

## Praise in the Desert: The Coptic Monastic Office Yesterday and Today

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Monastic life has been lived in Lower Egypt without interruption since the first half of the fourth century.<sup>1</sup> Two of the fourth-century monastic "deserts"<sup>2</sup> of Lower Egypt, Nitria and Kellia, have long since succumbed to the vicissitudes of history and the shifting desert sands. But forty miles to the south the third desert, the Scetis of antiquity, now known as the Wadi an-Natron (Natron Valley), is still a center of monastic life.<sup>3</sup> "The place where Saint Macarius lived is called Scetis. It is in a great valley, a day and a night's journey from the monasteries of Nitria, and the way to it is not found or shown by any track or landmarks on the ground, but one journeys

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<sup>1</sup> The best general introduction in English to the early history of monastic life in Egypt and Palestine is Derwas J. Chitty, *The Desert a City. An Introduction to the Study of Egyptian and Palestinian Monasticism under the Christian Empire* (1966, recently reprinted by St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, N.Y., n.d.). On present opinion concerning monastic beginnings see H. Bacht, "Neue Erkenntnisse über den Ursprung des östlichen Mönchtums," in A. Rauch and P. Imhof (eds.), *Basilios, Heiliger der einen Kirche* (Koinonia, Bd. I, Munich 1981) 137-142.

<sup>2</sup> On the peculiarly Egyptian and monastic senses of the Greek term *oros* ("desert" or "mountain") see *The Lives of the Desert Fathers. The Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, translated by N. Russell, Introduction by B. Ward (Cistercian Studies Series 34, Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications 1980) 125 note 12, referring to H. Cadell and R. Rémondon, "Sens et emplois de *to oros* dans les documents papyrologiques," *Revue des études grecques* 80 (1967) 343-349. On the spiritual symbolism of the "desert" in early monasticism, see A. Guillaumont, "La conception du desert chez les moines d'Égypte," in his *Aux origines du monachisme chrétien. Pour une phénoménologie du monachisme* (Spiritualité orientale 30, Abbaye de Bellefontaine 1979) 69-87.

<sup>3</sup> On Scetis and the sources of its history see J.-C. Guy, "Le centre monastique de Scété dans la littérature du V<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 30 (1964) 129-147; *Le centre monastique de Scété au IV<sup>e</sup> et au début du V<sup>e</sup> siècle. Prosopographie et histoire* (excerpt of doctoral dissertation, Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome 1964); H. G. Evelyn-White, *The Monasteries of the Wâdi'n Natrun, Part II: The History of the Monasteries of Nitria and Scetis* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art Egyptian Expedition, New York 1932).

by the signs and courses of the stars. Water is hard to find, and when it is found it has a bad smell, bituminous, yet inoffensive to the taste. Here men are made perfect in holiness, for none but those of austere resolution and supreme constancy can endure such a terrible spot. But their chief concern is the love they show one another and those who happen to arrive there."<sup>4</sup>

It was to Scetis, a twenty-two mile long depression in the Libyan or Great Western Desert forty miles northwest of Cairo, that I went on 24 September 1981 to be received with the same "love they show one another and those who happen to arrive there," by the community of the same St. Macarius the Great, the most important monastic brotherhood in Egypt today if not in the whole Christian East.

There are still four active Coptic Orthodox monasteries in the Wadi: the Monasteries of the Romans (Dayr al-Baramus), of St. Bishoi (Dayr Anba Bishoi), of the Syrians (Dayr as-Suryan, where Patriarch Shenuda has been in enforced residence for over a year), and of St. Macarius (Dayr Abu Maqar).<sup>5</sup> All four are "reformed" monasteries, at once the beneficiaries and the spearhead of the contemporary renaissance of the Coptic Orthodox Church.<sup>6</sup> But Dayr Abu Maqar, founded about 330 by St. Macarius the Great, called "the Egyptian," and apparently never without monks from that day until the present, is far and away the most impressive generator of this spiritual revival.

The renewal of the Monastery of St. Macarius began when Patriarch Cyril VI (1959–1971), predecessor of the present Patriarch Shenuda III, summoned Abuna Matta al-Maskin and his disciples to take over the dying monastery.<sup>7</sup> At that time this remarkable man was living with a dozen disciples in the caves of the totally inaccessible desert of Wadi Rayan to the south of Fayyum.<sup>8</sup> Since 1969 when

<sup>4</sup> Rufinus' version of the *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, translated in *The Lives of the Desert Fathers* (above, note 2) 152–153 (see 140ff on the difference between Rufinus' version and the Greek text)

<sup>5</sup> On the history of these houses, see Evelyn-White, *The History of the Monasteries of Nitria and Scetis* (above, note 3), O F A Meinardus, *Monks and Monasteries of the Egyptian Desert* (Cairo 1961)

<sup>6</sup> Cf H Legrand, "Le renouveau copte," *Istina* 8 (1961–1962) 133–150

<sup>7</sup> For an account of these developments see O F A Meinardus, "Recent Developments in Egyptian Monasticism," *Oriens Christianus* 49 (1965) 79–89, "Zur monastischen Erneuerung in der koptischen Kirche," *Oriens Christianus* 61 (1977) 59–70

<sup>8</sup> O F A Meinardus, "The Hermits of Wâdi Rayân," *Studia orientalia christiana Collectanea* 11 (1966) 293–317 + 22 plates

the move to St. Macarius was made, the monastery has changed from a fossil of six elderly monks with the buildings falling down on their heads, to an incredibly vigorous young community of eighty-four monks.

I went there prepared to study their liturgical uses, hoping also to become acquainted with the monks and share their way of life during my brief stay. Both desires were fulfilled beyond my most sanguine expectations. The following pages will be about their liturgy and its historical context. The rest of the story must await another, more anecdotal treatment.

#### THE ORIGINS OF THE COPTIC RITE

The liturgical significance of Dayr Abu Maqar goes back far beyond the present renaissance to the early centuries of the Coptic Orthodox Church. The monastic centers of Lower Egypt, though largely Coptic, were not without strong Greek influence — one need recall only Evagrius of Pontus (345–399), one of the great luminaries of Kellia.<sup>9</sup> The true cradle of native Coptic ecclesiastical culture was in Upper Egypt, in the White Monastery near Achmin, not far from the present city of Sohag. Under its second abbot, Shenouti (ca. 383–451), it became a center of Sahidic literature, the “classical” language of Coptic writing.<sup>10</sup>

The present liturgical language, Bohairic, is the dialect of Lower Egypt, and its rise is connected to a change in the fortunes of the Monastery of St. Macarius in the same year that Shenouti died. For it is to the Council of Chalcedon (451), the watershed event in the history of Egyptian Christianity, that one can trace the overriding role of the Monastery of St. Macarius in the development of the Coptic Church and its liturgy.<sup>11</sup> In the aftermath of the council, the non-chalcedonians underwent fierce persecution and were driven from their churches. The patriarchate, forced to leave Alexandria, took refuge in the Monastery of St. Macarius, which became per-

<sup>9</sup> On Kellia, see A. Guillaumont, “Histoire des moines aux Kellia,” in his *Aux origines du monachisme chrétien* (above, note 2) 151–167.

<sup>10</sup> On the early development of Christianity in Egypt, see C. H. Roberts, *Manuscript, Society and Belief in Early Christian Egypt* (London: Oxford University Press 1979). The classical study on the origins of Coptic Christianity remains J. Leipoldt, *Schenute von Atripe und die Entstehung des national ägyptischen Christentums* (Texte und Untersuchungen 25, Leipzig 1903). See also W. H. Worrell, *A Short Account of the Copts* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 1945). On the works of Shenouti see *CSCO* 41–42, 73, 96, 108, 129.

<sup>11</sup> For this story consult the works cited in note 5.

force the center of the Coptic Church, thereafter providing twenty-nine of its patriarchs, more than any other monastery.

More important, perhaps, this banishment from Alexandria emancipated indigenous Egyptian Christianity from the tutelage of its hellenic overlords of the Mediterranean littoral and the Delta. There had always been two Egypts, that of the Native Egyptian up the Nile, and that of the foreigner in the Delta and along the coast.<sup>12</sup> From the conquest of Egypt and founding of Alexandria by Alexander the Great in 332–331 B.C. up until the Byzantine epoch at the time of Chalcedon the situation had remained the same: a ruling class of hellenophones in the cities, especially in Alexandria and other coastal towns and in the Delta; an indigenous mass of native Egyptians or Copts (“Copt” is the “gypt” of Egypt) concentrated chiefly along the Nile in Upper Egypt.

Egyptian Christianity began in Alexandria and was Greek. By the third century, however, there were numerous converts among the Copts, and the Scriptures and liturgy were already in the native tongue. But it was not until the rise of monasticism that the Coptic Church solidified as a native counterbalance to the cosmopolitan, theologically sophisticated, hellenic Church of Alexandria, whose speculative, spiritualizing intellectualism stood in marked contrast to the popular, traditionalistic monastic piety of the South, a largely oral culture transmitted through sayings, proverbs, ritual, rather than through theological treatises. This monastic culture — concrete, popular, ascetic — created the liturgy and offices of the Coptic Church. It is a highly penitential, contemplative rite, long, solemn, even monotonous, with much less speculative poetry, symbolic splendor and sumptuous ceremonial than, for example, the Byzantine tradition.

Today’s Coptic Rite is basically the usage of Scetis somewhat modified by later reforms. Patriarch Gabriel II Ibn Turayk (1131–1145) reduced the number of anaphoras to the present three, and Gabriel V (1409–1427) composed a *Liturgical Order* to unify the divergent usages of Egypt. These regulations still govern the Coptic Rite today.<sup>13</sup>

#### THE EARLY EGYPTIAN MONASTIC OFFICE

Surely the most important liturgical contribution of Coptic Christian-

<sup>12</sup> H. H. Ayrout, “Regards sur le christianisme en Égypte hier et aujourd’hui,” *Proche-orient chrétien* 15 (1965) 3–42, esp. 11ff.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Malak Hanna, “Le rôle de la divine Liturgie eucharistique dans la vie de l’Église copte hier et aujourd’hui,” *Proche-orient chrétien* 23 (1973) 266–283.

ity to the Church at large is the pure monastic office. It has become popular in recent years to challenge the conceptual framework on which this characterization depends, considering the "monastic" and "cathedral" distinction a mere mental construct describing not so much concrete offices that ever existed independently, but rather "tendencies" or ideal "types" of liturgical forms found together in the same services from the start. The present Coptic office gives the lie to this scepticism. The "cathedral office" of the secular churches was a popular service characterized by symbol and ceremonial (light, incense, processions . . .), chant (responsories, antiphons, hymns . . .), diversity of ministries (bishop, priest, deacon, reader, psalmist . . .), and by psalmody that was not current and complete, but limited and selective. That is, the whole psalter was not read continuously according to its order in the Bible, but only certain psalms or sections of psalms, chosen for their suitability to the hour: Ps 62 (63) at matins and Ps 140 (141) at vespers are the classic examples. Furthermore, the cathedral services were an office of praise and intercession, not a Liturgy of the Word. Contrary to another popular misconception, there were no Scripture lessons whatever in the normal cathedral office.<sup>14</sup> The monastic office was less a liturgical service than a meditation in common on Sacred Scripture. As in the cathedral system, there were originally only the two common synaxes of morning and evening prayer at the beginning and end of the day.

Of special interest for our purposes are the two Egyptian monastic offices for which we have the most evidence, the tradition of Scetis and that of the Pachomian Tabennesiots.

1. *The Tradition of Scetis.* John Cassian, thought to have been born around 360 in Dobrudcha in Scythia Minor (Dobrutschka in present-day Rumania) near the Delta of the Danube, went to Egypt as a

<sup>14</sup> On this whole question see R. Zeffass, *Die Schriftlesung im Kathedraaloffizium Jerusalems* (Liturgiewissenschaftliche Quellen und Forschungen, Münster 1948). The East-Syrian office, one of the most primitive and purely "cathedral," had readings only on Easter Sunday. Cf. A. J. Maclean, *East Syrian Daily Offices* (London 1899) 264 note 2; J. Mateos, *Leyla-Şapra. Les offices chaldéens de la nuit et du matin* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta 156, Rome 1976<sup>2</sup>) 443. The Gospel now read at vespers on certain days of Lent or before Sundays and feasts is not an original part of the office, but comes from the old Pre-sanctified service, or — in the case of Sundays and feasts — from the Mass of the following day. Cf. S. Pudichery, *Ramša. An Analysis and Interpretation of the Chaldean Vespers* (Dhamaram College Studies 9, Dhamaram [India] 1972) 93ff, 184–198; C. Mousses, *Les livres liturgiques de l'Église chaldéenne* (Beirut 1955) 22.

young monk, and it is from him that we have our most detailed description of the usage of Scetis. Cassian lived in Scetis from about 380 until 399, undoubtedly visited the two nearby monastic centers of Nitria and Kellia, and may have had contact with the Pachomians of the Monastery of the Metanoia at Canopus on the coast in the Delta<sup>15</sup> (he knew the "Rule" of Pachomius since he refers to it in the Preface, 5, of his *Institutes*),<sup>16</sup> but he never set foot on Tabennesiot ground in the Thebaid or Nile Valley of Upper Egypt.<sup>17</sup> In his *Institutes*, written around 417–425, some twenty years after leaving Egypt (he says himself he no longer trusts his memory: Preface, 4), Cassian is attempting not a history of Egyptian monasticism, but a reform of Gallican monasticism along Egyptian lines. So he accommodates his experiences of the semi-anchoretic monasticism of Scetis to the framework of Gallican cenobitism. Cassian's main argument is "tradition," of which he is the self-appointed witness, and he presents a somewhat idealized Egyptian office that is apparently a synthesis of various elements, then claims universal authority for it as *the* tradition of "the whole of Egypt and the Thebaid" (*Inst.* II, 3–4). But in spite of similarities between the systems of Upper and Lower Egypt, Cassian cannot be taken as a reliable witness to Pachomian uses, as we shall see shortly. All this must be borne in mind when weighing Cassian's lengthy and detailed account of the Egyptian offices in Books II and III of his *Institutes*:<sup>18</sup>

"II, 5 . . . One rose up in the midst to chant the Psalms to the Lord. And while they were all sitting (as is still the custom in Egypt), with their minds intently fixed on the words of the chanter, when he had sung eleven Psalms, separated by prayers introduced between them, verse after verse being evenly enunciated, he finished the twelfth with a response of Alleluia, and then, by his

<sup>15</sup> J -C Guy, "Jean Cassien, historien du monachisme égyptien?" *Studia patristica* 8 (Texte und Untersuchungen 93, Berlin 1966) 366 On Canopus, see Chitty, *The Desert a City* (above, note 1) 54–55

<sup>16</sup> Cf Guy, *loc cit* and J -C Guy (ed ), Jean Cassien, *Institutions cenobitiques* (Sources chrétiennes 109, Paris 1965) 27 note 3

<sup>17</sup> A Veilleux, "La Liturgie dans le cénobitisme pachômien aux quatrième siècle" (*Studia anselmiana* 57, Rome 1968) 150, Guy, "Jean Cassien, historien" (above, note 15) 367

<sup>18</sup> I am using with minor changes the English version of E C S Gibson, *The Works of John Cassian* (A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan Eerdmans Publishing Co 1964) Second Series, vol XI 207–208, 213

sudden disappearance from the eyes of all, put an end at once to their discussion and their service.

“6. Whereupon the venerable assembly of the Fathers understood that by Divine Providence a general rule had been fixed for the congregations of the brethren through the angel’s direction, and so decreed that this number should be preserved both in their evening and in their nocturnal services; and when they added to these two lessons, one from the Old and one from the New Testament, they added them simply as extras and of their own appointment, only for those who liked, and who were eager to gain by constant study a mind well stored with Holy Scripture. But on Saturday and Sunday they read them both from the New Testament; viz., one from the Epistles or the Acts of the Apostles, and one from the Gospel. And this also those do whose concern is the reading and the recollection of the Scriptures, from Easter to Whitsuntide.

“7. These aforesaid prayers, then, they begin and finish in such a way that when the Psalm is ended they do not hurry at once to kneel down, as some of us do in this country. . . . Among them, therefore, it is not so, but before they bend their knees they pray for a few moments, and while they are standing up spend the greater part of the time in prayer. And so after this, for the briefest space of time, they prostrate themselves to the ground, as if but adoring the Divine Mercy, and as soon as possible rise up, and again standing erect with outspread hands — just as they had been standing to pray before — remain with thoughts intent upon their prayers. . . . But when he who is to ‘collect’ the prayer rises from the ground they all start up at once, so that no one would venture to bend the knee before he bows down, nor to delay when he has risen from the ground, lest it should be thought that he has offered his own prayer independently instead of following the leader to the close.

“8. That practice too which we have observed in this country — viz., that while one sings to the end of the Psalm, all standing up sing together with a loud voice, ‘Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost’ — we have never heard anywhere throughout the East, but there, while all keep silence when the Psalm is finished, the prayer that follows is offered up by the singer. But with this hymn in honour of the Trinity only the whole Psalmody is usually ended. . . .

“10. When, then, they meet together to celebrate the aforementioned rites, which they term synaxes, they are all so perfectly silent

that, though so large a number of the brethren is assembled together, you would not think a single person was present except the one who stands up and chants the Psalm in the midst; and especially is this the case when the prayer is completed, for then there is no spitting, no clearing of the throat, or noise of coughing, no sleepy yawning with open mouths, and gasping, and no groans or sighs are uttered, likely to distract those standing near. No voice is heard save that of the priest concluding the prayer. . . . They think it best for the prayers to be short and offered up very frequently.

“II. And, therefore, they do not even attempt to finish the Psalms, which they sing in the service, by an unbroken and continuous recitation. But they repeat them separately and bit by bit, divided into two or three sections, according to the number of verses, with prayers in between. For they do not care about the quantity of verses, but about the intelligence of the mind; aiming with all their might at this: ‘I will sing with the spirit: I will sing also with the understanding.’ And so they consider it better for ten verses to be sung with understanding and thought than for a whole Psalm to be poured forth with a bewildered mind. . . .

“III, 2 . . . except vespers and nocturnes, there are no public services among them during the day except on Saturday and Sunday, when they meet together at the third hour for holy communion.”

From this description we learn that there were two daily offices, one at night — that is, at cockcrow, in the wee hours of the morning (*Inst.* II, 5) — and one in the evening. The core of the offices comprised twelve psalms, doubtless “in course,” with private prayer, prostration, and a collect after each. The final psalm, apparently an “alleluia psalm,” was followed by the *Gloria patri* and two lessons of Sacred Scripture. So both offices had exactly the same structure:

PSALMODY. Twelve psalms *currente psalterio*, as follows:

*Seated:* Psalm read *tractim* by a soloist, standing (*Inst.* II, 10).

*Standing:* Silent prayer with arms extended.

*Prostration:* Praying all the while.

*Standing:* Silent prayer with arms extended; collect by the presiding priest (II, 7 and 10).<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Some authors think Cassian means there was but one collect, at the end of the whole office, but the context seems to require one here, since Cassian speaks of it when referring to the duration of the prostration which the collect, apparently, concluded (*Inst.* II, 7:2, ed. Guy, 70–71).

Psalm twelve is an alleluia psalm (II, 5, 11). *Gloria patri* concludes the psalmody (II, 8).

LESSONS. Two readings from the Bible:

*Weekdays:* OT reading; NT reading.

*Saturday, Sunday and Paschaltide:* Epistle or Acts; Gospel.

Comparative liturgy supports the view that morning and evening were the two pristine hours of obligatory prayer in both cathedral and monastic usage.<sup>20</sup> And although there is less than complete precision in the still extant descriptions of the prayer-life of the ascetics of Lower Egypt,<sup>21</sup> three of the apophthegmata referring explicitly to Scetis support Cassian's assertion that the embryonic *cursus* of Scetis, like that of the Tabennesiots, had only two daily prayer-times: on rising, and after the one daily meal at the ninth hour (3:00 PM), just before retiring.<sup>22</sup> Since the monks of Lower Egypt went to bed at nightfall and rose again after a brief rest, the morning office actually began in the second half of the night and was over by dawn.<sup>23</sup> But these two prayer-times correspond to morning and evening prayer in the cathedral usage. The basic tradition common to both cathedral and monastery was prayer at the beginning and end of the day. The monks just began the day earlier because they

<sup>20</sup> A summary view can be found in J Mateos, "The Origins of the Divine Office," *Worship* 41 (1967) 477-485. For a detailed history of the early office see P Bradshaw, *Daily Prayer in the Early Church* (Alcuin Club Collections No 63, London SPCK 1981).

<sup>21</sup> See the numerous references in such classical sources as the *Apophthegmata patrum* (*The Wisdom of the Desert Fathers, Apophthegmata Patrum The Anonymous Series*, Fnracres Publication 48, Oxford 1975, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers, The Alphabetical Collection*, trans B Ward, Cistercian Studies Series 59, Kalamazoo, Michigan Cistercian Publications 1975 — see the bibliography, *ibid* 210), for other editions and versions the *Historia monachorum in Aegypto* xx, 7-8, xxiii, 1 in the additions of Rufinus (Russell, *The Lives of the Desert Fathers* [above, note 2] 106, 148-149, 153-154), the *Historia Lausiaca* of Palladius, VII, 5 (*The Lausiaca History*, trans and annotated by R T Meyer, *Ancient Christian Writers* 34, Westminster, Maryland The Newman Press 1965, 41). Many of these citations are gathered — but not always rightly interpreted — in Evelyn-White, *The History of the Monasteries of Nitria and Scetis* (above, note 3) 174ff.

<sup>22</sup> Arsenius 24, Macarius 33, An Abba of Rome 1 (Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* [above, note 21] 10-11, 114, 175-176). Other evidence for two daily prayer-times with the meal at the ninth hour in Scetis can be found in Cassian's *Conferences* II, 26 2-3, M Petschenig (ed.), *I Cassiani opera*, pars II *Conlatones XXIII* (CSEL 13, Vienna 1886) 64. On the uses of Scetis see also Evelyn-White, *The History of the Monasteries of Nitria and Scetis* (above, note 3) 178ff, 185ff. Note that in the sources of Lower Egypt the use of the term "synaxis" for the hours of prayer does not imply that the prayer was done in common (see Veilleux, *Liturgie* [above, note 17] 293-294). For the Tabennesiot or Pachomian usage, see section 2 below.

<sup>23</sup> See Cassian, *Institutes* III, 4-6 (ed. Guy, 102-109).

slept less. So it is mistaken to relate this monastic nocturnal prayer to the common nighttime vigils for which we have evidence on the eve of eucharistic days or on special occasions in both the monastic and cathedral traditions of Egypt.<sup>24</sup>

On Monday through Friday, the two daily offices were done by the monks in their cells, either alone or with whoever happened to reside or be visiting with them at the time. Only on Saturday and Sunday did all the monks of the *laura* gather in church for offices, Eucharist, and a fraternal meal in common, after which each one drew supplies from the common storehouse to take back to his cell for the next five days of solitary prayer. "They come together in the churches only on Saturdays and Sundays, and meet one another. Many of them who die in their cells are not found for four days, because they do not see each other except at the *Synaxis*."<sup>25</sup>

But when we get down to the details of the two offices, Cassian's description is not without its problems. Armand Veilleux considers it a composite of the "rule of the angel" with "Pachomian rubrics" for the prayers and prostrations of the type we see in the Rule of Horsiesios.<sup>26</sup> As for the two readings, no contemporary monastic source from Lower Egypt mentions them,<sup>27</sup> and Cassian himself admits they are a later supplement added only for those that want them ("uolentibus": *Inst.* II, 6), and hence not a fixed part of the general tradition like the twelve psalms believed to have been established by divine intervention. However, we know from Athanasius that there were readings in the cathedral vigils of Alexandria,<sup>28</sup> offices which, he tells us explicitly, were also attended by the

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, *ibid.* III, 8–11 (ed. Guy, 110–117); Athanasius, *Historia arianorum ad monachos* 81, PG 25, 793; *Apologia de fuga* 6, 24; PG 25, 652, 673–676. Cf. Veilleux, *La liturgie* (above, note 17) 258–261, 302–305, 371ff.

<sup>25</sup> *Historia monachorum in Aegypto* xx, 7; see also the additions of Rufinus (Russell, *The Lives of the Desert Fathers* [above, note 2] 106, 149); *Lausiaca History* VII, 5 (Meyer [above, note 21] 41). These texts refer to Nitria, but the usage of Scetis was the same. See *Apophthegmata*, Daniel 7 (Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* [above, note 21] 45); Cassian, *Conferences* III, 1:1; XVIII, 15:2.6; XIX, 4:2 (ed. Petschenig 67, 524–525, 537–538). Cf. C. Donahue, "The *agape* of the Hermits of Scete," *Studia monastica* 1 (1959) 99; Veilleux, *La liturgie* (above, note 17) 234ff, 248; Evelyn-White, *The History of the Monasteries of Nitria and Scetis* (above, note 3) 185ff, 197ff, 207ff.

<sup>26</sup> Veilleux, *La liturgie*, 335ff; see also 146ff, 279ff. For the "rule of the angel" in the *Lausiaca History* and other sources, see *ibid.* 138–146, 324–334.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* 337.

<sup>28</sup> *Historia arianorum ad monachos* 81, PG 25, 793.

monks.<sup>29</sup> There may have been readings also in some cathedral offices of the Thebaid. In the second half of the fourth century Paphnutius, in his *History of the Monks of the Egyptian Desert*, quotes two friends from Souan (Aswan) who later became monks. "We used to go to church together daily, both evening and morning, and heard the Holy Scriptures that were read, and the lesson from the Gospel that says 'He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. . . .'"<sup>30</sup> This may refer to the Liturgy of the Hours, for there was no tradition of daily Eucharist in fourth century Egypt.<sup>31</sup> However, the text does not state unambiguously that there were readings every day, nor in what offices they were read.

2. *The Pachomian Tradition.* In the *Precepts of Our Father Pachomius* we find a passage (ch. 8) that describes the Tabennesiot office as psalmody, prayer, reading: "If it happens that during the psalmody or the prayer or in the midst of a reading anyone laughs or speaks, he shall unfasten his belt immediately and with neck bowed down he shall stand before the altar and be rebuked by the superior of the monastery."<sup>32</sup> This *ordo* is no different from what we saw in Cassian — and indeed, before the recent study of Armand Veilleux on the liturgy in the Pachomian cenobitic colonies of Upper Egypt,<sup>33</sup> most reconstructors of the Egyptian monastic office took Cassian at his word and extended the usage he describes to "the whole of Egypt and the Thebaid" (*Inst.* II, 3). However, this text of the *Precepts*, like the other components of the "Rule" of Pachomius, is part of a later

<sup>29</sup> *Apologia de fuga* 24, PG 25, 673–676

<sup>30</sup> H E Wallis Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts in the Dialect of Upper Egypt*, edited with English translations (London 1915) text 437, cf 953 and O H E Burmester, "The Canonical Hours of the Coptic Church," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 2 (1936) 82 Such vocation stories are a *locus communis* derived from Athanasius' *Vita s Antonii* 2–3, PG 26, 841–844

<sup>31</sup> See R Taft, "The Frequency of the Eucharist Throughout History," *Concilium* 152 (1982) 14

<sup>32</sup> A Veilleux (ed ), *Pachomian Koinonia*, vol 2 (Cistercian Studies Series No 46, Kalamazoo, Michigan Cistercian Publications 1981) 146 On the various Pachomian documents see Veilleux, *Liturgie* (above note 17) 116–137

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid* See also his "Prayer in the Pachomian Koinonia," in W Skudlarek (ed ), *The Continuing Quest for God Monastic Spirituality in Tradition and Transition* (Collegeville, Minnesota The Liturgical Press 1982) 61–66 Veilleux (*Liturgie*, part I) has been challenged about his textual criticism of the various recensions of the Pachomian *Vitae* by A de Vogué in *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 69 (1974) 425–453, and D Chutty in *Journal of Theological Studies* 21 (1970) 195–199

anthology of material that cannot be attributed to the most primitive Pachomian usage.<sup>34</sup> And Veilleux has shown convincingly that Cassian was not a disinterested observer.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, he was never in Upper Egypt. So whatever in his account is reliably Egyptian comes from *Lower Egypt*, and cannot automatically be extended to the Pachomians.

The Pachomian system was cenobitic, and the two customary daily offices at dawn and in the evening before retiring were held in common.<sup>36</sup> In the morning all the monks of the monastery gathered for one common synaxis. In the slightly later *Institutes* of Pachomius the evening office was said together by the monks of each house or dormitory before retiring.<sup>37</sup> Jerome tells us a Pachomian monastery comprised thirty to forty houses, with about forty monks to a house.<sup>38</sup> Pachomian sources also refer to all-night watches that went right through the night from the evening synaxis until the dawn synaxis, but this was a private devotion done alone, not a service celebrated in common assembly except at Easter or when a monk was being waked.<sup>39</sup> There was also a difference in the *horarium*. It seems that the morning office in the Pachomian system did not begin at cockcrow, as in Lower Egypt, but at the normal hour of the morning service in the cathedral usage.<sup>40</sup>

The Rule attributed to Horsiesios, who took over the direction of the Tabennesiot monastic federation in 346 (Pachomius and his immediate successor Petronius died two months apart in the plague that year), gives some idea of what went on in these assemblies:

“7. At the beginning of our prayers let us sign ourselves with the seal of baptism. Let us make the sign of the Cross on our foreheads, as on the day of our baptism, as it is written in Ezechiel. Let us not

<sup>34</sup> Veilleux, *Liturgie* (above, note 17) 116–132, and his “Introduction” to *Pachomian Koinonia* (above, note 32) vol. 2, 7–11.

<sup>35</sup> *Liturgie* (above, note 17) 146–154. On the general reliability of Cassian, however, see Guy, “Jean Cassien, historien” (above, note 15) 363–372.

<sup>36</sup> On the Pachomian liturgical usage cf. Veilleux, *Liturgie* (above, note 17) chapter 6.

<sup>37</sup> *Precepts and Institutes* 14 (Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia* [above, note 32] vol. 2, 171). Veilleux (*Liturgie* [above, note 17] 297) leans toward the view that this is a later development.

<sup>38</sup> *The Rules of St. Pachomius, Jerome's Preface*, 2 (Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia* [above, note 32] vol. 2, 142).

<sup>39</sup> Veilleux, *Liturgie* (above, note 17) 258–261, 288–292, 302–305, 371ff.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* 300–302.

first lower our hand to our mouth or to our beard, but let us raise it to our forehead, saying in our heart. 'We have signed ourselves with the seal.' This is not like the seal of baptism; but the sign of the Cross was traced on the forehead of each of us on the day of our baptism.

"8. When the signal is given for prayer, let us rise promptly; and when the signal is given to kneel, let us prostrate promptly to adore the Lord, having signed ourselves before kneeling. When once we are prostrate on our face, let us weep in our heart for our sins, as it is written, *Come, let us adore and weep before the Lord our maker*. Let absolutely no one of us raise his head while kneeling, for this shows a great lack of fear and knowledge.

"9. When we rise again, let us sign ourselves; and after uttering the prayer of the Gospel, let us supplicate saying, 'Lord, instill your fear into our hearts that we may labor for eternal life and hold you in fear.' Let each one of us say in his heart with an interior sigh, *Purify me, O Lord, from my secret sins; keep your servant from strangers. If these do not prevail over me, I shall be holy and free from a great sin; and, Create a pure heart in me, God, let a right spirit be renewed in my innermost self*.

"10. When the signal is given for us to be seated, let us again sign ourselves on the forehead in the form of the cross. Then let us be seated and pay attention, heart and ears, to the holy words being recited, in accord with what we have been commanded in the holy Scriptures: *My son, fear my words and having received them, do penance; and again, My son, take heed of my wisdom and incline your ear to my words.*"<sup>41</sup>

From this and other Pachomian writings the primitive office of the Tabennesiot cenobites can be reconstructed with some precision.<sup>42</sup> At the synaxis the seated monks continued their traditional handiwork of weaving baskets and mats while the appointed individuals went in turn to the ambo to recite, probably from memory, a biblical passage (*not necessarily a psalm*). After each passage the reader gave a signal and all rose, made the sign of the cross on the forehead, and recited the Our Father with arms extended in the form of a cross. At a second signal they blessed themselves again and prostrated themselves on the ground, bemoaning their sins. Then they rose, blessed themselves again and prayed in silence. After a final

<sup>41</sup> Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia* (above, note 32) vol. 2, 199–200.

<sup>42</sup> See Veilleux, *Liturgie* (above, note 17) 307ff, whom I follow here.

signal they sat down once more to recommence the whole cycle. So the structure of the basic liturgical unit was as follows:

*Seated:* scriptural passage recited by a monk standing at the ambo.

*Standing:* *signal*, sign of the cross on the forehead;  
Our Father with arms extended;  
*signal*, sign of the cross on the forehead.

*Prostrated:* penitential prayer in silence.

*Standing:* sign of the cross on the forehead;  
prayer in silence;  
*signal* to be seated.

It is not certain how often this liturgical unit was repeated at each synaxis. The evening prayer was called "The Office of the Six Prayers (or Six Sections of Prayers)," which may well mean that each soloist from the dormitory charged with the offices that week repeated six passages of Scripture with the accompanying prayers before ceding place to the next monk in order of seniority. At any rate there is no evidence whatever to interpret the "six" as six *psalms*, as most have done in the past.

So the dynamic of this Pachomian office is more like an Ignatian contemplation-with-colloquy done in common than what we are used to in later monastic hours, in which the psalmody becomes our praise of God, not his word to us, as de Vogué has pointed out.<sup>43</sup>

The "Psalmody" or Sunday office, however, did comprise the chanting of psalms by the heads of the monasteries, to which the brothers of the hebdomadary house responded to the soloist who was chanting the verses. On Sunday there was also Eucharist and two catecheses or spiritual conferences by the superior.<sup>44</sup>

This is the most we can say about the original office of the Tabennesiots, in spite of van der Mensbrugge's imaginative attempt to harmonize the disparate bits of evidence from different strata into a more complex structure, and contrary to numerous attempts to apply the twelve-psalm per office "rule of the angel" to the Pachomian

<sup>43</sup> A. De Vogué, *La Règle de s. Benoît VII Commentaire doctrinal et spirituel* (Sources chrétiennes, hors série, Paris 1977) 206–221, "Prayer in the Rule of St. Benedict," *Monastic Studies* 7 (1969) 129–134

<sup>44</sup> Veilleux, *Liturgie* (above, note 17) 313–315. Examples of the catecheses or spiritual conferences can be found in L. Lefort, *Oeuvres de S. Pachôme et de ses disciples* (CSCO 159–160, ser. copt 23–24, Louvain 1956)

system.<sup>45</sup> The fact of the matter is that very few of the surprisingly numerous and illustrious early monastic travelers to Egypt ever got very far south into the Pachomian territory of the Thebaid, and so they had firsthand experience only of the uses of Nitria, Kellia and Scetis in Lower Egypt.

#### THE COPTIC OFFICE TODAY

In spite of these not inconsiderable hermeneutical problems, Cassian's basic structure is still clearly visible in the hours of the present Coptic Horologion, though in monasteries the weekday hours are now done in common, and the *cursus* has been filled out with the other canonical hours that ultimately became a fixed part of the official daily prayer cycle in most traditions.

When the weekday synaxes came to be celebrated in common we do not know for sure. The Coptic *Life of Abba John of Khamé*, who lived sometime between 700 and 850, seems to witness to the practice at that time: "And he established for them canons and holy laws and set up for them a meeting-place, where they should meet together in the middle of the night and should sing psalmody and spiritual songs until the light dawn. And he bade them moreover one and all that they should pray each one apart."<sup>46</sup> But it is extremely difficult to conclude anything certain and generally applicable from such occasional references, which can be found in an earlier period too,<sup>47</sup> since the documents rarely state exactly what sort of assembly — occasional or regular, Sunday or daily — is being described.

As for the additional hours of prime, tierce, sext, none, and compline, we see them already in fourth-century monastic usage outside Egypt,<sup>48</sup> but the Egyptians resisted these hours,<sup>49</sup> and apparently they did not acquire *droits du cité* in Egyptian monasticism until

<sup>45</sup> See A. van der Mensbrugge, "Prayer-time in Egyptian Monasticism (320–450)," *Studia Patristica* 2 (Texte und Untersuchungen 64, Berlin 1957) 435–454, and the critique of Veilleux (*Liturgie* [above, note 17] 280ff, 298ff). On the "rule of the angel" see *ibid.* 324–339, and the discussion of the reliability of Palladius and Cassian as witnesses of Pachomian usage (138–158).

<sup>46</sup> M. H. Davis (ed.), *The Life of Abba John of Khamé*, PO 14, 352–353.

<sup>47</sup> For example the synaxis described in the additions of Rufinus to the *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* XXIII (Russell, *The Lives of the Desert Fathers* [above, note 2] 153–154).

<sup>48</sup> See the texts adduced by J. Mateos, "L'Office monastique à la fin du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle Antioche, Palestine, Cappadoce," *Oriens Christianus* 47 (1963) 53–88.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Cassian, *Institutes* III, 2 (ed. Guy 92) and the discussion in Veilleux, *Liturgie* (above, note 17) 280ff.

much later. Evelyn-White cites a text of the *Life of Abba John of Khamé* ordering — according to Evelyn-White’s interpretation — prayer at every canonical hour.<sup>50</sup> This is put forward as evidence that the little hours were introduced into Scetis by Agathon the stylite, who was there for ten years, not later than 672–682, before mounting his column. But that is not how the Coptic text reads. It says, rather, that Abba Teroti taught John “the canon of the holy *Synaxis* of the hours, that he should pray every hour, according to the commandment of our father Abba Agathon, the stylite. . . .”<sup>51</sup> That is not a reference to the little hours at all, but rather a throwback to the much older tradition of praying at every hour of the twenty-four, twelve per day and twelve per night. This was just another way of stating the evangelical command to “pray always,”<sup>52</sup> which was the original Egyptian tradition, and seems also to have been the primitive sense of the “rule of the angel.”<sup>53</sup> A passage of Palladius’ *Lausiatic History* refers to prayer at the ninth hour in addition to the two traditional synaxes,<sup>54</sup> and Shenouti’s *Monastic Precepts* speak of “those who are the first at church in the morning, in the evening, at mid-day, and at the requisite hour.”<sup>55</sup> But such texts cannot simply be taken as evidence for the day hours without further ado. The history of this development remains to be written, and the whole question would require a separate study beyond the scope of this paper. For the present, I can only say I know of no secure evidence for the day hours in the Coptic tradition before the Sahidic manuscript *Pierpont Morgan M 574* from Fayyum at the end of the ninth century, edited and thoroughly analyzed by H. Quecke.<sup>56</sup>

At any rate the present Coptic Horologion has eight hours: morning prayer, tierce, sext, none, eleventh hour (vespers), and compline, plus two hours that are apparently later additions: the “Prayer

<sup>50</sup> Evelyn-White, *The History of the Monasteries of Nitria and Scetis* (above, note 3) 281–282.

<sup>51</sup> Ed. Davis, *PO* 14, 377.

<sup>52</sup> Lk 18:1; 21:36; Rom 12:12; 1 Thess 5:16–18; Eph 6:18; Col 4:2.

<sup>53</sup> Veilleux, *Liturgie* (above, note 17), 325ff, 330–331, 339.

<sup>54</sup> Chapter 32:6; cf. also 7:5 (Meyer [above, note 21] 93, 41). On these texts see Veilleux, *Liturgie* (above, note 17) 331–332.

<sup>55</sup> E. Amélineau, *Oeuvres de Shenoudi*. Texte copte et trad. Française (Paris 1914) vol. 2, 233, cited in Burmester, “The Canonical Hours” (above, note 30) 82.

<sup>56</sup> H. Quecke, *Untersuchungen zum koptischen Stundengebet* (Publications de l’Institut orientaliste de Louvain, Université catholique de Louvain 1970) 117ff (cf. p. 87 for the date of the ms.).

of the Veil," and a midnight hour comprising three nocturns. Both of these additional hours repeat psalmody already distributed throughout the other six hours, and the Prayer of the Veil, a doubling of compline, appears first in Abu'l-Barakat around 1320, exists only in Arabic sources — a sure sign of its late origin — and is composed of elements from the other hours. It is used only in monasteries.<sup>57</sup>

With the exception of these two later additions, the structure of all these hours is the same:<sup>58</sup>

Fixed initial prayers  
Twelve psalms (ideally)  
Gospel lesson  
Psalm (poetic refrains)  
Kyrie eleison (41 or 50 times)  
Trisagion  
Our Father  
Dismissal Prayer of Absolution  
Final Prayer

Variety among the hours is minimal. Morning prayer has the Great Doxology (*Gloria in excelsis*), as one would expect, and the creed. Other hours also have certain minor peculiarities, but the basic structure is the same. So apart from the later addition of seven further psalms to the original twelve at morning prayer, and some variety in the final prayers, this is the structure of all the traditional hours from morning prayer to compline. The refrains or "Psalm" are a later addition of Palestinian origin,<sup>59</sup> and if we prescind from them we see an office that is almost pure Cassian.

<sup>57</sup> See Burmester, "The Canonical Hours" (above, note 30) 89–100. For the text of Abu'l Barakat see Villecourt, "Les observances liturgiques et la discipline du jeûne dans l'Église copte (ch. XVI-XIX de la *Lampe des ténèbres*)," *Le Muséon* 36 (1923) 249–292, 37 (1924) 201–282, 38 (1925) 261–320.

<sup>58</sup> See Burmester, *loc. cit.*, *The Coptic Church: A detailed description of her liturgical services and the rites and ceremonies observed in the administration of her sacraments* (Publications de la Société d'archéologie copte, Cairo 1967) 96–107. Quecke, *Untersuchungen* (above, note 56) 20ff.

<sup>59</sup> On the question of their origin see A. Baumstark, "Palastinensisches Erbe im byzantinischen und koptischen Horologion," *Studi bizantini e neoellenici* 6 (1940) 463–469. Quecke, *Untersuchungen* (above, note 56) 47–52, "Neue griechische Parallelen zum koptischen Horologion," *Le Muséon* 77 (1964) 285–294. Burmester, "The Canonical Hours" (above, note 30) 84–89. Many of the same texts are found in Greek in the present Byzantine horologion — but that is of Palestinian, not Byzantine provenance.

But in addition to this monastic psalmody we find other services, the Offering of Incense morning and evening, and the threefold Psalmody of the night, the morning, and the evening, which contain elements apparently of cathedral provenance.

The Offering of Incense is as follows, with the variable or proper parts in italics:<sup>60</sup>

Fixed introductory prayers  
*Invitatory*  
Praise of Mary  
*Supplications to the saints*  
*Prayer of Incense*  
Incensation of the altar, with short intercessions  
*Great Intercession*  
Incensation  
Trisagion  
Our Father  
Praise of Mary  
*Doxologies* (poetic refrains)  
Creed  
Incensation with prayers  
Blessing with candles and cross  
Solemn Kyrie eleison (litany)  
(*OT lessons* and litanies at Morning Offering of Incense on certain fast days)  
Prayer of the Gospel  
*Psalm verse*  
Alleluia  
*Gospel lesson*  
Incensation and short intercessions  
Prayer of Absolution to the Son  
(*Reading of the synaxary* at Morning Offering of Incense)  
Veneration of Cross and Gospel  
*Final blessing*

<sup>60</sup> On the Offering of Incense, see Quecke, *Untersuchungen* (above, note 56) 2–13; Burmester, *The Coptic Church* (above, note 58) 35–45. The text can be found in the versions of John, Marquis of Bute, in M. Cramer, *Koptische Hymnologie in deutscher Übersetzung* (Wiesbaden 1969); M. Cramer, *Koptische Liturgien. Eine Auswahl* (Sophia 11, Trier 1973); some parts are also translated in Burmester, *The Coptic Church*, Appendix.

This office contains what seems to be the débris of older cathedral services.<sup>61</sup> Even more significant in this regard is the so-called Psalmodia, which refers not to biblical psalmody but the sung office,<sup>62</sup> a term akin to the Greek *asmatikos* or old sung cathedral office of Hagia Sophia in Byzantine parlance.<sup>62</sup> This Psalmodia has never been subjected to thorough scholarly analysis, and poses numerous problems,<sup>64</sup> but the cathedral elements in its structure are particularly evident in the Psalmodia of the Evening and in the Psalmodia of the Night. The former is rarely celebrated today, but when done it comes between compline (and the Prayer of the Veil in monasteries) and the Evening Offering of Incense. It has the following elements:<sup>65</sup>

PSALMODIA OF THE EVENING:

Fixed initial prayers

Ps 116

Hos (ode) 4: Pss 148–150 with alleluia

*Psali* (poetic refrains) of season or feast and day

*Theotokia* (Marian refrain) of the day

*Lobsh* (crown) of the *Theotokia*

*Hymn from the Difnar* (antiphony)

*Conclusion of the Theotokia*

The much longer Psalmodia of the Night, sung between nocturns and the morning office, comprises:<sup>66</sup>

PSALMODIA OF THE NIGHT:

Fixed initial prayers

Invitatory versicles (chiefly psalmic)

<sup>61</sup> Quecke, *Untersuchungen*, loc cit

<sup>62</sup> In the Pachomian usage "psalmody" was characteristic of the Sunday office. See the Pachomian *Precepts* 15–18 (Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia* [above, note 32] vol 2 147–148) and Veilleux, *Liturgie* (above, note 17) 314

<sup>63</sup> See the numerous studies on this office in the extensive bibliography at the end of my forthcoming article "The Byzantine Office in the *Prayerbook* of New Skete: Evaluation of a Proposed Reform," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 48 (1982) fasc 2 (at press)

<sup>64</sup> See the discussion in Quecke, *Untersuchungen* (above, note 56) 52–80

<sup>65</sup> C. Ballin, *L'office copte. L'office des heures, l'offrande de l'encens, la psalmodie annuelle* (unpublished licentiate thesis, Pontifical Oriental Institute, Rome 1979) 73, Burmester, *The Coptic Church* (above, note 58) 108–111, text in M. Brogi, *La santa salmodia annuale della chiesa copta* (Studia orientalia christiana Aegyptiaca, Cairo 1962)

<sup>66</sup> Ballin, *L'office copte* (see previous note) 90–94

(Resurrectional praises on Sundays and in Paschaltide)

Hos (ode) 1: Ex 15:1–21 with Psali (poetic commentary on the ode)

2: Ps 135 with Psali

3: Dan 3:52–88 with Psali of the paschal mystery and Psali of the ode (on the three youths in the furnace)

Litany of the saints

*Doxologies of the feast or day*

Hos (ode) 4: Pss 148–150 with alleluia after each verse

*Psali of the feast or day*

*Hymn of the day from the Difnar (antiphonary), with its Tarh (response)*

*Conclusion of the Theotokia*

Creed

Concluding litany

Sanctus

Our Father

Dismissal Prayer of Absolution

The Psalmodia of the Morning, which follows the morning office of the Horologion, is made up of only a couple of poetic pieces and can hardly be called an office at all.<sup>67</sup> But according to Camillo Ballin, who has written a preliminary study of the Coptic office under the direction of J. Mateos and is continuing under my direction his doctoral research on the same topic at the Pontifical Oriental Institute (Rome), the Psalmodia of the Evening and of the Night seem to be the remnants, in the first case, of cathedral lauds, and in the second, of lauds again, this time preceded by elements of the old Sunday Resurrection Vigil as reconstructed by Mateos.<sup>68</sup> I would

<sup>67</sup> Burmester, *The Coptic Church* (above, note 58) 111.

<sup>68</sup> Ballin, *L'office copte* (see above, note 65) 95ff. On the Cathedral Vigil, see J. Mateos, "La vigile cathédrale chez Egérie," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 27 (1961) 281–312; "Les différentes espèces de vigiles dans le rite chaldéen," *ibid.* 47–67; "Les matines chaldéennes, maronites et syriennes," *ibid.* 26 (1960) 51–73; *Lelya-Sapra* (above, note 14) 55–66, 423–431; "L'office dominicale de la Résurrection," *Revue du Clergé africain* (May 1964) 263–288; "Quelques problèmes de l'orthros byzantin," *Proche-orient chrétien* 11 (1961) 17–35, 201–220, esp. 203–205; J. Tabet, "Le témoignage de Bar Hebraeus († 1286) sur la vigile cathédrale," *Melto* 5 (1969) 113–121; "Le témoignage de Sévère d'Antioche († 538) sur la vigile cathédrale," *Melto* 4 (1968) 6–12; *L'office commun maronite. Étude du lilyō et du safro* (Bibliothèque de l'Université S.-Esprit, Kaslik [Lebanon] 1972) 210ff.

caution the reader, who might quite logically deem such duplication preposterous, to glance first at Mateos' study of matins in the Syrian Rites before rejecting this hypothesis out of hand. In three of the four traditions (Maronite, West Syrian, Tikrit) there is a double office of lauds.<sup>69</sup>

As for cathedral vespers in the Egyptian tradition, evidence of it can still be found in Ethiopian vespers which are of Egyptian provenance, and Winkler has identified the débris of an old cathedral vespers in the Coptic Evening Offering of Incense.<sup>70</sup>

#### THE MONASTIC CURSUS AT DAYR ABU MAQAR

At St. Macarius today as of old the daily monastic office is accomplished for the most part in two synaxes. When the bell rings at 3:00 AM the monks rise to pray in their cells until the morning synaxis, which lasts from about 4:30 to 6:30 and includes nocturns, Psalmody of the Night, matins, tierce and sext, all done in sequence without interruption. The bell is rung a second time before matins, to summon those who have preferred to prolong their solitary prayer.

The offices are performed standing, except for the prostrations that accompany the prayers, though one can sit cross-legged on the floor if the standing becomes too much (there are no pews in Coptic monastic churches, though one finds them commonly in secular churches today). Unlike the secular churches, which are generally basilical in form, the monastic churches are more square, and when one takes a substantial strip all along the east wall for the enclosed triple sanctuary (haikal), the remaining area outside the haikal is wider than it is long, and the monks stand single file, facing the haikal with their backs to the grill separating the choir from the nave. There are no special places except for the senior priest present, who always presides. Before the rank of monks there is a long lectern to hold the books needed for the Psalmody, which is still done in Coptic except for some parts that are taken in Arabic. The hours of the Horologion, done entirely in Arabic and absolutely invariable every day including even the lessons (though this is clearly a later corruption), are done entirely from memory, without books. So the church is lit only by one or two tapers except at the Psalmo-

<sup>69</sup> "Les matines chaldéennes" (previous note) 56-72

<sup>70</sup> G Winkler, "Über die Kathedralvesper in den verschiedenen Riten des Ostens und Westens," *Archiv für Liturgiewissenschaft* 16 (1974) 81-83. Text and Russian translation in B Turaev, *Časoslov efiopskoj tserkvi*. Izdal 1 pereval na osnovanii neskol'kich rukopisej B Turaev (St Petersburg 1897) 72-87

dia, when lanterns are lighted to permit reading (the monastery generator is shut down around 10:00 PM and after that there is no electricity until the next day's work begins).

The office opens with the presiding priest pronouncing the initial phrases of the opening prayers, which each monk then recites to himself. Since twelve psalms per hour is a considerable *pensum*, the psalmody is now done in the following manner: a precentor goes down the line whispering the *incipit* of a psalm to each monk (to me he whispered the psalm number in English), making as many runs as necessary to distribute all at once, in their prescribed order, the assigned psalms of the hour. Then everyone simultaneously recites by heart his assigned psalm(s) in silence. Needless to say, such a practice is a later abuse designed to relax the burden of excessively long synaxes for those who have other things to do than pass the whole day in church. A better solution, surely, would be to reduce the hours recited in common, but do them properly, leaving the day hours and perhaps nocturns to be prayed by heart in private during the day's work and the solitary watches of the night. After the psalmody the assigned reader, standing facing the sanctuary a bit to the right of the closed doors of the haikal screen, recites the Gospel lesson in a low voice (since it is invariable, everyone knows it by heart). This too is a later corruption. The texts of the lessons are not given in the manuscripts of the Horologion, since they were variable and taken from the lectionary. The present invariable readings are from the printed Arabic editions, which sometimes provide a selection of two or three lessons for an hour.<sup>71</sup> One of my former students at the Pontifical Oriental Institute, Ugo Zanetti S.J. is presently preparing a thesis on the Coptic lectionary which will help to clarify the whole structure of the earlier Coptic calendar and offices. The lesson is followed by the Psali or poetic refrains, done by a soloist from his place. Then the *Gloria patri* is chanted by all, and the hour is concluded with the *Kyrie eleison*, Trisagion, Our Father, and final prayers.

Such an office is more a meditation in common than a liturgical service. As such, it is faithful to the pristine orientation of the pure monastic hours. But this is not true of the *Psalmodia*, a sung office chanted in Coptic in a swiftly moving, strongly punctuated, almost

<sup>71</sup> Burmester, "The Canonical Hours" (above, note 30) 90 note 2, 93 note 6, 95 note 1, 99 note 3.

staccato rhythm, the presider keeping time all the while with small cymbals.

I was treated with the utmost deference and warmth at the offices. The monks were obviously pleased with my attendance at all the common services, and someone was always on hand, discreetly solicitous to see that I did not lose my place during the *Psalmodia*, which I did often since the *Psalmodia* is variable, and like any other office with considerable propers, requires a fair amount of knowledgeable page-flipping. A *Psalmodia*, which is also the name of the book, was provided me when they saw I knew Coptic, a taper lit so I could see, and once I became accustomed to their pronunciation, with *X* pronounced "sh" and *theta* pronounced "s," I was able to join in the chanting. Before my departure I was presented with a *Psalmodia* of my own, a treasured remembrance of those idyllic days of *koinonia* in the prayer of the desert nights.

Weekday evenings from 6:00 to 6:30 the monks chant vespers, compline and the Prayer of the Veil. None is done in the refectory before the noon meal, the only common repast at St. Macarius.

At the end of each synaxis all the monks except the presiding priest line up facing him, their backs to the sanctuary wall, while he says the final prayers of intercession, then one by one they approach him and one another for the "peace," the juniors placing the palm of their right hand in that of the senior (or if they are priests, taking his hand in both of theirs). Then each one kisses his own hand and places it over his breast — a common greeting of respect in Egypt even apart from such formal circumstances. The monks also give the *pax* to one another (or only to the presider, if the office has begun) on entering church before the synaxis, though with less formality.

On Saturday the evening synaxis begins at 4:00 PM because the Evening Offering of Incense and Evening *Psalmodia*, not done on ordinary days, are celebrated in preparation for Sundays or feasts. And on the morrow everyone is in church again at 2:00 AM for the usual daily offices, followed at 4:30 by the Morning Offering of Incense, generally done only on eucharistic days, and at 5:30 by the eucharistic liturgy, at which all monks present communicated. The Eucharist is concelebrated, which means that a couple of priests and a few deacons share the common service, not that *all* priests concelebrate. Contrary to what is sometimes assumed, the traditional purpose of concelebration is not to provide presbyters with the chance

to “say mass” without resorting to that occidental curiosity known as the “private mass.”<sup>72</sup> Presbyterate is a common ministry whose purpose is service, not a personal privilege entailing individual prerogatives and designed to satisfy personal devotional needs.

There are about fourteen priests in the brotherhood, but some were ordained to serve other churches, and once they have returned from that “mission” they are not allowed to serve as priests within the monastery, although at the eucharistic liturgy they give themselves communion within the sanctuary, in the manner of priests. Other young priests do not celebrate in the monastery because it is thought unsuitable for them to hold a position superior to older and more venerable lay brethren. So in all about seven priests take their turn as celebrants at the Eucharist, and the leader at the offices is always the senior priest present. Needless to say, there are no other Eucharists except the common one and one said out on the farm for those working there.

At Dayr al-Baramus, which I also visited, there is daily Eucharist (except Saturday). This entails also the celebration of the Morning Offering of Incense that always precedes Mass in Coptic Orthodox usage, so the daily morning synaxis lasts from 4:00 to 11:00 AM. But in the evening, vespers, compline and the Prayer of the Veil take much less time, since there too the psalms are distributed and done simultaneously, and the Evening Offering of Incense is celebrated only on Saturdays and the eve of feasts.

<sup>72</sup> See R. Taft, “Ex Oriente Lux? Some Reflections on Eucharistic Concelebration,” *Worship* 54 (1980) 308–325



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