence and fullness of food are bad. For the one makes the fighter weak and altogether inactive as regards the actions, whereas the other incites the passions of the flesh even more and wages the war against the soul more vehemently.”¹²⁷

The text is addressed to the monk Euthymius who may be identified with the abbot of Psamathia and later patriarch¹²⁸. Yet it is difficult to gauge whether it had a practical purpose. With it Leo attempted to revive a literary genre that had been defunct since the end of Late Antiquity. Thus it may well reflect the emperor’s antiquarian interests rather than his concerns for contemporary monasticism. The absence of other discursive or normative texts makes it extremely difficult to assess whether the coenobitic ideology played a role in this period. All we can do is search for clues in hagiographical texts.

These texts give the impression that the ideal of extreme and agonistic asceticism reigned supreme. Stephen the Neolampes (d. 911), a former patriarchal cleric, is said to have eaten legumes without salt once or twice a week and to have consumed only a dried fig and a little water to wet his mouth after he had celebrated the Eucharist¹²⁹. Stephen was an extreme case, a recluse who was not attached to a monastic community. Yet *Lives* of saintly abbots do not present us with a substantially different picture. Joseph the Hymnographer (d. 886), abbot and sacristan of the Great Church, is said to have “engaged ... in fasts that exceeded nature” (ἐχρήτο ... νηστείας τὴν φύσιν ὑπερβαλλούσας) even at an early age, and thus to have gained the admiration of his abbot and the other members of the community¹³⁰. This is all the more significant as the author was Joseph’s successor in the office of abbot¹³¹. It may well be that he found such behaviour acceptable even for his own monks. Most likely Joseph himself would not have disagreed because in his *Life of John*, a Galatian hermit who became abbot of St Sergius near Constantinople, he claims that the saint contented himself with very little water and tormented his body through great austerities¹³². The *Life* of the Bithynian hermit Constantine the ex-Jew presents us with a similar picture¹³³. The hagiographer who wrote his text for a Constantinopolitan audience claimed that the saint ate so little that he outdid all others and appeared to be “an angel instead of a human being” (ἄγγελος ἐξ ἀνθρώπου)¹³⁴. Even authors who content themselves with brief comments pay lip-service to the ideal of extreme asceticism. In his *Life of Patriarch Ignatius* (d. 877) Nicetas the Paphlagonian informs us that the saint engaged in “extended fasts, vigils, psalmody” (νηστείαν ἀγρυπνίαν ψαλμωδίαν ἐπιτεταμένην) during his time as a member of a coenobitic community¹³⁵. The *Life of Theophylact of Nicomedia* (d. 840?), which may also date to this period, has nothing to say about the intake of food but emphasizes the fact that the saint went

¹²⁶ Leo VI, Oiakistike I.8 (ed. A. PAPADOPOULOS-KERAMEUS, *Varia graeca sacra*. St. Petersburg 1909, 216–217).

¹²⁷ Translation by me.

¹²⁸ See GROSIDIER DE MATONS, *Trois études* 215–216.

¹²⁹ Synaxarium, Dec. 2 (S) (BHG 2404t) (291–294 DELEHAYE). See also M. CAPRARA, La ‘Vita’ latina di Stefano Confessore, detto Neolampes. *Hagiographica* 14 (2007) 101–140.

¹³⁰ *Life of Joseph* (BHG 944) (ed. A. PAPADOPOULOS-KERAMEUS, *Monumenta graeca et latina ad historiam Photii Patriarchae spectantia*, II. St. Petersburg 1901, 1–14).

¹³¹ Joseph (PMBZ 3454). See L. VAN ROMPAY, Joseph l’Hymnographe (Saint). *DHGE*, fasc. 162 (2001) 209–210.

¹³² *Life of John 5* (ed. M. VAN ESBROECK, *La Vie de Saint Jean higoumène de Saint-Serge par Joseph le Skevophylax*. *Oriens Christianus* 80 [1996] 153–166, esp. 160).

¹³³ See D. KRAUSMÜLLER, The Unaware Saint: Divine Illusion and Human Sanctity in the *Life* of Constantine the Ex-Jew. *AnBoll* 129 (2010) 339–347.

¹³⁴ *Life of Constantine* (BHG 3701) 6 (ed. H. DELEHAYE, *Vita Constantini [Acta Sanctorum Novembris IV]*. Brussels 1925, 632F).

¹³⁵ *Life of Ignatius* (BHG 817) (PG 105, 496A).

for days without drinking¹³⁶. The hagiographer of Michael the Synkellos (d. 843), abbot of the monastery of Chora, goes so far as to reject explicitly the ideal of moderation. He tells us that the saint consumed only vegetables during the week and often ate only every second or third day. The abbot asked him “to give in a little so that his body might suffice for the liturgy of God and for the service of the *lavra*” (ἐνδοῦναι μικρὸν πρὸς τὸ ἐξαρκεῖν τὸ αὐτοῦ σῶμα ἐν τῇ τοῦ θεοῦ λειτουργίᾳ καὶ τῇ διακονίᾳ τῆς λαύρας), but Michael paid no heed to this advice¹³⁷.

A more complex case is the hagiographical production of the monks of St Phocas on the Bosphorus, a foundation of Emperor Basil I (867–886), which was also closely connected to the patriarchate¹³⁸. Unfortunately, the *Life* of its first abbot, Peter of Galatia, is no longer extant but we still have a summary in the *Synaxarium*, which informs us that after his tonsure he lived on Mt Olympus, “fasting for a week or two or three days” (δι’ ἐβδομάδος καὶ δύο καὶ τριῶν νηστεύων)¹³⁹. This suggests that extreme asceticism was considered praiseworthy by his flock. Yet the bishop Peter of Argos (d. 947/948) who in his youth had been member of the community inserted a reference to the “golden mean” into his *Encomium* of Athanasius of Methone (d. c. 900)¹⁴⁰. He states that even as a bishop the deceased had been graced with virtues “so that he never deviated from the royal highway through excesses and deficiencies which fight against them” (ὡς μηδέποτε ταῖς μαχομέναις αὐταῖς ὑπερβολαῖς καὶ ἐλλείψεσι τῆς βασιλικῆς ἐκκλίνειν ὁδοῦ)¹⁴¹. This discrepancy is not easy to interpret. One could argue that it reflected the different lifestyles of the saints. Indeed, it is conceivable that Peter merely sought to cover up a lack of ascetic achievements. Even if this was not the case, Peter’s stance may have had little to do with his monastic formation, especially since he had long left St Phocas when he wrote the text. Under these circumstances it is impossible to argue that the ideal of moderation gained ground in the community.

THE TENTH CENTURY

The more plentiful evidence from Stoudios allows us to come to more definite conclusions. The first text to consider is the *Life of Euarestus*, abbot of Kokorobion in Constantinople (d. 897), which most likely antedates the year 925¹⁴². It was delivered in the church of the monastery but the author is exceptionally well informed about the internal affairs of Stoudios and may well have hailed from there¹⁴³. We are told that Euarestus had entered Stoudios during the time of Theodore’s disciple Naukratius. There he teamed up with an older monk called Eubiotus. Both men subjected themselves to an exacting fasting regime, eating barley bread that was baked twice and drinking water in which they had let rot unsalted vegetables, in such small quantities “that they barely ensured the survival of the flesh” (ὡς τῇ σαρκὶ τὸ ζῆν μόνον οἰκονομεῖσθαι)¹⁴⁴. In order to justify this behaviour the hagi-

¹³⁶ Life of Theophylactus (*BHG* 2451) 6 (ed. A. VOGT, S. Théophylacte de Nicoméde. *AnBoll* 50 [1932] 67–82, esp. 74).

¹³⁷ Life of Michael (*BHG* 1296) 3 (ed. M. B. CUNNINGHAM, The Life of Michael the Synkellos. Text, Translation and Commentary [*Belfast Byzantine Texts and Translations* 1]. Belfast 1991, 50).

¹³⁸ See D. KRAUSMÜLLER, Imperial Founders and First Abbots: the Cases of John II Komnenos and Basil the Macedonian, in: Founders and Refounders, ed. M. Mullett (*Belfast Byzantine Texts and Translations* 6, 3). Belfast 2007, 344–365.

¹³⁹ *Synaxarium*, Oct. 9, 12 (S) (125–126 DELEHAYE).

¹⁴⁰ Peter (*PMBZ* 26428).

¹⁴¹ *Encomium of Athanasius* (*BHG* 196) (ed. Ch. ΠΑΡΑΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΟΥ, Ὁ πολιοῦχος τοῦ Ἄργου ἀγιος Πέτρος ἐπίσκοπος Ἄργου ὁ θαυματουργός. Athens 1908, 97).

¹⁴² *Dumbarton Oaks Hagiography Database*, <https://www.doaks.org/research/byzantine/resources/hagiography> [41] (accessed 07.12.2019). See S. EFTHYMIADIS, Hagiography from the ‘Dark Age’ to the Age of Symeon Metaphrastes (Eighth-Tenth Centuries), in: *The Ashgate Research Companion* 118.

¹⁴³ Life of Euarestus (*BHG* 2153) 12 (ed. C. VAN DE VORST, La vie de s. Évariste, higoumène à Constantinople. *AnBoll* 41 [1923] 287–325, esp. 306).

¹⁴⁴ Life of Euarestus 9 (303 VAN DE VORST).

ographer appeals to 2 Corinthians 4:16: “Even if our outer man perishes, our inner man is renewed from day to day” (εἰ καὶ ὁ ἔξω ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος διαφθείρεται, ἀλλ’ ὁ ἔσω ἡμῶν ἀνακαινοῦται ἡμέρα καὶ ἡμέρα), which he interprets in starkly dualistic fashion¹⁴⁵. It is likely that this view was shared by members of the Stoudite community since the commemoration of Eubiotus as a saint is stipulated in the liturgical *Typikon* of the Stoudios monastery¹⁴⁶. Euarestus is even said to have intensified his asceticism in later years, although we are only told that his achievements were “beyond nature” (ὕπερ φύσιν)¹⁴⁷. The agonistic character of his asceticism is highlighted in a *syncrisis* at the end of the text. There we are told that he excelled even the great saints of old¹⁴⁸. Negative consequences of such behaviour to which Theodore had drawn attention are denied: “Even with such ones it is the case that one excels the other and there is in them no envy of ascent” (ἔστι γὰρ κὰν τοῖς τοιοῦτοις ἄλλον ἄλλου προέχειν καὶ φθόνος ἐν αὐτοῖς οὐδεὶς ἀναβάσεως) but only the wish to emulate¹⁴⁹. One may wonder, however, how extreme the asceticism of Euarestus and Eubiotus really was. Indeed, the text is equally interesting for what it does not say. There is no mention of extended fasts that lasted for days or even weeks. This leaves open the possibility that they ate every day. If so, the hagiographer did his utmost to gloss over this fact. This shows clearly that he could not imagine a model of sainthood that was not based on extreme activities. There is only one oblique reference to the coenobitic regime. We are told that although the saints stayed clear of wine, oil and legumes, such a diet was entirely acceptable for monks¹⁵⁰.

Only a couple of decades later we encounter a radically different point of view. It is expressed in the *Life of Blaise of Amorium* (d. 912), which most likely dates to the second quarter of the tenth century¹⁵¹. Its author, an unnamed Stoudite monk, provides detailed information about the saint’s asceticism in two separate passages¹⁵². The topic is first broached when Blaise, then still a layman, comes to Rome on a pilgrimage.

Κὰν¹⁵³ τούτοις τῷ ἀράτρῳ τῶν ἐντολῶν τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς διερχόμενος αὐλακα διὰ δύο ἢ καὶ τριῶν <ἤσθιε>, ἔστι δ’ ὅτε καὶ μετὰ τὴν τῆς ἐβδομάδος ἐκπλήρωσιν ἄρτῳ βραχυτάτῳ καὶ ὕδατι συγκροτοῦμενος¹⁵⁴.

“In this, too, traversing the furrow of the soul with the plough of the commandments, he ate every other or even third day, and sometimes even after the end of the week, being held together by very little bread and water.”¹⁵⁵

It is then taken up again in the account of Blaise’s life as a monk in the *lavra* of Caesarius. There we are told that he imposed on himself a different ascetic regime.

Ὡς ἂν δὲ μὴ δόξειε τοῖς πολλοῖς ὑπερέχειν αὐτῶν¹⁵⁶ τῷ φρονήματι μετρίως δ’ ἐπίσης εἶναι τοῖς ὁμοταγέσι βουλόμενος ἡσθιεν ἅπαξ τῆς ἡμέρας βραχὺ τι μετὰ τὴν τοῦ ἡλίου δύσιν ἀπογευόμενος

¹⁴⁵ Life of Euarestus 9 (304 VAN DE VORST).

¹⁴⁶ *Typikon* of Alexius (ed. A. M. PENTKOVSKI, *Типикон патриарха Алексия Студита в Византии и на Руси*. Moscow 2001, 284). On September 15, at Vespers: ΠΑΜΑ(Τ) [...] и прп(д)ѣнаго ѿца наше(г) евиота стоудииска(г).

¹⁴⁷ Life of Euarestus 11 (305 VAN DE VORST).

¹⁴⁸ Life of Euarestus 24 (314 VAN DE VORST).

¹⁴⁹ Life of Euarestus 9 (303 VAN DE VORST).

¹⁵⁰ Life of Euarestus 9 (303 VAN DE VORST).

¹⁵¹ See EFTHYMIADIS, *Hagiography from the ‘Dark Age’* 117.

¹⁵² *Dumbarton Oaks Hagiography Database*, <https://www.doaks.org/research/byzantine/resources/hagiography> [30] (accessed 07.12.2019).

¹⁵³ Ed. καί.

¹⁵⁴ Life of Blaise (*BHG* 278) 10 (ed. H. DELEHAYE, *Vita Blasii Amoriensis [Acta Sanctorum Novembris IV]*. Brussels 1925, 662D).

¹⁵⁵ Translation by me.

¹⁵⁶ Ed. αὐτῶν.

κὰν τούτῳ τὴν πάλαι ὑπὸ τῶν ἀγίων πατέρων οικονομικῶς ἐκτεθεῖσαν διαφυλάττειν παράδοσιν ὡς ἂν ἄρτιος εἶη τὸ σῶμα καὶ μὴ ἄτονόν τε καὶ ἔκλυτον πρὸς τὴν τῶν πνευματικῶν ἀγωνισμάτων ἐκπλήρωσιν· τὰς δὲ γε τῆς τεσσαρακοστῆς ἡμέρας ἀπαρατρώτως ἐφύλαττε, μίαν τῆς ἐβδομάδος ἀμυδρᾶς τινος τροφῆς ἐμπιμπλόμενος, ὅσον τὸν σύνδεσμον καὶ μόνον συγκροτεῖσθαι τῷ σώματι· καὶ γὰρ ἅπας ὁ βίος τῆς διαίτης αὐτῷ ἄνευ ὑπῆρξεν ἄρτου καὶ οἴνου καὶ τῶν ἄλλως ἐχόντων θέλγειν τὴν αἴσθησιν¹⁵⁷.

“But lest he appear to the many to exceed them as regards his attitude, and wishing to be moderately equal to those who had the same rank as he, he ate once a day, tasting a little after sunset, keeping in this, too, the tradition that had of old been set out economically by the holy Fathers, in order that the body be sound and not enfeebled and enervated as regards the fulfilment of the spiritual struggles. By contrast, he kept the days of the forty-day Lent at least without infringement, being filled with some slight food once a week, only so much that the bond was held together with the body. For his whole lifestyle and diet was without bread and wine and whatever else enchants the senses.”¹⁵⁸

At first sight it seems that Blaise was an ascetic of a traditional sort. Indeed, the hagiographer appears to be particularly insistent on this point because he claims that the saint fasted even before he became a monk, a detail that is missing in hagiographies of an earlier date. Yet a closer look reveals that this impression is deceptive. One would expect the second dietary regime to be stricter than the first, in particular since the hagiographer states that as a monk Blaise “subjected himself to harsher contests” (σκληροτέροις ἀγῶσιν ἐαυτὸν καθυπέβαλλε)¹⁵⁹. Yet this is not quite the case. It is true that the saint is now said to abstain from bread, which he had continued to consume while he was still a layman. He does, however, eat more frequently than before, once a day, whereas as a layman he had fasted for longer periods of time. Only the Lenten regime breaks this pattern. In the forty days before Easter, Blaise is again said to have eaten only once a week.

The hagiographer gives us three reasons why the saint toned down his dietary regime: his concern not to be regarded as prideful by other members of the community, his wish not to be different from other members of the community, and his obedience to the monastic tradition, which leads him to consider the negative consequences of extreme asceticism for the body¹⁶⁰. It is evident that this attitude is radically different from the mind-set that ninth-century hagiographers attribute to their heroes. As we have seen, they speak quite unselfconsciously about exceptional behaviour and envisage that it will engender in others only feelings of admiration and the wish to imitate, and they stress that the body needs to be weakened. This leaves no doubt that the author of the *Life of Blaise* broke with the existing consensus, which established a close nexus between extensive asceticism and saintly status. Indeed, one can argue that he expected a negative response. The passage about the saint’s fasts while he was still a layman may well have been introduced in order to show that he could have fasted as much as the great ascetics of old, if he had not felt constrained by the above-mentioned considerations.

A further layer of meaning reveals itself when we identify borrowings from older texts. The author’s main point of reference is the *Life of Anthony*. The phrases ἅπαξ τῆς ἡμέρας and μετὰ τὴν τοῦ ἡλίου δύσιν, which appear in the description of Blaise’s diet as a monk, correspond to ἡσθιε τε ἅπαξ τῆς ἡμέρας μετὰ δύσιν ἡλίου in the older text, whereas the phrases διὰ δύο and ἔστι δ’ ὅτε, which are used to characterize Blaise’s diet as a layman have a counterpart in ἦν δ’ ὅτε καὶ διὰ δύο. In this last case the match is not complete because Blaise’s hagiographer has replaced διὰ τεσσάρων with διά ...

¹⁵⁷ Life of Blaise 14 (661A DELEHAYE).

¹⁵⁸ Translation by me.

¹⁵⁹ Life of Blaise 14 (661A DELEHAYE).

¹⁶⁰ See KRAUSMÜLLER, From Competition 204–205.

τριῶν ... καὶ μετὰ τὴν τῆς ἑβδομάδος ἐκπλήρωσιν. Here we can detect the influence of later texts. A precedent is found in the late antique *Life of Peter the Iberian* where we read that the saint ate every third or fourth day and at times only once a week¹⁶¹. Such statements are possibly also derived from the *Life of Anthony* but they raise the bar for what is regarded as proper “saintly” fasting, evidently because the authors considered Anthony’s diet to be unacceptably lax. In the *Life of Blaise* this intensification is accepted but such a diet is now relegated to a preliminary stage, whereas his dietary regime as a monk corresponds to Anthony’s “normal” pattern.

In order to understand the full significance of this step we need to consider another hagiographical text, the *Life of David, Symeon and George*, which predates the eleventh century¹⁶². There we read that when he became a monk Symeon engaged in strenuous fasting.

Εὖ γὰρ ἦδει ὁ γεννάδας τὴν τοῦ σκολιοῦ δράκοντος ἰσχὺν ἐπ’ ὀμφαλοῦ γαστρὸς ἐσομένην, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ἦσθιε μὲν ἐν ἀρχῇ ἅπαξ τῆς ἡμέρας ἄρτον καὶ ὕδωρ μόνον, βραχὺ δὲ λίαν καὶ τοῦτο μετὰ τὴν τοῦ ἡλίου δύσιν, ἔπειτα διὰ δύο, πολλάκις δὲ καὶ τὴν ἑβδομάδα παρέλκων· τοσαύτην γὰρ νηστείαν ἀκριβῆ καὶ ἐπιτεταμένην ἐπεδείξατο, ὡς ἐν ταῖς τῆς ἀγίας τεσσαρακοστῆς σχεδὸν πάσαις ἡμέραις ἄσιτος διαμένειν, ξένον μέντοι καὶ παράδοξον ἄκουσμά τε καὶ θέαμα, τοῖς δὲ τῷ θεῷ ἀνατεθειμένοις οἰκεῖον καὶ συμφυρές¹⁶³.

“For the valiant one knew well that the power of the twisted dragon would be in the navel of the stomach¹⁶⁴, and for this reason ate at the beginning once a day bread and water, but very little and that only after the setting of the sun, afterwards every other day, and often also fasting the whole week. He showed such a precise and extended fasting that during almost all the days of the holy forty-day Lent he remained without food, which is indeed strange and paradox to hear and to see, but is appropriate and intrinsic to those who have devoted themselves to God.”¹⁶⁵

The presence of the elements ἅπαξ τῆς ἡμέρας ... μετὰ τὴν τοῦ ἡλίου δύσιν and διὰ δύο πολλάκις shows that in this case, too, the *Life of Anthony* is the ultimate model. Again, however, Athanasius’ account is subtly modified. The different regimes, which had been alternatives in the older text, are now presented as a temporal sequence, which is indicated through insertion of the phrases ἐν ἀρχῇ and ἔπειτα. As a consequence, Symeon’s career as a faster appears to be a rising crescendo, culminating in the most extreme regime during Lent. I would argue that Blaise’s hagiographer started out from such a scenario, and that he turned it on its head, putting the stricter fasting practice before the laxer one. As a consequence the fasting during Lent now seems isolated in its context.

This raises the question: how does Blaise’s hagiographer justify his reinterpretation of the regime detailed in the *Life of Anthony*? I would argue that the answer lies in the phrase τὴν πάλαι ὑπὸ τῶν ἀγίων πατέρων ... ἐκτεθεῖσαν ... παράδοσιν. This is best understood as a reference to the *apophthegma* of Poemen, which a century earlier had allowed Theodore of Studios to undermine the authority of the *Life of Anthony*. Theodore’s abstract discussion would then have been turned into a narrative. It is intimated that in his own life Blaise went through the same stages as Poemen, beginning with the harsher regime and then moderating it because he realised that it was the better way. Since the hagiographer was a Stoudite monk it is entirely possible that he drew his inspiration from Theodore’s *Catechesis*.

¹⁶¹ *Life of Peter* 17 (tr. H. RABE, Petrus der Iberer. Leipzig 1895, 24).

¹⁶² Dumbarton Oaks Hagiography Database, <https://www.doaks.org/research/byzantine/resources/hagiography> [32] (accessed 07.12.2019).

¹⁶³ *Life of David, Symeon and George* (BHG 494) 10 (ed. I. VAN DEN GHEYN, Acta graeca ss. Davidis, Symeonis et Georgii Mitylenae in insula Lesbo. *AnBoll* 18 [1899] 143–241, esp. 221).

¹⁶⁴ Job 40:16.

¹⁶⁵ Translation by me.

The difference between the corresponding passages in the *Lives* of Euarestus and Blaise is striking. It needs to be stressed, however, that this is above all a matter of presentation. The two saints' ascetic regimes were probably not very different from one another, especially if it is true that Euarestus ate every day. Yet whereas Euarestus' asceticism is played up, Blaise's is toned down in order to make it conform to the coenobitic ideal. Curiously enough, Blaise's hagiographer seems to have had reservations about the strict application of this ideal. As we have seen, he qualifies the phrase ἐπίσης εἶναι τοῖς ὁμοταγέσι through the adverb μετρίως. The significance of this modification is obvious. It means that Blaise does not subject himself completely to the coenobitic rule, which is characterized "through the equality in all respects of the common table" (τῆ κατὰ πάντα ἰσότητι τῆς κοινῆς τραπέζης)¹⁶⁶. In the context μετρίως is a strange choice of expression. In other texts it is coupled with ἀπογεύεσθαι and denotes measured intake of food¹⁶⁷. By contrast, Blaise's hagiographer uses it in order to make the opposite claim, namely that Blaise was a more rigorous faster than his peers. This gives the impression that he wished to subvert the ideal of moderation. Equally significant is the use of the term οἰκονομικῶς in order to characterize the legislation of the Fathers. It suggests that it is merely a concession to weakness and has no value in itself. A similar point is made in the subordinate clause ὡς ἂν δὲ μὴ δόξειε τοῖς πολλοῖς ὑπερέχειν αὐτῶν τῷ φρονήματι. It is an adaptation of Philippians 2:3–4: "considering each other in humility to be above yourselves" (τῆ ταπεινοφροσύνη ἀλλήλους ἡγούμενοι ὑπερέχοντας ἑαυτῶν). In Philippians Christ is then introduced as a model for such behaviour because he did not insist on remaining "like God" (ἴσα θεῷ) but rather became a human being even to the point of dying. This suggests that Blaise acted in imitation of Christ and that he, too, was above the other monks and would have pursued a much more elevated regime if he had not condescended to the weakness of others.

Since Blaise's hagiographer accepted the ideal of moderation despite reservations, one could argue that it was again in the ascendancy. Indeed, other texts produced by Stoudite monks present us with a similar picture. In the *Life* of the abbot Nicholas (d. 868), which postdates the year 910, we are told that the saint did justice both to the flesh and to the spirit by giving each of them its due¹⁶⁸. A more elaborate version of this topos is found in the oldest surviving *Life of Theodore the Stoudite, Vita B*, which can be attributed to the same author, Michael, who later became abbot of Dalmatos and patriarchal *synkellos*¹⁶⁹. There we read that when as a young monk Theodore ate in the refectory, he was admired by his fellow-brethren who sought to imitate him because of his exemplary conduct.

Τὸν γὰρ λογισμὸν ἐπιστήσας ὥσπερ δικαστὴν ἀδέκαστον πνεύματι καὶ σαρκί, οὕτω δι' αὐτοῦ ἐποιεῖτο ἑκατέρου τὸ δέον, ὡς μήτε διὰ τῆς ἄγαν ἀσιτίας τὸ ὄρατὸν αὐτοῦ ἐκλύεσθαι, καὶ πρὸς τὰς ἐν Χριστῷ διακονίας ἄπρακτον παρὰ τὸ εἰκὸς καθίστασθαι, μήτ' αὖ διὰ τὸν κόρον τῶν εἰσκριθέντων τὰς ψυχικὰς ἕξεις ἀκηδεῖας ἐνέχεσθαι πάθεισιν¹⁷⁰.

"For having set up reason as an incorruptible judge for spirit and flesh, he gave through it what was due to either, to such an extent that neither his visible part was enervated through excessive not-eating or became inactive as regards the services in Christ contrary to what is proper,

¹⁶⁶ Diploma Isaacii protii, a. 1344 (ed. P. LEMERLE, Actes de Kutlumis, 2nd edition, Paris 1988, 75).

¹⁶⁷ See e.g. *Life of Theodore of Cythera* (ed. N. ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΔΗΣ, Ὁ βίος τοῦ ἁγίου Θεοδώρου Κυθήρων (10^{ος} αἰ.), in: *Praktika Tritou Panioniou Synedriou* 1. Athens 1967, 264–291, esp. 178): ἄρτον δὲ ἢ καὶ τι ἄλλο ἀπέστειλεν αὐτῷ τις, μετρίως ἐξ αὐτοῦ ἀπογευσάμενος τὰ λοιπὰ τοῖς δεομένοις ἐδίδου.

¹⁶⁸ *Life of Nicholas* (BHG 1365) (PG 105, 873B). *Dumbarton Oaks Hagiography Database*, <https://www.doaks.org/research/byzantine/resources/hagiography> [72–73] (accessed 07.12.2019).

¹⁶⁹ See D. KRAUSMÜLLER, *Vitae B, C and A of Theodore the Stoudite: their Interrelation, Dates, Authors and Significance for the History of the Stoudios Monastery in the Tenth Century*. *AnBoll* 131 (2013) 280–298.

¹⁷⁰ *Vita B of Theodore* 8 (PG 99, 244CD).

nor the habits of the soul were entangled in the passions of sloth through satiety with what was ingested.”¹⁷¹

A similar passage is found in Methodius’ *Life of Theophanes*. Thus it is possible that it was already present in Methodius’ now lost *Life of Theodore*, which served as a model for *Vita B*¹⁷². Yet even so we can be sure that it reflects contemporary concerns. In fact, a somewhat later *metaphrasis*, the so-called *Vita C*, goes one step further¹⁷³. Its anonymous author tells us that Theodore “sometimes partook of all things and tasted from them a little, lest he appear to have an incongruous asceticism” (τοῖς παρατιθεμένοις ἔστιν ὅτε πᾶσιν ἐχρῆτο καὶ τούτων μικρὸν ἀπεγεύετο ὡς μὴ δοκεῖν ἀπεμφαίνουσιν ἔχειν τὴν ἄσκησιν)¹⁷⁴. This statement resembles closely what we have found in the *Life of Blaise*. Here, too, conformity is seen as something positive and the negative effect of extreme asceticism on others is considered¹⁷⁵. Yet we also encounter a new theme, the need to eat from all the dishes that are being served in the refectory. Here we can detect the influence of the ascetic writings of Basil the Great where it is stipulated “that we must eat from all that is set before us” (ὅτι δεῖ πάντων τῶν παρατιθεμένων ἡμῖν ἀπογεύεσθαι), in accordance with 1 Corinthians 10:27¹⁷⁶. There is, however, an important discrepancy. Whereas Basil had demanded that monks behave in this fashion at all times, the author of *Vita C* claims that Theodore did so only occasionally. Undoubtedly it was the traditional nexus between strenuous asceticism and sainthood that made this modification necessary. In normative texts from Stoudios this problem did not arise. The Stoudite *Hypotyposis*, which most likely dates to the early tenth century, is a technical manual which gives little room to reflection. Yet it begins with the claim that the tradition of Stoudios is preferable “because it is the best and the most royal and avoids both excesses and deficiencies” (ὡς ἀρίστην καὶ βασιλικωτάτην καὶ τὰς ὑπερβολὰς καὶ ἐλλείψεις ἐκκλίνουσιν)¹⁷⁷. Even more significant are the *Chapters* of Symeon the Pious, the spiritual father of Symeon the New Theologian. This text describes the proper behaviour in the refectory, advising the addressee “to eat what is put in front of you whatever it is, and likewise also wine with self-restraint and without grumbling” (ἐσθίειν δὲ τὰ παρατιθέμενά σοι οἷά εἰσιν, ὁμοίως καὶ οἶνον μετὰ ἐγκρατείας ἀγογγύστως), unless he is ill, when he may eat only vegetables in his cell¹⁷⁸. This is surely no coincidence but reflects a broader movement within Stoudios to enforce this rule. It is likely that the abbots played a leading role here, especially Anatolius (fl. c. 900) who is credited with having restored the monastery to its old glory after the conflicts with the patriarchs¹⁷⁹.

This does not, of course, mean that the new ideal had completely replaced the old. Indeed, the Constantinopolitan populace continued to visit extreme ascetics such as the stylite Luke (d. 979)¹⁸⁰. In Luke’s *Life*, which was written by one of his disciples, we are informed that he tamed the flesh through frequent fasts “partaking of food only every seventh day” (δι’ ἡμερῶν ἑπτὰ μεταλαμβάνων

¹⁷¹ Translation by me.

¹⁷² See D. KRAUSMÜLLER, Patriarch Methodius, the First Hagiographer of Theodore of Stoudios. *Symbolae Osloenses* 81 (2007) 144–150.

¹⁷³ See D. KRAUSMÜLLER, The Abbots of Evergetis as Opponents of ‘Monastic Reform’: a Re-Appraisal of the Monastic Discourse in Eleventh- and Twelfth-Century Constantinople. *REB* 69 (2011) 111–134, esp. 126–127.

¹⁷⁴ *Vita C* of Theodore (*BHG* 1755d) 11 (ed. V. LATYŠEV, *Vita s. Theodori Studitae in codice Mosquensi musei Rumianzovani* no. 520. *VV* 21 [1914] 258–304, esp. 264).

¹⁷⁵ See KRAUSMÜLLER, *From Competition* 203.

¹⁷⁶ See Basil of Caesarea, *Regulae fusius tractatae* 18 (*PG* 31, 965A).

¹⁷⁷ *Hypotyposis* (*PG* 99, 1704A).

¹⁷⁸ Chapter 25 (ed. and tr. H. ALFEYEV – L. NEYRAND, *Syméon le Studite, Discours Ascétique* [SC 460]. Paris 2001, 102).

¹⁷⁹ See O. DELOUIS, *Écriture et réécriture au monastère de Stoudios à Constantinople (IX^e–X^e s.): quelques remarques*, in: *Remanier, métaphraser: fonctions et techniques de la réécriture dans le monde byzantin*, ed. S. Marjanovic-Dušanic – B. Flusin. Belgrade 2011, 101–110, esp. 106.

¹⁸⁰ See *Dumbarton Oaks Hagiography Database*, <https://www.doaks.org/research/byzantine/resources/hagiography> [63–64] (accessed 07.12.2019).

τροφῆς)¹⁸¹. Luke spent some time in a coenobitic monastery but there is no indication that he deviated from his customary lifestyle while he was there¹⁸². The continuing strength of the traditional model of sainthood can also be felt in the *Life of Nicephorus of Miletus* (d. c. 1000), whose author may have been a Constantinopolitan rhetorician¹⁸³. Nicephorus is a special case because he became a monk only late in life when he left his see in order to found a monastery. However, his sojourn as a boy in a Constantinopolitan educational institution is narrated in such a way that it follows closely the monastic template. We are told that the saint sought to dominate his concupiscence through abstinence and fasting and that he took this so far that he fell ill¹⁸⁴. There is no sign that the hagiographer disapproved of such behaviour.

Other texts eschew programmatic statements. The hagiographer of Patriarch Anthony Kauleas (d. 901), the philosopher Nicephorus, simply declares that the saint partook of bread and legumes¹⁸⁵. There is only one text that can be compared with the Stoudite writings, the *Life of Patriarch Methodius*, which gives the following account of the saint's stay at the monastery of Chenolakkos.

Κάκειψε τὴν ἀσκητικὴν ἐξανύει παλαιστραν μὴδ' ὅ,τι οὖν τοῦ κανόνος ὑπερβαλέσθαι ἢ καταλείψαι σπουδάζων σαφῶς ἐπιστάμενος τὴν εἰς ἑκάτερα κλίσιν τοῦ παντὸς εἶναι ἀπόπτωσιν¹⁸⁶.

“And there he completes the ascetic wrestling-ground, endeavouring neither to exceed nor to lag behind in anything pertaining to the rule, for he clearly understood that the inclination to either side is the loss of everything.”¹⁸⁷

Here we find a straightforward identification of the “golden mean” with the “rule” (κανών) of the monastery that leaves no room for ambiguity. The *Life* has survived in a tenth-century manuscript¹⁸⁸. Unfortunately, the exact date and original context of its production can no longer be established with any certainty. It has been argued that the text reflects a Stoudite point of view¹⁸⁹. However, the anonymous author's keen interest in the patriarch's ecclesiastical policy may rather suggest that he was associated with Hagiosophite circles.

Indeed, there is clear evidence that at the time the ideal of moderation was promoted by the Constantinopolitan ecclesiastic elite. It is found in a “letter to John monk and recluse” (ἐπιστολὴ πρὸς Ἰωάννην μοναχὸν ἔγκλειστον), which was penned by Symeon of Euchaita¹⁹⁰. Only one Euchaitan metropolitan of this name is known, the addressee of a letter that the general Nicephorus Ouranos wrote around the year 1000¹⁹¹. Symeon had close links with the capital and was quite likely a former

¹⁸¹ *Life of Luke* (BHG 2239) 5 (ed. H. DELEHAYE, *Les saints stylites* [Subsidia hagiographica 14]. Paris 1923, 195–237, esp. 200).

¹⁸² *Life of Luke* 8 (203 DELEHAYE).

¹⁸³ See E. PAPAIOANNOU, *Sicily, Constantinople, Miletos: The Life of a Eunuch and the History of Byzantine Humanism*, in: *Myriobiblos. Essays on Byzantine literature and culture*, ed. Th. Antonopoulou – M. Loukaki – S. Kotzabassi. Boston 2015, 261–284.

¹⁸⁴ *Life of Nicephorus* (BHG 1338) 8 (ed. H. DELEHAYE, *Vita sancti Nicephori episcopi Milesii saeculo X. AnBoll* 14 [1895] 129–166, esp. 140).

¹⁸⁵ *Life of Anthony Kauleas* (BHG 139) 8 (ed. P. L. M. LEONE, *L' encomium in patriarcham Antonium II Cauleam del filosofo e retore Niceforo. Orpheus* 10 [1989] 404–429, esp. 418).

¹⁸⁶ *Life of Methodius* (BHG 1278) 3 (PG 100, 1245D).

¹⁸⁷ Translation by me.

¹⁸⁸ See *Dumbarton Oaks Hagiography Database*, <https://www.doaks.org/research/byzantine/resources/hagiography> [68–69] (accessed 07.12.2019).

¹⁸⁹ See D. AFINOGENOV, *Κωνσταντινούπολις ἐπίσκοπον ἔχει*, II: From the Second Outbreak of Iconoclasm to the Death of Methodius. *Erytheia* 17 (1996) 43–71, esp. 62.

¹⁹⁰ *Letter to John* (ed. K. MITSAKIS, *Symeon Metropolitan of Euchaita and the Byzantine Ascetic Ideals in the Eleventh Century. Byzantina* 2 [1970] 301–334, esp. 319–332).

¹⁹¹ *Letter to Symeon* (ed. J. DARROUZÈS, *Épistoliers byzantins du Xe siècle* [Archives de l'Orient Chrétien 6]. Paris 1960, V [Nicephorus Ouranos], no. 39, 238–239). Nicephorus' dates give a time frame between c. 980 and c. 1006, see Darrouzès' in-

deacon of St Sophia, since Ouranos addressed both him and the steward of the Great Church. In his *Letter* he chides his addressee for having skipped a proper preparatory period of subjection in a coenobium and then offers the following advice to make up for this shortcoming.

Καὶ τὰς ὑπερβολὰς καὶ τὰς ἐλλείψεις τῶν ἀρετῶν φεῦγε διὰ παντός, τὸ δὲ τούτων μέσον ἐμπόνως ζῆται καιρῶ καὶ μέτρῳ ποιῶν· εἰσὶ δὲ ὑπερβολαὶ μὲν ἐπιτεταμένη νηστεία καὶ ἀγρυπνία καὶ γυμνότητες καὶ σιδηροφορία καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα, ἐλλείψεις δὲ ἀδηφαγία ἀναπαύσεις ἀδιαφορία καὶ τὰ λοιπά, μεσότης δὲ τὸ καθ' ἡμέραν μεταλαμβάνειν καὶ μὴ κορέννυσθαι ὁ σύμμετρος ὕπνος καὶ κόπος καὶ τὰ πάντα ποιεῖν κατὰ τὴν ἀκριβῆ παραδόσιν τῆς ἐκκλησίας καὶ μοναχικῆς καταστάσεως· εἶπε γάρ τις τῶν πατέρων ὅτι τὰ ἄκρα τῶν δαιμόνων εἰσὶν¹⁹².

“Always avoid both the excesses and the deficiencies of the virtues, and diligently seek that which is in the middle between the two, acting at the right time and in the right measure. Excesses are extended fasts and vigils and nakedness and chain-bearing and things of this kind, whereas deficiencies are gluttony, respites, indifference and the rest, and the medium is to eat every day and not be satiated, measured sleep and toil, and to do everything according to the exact tradition of the church and the monastic estate. For one of the Fathers said that the extremes belong to the demons.”¹⁹³

This statement reflects the ideal of the “golden mean”. Eating a little once a day is juxtaposed both with extreme fasting and with gluttony. Symeon inserts into his text several quotations from Maximus’ spiritual writings¹⁹⁴. Thus, it is possible that his views on asceticism were also inspired by these texts. Yet it needs to be pointed out that Maximus is not Symeon’s only point of reference. The passage ends with a quotation which can be identified as an *apophthegma* of Poemen: “All that is beyond measure belongs to the demons” (τὰ ὑπέμετρα πάντα τῶν δαιμόνων εἰσὶν)¹⁹⁵. This suggests that the recommendation to eat each day is based on another *apophthegma* of the same saint, namely the one that is alluded to in Theodore’s *Catechesis* and in the *Life of Blaise*. There is, however, an important difference between the *Life of Blaise* and Symeon’s *Letter*. Whereas Blaise’s hagiographer states that the Fathers gave the rule “economically” (οἰκονομικῶς), Symeon speaks of an “exact practice” (ἀκριβῆ παραδόσιν). Accordingly, extreme behaviour is unequivocally presented as something bad.

In an earlier part of his *Letter* Symeon acknowledges the saintly status of the extreme ascetics of the past, such as the first monk Anthony and the stylites Symeon, Alypius and Daniel¹⁹⁶. Yet he is very sceptical about their contemporary imitators.

Ἀκούω γὰρ καὶ πολλοὺς εἶναι καὶ νῦν καὶ ἐν τοῖς ὄρεσι καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἐρημίαις καὶ ἐν τοῖς μοναστηρίοις ἀγωνιστὰς καὶ θεωρῶ δὲ πλείστους ὑπὲρ τὴν ἐντολὴν καὶ τὸ τῆς ἀρετῆς ἀγωνιζομένους μέτρον, ἀλλ' ἵνα τούτους ὡς ἔτι ἀγωνιζομένους καταλείψωμεν· τὸ γὰρ τέλος ἄδηλον¹⁹⁷.

“For I hear that there are many fighters even now in the mountains and in the deserts and in the monasteries, and I see that most of them struggle beyond the commandment and the measure of virtue, but I will leave them aside because they are still struggling, for the end is uncertain.”¹⁹⁸

roduction, 44–48, esp. 45–46. See also J. GOULLARD, Syméon d’Euchaïtes. *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* 14 (1941) 2939–2940.

¹⁹² Letter to John 9 (325 MITSAKIS).

¹⁹³ Translation by me.

¹⁹⁴ See MITSAKIS, Symeon Metropolitan 311.

¹⁹⁵ *Apophthegmata Patrum*, Poemen 128 (PG 65, 333D).

¹⁹⁶ Letter to John 7 (324 MITSAKIS).

¹⁹⁷ Letter to John 7 (324 MITSAKIS).

¹⁹⁸ Translation by me.

Here Symeon does not simply explain the discrepancy with the weakness of the present generation. He also asserts that extreme asceticism goes beyond what is considered appropriate behaviour. The *Letter* evidently found a wide readership since it has come down to us in a great number of manuscripts and was quoted by later spiritual authors. One of the manuscripts was written in the year 1088/9 at the Chora monastery, which shows that by that time the text was known to the monks of the capital¹⁹⁹.

THE ELEVENTH CENTURY

The ideal of moderation continued to enjoy popularity in the 11th century. In fact, here the evidence is even more plentiful. This is due to the existence of several *Typika*, which are considerably longer than the Stoudite *Hypotyposis* and contain numerous programmatic statements. The first text to consider is the rule that Patriarch Alexius (1025–1043) gave to a monastery he had founded in the capital. This text, which has only survived in Church Slavonic translation, contains the following statement about fasting during the Lent of St Philip.

Понеже оубо · ни въздрать юдина · ни сила телесная · ни такоже вса болѣзными оудържити сѧ · нѣ ови оуни соуть · друзии же заматерѣли · и ови соуть крѣпции · а ови неощни · и ови немощни · и ови паче · ови же мѣне трюдь причащают сѧ · и ови оубо или старости ради · или немощи ради · или трюда оутѣшения трѣбують · ови въздржати сѧ хотать · ниюдиномоуже подобаетъ свои воли вслѣдовати · нѣ обьчимъ правилемъ прѣтварати сѧ вси ноудать сѧ · дивно же и се моудрѣе бци наши размыслиша · и въ врѣма поста того дѣво ѿ брашнь · масльмъ дрѣванымъ оуматиша · другою же сего непричастно оставиша · яко ни оутѣшения трѣбующимъ · зане отиноудъ ѿрещи сѧ масла дрѣванаго попустиша · ни въздржати сѧ и могоуще имъ [ed. могоущимъ] · и хотащимъ · зане въкоупъ ѣдь строити опечалать²⁰⁰.

“People are not of the same age and bodily vigour and not in the same way afflicted by sickness but some are young, others at an advanced age, and some are strong, others infirm, and some take on more work, others less, and some need consolation because of old age or infirmity or because of their toils, others wish to abstain. None of these should follow his will, but they must obey the common rule as our fathers designed it in a wonderful and wise manner: during this Lent, they added wooden oil (i.e. the cheapest sort of olive oil) to two dishes and left another without it so that those who need consolation would not be required to abstain from wooden oil completely and those who can and wish to abstain would not be sad due to (sc. the necessity of) arranging the meal together (sc. with the former).”²⁰¹

Differences between members of the community are acknowledged but this does not lead to the conclusion that the general rule should be modified for each individual. Instead it is claimed that the general rule already takes into consideration these different needs and that it satisfies them all. Here we find several themes that we have already encountered in Stoudite texts from the tenth century: the coenobitic diet is the happy mean between two extremes, all monks should eat from all dishes, and nobody should be different from the others. This is no coincidence because the author Alexius had been a monk at Stoudios before he became patriarch. Indeed, comparison with Southern Italian rules shows that large parts of the text go back to a Stoudite work, an extended *Typikon*, which was com-

¹⁹⁹ See MITSAKIS, Symeon Metropolitan 307.

²⁰⁰ *Typikon of Alexius* (ed. A. M. РЕНКОВСКИ, Типикон патриарха Алексия Студита в Византии и на Руси. Moscow 2001, 374).

²⁰¹ I would like to thank Basil Lourié for correcting my translation and complementing it with the original Church Slavonic text.

posed in the late tenth or early 11th century in order to replace the older *Hypotyposis*²⁰². One would like to know if this passage, too, was taken from the same source. Unfortunately, this is not certain. The *Mili Typikon*, where we find a textual parallel for the section about the Lent of St Philip, does not contain it²⁰³.

The evidence discussed so far gives the impression that the monks of Stoudios were all card-carrying coenobites. Yet this is not entirely the case. Symeon the New Theologian (d. 1022) received his formation at Stoudios before he transferred to St Mamas where he then became abbot. Yet when he gives advice about proper conduct in his *Catecheses* he never makes mention of the ideal of moderation. In the eleventh *Catechesis*, he admonishes his flock: “Let us then guard ourselves, brothers, not from clandestine eating alone but also from satiety with the food that is served you in the refectory” (φυλαξόμεθα τοιγαροῦν, ἀδελφοί, μὴ ἀπὸ λαθροφαγίας μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπὸ κόρου τῶν ἐπὶ τῆς τραπέζης παρατιθεμένων βρωμάτων ἡμῶν)²⁰⁴. Demands to eat a minimum of food are conspicuously absent despite the fact that they had been included in the *Chapters* of Symeon’s spiritual father Symeon the Pious. All that is demanded is that the practitioner does not follow his inclination. This understanding of proper monastic life is also reflected in the *Life of Symeon the New Theologian* by Nicetas Stethatos which dates to the middle of the 11th century²⁰⁵. Nicetas, a monk of Stoudios, considered himself the heir of Symeon’s spiritual legacy, despite the fact that he had never spent time with him. At the beginning of the text we hear that after he had entered Stoudios, Symeon was placed under the control of Symeon the Pious who immediately took steps “to excise the will” (ἐκκόπτειν θέλημα) of the fledgling saint.

Σοφὸς γὰρ ὢν ὁ γέρων ἐκεῖνος ὁ θεῖος ποτὲ μὲν τὰ τῆς ἀτιμίας καὶ τοῦ κόπου μεταχειρίζεσθαι τοῦτον ἐποίει ποτὲ δὲ τὴν τιμὴν καὶ τὴν ἄνεσιν οὗτος ἐκείνῳ προσέφερε καὶ ἀμφοτέρωθεν μισθοὺς αὐτῷ προξενεῖ τῷ θελήματι αὐτοῦ ἀντιπίπτων²⁰⁶.

“That divine elder, who was a wise man, let him sometimes handle that which involves dishonour and toil and at other times gave him honour and leisure and gave him rewards, opposing his will from both sides.”²⁰⁷

Although fasting is not mentioned explicitly we can assume that the same technique was applied there, too. There is no reference to an absolute standard, such as eating every day or partaking of all dishes. Quite the contrary, the breaking of the will does away with all regularity. As such it runs counter to the coenobitic ideal. One gets the impression that Nicetas deliberately set out to provoke the champions of moderation. Yet another passage in the *Life* suggests that even he could not completely dissociate himself from the predominant ideology²⁰⁸. We are told that a novice in Symeon’s monastery did not adhere to the community’s Lenten regime and that as a consequence he fainted during a vigil so that he was forced to eat then and there. The novice is told by Symeon that this would not have happened “if you had been in all things like the brothers” (εἰ ὁμοίος κατὰ πάντα ἦσθα

²⁰² See D. KRAUSMÜLLER – O. GRINCHENKO, The Tenth-Century Stoudios-Typikon and its Impact on Eleventh- and Twelfth-Century Byzantine Monasticism. *JÖB* 63 (2013) 153–175.

²⁰³ See ПЕНТКОВСКИ, Типикон 84.

²⁰⁴ Catechesis 11 (ed. B. KRIVOCHEINE – J. PARAMELLE, Syméon le Nouveau Théologien. *Catéchèses* 6–22 [SC 104]. Paris 1964, 160).

²⁰⁵ See M. HINTERBERGER, Niketas Stethatos der ‘Beherzte’? *BZ* 103 (2010) 49–54, and G. DIAMANTOPOULOS, Die Hermeneutik des Niketas Stethatos (*Diss. Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität*). Munich 2018.

²⁰⁶ Life of Symeon (*BHG* 1692) 12 (ed. I. HAUSHERR, Nicétas Stéthatos, Un grand mystique byzantin. *Vie de Syméon le Nouveau Théologien* (949–1022) [*Orientalia Christiana* 12]. Rome 1928, 20).

²⁰⁷ Translation by me.

²⁰⁸ See KRAUSMÜLLER, From Competition 208–209.

τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς)²⁰⁹. Yet this is little more than lip-service. In another chapter Symeon behaves towards the novice in the same way as his spiritual father had behaved towards him²¹⁰.

So far we have focused on texts relating to Stoudios. Yet in the 11th century the ideal of moderation was propagated in other monastic settings as well. The monastery of Panagios, which was situated in the middle of the city, produced a *Typikon* which reflects a strictly coenobitic stance. The original text, which was written by the abbot Anthony in the first quarter of the 11th century, is no longer extant²¹¹. Yet study of an adaptation for the monastery of Petritzos allows us to reconstruct its structure and content²¹². The topic of fasting is broached in chapter fifteen in three consecutive passages. The first passage reads as follows.

Ἐάν τις τὰς μεγάλας ἐγχειρίζηται ἐγκρατείας αὐτοθελῶς διακρίνων καὶ περιφρονῶν τὸν ὄρον τὸν τεθέντα παρὰ τῶν ἁγίων πατέρων ὃν πρῶτον κατ' ἐκλογὴν καὶ μετὰ δοκιμασίας ἡμῖν παραδεδώκασι κατὰ τὰς θείας αὐτῶν παραδόσεις τὴν ἀληθῆ τε καὶ ἀπλανῆ καὶ μέσην ὁδόν, τουτέστιν τὴν ἀποκοπὴν τοῦ οἰκείου θελήματος [...] οὐδὲ ἀνέχεσθαι τούτων²¹³ δεῖ τῶν οὕτω διακειμένων²¹⁴.

“If someone undertakes the great abstentions, judging with his own will and despising the limit that has been set by the holy Fathers, which they first have given us according to their selection and with their examination in keeping with their divine traditions, the true and unerring and middle road, that is, the excision of one’s own will ... one must not tolerate those who are thus minded.”²¹⁵

This is advice for the abbot on how to deal with members of the community who take it on themselves to engage in excessive asceticism. The concern about independent behaviour pervades the whole text. In chapter thirteen monks are told not to embark on administrative tasks without the knowledge and approval of the abbot²¹⁶. Yet in chapter fifteen the situation is more complex. We encounter a further criterion for proper behaviour, the limit set by the Fathers. The metaphor of the “middle road” clearly identifies this limit as the mean between two extremes. It is possible that the author had the *apophthegma* of Poemen in mind, but if this was indeed the case he had given it a different meaning. No mention is made of eating every day (although it may be implied). Instead the “middle road” is identified with the excision of the will. This is an awkward combination. As we have already seen in the *Life of Symeon the New Theologian*, the breaking of the will is not intrinsically linked to a fixed regime. It just means that nobody is allowed to do what he wants. This leaves open the possibility that the monks of Panagios could engage in extended fasts if the abbot told them to do so.

²⁰⁹ Life of Symeon 48 (64 HAUSHERR).

²¹⁰ Life of Symeon 51 (66 HAUSHERR).

²¹¹ See D. KRAUSMÜLLER, An Ascetic Founder. The Lost First Life of Athanasius the Athonite, in: Founders and Refounders of Byzantine Monasteries. Papers of the Fifth Belfast Byzantine International Colloquium, ed. M. Mullett (*Belfast Byzantine Texts and Translations* 6, 3). Belfast 2007, 63–86.

²¹² See D. KRAUSMÜLLER, On Contents and Structure of the Panagiou Typikon: A Contribution to the Early History of ‘Extended’ Monastic Rules. *BZ* 106 (2013) 39–64.

²¹³ Ed. τοῦτον.

²¹⁴ Petritzos Typikon 15 (ed. P. GAUTIER, Le typikon du sébaste Grégoire Pakourianos. *REB* 42 [1984] 5–145, esp. 81).

²¹⁵ Translation by me.

²¹⁶ Petritzos Typikon 13 (75 GAUTIER).

In the following passage we find a reference to the ideal of conformity, which we have already encountered in the *Life of Blaise* and *Vita C* of Theodore. The author criticizes monks who seek to show their fellow brethren through ostentatious prayer that they are “different from others” (ἄλλοις ἀνόμοιοι)²¹⁷. This may refer to the habit of praying in the refectory instead of partaking of food. It is claimed that such behaviour makes the monk the prey of demons. Here, too, however, there is ambiguity because we are told that such people act against the will of the abbot and the rest of the community.

It is only in the third passage that we get a clearer idea of the author’s point of view²¹⁸. We read that monks should abstain from evil and progress in the good, and acquire the fruits of the spirit of which Paul had spoken in Galatians 5:21: “love, joy, peace, long-suffering, goodness” (ἀγάπη, χαρά, μακροθυμία, χρηστότης). Then follows another invective against “the self-willed abstainers” (τοῖς ... αὐτοβούλοις ἐγκρατευταῖς) who will eventually contract madness because they are motivated by vainglory. It is claimed that the focus on visible activities is reprehensible because it lets the onlookers think that they “are virtue although they are not truly virtue, as some of the Fathers have determined” (εἶναι ἀρετὴν μὴ οὕσα ὄντως ἀρετή, ὥσπερ τινὲς τῶν πατέρων διωρίσαντο)²¹⁹. Then the author makes another positive statement. Quoting Isaiah 58:5–7, he declares that monks should not engage in ascetic activities but rather help the poor. These stark oppositions leave little doubt that the author considered extreme asceticism to be wrong in itself and not only in cases where the abbot does not give his permission. Consequently, humility is declared to be the greatest virtue of all. It is no longer a corrective that allows ascetics to fast as much as they like without negative consequences, but rather diametrically opposed to extreme asceticism.

The ideal of conformity and moderation also features in the two *Lives* of Athanasius the Athonite, *Vita A* and *Vita B*. *Vita A* was written at the Panagios monastery, whereas *Vita B* was composed at the Lavra. Yet both texts can be shown to go back to a now lost common model, the *Vita prima*, which was written by the abbot Anthony of Panagios, the favourite disciple of the saint²²⁰. Stylistic analysis suggests that *Vita B* contains the text of the *Vita prima* with only minor reworkings, whereas *Vita A* is a *metaphrasis* in a higher style²²¹. Both versions contain the story of a hermit named Nicephorus who asked Athanasius to let him live in the Lavra. We are told that Nicephorus had devised his own fasting regime, “eating bran soaked in tepid water and a little salt after the setting of the sun” (ἐσθίων δὲ πίτυρα βρεκτὰ ἐν χλιαρῷ ὕδατι καὶ ὀλίγῳ ἄλατι μετὰ τὸ δῦναι τὸν ἥλιον)²²². Before long, however, Athanasius persuaded him to subject himself to the common rule. What is striking in this episode is that Nicephorus’ original regime was not very exacting by Byzantine standards. In fact, it closely resembles Anthony’s habit of eating once a day after sunset, which had been the yardstick for proper behaviour in tenth-century texts such as the *Life of Blaise*.

At the end of the episode it is claimed that Nicephorus’ corpse discharged a sweet-smelling liquid, a traditional sign of saintly status, despite the fact that he had toned down his asceticism²²³. Thus one would expect the hagiographer to treat Athanasius in the same way, asserting that a moderate diet does not preclude saintly status. This, however, is not quite the case. In *Vita B* we are told that Atha-

²¹⁷ Petritzos Typikon 15 (81 GAUTIER).

²¹⁸ Petritzos Typikon 15 (83 GAUTIER).

²¹⁹ Reference not identified.

²²⁰ J. NORET, *Vitae duae antiquae sancti Athanasii Athonitae* (CCSG 9). Turnhout – Leiden 1982: *Vita A* (BHG 187), 1–124; *Vita B* (BHG 188), 125–213.

²²¹ See D. KRAUSMÜLLER, *Sophisticated Simplicity: On the Style of the Vita prima of Athanasius the Athonite*, forthcoming in *Erytheia*.

²²² *Vita B* 43 (176–177 NORET). See also *Vita A* 160 (77–78 NORET).

²²³ See D. KRAUSMÜLLER, *From Hybrid Monastery to Strict Coenobium? Gauging the Impact of the Reform Movement on Byzantine Monasticism in the Eleventh Century*. *RSBN* 54 (2017) 85–104.

nasius was a great faster even when he still lived in the world, eating barley bread and vegetables and drinking water every other day²²⁴. When he became monk his abbot did not allow him to fast as much as he would have liked. He told him to eat every third day, thus breaking his will²²⁵. At a later date when he began to live in a hermitage attached to the monastery, the abbot is said to have toned down his regime even further. Now the saint consumed hard bread, vegetables and a little water every other day. Only during Lent was he allowed to fast for five days²²⁶. We have already encountered a similar sequence in the *Life of Blaise*. Yet there is one important difference. As a monk Blaise is said to have eaten once a day. Athanasius' hagiographer clearly did not wish to go so far.

The tension between the two models, moderation and extremism, is even more visible in the account of Athanasius' time as abbot of Lavra. We are told that at the beginning there was not sufficient food and the monks had only berries, hard bread and water to eat. Yet they endured "because when they saw that he ate the same things every third or every fourth day they regarded eating every day as an extravagance" (ὀρῶντες γὰρ ἐκεῖνον τοῖς αὐτοῖς τρεφόμενον εἶδεσι διὰ τριῶν ἢ τεσσάρων τρυφήν ἡγοῦντο τὸ καθ' ἕκαστον ἐσθίειν)²²⁷. A similar passage is found later on in the text. When sitting in the refectory with his monks Athanasius is said to have distributed the dishes to them "whereas he himself only showed the appearance of one who eats and escaped their notice" (αὐτὸς δὲ σχῆμα ἐσθίουτος δεικνύων ἐλάνθανε τὰς ὄψεις αὐτῶν), not even consuming the entire blessed bread after communion. During the Lenten periods he stepped up his efforts, remaining without food for five days²²⁸. This signals a return to the traditional template of the holy man. It was evidently easier to claim a moderate regime for a minor figure such as Nicephorus. In this respect the *Life of Athanasius* can be compared with the *Life of Symeon the New Theologian* where strict conformity is only demanded from a novice.

The last passage has a counterpart in *Vita A*, which otherwise shows much less interest in fasting. There it is asserted that in the refectory Athanasius "seemed to partake of all and taste all that was being served" (ἐδόκει μὲν πάντων μεταλαμβάνειν καὶ πάντων παραγεύεσθαι τῶν παρατιθεμένων)²²⁹. This shows that the author was aware of the opinion that one should eat from all dishes. Yet in the case of Athanasius this is just pretence.

A much clearer reference to this opinion is found in a *metaphrasis* of the ninth-century *Life of Joseph the Hymnographer* by the patriarchal deacon John, which dates to the later 11th century²³⁰. Unlike its model where agonistic and extreme asceticism is presented as something praiseworthy, it acknowledges possible problems.

Τῷ προεστῶτι τῆς μονῆς τῆς πολλῆς σκληραγωγίας ἐπετιμᾶτο, παθοκτόνον λέγοντι τὴν νηστείαν, οὐ σωματοκτόνον, διὰ τὴν τῆς φύσεως οἰκειότητα· ἀμέλει καὶ πάντα τρόπον ὑπέικειν μεμαθηκῶς καὶ κατὰ μηδὲν ἀντιλέγειν τοῖς αὐτοῦ ἐνάγουσιν εἰς ταπεινώσιν τὸ προστεταγμένον ἐποίει καὶ τῶν προκειμένων ἐπήπτετο, πάντα εἰς δόξαν θεοῦ καὶ συλλογιζόμενος καὶ ποιῶν²³¹.

"He was criticised for the great harshness of his asceticism by the abbot of the monastery who said that fasting is a killer of passions and not a killer of the body because of the natural bond. Then he who had learned to yield in all ways and to contradict in no way those who led him to humility

²²⁴ Vita B 6 (131 NORET).

²²⁵ Vita B 9 (133 NORET).

²²⁶ Vita B 10 (134 NORET).

²²⁷ Vita B 24 (151 NORET).

²²⁸ Vita B 42 (175 NORET).

²²⁹ Vita A 142 (67 NORET).

²³⁰ See KRAUSMÜLLER, *Abbots of Evergetis* (as in n. 173) 124.

²³¹ *Life of Joseph (BHG 945) 11 (PG 105, 949AB)*.

did what he had been ordered and touched what lay before him, reasoning and doing everything to the glory of God.”²³²

John was clearly dissatisfied with the stance of the author of the first *Life*, and proceeded to modify it in order to bring it in line with contemporary views. Significantly, it is again an *apophthegmata* by Poemen to which he refers: “We have not been told to be killers of the body but killers of the passions” (ἡμεῖς οὐκ ἐδιδάχθημεν σωματοκτόνοι, ἀλλὰ παθοκόννοι)²³³. Unlike Athanasius the Athonite, Joseph was a universally recognised saint. Thus it would have been easier to present him in this manner without raising doubts about his saintly status.

How pervasive the new ideology had become can be gauged from the *Life* of the stylite Lazarus (d. 1053). Lazarus, who founded several monasteries on Mt Galesion near Ephesus, was a typical “holy man”²³⁴. His hagiographer, a member of his community, claims that he was an extreme faster²³⁵. Yet when we turn to a speech that Lazarus is said to have given to his flock we encounter a radically different point of view.

Προσέχειν δὲ δεῖ καὶ τηρεῖν καὶ τὸ μὴ σχήμασι δῆθεν ἢ ἐπιτηδεύμασι πνευματικοῖς ἀδελφοῦ πλῆξαι συνείδησιν, μὴ ἀπατᾶσθαι χορτασία κοιλίας, ἀλλὰ καθ’ ἐκάστην μὲν ὡς ἄπαξ στοιχήσαντα τῷ τῆς μονῆς κανόνι ἐσθίειν, οὐ μὴν δὲ εἰς κόρον, ἀλλ’ ἔτι τῆς γαστρὸς ἐνδεῶς ἐχούσης παύεσθαι τῆς τροφῆς· οὕτω γὰρ καὶ οἱ πατέρες ἔκριναν καὶ ὠρίσαντο ὑπὲρ τὸ νηστεύειν δύο ἢ τρεῖς εἴθ’ οὕτω τῇ τροφῇ κορένυσθαι καθ’ ἐκάστην τροφῆς μεταλαμβάνειν, ἀλλὰ παρὰ μικρόν²³⁶.

“One must pay attention and look out that one does not supposedly through gestures or spiritual pursuits wound the conscience of a brother, that one is not deceived by the fullness of the belly, but eats every day, as having once and for all followed the rule of the monastery, yet not up to satiety, but stops eating when the stomach is still wanting, for thus the Fathers, too, judged and stipulated that it is better to partake of food every day but a little, rather than to fast two or three days and then be sated with food.”²³⁷

It is immediately evident that this is a comprehensive exposé of the arguments in favour of a strictly coenobitic lifestyle. We find the warning against possible negative effects of extreme asceticism on others and the advice to eat every day. Moreover, καθ’ ἐκάστην ... παρὰ μικρόν is a clear reference to the *apophthegma* of Poemen, which is called the “definition” (ὄρος) of the Fathers and thus invested with a special status. The similarity not only with the Panagios *Typikon* but also with the *Life of Blaise* is striking. The fact that the hagiographer put such a statement into the mouth of the saint shows clearly that the ideal of moderation had become known even in the provinces. This does not mean that it informed the life of the community. Immediately afterwards we read that some monks followed Lazarus’ advice and chose the “royal highway” (τὴν βασιλικὴν ὁδόν) while others insisted on their plans to intensify their asceticism. Some failed but “those who were firmer in mind and in body concluded successfully in humility what they had embarked on” (ὄσοι δὲ γε τὴν γνώμην

²³² Translation by me.

²³³ Apophthegma Poemen 184 (PG 65, 368A).

²³⁴ See R. GREENFIELD, Drawn to the Blazing Beacon: Visitors and Pilgrims to the Living Holy Man and the Case of Lazaros of Mount Galesion. *DOP* 56 (2002) 213–241.

²³⁵ Life of Lazarus 251 (ed. H. DELEHAYE, Vita S. Lazari auctore Gregorio monacho [Acta Sanctorum Novembris III]. Brussels 1910, 508–588, esp. 587).

²³⁶ Life of Lazarus 196 (567D–568A DELEHAYE).

²³⁷ Translation by me.

καὶ τὸ σῶμα στερρότεροι, ταπεινοφρόνως οἷς ἐπεχείρησαν καὶ δεξιὸν τὸ πέρας ἐπέθεντο)²³⁸. This inconsistency, however, should not detract from the significance of the passage. Up to this point provincial hagiography had accepted the template of the “holy man” in a completely unselfconscious way, which showed no awareness of the Constantinopolitan monastic discourse.

Another reflection of the debate between extremists and moderates can be found in the *Life of Auxentius* by Michael Psellus²³⁹. As we have already seen, the author of the original *Life* spoke of an encounter between Auxentius and a group of monks who criticised his refusal to eat. Psellus reworks this episode, giving it an unexpected twist. In his narrative the monks pose the following question.

Τίνος χάριν, Αὐξέντιε, τῶν πατέρων ἡμῖν ἄνωθεν τὸν τῆς ἀσκήσεως κανόνα διορισάντων καὶ τὴν μέσην ἀγαπησάντων ζωὴν, αὐτὸς ὡσπέρ τι πλεόν τῶν ἄλλων φρονῶν, ἄρτου μὲν ἀπέχη, οἶνον δὲ ἀποστρέφη, τοῦ δὲ ὕδατος τοσοῦτον ἀρύη, ὅποσον ἂν μὴ κατενεχθεῖ τῷ φάρυγγι, ἀλλ’ ἄκραν καταπύξαι τὴν γλῶτταν; εἰ γὰρ ἦν τοῦτο καλόν τε καὶ νόμιμον, ἦν ἂν συνηριθμημένον ταῖς τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν διατάξεσιν²⁴⁰.

“Why, Auxentius, when the Fathers have fixed for us from the beginning a rule of asceticism and have loved the middle life, do you yourself abstain from bread, reject wine and drink only so much water that it is not sent down the throat, but cools the tip of the tongue, as if considering yourself above the others? For if this were good and lawful it would have been listed in the ordinances of our Fathers.”²⁴¹

Here the monks present themselves as champions of the ideal of moderation. The reference to the Fathers suggests that Psellus had the *apophthegma* of Poemen in mind. Since Auxentius lived in the first half of the fifth century and thus was a contemporary of Poemen, this is a flagrant anachronism. This shows clearly that Psellos was not interested in constructing a historically correct story. Quite the contrary, he wished to engage in a contemporary debate. His own position is reflected in the response that he puts into the mouth of Auxentius.

Οἱ θεῖοι πατέρες θεσπίσαντες ἡμῖν τὰ περὶ τοῦ ἀσκητικοῦ βίου, τῶν πολλῶν μᾶλλον ἢ τῶν ὀλίγων ἐφρόντισαν· διὰ ταῦτα συμμετρήκασιν ταῖς τούτων γνώμας οἷά τε καὶ ὅσα βρωτέον τε καὶ ποτέον αὐτοῖς. οὐ μὴν, τοῦτο δεδωκότες, ἐκεῖνο ἀνηρήκασιν, εἰ γέ τις ἐπέκεινα τῆς φύσεως βούλοιο ζῆν· ὁ γὰρ ἄνθρωπος ἐξ ἀλόγου καὶ λογικῆς συγκείμενος φύσεως, ἔχει τι καὶ θεῖον ἐν ἑαυτῷ· εἰ μὲν οὖν τὴν σωματικὴν αἰροῖτο ζωὴν, θηρίον ἐστὶν ἀτεχνῶς· εἰ δὲ γε τὴν μέσην καὶ ἐπιστατικὴν, ζῶν λογικὸν καὶ θνητόν· εἰ δὲ τὴν κρείττονα καὶ νοεράν, θεὸς ἀντικρυς· ἐφ’ ὃ δὴ μέρος, ὃ ἔδωκε θεός, ἐπαναβεβηκῶς, κἂν ἐς τὸ παντελὲς διατελέσειεν ἄσιτος· ζῆν γὰρ οὐχ ἑαυτῷ, ἀλλὰ τῷ θεῷ²⁴².

“When divine Fathers ordained for us that which pertains to the ascetic life, they thought of the many rather than of the few. Therefore they adapted to their minds what and how much should be eaten und drunk by them. But in having given this, they have not taken away the other if indeed somebody wants to live beyond nature. For the human being is composed of an irrational and a rational nature, and also has something divine in him. If, then, he chooses the life of the body, he is simply a beast, but if he chooses the middle and governing life, he is a rational and mortal

²³⁸ *Life of Lazarus* 197 (568AB DELEHAYE).

²³⁹ See E. A. FISHER, Michael Psellos on the Rhetoric of Hagiography and the Life of St Auxentius. *BMGS* 17 (1993) 43–55.

²⁴⁰ *Life of Auxentius ‘B’* (ed. E. A. FISHER, Michaelis Pselli orationes hagiographicae. Stuttgart – Leipzig 1994, 53–54).

²⁴¹ Translation by me.

²⁴² *Life of Auxentius ‘B’* (54 FISHER).

living being, but if he chooses the greater and intellectual, he is simply a god. And one who has ascended to this part, which God has given, could remain altogether without food, for he does not live for himself but for God.”²⁴³

Psellus starts by claiming that the rule of the Fathers is a concession to weakness. Yet he is not content with reproducing this traditional argument, which we have already encountered in the *Life of Blaise*, for he then launches a frontal attack on the ideal of the “golden mean”. He rejects the notion that the human nature is enclosed by boundaries, which cannot be transcended, and that reason is the only arbiter of what is possible. Instead he introduces a tripartite model of the human being where the irrational and rational parts of the soul are complemented with the mind, which offers an escape from this closed system. Psellus’ starting-point was Auxentius’ claim in the original *Life* that he could go without food for a long time. Yet the conceptual framework has changed. Whereas Auxentius’ late antique hagiographer stated that the saint was strengthened by Christ, Psellus, following Neoplatonic theories, speaks of an innate ability of human beings that allows them to transcend their nature and become “god”²⁴⁴.

Psellus’ *Life of Auxentius* shows that not only monks, metropolitans and patriarchal deacons engaged in the debate about what constitutes the proper fasting practice. Yet the stance he takes is not what one would expect. Indeed, in the 12th century, intellectuals such as John Tzetzes and Eustathius of Thessalonike took a radically different approach. They complained about extreme ascetics and suggested that they should be disciplined in coenobitic monasteries²⁴⁵. One wonders what motivated Psellus to break a lance for figures like Auxentius. It may be that he regarded it as an intellectual challenge to make the case for a way of life that in the contemporary monastic discourse had come to be considered substandard.

To conclude: Analysis of the available evidence permits us to chronicle the development of the discourse on fasting in Constantinopolitan monasticism from the fifth to the eleventh century. The *Lives* of fifth-century saints, be they hermits or abbots, give the impression that the ideal of extreme and agonistic asceticism reigned supreme. The alternative ideal of moderation and conformity is not securely attested. Circumstantial evidence suggests that this may have changed in the sixth century: there are no *Lives* of contemporary saints, and Justinian’s legislation promotes strict coenobiticism. Little is known about the period between the middle of the seventh and the middle of the eighth century because so few texts were produced. The darkness lifts again in the late eighth century. At that point a coenobitic revival took place. Yet in *Lives* of abbots which date to the first half of the ninth century, the ideal of extreme and agonistic asceticism is predominant. The only exception is Theodore of Stoudios’ *Encomium* of Theophanes, which speaks of the saint’s measured food intake. In Theodore’s case we have not only hagiographical texts but also a great number of *Catecheses*. There he explained to his monks that a moderate diet was no obstacle to sainthood. What made his task so difficult was the existence of authoritative texts, which promoted extreme asceticism. He constructed a sophisticated argument that reinterprets a passage in the *Life of Anthony* in the light of an *apophthegma* of Poemen in order to prove that eating once a day is best. In the second half of the ninth and the early tenth centuries, the extreme and agonistic ideal seems to have predominated. Yet in tenth-century Stoudios the pendulum began to swing again in the opposite direction. The hagiog-

²⁴³ Translation by me.

²⁴⁴ See e.g. J. BUSSANICH, Plotinus’s Metaphysics of the One, in: *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, ed. L. P. Gerson. New York – Cambridge 1996, 38–65, esp. 56.

²⁴⁵ P. MAGDALINO, The Byzantine Holy Man in the Twelfth Century, in: *The Byzantine Saint*, ed. S. Hackel. London 1981, 51–66.

rapher of Blaise of Amorium follows Theodore's lead, subverting the authority of the *Life of Anthony* and emphasizing the need for moderation and conformity. *Vita C* of Theodore of Stoudios makes the further claim that the saint ate from all dishes that were being served in the refectory, because he did not wish to be different from other monks. In the tenth century Stoudios is an isolated case. Only a *Letter* by the metropolitan Symeon of Euchaïta stresses the need for moderation. This situation changes in the 11th century when we have monastic rules at our disposal. The *Typikon* for the monastery of Patriarch Alexius the Stoudite rejects the notion that one must adapt the fasting regime to the needs of the individual, whereas the Panagios *Typikon* contains a fierce invective against extreme fasters. The *Lives of Athanasius the Athonite*, which were produced at Panagios, show how difficult it was to express the ideal of moderation in a hagiographical text. It is exemplified by a subsidiary figure, whereas the saint himself is presented as an extreme faster, so as not to endanger his saintly status. A similar configuration is found in the *Life of Symeon the New Theologian* by Nicetas Stethatos. These texts also show how the authors struggled to construct a coherent argument. At times one gets the impression that extreme fasting is permissible as long as it is not the practitioner himself who makes the decision. Such a position would be at odds with the ideal of moderation, which emphasized the need for a healthy body. Despite these ambiguities, however, there can be no question that the coenobitic current was very strong. Indeed, the ideal of daily food intake even makes an appearance in a text from the provinces, the *Life of Lazarus of Galesion*. Michael Psellus, a lay intellectual, also waded into the debate, breaking a lance for extreme asceticism in his *metaphrasis* of the *Life of Auxentius*. At this point we need to ask: why was it that in some periods extreme and agonistic asceticism reigned supreme, whereas in others the emphasis was on moderation and conformity? A satisfactory answer can only be given if we can find a way to link changes in monasticism to changes in Byzantine society at large.