Monks and Matrons:
The Economy of Charity in the Late Antique Mediterranean

By

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For my grandparents:
Marvin, Virginia, Leonard, and Jean

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Preface

Table 1:
Timeline of events

Black text=events in the lives of Melania the Elder or Melania the Younger

Blue text=events in the lives of other prominent ascetics or religious figures

Red text=political events

341	Melania the Elder born
345	Rufinus born
346	Athanasius leaves Rome after exile
347	Jerome born; Paula born
354	Augustine born
356	Anthony of Egypt dies
360	Athanasius writes the Life of Anthony; Olympias born
363	Melania the Elder's husband dies; Palladius born
367	John Chrysostom ordained Bishop of Constantinople
370	Jerome and Rufinus meet for the first time
372	Melania the Elder and Rufinus leave Rome for Egypt
373	Jerome travels to Syria; Athanasius of Alexandria dies; Evagrius of Antioch translates the *Life of Anthony* into Latin; Arian persecution of Egyptian monks begins
374	Melania the Elder flees to Jerusalem

378	Jerome travels to Antioch
379	Paula widowed; Valentinian II becomes Western Emperor
380	Rufinus travels to Jerusalem
382	Jerome returns to Rome; Jerome and Paula meet
385	Melania the Younger born
386	Jerome and Paula arrive in Bethlehem
387	Augustine converts to Christianity
390	Palladius travels to Palestine as a monk
392	Valentinian II dies; Honorius becomes Western Emperor
394	Jerome and Rufinus begin to publicly fight about Origenism
395	Augustine ordained Bishop of Hippo
397	Rufinus returns to Rome
399	Melania the Younger marries Pinianus
400	Melania the Elder visits Rome; Palladius appointed Bishop of Helenopolis
404	Melania the Elder returns to Jerusalem; John Chrysostom and Olympias exiled; Paula dies
406	Vandals enter Gaul
407	Melania the Younger and Pinianus flee Rome; the Visigothic siege of Rome begins
408	Melania and Pinianus visit Rufinus in Sicily; Olympias dies; Stilicho and Serena killed; Theodosius II becomes Eastern Emperor;
409	Vandals enter Hispania
410	Melania the Elder dies; Melania the Younger and Pinianus arrive in North Africa; Rome sacked by the Visigoths
411	Rufinus dies
417	Melania the Younger and Pinianus leave North Africa for Jerusalem

420 Melania and Pinianus visit Egypt; Palladius writes the Lausiac History; Jerome dies

429 Vandals enter North Africa

430 Vandal siege of Hippo; Augustine dies

431 Melania and Pinianus begin construction of a monastery on the Mount of Olives; Albina dies

432 Pinianus dies

436 Melania begins construction of a monastery for men on the Mount of Olives

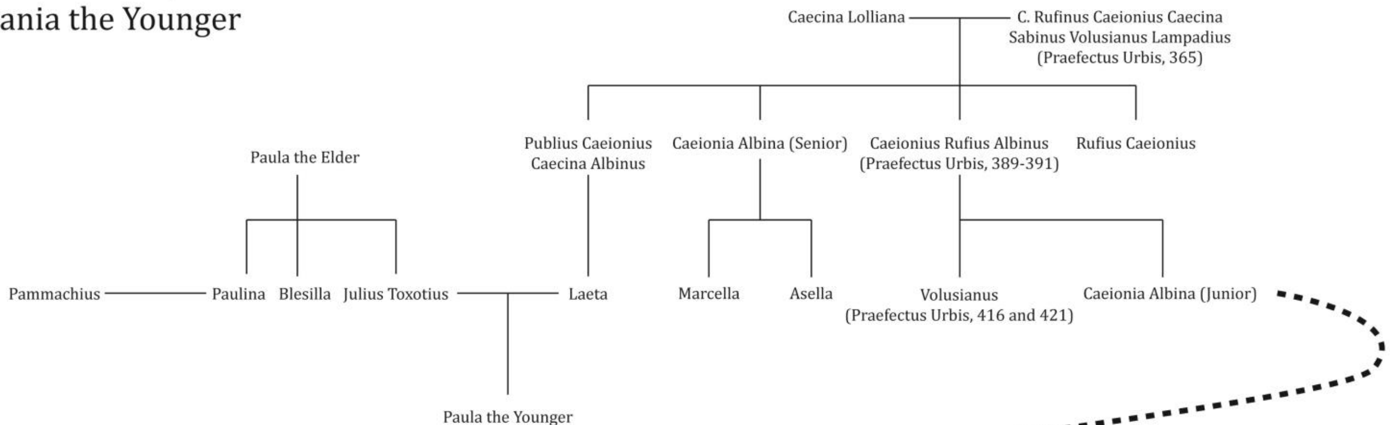
437 Melania travels to Constantinople

438 Melania and Eudocia travel to Jerusalem; Melania begins the construction of the Martyrion of Saint Stephen

439 Melania the Younger dies; Vandal siege of Carthage

443 Eudocia exiled to Jerusalem

450 Gerontius writes the *Life of Melania the Younger*



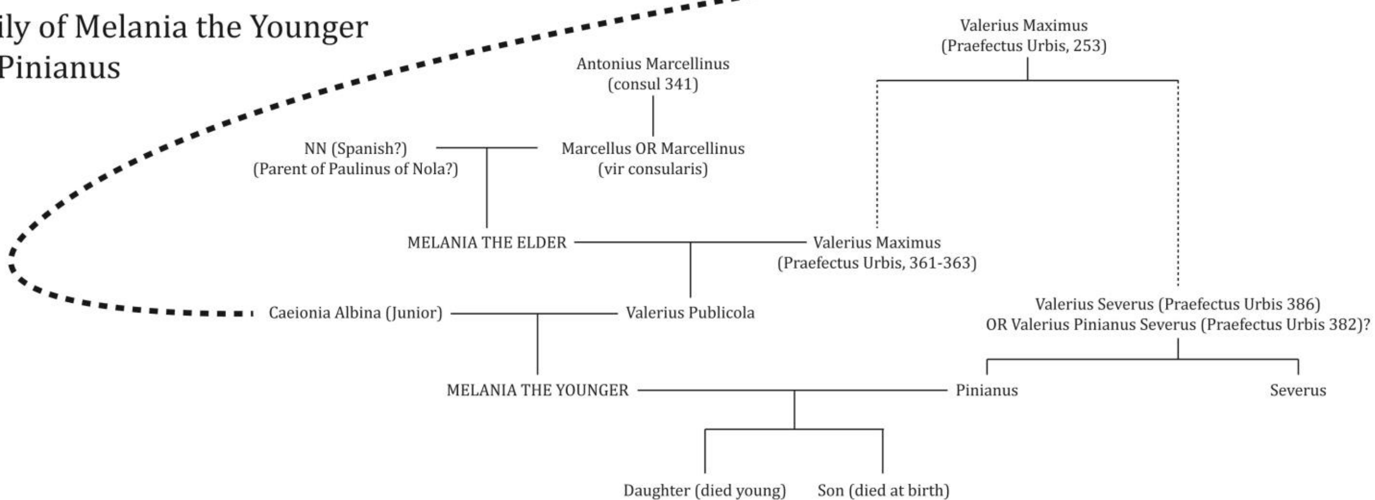


Figure 1: The families of Melania the Elder and Melania the Younger. After Gorce 1962, 21 and 26.

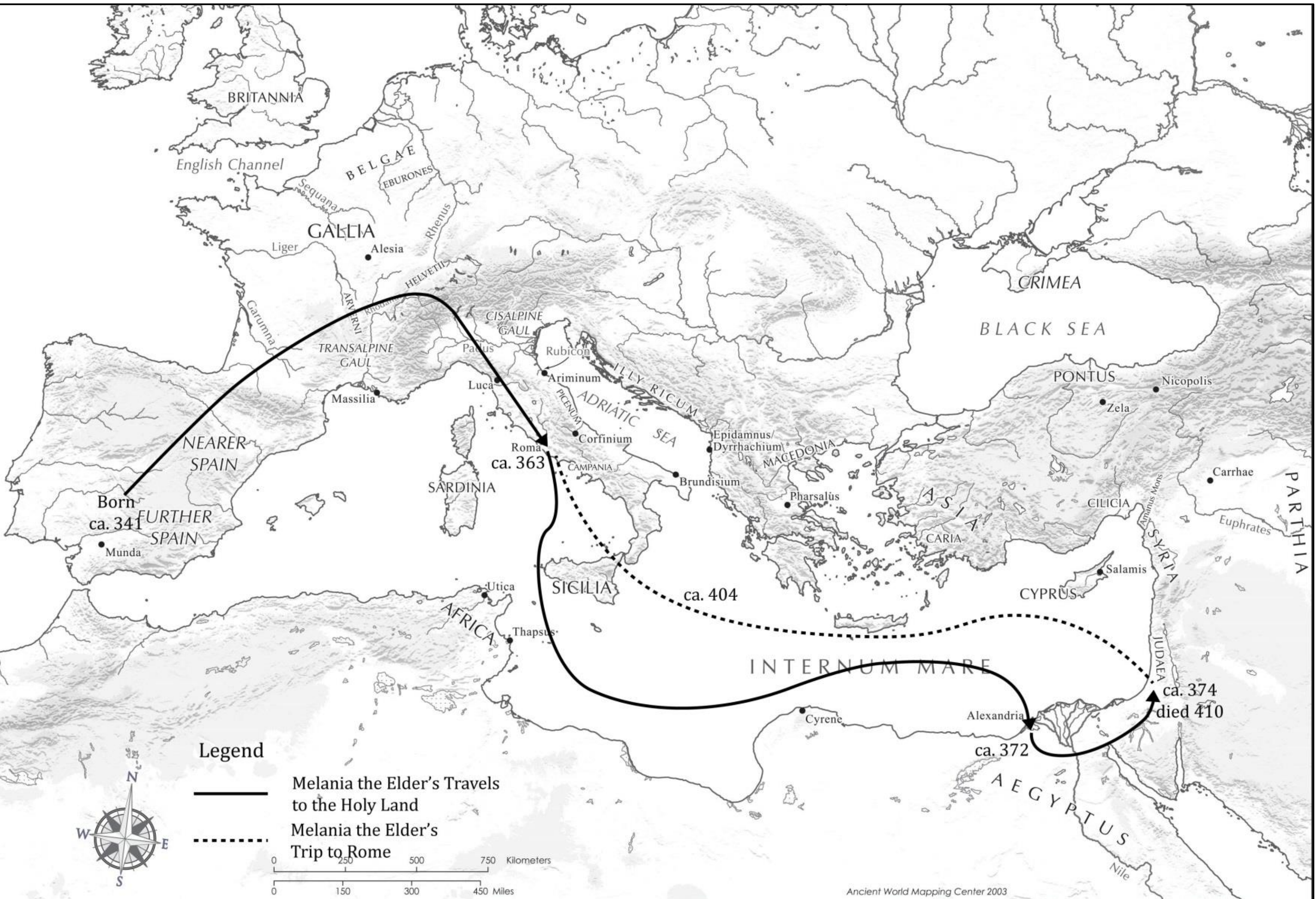


Figure 2: Melania the Elder's travels. Map adapted from a template made publicly available by the University of North Carolina's Ancient World Mapping Center (http://awmc.unc.edu/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/rve_08_2.pdf).

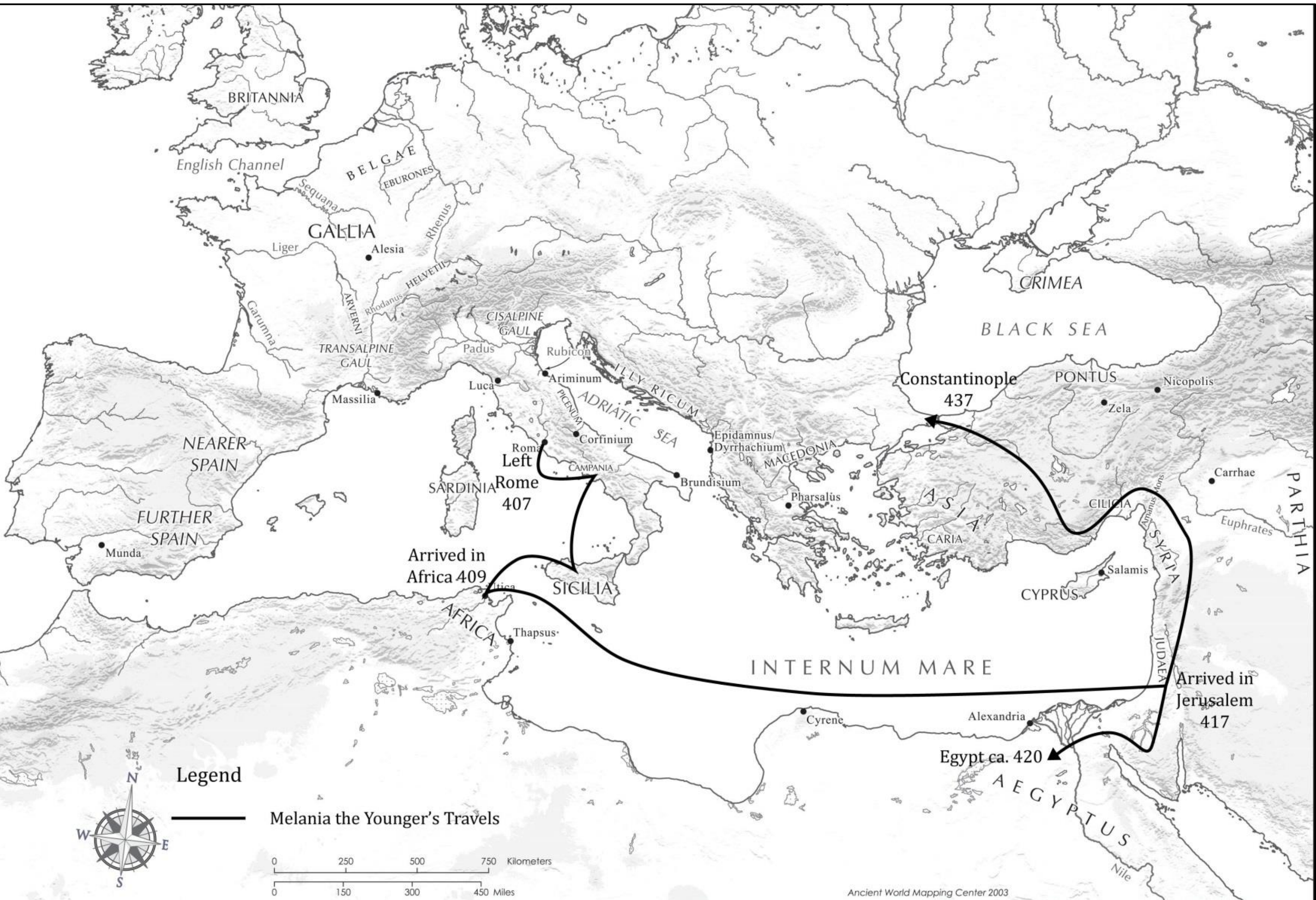


Figure 3: Melania the Younger's travels. Map adapted from a template made publicly available by the University of North Carolina's Ancient World Mapping Center (http://awmc.unc.edu/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/rv).e_08_2.pd).f

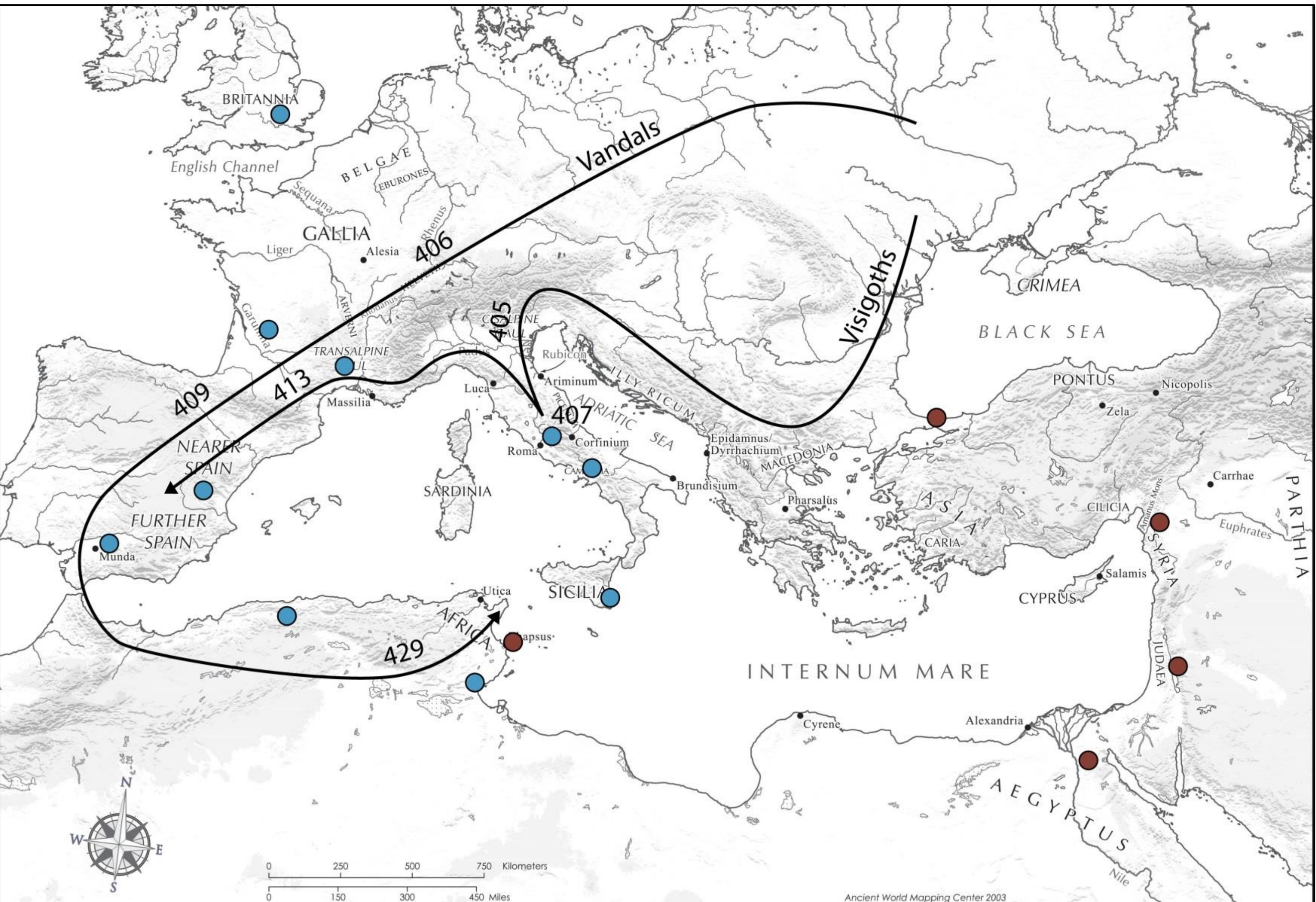


Figure 4: Melania the Younger's property and the barbarian invasions. Blue dots indicate the location of Melania's familial estates; red dots indicate sites of Melania's charity, including monasteries she founded. Map adapted from a template made publicly available by the University of North Carolina's Ancient World Mapping Center (http://awmc.unc.edu/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/rve_08_2.pdf).

Table of Contents

Dedication ii
Acknowledgements iii
Preface v
List of abbreviations xv

Chapter 1: Introduction 1

Section 1: The current state of scholarship 1

Section 2: Methodology 9

Section 3: Palladius' *Lausiac History* 16

Section 4: Gerontius' *Life of Melania the Younger* 24

Section 5: Desert monasticism and the Roman West 30

Section 6: Synopsis of chapters 37

Chapter 2: Talking Business: Economic Language and the Rhetoric of Charity 42

Section 1: Water and Wine: Palladius and Gerontius' aristocratic audiences 45

Section 2: The Devil in the Mirror: Wealth as temptation 52

Section 3: Yours is the Kingdom: The problem of poverty in Late Antique Christianity 62

Section 4: A Profitable Life: Variations on asceticism 69

Section 5: Coins in a Salt Basket: Melania the Younger's struggle with wealth 78

Section 6: Conclusions 86

Chapter 3: A Death in the Family: Ascetic Identities and Female Agency 90

Section 1: Living in a Material World: Familial expectations in the *Life of Melania the Younger* 94

Section 2: Only Let My Body Be Free: Marriage and virginity in Late Antique Christianity 102

Section 3: Take Away the Fruit of My Sin: Family as temptation for female ascetics 112

Section 4: A Second Life: Matrons as ascetics 121

Section 5: A Very Affectionate Mother: The transformation of the Roman family 128

Section 6: Conclusions 137

Chapter 4: The Society of the Desert: Christian Charity and Ascetic Social Networks 140

Section 1: Carved in Stone: Euergetism and charity as Investment in social capital 143

Section 2: Buying Friends: Melania the Elder and Pambo 156

Section 3: One of the Boys: Melania the Elder in Egypt 163

Section 4: Remembering Melania: Saints and their biographers 173

Section 5: All My Friends are Dead: Melania the Younger, the relics of martyrs, and the women of the court 179

Section 6: Forgetting Melania: Gerontius' selective memory 186

Section 7: Conclusions 189

Chapter 5: These Corruptible Goods: Melania the Younger's monastic investments 192

Section 1: The economy and society of aristocratic monasticism 195

Section 2: Same as It Ever Was: The monastic economy 200

Section 3: Monasticism as investment: A means of controlling wealth 212

Section 4: The Wealth of the East: Melania the Younger in Egypt and the Holy Land 226

Section 5: The Mouth of the Lion: Barbarians invade Western Europe 235

Section 6: Conclusions 241

Chapter 6: Conclusion 244

Section 1: The benefits of asceticism 244

Section 2: Key concepts of this project 250

Section 3: Future directions 253

Bibliography 259

List of Abbreviations

Ep.= *Epistulae*.

HL= Palladius. *Historia Lausiaca*.

IE= *Itinerarium Egeriae*.

PLRE= Jones, A.H.M., J.R. Martindale, and J. Morris. 1980. *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*.

VA= Athanasius. *Vita Antonii*.

VM= Gerontius. *Vita Melaniae Iunioris*.

VMac= Gregory of Nyssa. *Vita Macrinae*.

VO= *Vita Olympiadis*.

VP= Jerome. *Vita Pauli*.

Chapter 1
Introduction

Section 1
The current state of scholarship

Sometime around 420, Palladius, a bishop in Bithynia who had lived as a monk in Egypt and Palestine, wrote a collection of short biographies of desert ascetics, known as the *Lausiac History*, on the behest of a wealthy Constantinopolitan patron. In this collection, he included the biographies of several women, writing, "I have not set up the virtuous works of these women as secondary [to my purpose], so that we might learn that it is possible to gain profit in many ways if we want to."[1] Palladius and his patron were both men who operated in the masculine worlds of the church and imperial hierarchy; Palladius' collection of stories focused on the male-dominated world of Egyptian asceticism. Yet Palladius, according to his own words, made a clear choice to include women in his collection of monastic biographies. Palladius included a justification for his inclusion of the stories of women, asserting that women's stories were understood in relation to his male readers: they showed the variety of Christian living available to his audience.

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[1] *HL* 64. Throughout this work, all translations of ancient texts are my own unless otherwise noted. For the *Lausiac History*, I have use G.J.M. Bartelink, G.J.M, 1974, *La Storia Lausiaca*, *Vite dei Santi* 2 *(Milan*: A. Mondadori) as my primary edition; for the *Life of Melania the Younger*, D. Gorce, 1962, *Vie de Sainte Mélanie*, *Sources Chrétiennes* (Paris: Le Cerf). I have also made reference to E.A. Clark, 1984, *The Life of Melania the Younger* (New York: Edwin Mellon Press) in translations.

For Palladius, the ways in which women could "gain profit" through the pursuit of ascetic lifestyles were both compelling to his wealthy male patron and divergent from the stories which he included about male ascetics.

The following work argues that Palladius included women in his text in order to advertise the benefits which primary group membership in aristocratic ascetic communities offered, and that Gerontius' later biography of Melania the Younger showed a similar interest in the benefits of asceticism. Their stories not only reflected attitudes toward women in the monastic world, but also imagined the actions and experiences of women as an attractive and integral part of aristocratic asceticism. In other words, the portrayal of women in monastic texts revealed that women in monastic society were limited by their gender and their sexuality; but monastic texts also imagined women as having the ability to choose to live ascetically and to understand and derive benefits from ascetic practice, and praised them for their social and economic success within the ascetic paradigm. Monastic literature promised women not only real agency in their economic and social actions through their dedication to asceticism and the favor of God, but also admiration for their actions.

The depiction of women in monastic literature has been a subject of scholarly interest for the past four decades. The application of gender studies and feminist theory to Late Antique hagiographic sources has been a particularly fruitful study in the last 30 years. At the beginning of the integration of feminist scholarship into the discipline, the tone was polemical, as feminist scholars attempted to counteract

strongly conservative tendencies in a field of study already contentious because of its religious ramifications.[2] However, feminist scholarship, including gender studies, is now an integrated part of the field of Patristics,[3] and discussions of the experience of women in Late Antique Christianity are now common not only at Patristics conferences and in journals of Church History, but also in classes on the history and literature of gender.[4] Trends in feminist scholarship, especially in the field of religious studies, have validated the study of early Christian women as a meaningful and integrated aspect of the movement.

Much feminist scholarship recently has focused on two major areas of inquiry, largely inspired by the impact of the growth of gender studies. The first is a long-standing interest in attitudes toward female sexuality in the patristic sources, inspired by the teachings in the Pauline and Pastoral Epistles.[5] This conversation has included both a consideration of the actual practices of Christian women and men in Late Antiquity and an exploration about how sexuality defined female characters and their relationship to men—and the male God—in Christian literature.[6] This focus is especially evident in studies of ascetic women, in which

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[2] E. Schüssler Fiorenza's 1983 *In Memory of Her* is an excellent example of a study of the impact of women on the early Church with, as Fiorenza herself points out, a reading influenced by liberation theology, working specifically toward the empowerment of women in modern religious practice. Ruether 1974 lay an earlier foundation through a similar study. Such an approach has continued; see Schottroff 1995.

[3] See, for instance, Levine and Robbins, 2008, part of the *Feminist Companions to the New Testament and Early Christian Writings* series.

[4] For instance, Trout's 2012 North American Patristics Society Presidential Address dealt with women in Late Roman epitaphs (Trout 2013).

[5] I Cor. 5-7; 11:2-16; Gal. 5:16-20; Eph. 5:21-6:4; Col. 3:18-21; 1 Tim. 5:1-16.

[6] Cooper 1999 provides a good introduction to the study of women, sexuality, and the family among Late Antique Christians. In addition, see Brown 1986; Burrus 1987; Burrus 2004; Clark 1986; Clark 199b; Clark 1995; Clark 2008; G. Clark 2011, 33-48, 99-115; Hunter 2000; Hunter 2007; and McNamara 1976 on female virginity in Christianity; Cloke 1995, Cooper 1992, Cooper 2007b, Lampe

authors emphasized the sexuality of women to emphasize either sexual temptation or abstinence.[7] Such studies rightly emphasize the utility of female characters to the narratives, and the fact that, more often than not, women in ascetic texts were stock characters without any real depth or relationship to actual female experience.

Another fruitful area of study concerning the women of Late Antique hagiography is the issue of the constructions of not only gender, but also female characters in texts written almost exclusively by men. Both structuralist and post-structuralist textual readings inspire an anxiety about authorial objectivity, which has resulted in the concern among historians about the ability to read women—and "women's experience"—in texts written by male authors.[8] In response, historians have considered the ways in which it is still possible to understand cultural attitudes toward women, and how those attitudes themselves reflect reality, through the reading of such texts.[9]

While the role of gender in the study of Late Antique hagiographic texts has been a focus of scholarship, and is necessarily an aspect of this project, my goal is to use the study of gender and sexuality in Late Antique ascetic texts as a model for a

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2012 and Salisbury 1991 on women's power in the Late Antique Church; Balch and Osiek 2012, Cooper 2007a, and Nathan 2000 on Christianity in the Roman family; Burrus 2000 on gender and masculinity in Late Antiquity.

[7] See, for instance, G. Clark 1993, 94-118; Drijvers 1987; Elm 1994; Petersen 1996.

[8] Clark 2004 provides a comprehensive study of the impact of the linguistic turn on historical methodologies from the point of view not only of a pre-modern historian, but also of an historian of early Christianity.

[9] For the impact of post-structuralist theory on the feminist reading of late ancient texts, see Clark 1998. Haines-Etzen 2012 examines this issue more deeply and applies some of the theory put forth in Clark 1998. This work is particularly useful for the many ways that the author considers women (and ascetic women) interacting with text: as readers, subjects, and writers. Coon 1997 addresses the issues of writing and reading hagiography with a particular concern for understanding the function of gender and sexuality in these texts. See also Jacobs 2000. For the writing of hagiography more generally, see Krueger 1999. For the future of feminist scholarship in Early Christian Studies, see Clark 2001.

consideration of the other underlying social and cultural structures which informed attitudes toward asceticism. In particular, I focus on the economic realities of asceticism, considering both the economic motivations which attracted aristocratic Romans to ascetic practice and the economic function of the great monastic foundations of the Eastern Roman Empire. The latter aspect of the intersection of economy and monasticism has attracted a good deal of interest in recent years, particularly among scholars who work on Late Antique Egyptian monasticism. Wipszycka's compendious work on the economy of monasticism in Late Antique Egypt has been instrumental in supporting the economic study of monasticism.[10] In addition to Wipszycka's comprehensive approach, many scholars have added to the study of the monastic economy as a whole by considering the economic function of a particular monastic site using either archaeological or documentary evidence. [11] Although much of the archaeological and documentary evidence of the monastic economy dates to the seventh or eighth centuries, when many Egyptian monasteries were abandoned, such studies allowed for the integration of papyrological and archaeological evidence into historical inquiry, which has fostered, in the past half

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[10] Wipszycka 2009 provides the most comprehensive study of the monastic economy to date. See also Wipszycka 2007a, 2007b and 1972 for the economy of the institutional Church (and its connection to the monastic economy) and Wipszycka 1965 for a study of the textile industry in Egypt, which monasticism revolutionized.

[11] It would be impossible to include a comprehensive bibliography here, but the following provide a basic introduction to the study of the archaeology and documents of Late Antique Egyptian monasteries. For a general introduction to archaeology of Christian Egypt, see Walters 1974, Grossmann 2002; for Coptic monasteries, see Gabra 2002.For the Monastery of Apollo at Bawit, see Clédat 1999 for archaeology and Clackson 2000 for texts; for the monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes, see Winlock 1926 for both archaeology and texts; for the Monastery of Jeremiah at Saqqara, see Quibell 1912 for archaeology; for Abu Mina, see Grossmann 2004 for archaeology; for the Monastery of Phoibammon at Thebes, see Godlewski 1986; for Wadi al-Natrun, see Evelyn-White 1933. For texts from the Theban monasteries generally, see Crum 1971 MacCoull 2011, and Wilfong 2002. For an overview of the intersection between monasticism, society, and the Roman economy, see Goehring 1999, 39-52.

century, a very specific study of the Roman-Egyptian economy.[12] Indeed, the study of the monastic economy has particularly benefited from the wealth of sources available from Late Antique Egypt, and from the close connection between the landscape of Egypt and the development of desert monasticism.

Likewise, the question of the economy of the ancient Mediterranean world has been a growing area of interest, with particular interest in the possibility of individual rational economic action within the constraints of ancient society. In recent years, scholars have both supported and questioned claims made in the seminal works on the ancient economy, especially those of Rostovtzeff and Finley.[13] As scholars generally move away from a strictly primitivist or modernist, structuralist or functionalist approach to the ancient economy, there has been a growing interest in the particulars of the ancient economy, such as monetization and circulation of goods, as well as economic theory.[14] New evidence—particularly archaeological and documentary—has also led to a reconsideration of the extent of banking systems and the availability of credit in the ancient world.[15] This growing interest in the specifics of the ancient economy has influenced scholarship in the economy of Late Antique monasticism

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[12] Rathbone 1991 and Bagnall and Frier 1994 are examples of two different approaches. Rathbone focuses on particular archives to achieve a deep description of the economic function of a select estates; Bagnall and Frier approach a broad range of papyrological sources in an attempt to answer quantitative questions about demography. For a full bibliography on the use of papyrological evidence in studying the ancient economy, see Bagnall 1995.

[13] Rostovtzeff 1926 and 1953; Finley 1999.

[14] Howgego 1995; Duncan-Jones, 1982, 1990. For overall directions in the study of the ancient economy, see Scheidel, Morris, and Saller 2007.

[15] See, for instance, Andreau 1999; Jones 2006.

While there has been relatively little work on economic motivations for participating in the ascetic enterprise, scholars of ancient asceticism have considered asceticism as a social institution which rewarded members socially for their participation. Clark has been a pioneer in considering this aspect of asceticism, especially for Roman women. Her article, "Ascetic Renunciation and Feminine Advancement: A Paradox of Late Ancient Christianity,"[16] was one of the first studies to seriously address the benefits which asceticism offered to aristocratic women; however, there is still work to be done on this issue. In particular, there is a need for innovative considerations of the social circles of ascetics with an eye to modern theories of and approaches to social networks. While Clark's *The Origenist Controversy* began to address this issue,[17] more such studies are both possible, given the rich literary and epistolary evidence available. They are also necessary in order to fully understand not only the complicated primary groups which made up the Late Antique monastic community, but also their interaction and relationship to other social structures, such as economic class, gender, or geographical origin. Indeed, such studies would complement the growing literature on the creation, maintenance and utility of social connections in the ancient world.[18] Although such studies are necessarily limited to the upper classes in many circumstances, a solid basis for comparative work would also allow a more nuanced reading of the ability

[16] In Clark 1986.
[17] Clark 1989; amended slightly in Clark 1990a.
[18] Schor 2011 is an admirable example of the utility of social network theory as applied to late antique religious contexts. More generally, see Malkin et al. 2009; Malkin 2011; Ruffini 2008.

of ascetic rhetoric or practice to bring together members of different classes, backgrounds, or geographic origins.[19]

Finally, and most recently, there has been an interest in the study of wealth and poverty in Late Antiquity, particularly through the lens of ascetic or monastic sources.[20] Brown's most recent book, *Through the Eye of the Needle*, is perhaps the most expansive example of this sort of work. Brown brings together a comprehensive collection of quotations and observations about aristocratic attitudes toward poverty—it is, after all, nearly impossible to study the experiences of the actual poor in the ancient world.[21] Such studies are a clear response to the decades-old trend of the study of the subaltern in modern historical studies.[22] Ancient historians have long despaired of the possibility of gathering evidence about these invisible classes, although new archaeological approaches have offered some hope of finding the subaltern in the ancient landscape.[23] In order to circumvent the probably insurmountable problem of the invisibility of the poor in the ancient textual record scholars have recently taken the approach of studying attitudes

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[19] Recent scholarship which articulates the relationship between voluntary ascetics and the systemically poor is evidence of one of the uses of network theory. For instance, Wolf 2003 shows that Franciscan poverty was a strategy for the inclusion of the poor in a religious movement. Compare this to Caner's 2002 study of patronage networks and promotion among Eastern monks in Late Antiquity, which also addresses the social benefit, within a network, of voluntary poverty.
[20] Avila 1983 was an influential early study; see also Gonzalez 2002 for a popular reading. Janes 1998 considers admonitions about wealth in light of the use of gold in Christian art. Holman 2008 covers this issue in the earliest Christian literature.
[21] Brown 2012.
[22] Although subaltern studies have long been a subfield of historical inquiry, scholars like Hobsbawm (1959) brought the field to the forefront. Chakrabarty 1998 offers an accessible popular overview of the field and the problems it presents.
[23] A joint panel at the 2012 APA/AIA meeting, "Finding Peasants in Mediterranean Landscapes: New Work in Archaeology and History," organized by Cam Grey and Kim Bowes, is an example of the type of work currently being undertaken. For a general introduction to the archaeology of poverty, see Orser 2011. Orser's work focuses on historical archaeology in England, which poses questions within a context different from that of classical archaeology; however, the problems Orser outlines are the same as those posed in the study of poverty in the ancient world.

toward wealth and poverty in the ancient world. Christian sources from Late Antiquity are particularly attractive for such an inquiry, as they often addressed attitudes toward wealth and the problem of poverty in local communities in a way which pre-Christian texts had not. Rather than trying to uncover the experiences of the poor, these studies consider the attitudes toward wealth and poverty both in the Greco-Roman world generally and under the influence of ancient religions, including Christianity, specifically.[24] A corollary to the study of Christian attitudes toward wealth and poverty has been an exploration of early Christian charity. In particular, recent scholarship has focused on the ways in which charitable institutions, such as hospitals or guesthouses, supported both the local community and the status of donor within the Late Antique city as well as benefitted wealthy donors.[25]

Section 2
Methodology

Although Late Antique ascetic literature has long been part of the conversation about the religious culture of the late Roman Empire, the relatively recent development of Late Antiquity as its own historical time period worthy of specific consideration has inspired the application of historical methodologies to this body of literature. In particular, the past several decades of historical research on the religious life of the Late Antique Mediterranean have marked a change in scholarly attitude toward hagiographic texts. Scholars were once wary of

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[24] See, for instance, Evers 2010.
[25] See, for instance, Constable 2003, Wainwright 2006, Horden 2008, and Ferngren 2009. For more general discussions of Early Christian charity, see Garrison 1993 on the New Testament; Frenkel and Lev 2009 covers Late Antiquity relatively comprehensively while still providing ample comparative material (see pages 15-124 for ancient Christianity).

considering the historicity of hagiographic sources. With the rehabilitation of hagiography and the integration of these sources into the study of the history of Late Antiquity, scholars were eager to use hagiographic sources to provide specific historical data, such as fleshing out prosopographies, verifying dates of events, or finding a correlation between events described in a specific text and those attested in other sources.[26] More recently, still inspired by the linguistic turn and post-structuralism of the mid-twentieth century, scholarly anxiety about the use of literature to answer historical questions, threatens to again relegate hagiography to textual studies.[27]

Although the specific goals of authors of hagiography distorted the historical truth in many ways, hagiographic works nevertheless recorded accurately the events of the lives of historically attestable individuals. While the *extent* of historical accuracy varies among hagiographical texts, Late Antique hagiographies nearly always focused on individuals whose attitudes, impact, and even actions are known from other sources. Thus, while the *specifics* of hagiographic texts may diverge substantially from reality, and while the *narrative* of the hagiography necessarily has a specific didactic goal, the general episodes, events, and characters of a

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[26] For an overview of the development of the scholarly approach to hagiography, particularly concerning women, see Clark 1998; Castelli 1994, especially pages 79-81, also provides a succinct overview of the topic. Rabinowitz and Richlin 1993, 75-124 address the problems of "reading" and "writing" women in classical literature. For concern about and approaches to hagiography more generally, see Frank 2000, 2-6.

[27] Clark 2004 provides not only an overview of post-structuralist scholarship in history, but also an argument for its utility to Late Antique religious studies: "I hope to convince historians that partisans of theory need not be branded as disciplinary insurrectionaries; rather they raise in new guise issues of long-standing intellectual discussion. More particularly, I wish to persuade scholars of Western pre-modernity (and especially those of ancient Christianity) that the texts they study are highly amenable to the types of literary/philosophical/theoretical critique that have excited—and indeed, have now transformed—other humanities disciplines under the rubric of post-structuralism" (ix).

hagiographic text need not vary greatly from their historical basis. Moreover, authors of hagiographies, just as authors of ancient historical writings or as rhetoricians, tended to alter the details of their stories in specific ways.

The intersection between text and reality is problematic for all ancient sources; hagiography is barely an exception, and, in fact, the clear religious motivations for hagiographic authors, because they are evident in the text, alert the modern reader clearly to the bias. While the historical accuracy of hagiography has long been questioned because of the propensity of authors to include stories of miracles or obvious exaggerations of renunciation, scholars accept, for instance, the historical accuracy of some aspects of Herodotus' *Histories* despite gold-bearing ants and a Persian army several times larger than historically reasonable. A long-held skepticism of the historicity of Christian texts, in conjunction with their treatment as a specifically literary genre, has limited the extent to which scholars have turned to hagiography to address historical questions. However, Late Antique hagiography, at its basis, is no more or less historical than other texts which ancient historians accept as useful for addressing such questions.

Furthermore, while hagiographic writing recorded, in some form, historical characters, events, actions, and motivations, hagiographic literature often also had a didactic program. Often, as in the case of the texts with which I engage here, authors made their goals for the project clear in their writing. In general, authors note their desire to inspire saintly action, similar to that of their subject, in their readers. Thus, their descriptions of the actions of their subjects, even when they did not reflect

reality, may reasonably be assumed to further the didactic goal of the author. Thus, even the potentially exaggerated aspects of hagiographies represent a reasonable expectation of outcome within a specific cultural and historical context. Put simply, hagiographic sources were clear reflections of both the general historical and cultural context in which they were written, but also the specific goals and objectives of their authors and the actions and motivations of their characters. These two assumptions about hagiographic writing shape my approach to the historicity of these sources.

Both the historical characters portrayed in hagiographic sources and the authors of the texts detailing their lives strongly identified with specific religious belief systems. As an aspect of religious behavior, ascetic practice was shaped by the philosophical concepts of the practitioner. For instance, within the ancient Stoic paradigm, "accepted standards of behavior, including ascetic behavior, were either established by this philosophy or articulated and justified in its terms."[28] The relationship between individual ascetics and Christian philosophy was similar. I therefore take religious motivation as an impetus for ascetic action as a given. Likewise, I assume that authors crafted their texts in a way which not only highlighted the actual religiosity of their subjects, but also advanced their own religiously motivated agendas.

Scholarly reading of hagiographic texts has often focused on their religious content, asking questions about the sectarian motivations of the subject or author,

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[28] Francis 1995, 1.

for instance, or the theology evident in the speech of characters.[29] The study of hagiography from a religious studies or literary point of view has been extremely fruitful and has shaped scholarly conceptions not only of Late Antique Christianity, but also of the role of hagiography and other religious literature in the formation of religious identity in the Late Antique period, especially among the aristocracy. The success of such studies have allowed me to undertake the current study, which builds upon the understanding that hagiographic texts both described and codified religious belief. Here, I have chosen to study the economic and social objectives of each party rather than the religious motivations of both subjects and authors.

Tracking economic motivation—indeed, personal motivation of any kind—presents the problem of uncovering the thought process of an individual. Scholars of the ancient economy still disagree about the extent to which individuals acted, and act today, rationally in regard to economic thought.[30] Economic rationality is generally defined as the ability to undertake economic action—motivated solely by financial gain—outside of cultural, social, political, or religious influence. In the case of ancient ascetics, who were religiously motivated in their actions, strict economic rationality is an obviously inappropriate way to define individual actions. However, the concept of economic motivation in individual choice is still applicable to these texts, although it has long been ignored. Indeed, the asceticism which typified Late

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[29] The consideration of anti-Arian strains in Athanasius' *Life of Anthony*, particularly in relation to his other writings, is a good example of this; see Hanson 1988, Ernest 1993, Brakke 1994a, Brakke 1995, Rubenson 1995, Anatolios 1998.

[30] I am particularly indebted to Michael Leese for his help in this discussion of economic rationality in the ancient world, and scholarly interpretations of it. Leese's current work on economic rationality in fourth-century Greece is the most comprehensive to date on the subject. For a discussion of scholarly interpretations of economic rationality, especially as it applies to the ancient world, see Leese 2013 (forthcoming).

Antique practice—which might alternatively be defined as voluntary poverty—was at least partially an economic choice. It demanded a personal reorientation to wealth and, at least in the case of aristocratic asceticism, charitable renunciation. That the conversion to ascetic life had an impact on the economic status and identity of an individual was made abundantly clear in every hagiographic source; indeed, most emphasize the economic realities of asceticism, including the specific problems converts faced in liquidating and distributing their wealth.

As asceticism demanded a specific economic attitude, one of the aims of ascetic literature, including hagiographies, was to set out either rules or suggestions for converts. In doing so, they disseminated economic information. The circulation of specific ascetic texts could create or enforce expectations for action within the social circles through which they moved; these expectations could in turn be mutually reinforced based on the adoption of specific economic actions—such as charitable renunciation—as a marker for a specific group. Furthermore, the non-economic rules and expectations surrounding ascetic practice, and most specifically the objectivity granted to mutually held and reinforced concepts of right action through the promise of eternal reward or punishment meted out by an all-knowing judge, supported the codification of specific economic practices within ascetic groups. In this way, in specific social contexts present in the Late Antique Mediterranean, asceticism functioned as an economic institution—a set of rules or expectations which defines and motivates individual economic behavior. In many ways, a New Institutional Economics (NIE) approach to Late Antique asceticism is particularly attractive: NIE considers individual economic action to be determined

and constrained by primary social affiliations through institutions. Institutions in turn act more rationally than individuals. Thus, while individual ascetics may have acted *irrationally* in their extreme charitable renunciation, asceticism *as an institution* played a *rational* role in the Late Antique economy.[31] That is, while the renunciations of an individual adherent to asceticism, for instance, might be irrational and not lead directly to economic gain, the economic action of a monastery overall will be more rational, guaranteeing its continued existence as an institution. Likewise, the sum of human actions circumscribed by the rules of an institution—in this case, aristocratic asceticism—will lead to more rational economic action.

Late Antique asceticism required of its adherents specific economic action, constrained and determined by social relations within the primary group and expectations regulated by cultural and religious circumstances.[32] Within the context of aristocratic asceticism, this project considers both the emphasis on inspired individual action in literature and its relation to the economic expectations of the group which the author of the text represented. It is far outside the scope of this project to consider the impact of ascetic thought on the Late Roman economy as a whole, or even the economy of monasticism in the Late Antique Mediterranean.[33]

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[31] Brousseau and Glachant 2008, xlv. For an application of NIE on the ancient world, see Monson 2012; pages 16-27 explicitly address the use of NIE methodology and its utility for ancient historians. See Ekland, Hébert, and Tollison 2006 for the application of economy theory to religion conversion and competition between religions (see in particular pages 13-104). While this approach does not deal with financial gain associated with conversion, it does provide an interesting study concerning the utility of economic thinking in the study of religious belief.

[32] Sahlins 1972, Polanyi 1957, Finley 1999.

[33] This question is problematic in and of itself, as there were so many competing models of asceticism during this period. It is possible to make specific observations of the function of a given monastery or

Instead, I am considering specifically the aristocratic ascetic economy, which depended on the accretion of value through a particularly evident form of charitable renunciation, and, within the aristocratic ascetic practice, specifically the economic choices which women made, or at least the choices which hagiographic sources attributed to women.

Section 3
Palladius' *Lausiac History*

To this end, this project closely considers two texts in order to control for authorial intent as much as possible, and to address the economic actions of aristocratic ascetic women—real and attributed—precisely. The two fifth-century texts under consideration here are: the *Lausiac History* of Palladius and *Life of Melania the Younger* by Gerontius. I have chosen these texts because of their similar didactic tone, the detail of action which they include, and their focus on aristocratic Roman women. In fact, the two texts in some ways form a single historical narrative; their female subjects, Melania the Elder and Melania the Younger, were related women with similar ascetic trajectories. However, the two works varied in genre: while the *Life of Melania the Younger* told only the story of its namesake, the *Lausiac History* was a collection of short biographies of monastic personalities which included extended stories of Melania the Elder and Melania the Younger. The different approaches of these two authors provide a spectrum of interpretations of

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the conception of the monastic economy in a text or set of texts, and we may, with caution, extrapolate about larger trends in the monastic economy from this starting point.

the actions of these women, especially in the context of their particular narrative projects.

The former of these two texts, the *Lausiac History*, was composed in around 420 by Palladius, then the bishop of Helenopolis in Bithynia near Constantinople. Palladius, a native of Asia Minor, born around 363, had dedicated himself to asceticism at a young age. He traveled to Egypt and became a disciple of Macarius the Younger and, later, the famous Origenist Evagrius Ponticus. He included long biographies of both men in the *Lausiac History*.[34] At the time of the Origenist controversy in the 390s—and perhaps as a result of it—Palladius traveled to and settled in Palestine, where he met Melania the Elder. Their friendship would shape the *Lausiac History*. In 400, he was appointed Bishop of Helenopolis. He became integrated into the aristocratic Christian community in Constantinople; he probably originally met his patron, Lausus, in that context. He also befriended the Bishop of Constantinople, John Chrysostom. When Bishop Theophilus of Alexandria accused Chrysostom of being an Origenist because of his support of certain Egyptian ascetics, Palladius defended Chrysostom and was exiled to Egypt.[35] After Chrysostom was reinstated by imperial decree and Palladius returned to Helenopolis, he was commissioned by Lausus, a wealthy member of the court, to write a collection of short biographies of the monks whom he had met in his travels.[36] Palladius included a carefully worded dedication to Lausus in the

[34] *HL* 15, 18, and 38 respectively.
[35] Clark 1989, 20-25.
[36] For a timeline of events, see preface.

introduction to his text, making the link between the concerns of his wealthy audience and the construction of his ascetic narratives clear.[37]

The resulting work, known as the *Lausiac History* after its patron, included biographies not only of monks of Nitria, Kellia, Scetis, and the Thebaid, but also of notable ascetic characters from throughout the empire. However, one character appeared often, not only in her own biographies, but in those of other ascetics: Melania the Elder. Her pride of place in this text was the result of not only her close friendship with Palladius, which developed during the time he spent in Palestine and through their shared social and theological interests, but also because he relied heavily upon her as a source for Nitrian monks. Although the biography of Melania the Elder in the *Lausiac History* is relatively short compared to hagiographic biographies dedicated to single individuals, it still represented the most complete existing biography of her. However, Melania the Elder is also attested in several letters exchanged among an aristocratic social circle of ascetic friends which included Paulinus of Nola, Jerome, and Augustine.

Melania the Elder was born somewhere in Hispania in the second quarter of the fourth century, perhaps 341.[38] Her family was a branch of the *gens Antonia*.[39] She married a local nobleman of the *gens Valeria*, perhaps Valerius Maximus Basilius;[40] he was the *prefectus urbis* from 361-363. They had four sons, but all but one died before adulthood. Valerius also died young, leaving Melania a widow

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[37] *HL* prologue.
[38] For a timeline of events, see preface.
[39] Clark 1984, 83; *PLRE* Melania 1 (592). For Melania's family tree, see Fig. 1, page 4.
[40] Clark 1984, 83.

sometime after 363, possibly when she moved to Rome.[41] Upon the death of her husband, according to Palladius, Melania dedicated herself to asceticism. Leaving behind her son,[42] Publicola, in the care of a guardian, she sailed to Egypt with the goal of experiencing desert asceticism first-hand in 372.[43] Melania was therefore at the forefront of a movement among aristocratic Romans to travel to the East on a sort of ascetic pilgrimage; her trip predated that of the famous female pilgrim Egeria by about a decade,[44] and probably roughly coincided with Jerome's relocation to Syria.[45]

Melania spent at least six months, and likely longer, in Egypt, principally at the Nitrian monasteries. According to Palladius, she formed a close relationship with the author Evagrius Ponticus,[46] a prominent priest named Isidore,[47] the controversial ascetics known as the Tall Brothers,[48] and the monastic leader Pambo.[49] Although Palladius barely mentioned it, other sources, including her then-friend Jerome, also attested to her very close partnership with the ascetic and scholar Rufinus of Aquileia.[50] Melania may have met Rufinus in Rome, prior to her departure for Egypt; however, we cannot conclusively say that they were

[41] Although Melania has been accepted as a Roman noblewoman, Wilkinson 2012 argues that she only arrived in Rome after the death of her husband. Although his argument for her late arrival in Rome is not entirely convincing, he is certainly right to dismiss Booth 1981 and 1983, which pushed the timeline for Melania the Elder and Jerome back about five years.
[42] Although Palladius noted that Melania appointed a guardian for her son, Publicola, he was likely nearing the age of majority; his daughter, Melania the Younger, was born about 15 years after his mother left Rome, but the typical age differential between Roman spouses suggests that we should imagine Publicola to be around 15 when his mother left.
[43] For a map of Melania's travels, see preface.
[44] Wilkinson 1981, 3.
[45] Rousseau 2010, 81.
[46] *HL* 38.
[47] *HL* 1.
[48] *HL* 11;4.
[49] *HL* 10.
[50] Jerome *Ep*. 4.2.

acquainted before meeting in the Nitrian desert.[51] Rufinus had been a student of Christian thought in Rome in around 370, where he first met and befriended Jerome. He left Rome to study in Alexandria in about 372; he met Melania through his monastic tutors, particularly Didymus the Blind. Their friendship would last until the ends of their lives, but would, in the end cost Melania dearly.

After the death of Athanasius, the Bishop of Alexandria, in 373, who had been an outspoken opponent of Arianism and supporter[52] of the monastic community in Egypt, the Arian Emperor Valens began a persecution of Egyptian monks. Shortly after Athanasius' death, likely around 374, Melania the Elder fled Egypt with a group of her monastic friends to seek refuge in the Holy Land. She established a monastery for a community of Egyptian monks on the Mount of Olives outside of Jerusalem. Melania's monastery was likely one of the first on the Mount of Olives, although, by the time of Egeria's visit to the Holy Land ten years later, the hill was dotted with monastic foundations.[53] By about 380, Rufinus had joined Melania in the Holy Land, and she used her personal wealth to help him found his own monastery there. In 386, they were joined by their aristocratic friends Jerome and Paula, who followed suit, making the Holy Land the center of aristocratic monasticism.

However, Melania, Rufinus, Jerome, and Paula's friendship would not last. While Rufinus was in the process of translating some writings of the third-century Alexandrian theologian, Origen, whose works strongly influenced Egyptian desert asceticism, Origen's theological thought was condemned by the Bishop Epiphanius

[51] Clark 1989, 20.
[52] Haas 1993.
[53] Wilkinson 1981, 49-51; see also *IE*.

of Salamis.[54] Rufinus and his ascetic friend Evagrius Ponticus nevertheless continued to embrace Origenist thought, but Jerome sided with Epiphanius and strongly denounced Origen. The dispute soon became vitriolic; however, Rufinus remained a staunch supporter of his point of view throughout his life. Origen was not formally denounced by council until after Rufinus' death.

During this controversy, Melania and Rufinus traveled together to Italy, where Melania mentored her granddaughter, Melania the Younger, who was just beginning to explore asceticism. Melania returned to the Holy Land in 404 and died there around 410. Writings about the ascetic circle of Melania the Elder, from the *Lausiac History* to the *Life of Melania the Younger*, interpreted her influence in light of the conflict between Rufinus and Jerome; Palladius, as an pro-Origenist supporter of John Chrysostom and the Tall Brothers against the claims of Theophilus, consistently praised Melania the Elder not only for her personal character and devotion to asceticism, but also for her orthodoxy.

Modern scholarship concerning Melania the Elder tends to focus on her relationship to Rufinus and Jerome; Clark's *The Origenist Controversy* is an example of this.[55] Clark's work was particularly innovative in considering the role of social ties in the controversy between Rufinus and Jerome, and therefore considers Melania the Elder a more integral player in this period of Christian history than most other approaches. Such an approach has inspired the current consideration of the social and economic position of aristocratic women within the Eastern ascetic

[54] Clark 1989, 86-104.
[55] Clark 1989.

context. Likewise, Melania the Elder's life has often been considered as one example of female piety and asceticism in this period, alongside Melania the Younger and Paula.[56] Again, the present project offers another consideration of the variations on aristocratic female asceticism, taking Melania the Elder and Melania the Younger as two related but divergent case studies.

Apart from the treatment of the biography of Melania the Elder in particular, which is often supplemented by a consideration of aristocratic letters and dedications, the *Lausiac History* has historically received very little attention. The ancient popularity of the work is well attested in the various manuscript traditions; sections of the *Lausiac History* are preserved in the original Greek, ancient and Renaissance Latin translations, Coptic, Syriac, Armenian, Ethiopian, and Arabic.[57] Because the first published text of the *Lausiac History* was a Latin redaction which included long sections of the *Historia Monachorum*, another, separate collection of monastic biographies,[58] the exact nature of the text was unclear until modern critical editions of Greek manuscripts appeared in the nineteenth century.[59] Recent comprehensive scholarly treatments of the *Lausiac History* are limited; Frank's *The Memory of the Eyes*,[60] is the notable exception. In this study, Frank effectively reads the *Lausiac History* and the *Historia Monachorum*, as literary pilgrimages. Her

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[56] See, for instance, Clark 1986 and Cooper 2005.
[57] Bulter 1898,77-172
[58] The *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* was composed a few decades before the *Lausiac History* by a monk living in Jerusalem. Melania the Elder's friend and ascetic partner Rufinus has traditionally been considered responsible for translating the work into Latin. The two works were similar in structure and were part of a specific genre which combined biography with travelogue. See Frank 2000, 1-34.
[59] Butler 1898, 15-50.
[60] Frank 2000.

innovative approach to biographic collections as literature has also inspired my reading of the *Lausiac History*, considering both the objectives of the author and the relationship between reader and text in order to interpret a collection of biographies in a comprehensive manner. More recently, scholars of Late Antique Christianity, perhaps inspired by the growing interest in Mediterranean Studies, have increasingly viewed the *Lausiac History* and the *Historia Monachorum* as a link between Western and Coptic Christianity, useful both for understanding the connectedness of the traditions and also for introducing students familiar with such Greek texts to their Coptic counterparts.[61]

Despite the difficulties of a comprehensive reading of a collection of monastic biographies, the *Lausiac History* is well suited to the type of reading I apply in this project. The author and his audience are well attested, allowing an interpretation of the text based on the didactic program inherent to it. Furthermore, both the author and the patron firmly place this work within the context of aristocratic asceticism. Palladius used economic language throughout the work, and seemed to be particularly interested in creating an image of asceticism which appealed to his wealthy audience. Although the *Lausiac History* is a collection of monastic biographies, Melania the Elder is a constant character throughout. Thus, just as the *Lausiac History* can be read as the story of Palladius' life told through related biographies,[62] it is also the story of Melania the Elder narrated through her ascetic

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[61] See, for instance, Vivian and Greer, 2004.
[62] Frank 2000, 40-41.

social circle. In other words, the many biographies contained in the work provide both a context for and a counterpoint to the biography of Melania the Elder.

Section 4
Gerontius' *Life of Melania the Younger*

In contrast to the *Lausiac History*, *The Life of Melania the Younger* is a a long biography of a single saintly individual. Melania the Younger, who is also attested in several letters of aristocratic Christians of the fifth century,[63] was a Roman noblewoman of the *gens Valeria* through her father, the son of the saint Melania the Elder and her husband and of the Ceionii Rufii through her mother, Albina.[64] She was born in the late fourth century, possibly around 385.[65] Although Gerontius hinted that Melania was an only child, he at times suggested that she may have had a sibling.[66] Indeed, Palladius, in his biography of Melania the Younger in the *Lausiac History*, wrote that she had two grandchildren by her only son Publicola.[67] Melania the Younger's family was not only politically successful—both her grandfathers had served as *praefectus urbis*[68]—but extremely wealthy, having inherited wealth dating back to the early imperial period. At around the age of 14, she was married to Pinianus, a member of another branch of the *gens Valeria*.[69] Their marriage united two powerful and wealthy aristocratic families. Thus, when Melania's two children

[63] *PLRE* Melania 2 (593).
[64] For Melania's family, see Fig. 1, page 4.
[65] Clark 1984, 84; Gorce 1962 dated her birth to 383.
[66] *VM* 12 mentioned that Melania's father Publicola wanted to give their property "to the other children" (τοῖς ἄλλοις τέκνοις).
[67] *HL* 54. For a discussion of Melania's possible siblings, see Clark 1984, 90-91.
[68]Clark 1984, 83-84; Gorce 1962, 20-36.
[69] Clark 1984, 85; *PLRE* Valerius Pinianus 2 (702). For a timeline of events, see preface.

died, sometime in the early fifth century, the couple's great wealth became available to investment.

By this time, both Melania and her husband, Pinianus, had been attracted to Christian asceticism. Melania's grandmother, Melania the Elder, likely played a role in her granddaughter's conversion, as did the couple's powerful family friends, including Paulinus of Nola. The couple was in Rome during the siege of the city by the Gothic general Alaric from 407 to 410; the current *prefectus urbis* may have targeted their familial wealth in order to pay off the Gothic troops.[70] However, Melania and Pinianus fled the city for their familial estates in Campania.[71] They eventually moved to North Africa, in the region of Thagaste, where they held estates and gained influence under their friend, Augustine.[72] While in Thagaste, Melania founded her first monastery on her familial estate. However, the couple's great wealth, which they publicly lavished on Augustine's churches in the region, made local residents jealous, and they attempted to force Pinianus to become their bishop in order to access his wealth.[73] After spending nearly seven years on their estates in North Africa, the couple left for the Holy Land in 417.

There, at the Mount of Olives, Melania and Pinianus founded their most successful and long-lasting monastic estates—a pair of monasteries for men and women. In doing so, they followed in the footsteps of Melania's grandmother,

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[70] Clark 1984, 104-108.
[71] For maps of Melania's travels and of Melania's property and the barbarian invasions, see preface.
[72] *VM* 20-22.
[73] Augustine, *Ep*. 125-126.

Melania the Elder.[74] Melania continued to travel. She visited the monks of the Egyptian desert, again echoing the movement of her grandmother, who had spent a few years among the Egyptian monks, and whose monastery on the Mount of Olives served Egyptian monks in exile. After the death of Pinianus, Melania the Younger also traveled to Constantinople ostensibly, according to her biography, to convert her dying uncle. However, she also succeeded in making friends with the likes of the wealthy monastic patron, Lausus,[75] and the Empress Eudocia, who travelled with her through the Lycian coast and Cappadocia, and visited Melania's monastery in the Holy Land. Melania died at her monastery in the Holy Land, never having returned to Rome or the West, in 439.[76]

Melania's biography, the *Life of Melania the Younger* was written soon after Melania's death, probably around 450.[77] Gerontius, Melania's successor at her monastery in Palestine, has traditionally been considered the author of the text, for two reasons. First, he is named as the abbot of Melania's monastery in John Rufus' *Life of Peter the Iberian*, a Syriac source detailing the visit which a Georgian prince, raised in the Byzantine court, paid to Melania's monastery in the Holy Land in the fifth century.[78] Secondly, the author indicated that he was with Melania at key times during her life. Although it is possible these claims were falsified in order to give the

[74] *HL* 64; Wilkinson 1981, 184 (notes).
[75] Clark 1984, 136-137; *VM* (Latin), 41; Rampolla 1905, 235-237.
[76] Basic information on Melania's life comes from Clark 1984 and Gorce 1962, in conjunction with the *Life of Melania the Younger* itself, except where otherwise noted.
[77] This dating generally depends on the relationship of the *Life of Melania the Younger* to the Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE, which had a deep effect on non-Chalcedonian monks, Gerontius (Clark 1984, 17-20).
[78] *Life of Peter the Iberian*, 49. The (postulated) original Greek text dates to the fifth/sixth century (the author, John Rufus, was a follower of Peter). The Syriac, however, dates to the eighth century. (Horn 2006,12-15).

author *auctoritas*, the author indeed seemed not only knowledgeable about the details of Melania's life, but also interested in aspects of her story which were unlikely to appeal to someone who did not know her.[79] Clark has added to this evidence through her argument that the priest to whom the book was dedicated in the introduction was, in fact, the bishop of Jerusalem, Theodosius, a monophysite Christian like Gerontius and a supporter of the monks of Jerusalem unlike his predecessor, Juvenal. Such an attribution would argue strongly for a monastic identification of the author, and the attested superior of Melania's monastery is the most obvious probability.[80]

The *Life of Melania the Younger* is a relatively recent addition to the hagiographic cannon. Although the Greek text was known in Eastern traditions—and a Latin translation of a Byzantine rendition of her life was published in Venice in the sixteenth century—it was only in the late nineteenth century that a complete, original Greek text was found in the Barberini Library in Rome. At about the same time, Cardinal Rampollo del Tindaro found a Latin manuscript in the Escurial Library which accorded with the early Greek Barberini version, but included more information.[81] In 1905, Rampolla published his Latin version of the text along with an edited Greek edition based on the Barberini manuscript, in comparison with

[79] The description of Melania's death (*VM* 67-69) is a good example; Gerontius included not only a melodramatic description of Melania's bravery, but also specifics of the reaction of the local community which would not have had broad appeal far beyond the monastery.
[80] Clark 1984 20-23. Cooper recently (2005) has argued that such a strong attribution to Gerontius is unnecessary. However, as I see no compelling argument against Gerontius as author and no likely competing candidate, I follow Clark's arguments here and assume that the author of this text was Gerontius, Melania's successor as superior of her Jerusalem monastery. Even if the attribution to Gerontius proves incorrect, the relationship between the author and his subject, as articulated in the text, remains, and that forms the basis of the following arguments.
[81] Clark 1984, 1-24; Gorce 1962, 1-19.

other early Greek manuscripts.[82] At the time, Rampolla argued strongly that the Latin language text was the original, which had later been translated into Greek with omissions.[83] However, Gorce's edition of the Greek text for *Source Chretiennes* made a convincing argument for the primacy of the Greek text,[84] which Clark supported.[85] The Greek version is now accepted as the original.

Since the publication of Gorce's edition in 1962, interest in the *Life of Melania the Younger* has grown, especially in the fields of gender studies in Late Antique hagiography and the study of the Late Antique economy. Clark's 1984 translation and commentary on the text, which was the result of years of work on the *Life of Melania the Younger*, spurred interest in both fields.[86] Clark based many of her studies of gender and sexuality in Late Antique asceticism on close readings of the *Life of Melania the Younger*. More recently, Cooper has based studies of authority and gender in monastic texts on the *Life*,[87] while Coon included an extended study of the *Life* in her exploration of gender and writing in the ancient world, *Sacred Fictions*.[88] Almost as soon as Rampolla's edition of the *Life of Melania the Younger* was published, scholars realized the utility of the rich economic detail to their understanding of the Late Antique economy.[89] Jones' magisterial work, *The Later Roman Empire*, used the *Life of the Melania the Younger* as evidence of the

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[82] Rampolla 1905.
[83] Rampolla 1905, LXII-LXX.
[84] Gorce 1962, 49-54.
[85] Clark 1984, 5-13.
[86] Indeed, Clark's influence on *Melaniana* is so complete that, at the upcoming conference organized at Duke University in honor of her retirement, many papers are dedicated to this text.
[87] Cooper 2005.
[88] Coon 1997, 95-119.
[89] Allard 1907.

administration of large senatorial estates in Late Antiquity.[90] After the publication of Clark's 1984 translation and edition, which included more information on the economic particularities of the *Life*, a few articles appeared considering the social implications of Melania's charity.[91] However, the *Life* still remains to be fully integrated into the study of the ancient economy, and has not yet been effectively employed to increase understanding of the relationship between wealthy women and the ascetic program.

Because of the wealth of information it presents about the Late Antique monastic and charitable economy, the *Life of Melania the Younger* is particularly suited to this present project. It offers a balance to the *Lausiac History*; while the *Lausiac History* provides breadth, the *Life of Melania the Younger* offers depth and specificity. Furthermore, the two texts work well in conjunction because of their focus on women from the same family: Melania the Elder and Melania the Younger, as relatives, are comparable in their social and economic status. They also shared elements of the same social circle, suggesting that they were both subject to the same group-enforced ascetic demands and expectations and their attendant economic requirements based on voluntary poverty and charitable renunciation. However, the different familial, financial, and social circumstances of the two women also provide a broader view of aristocratic female asceticism and a basis for comparison with a range of other Late Antique aristocratic female ascetics, such as Paula, Macrina, and Olympias. Finally, although the authorship and patron of the *Life*

[90] Jones 1964, 781-795.
[91] Giardino, 1988; Consolino, 1989; Laurence 1997.

of Melania the Younger are not as certain as those of the *Lausiac History*, the relatively secure context of Melania's monastery in Jerusalem suggests a specific audience, in turn allowing us to consider and account for the goals of the author. In addition, the extensive work of Clark, which further contextualized the *Life of Melania* not only as an historical text, but also considering the religious circumstances of fifth-century Palestine.

Section 5
Desert monasticism in the Roman West

In order to understand both the composition of the *Lausiac History* and the *Life of Melania the Younger* and their audiences, a consideration of the actual contemporary practices of desert and aristocratic asceticism and the interplay between the two is necessary. Aristocratic asceticism, as practiced by a socially integrated Christian upper class throughout the Roman Empire, was inspired by desert asceticism, especially as practiced in Egypt.[92] However, it represented an interpretation of desert asceticism viewed through a generally Western lens, and adapted for the particular anxieties and desires of an extremely wealthy and socially powerful aristocracy.[93]

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[92] For a succinct overview of desert asceticism in the West, see Driver 2002, 45-64.Rousseau 2010, especially 79-113, 169-198 addresses the interplay between the East and West mediated through monastic literature, pilgrims, and exiles. See also Goehring 1999, 73-88. For a general introduction to the popularity of the concept of monasticism, see Caner 2009.
[93] Melania's yearly income of 120,000 *solidi*, in conjunction with that of her husband, Pinianus, put her among the wealthiest. For an introduction to the Roman senatorial class, see Salzman 2002, 24-43. According to Salzman, there were 2,000 senators by 359 (31). If we follow the estimation of Scheidel 2007 and assume that the Roman Empire included about 50,000,000 subjects (6), there were *four* senators for every 10,000 citizens. Furthermore, because wealth and political power were closely related, these senators made up by far the wealthiest class. For a succinct overview of desert asceticism in the West, see Driver 2002, 45-64.Rousseau 2010, 79-113, 169-198 addresses the

It is worth taking a moment to define some terms used throughout this study. First, I use *monasticism* to describe a movement particularly related to monastic institutions; for instance, Egyptian monasticism refers to the particular type of lifestyle practiced in communities such as Nitria or the Pachomian monasteries in the Thebaid. *Asceticism*, on the other hand, is a broader concept which encompasses many types of religiously-inspired renunciation, restriction, or abstinence. The two women whom I discuss at length here, Melania the Elder and Melania the Younger, were both involved in monastic practice as they lived in monastic communities and indeed founded their own monasteries. However, they were also part of a larger aristocratic ascetic movement which included a range of ascetic practice not necessarily undertaken within a monastic context. In order to fully encapsulate this movement, then, I refer to it as aristocratic asceticism. By aristocratic asceticism, I mean a set of practices adopted by an extremely wealthy class, already connected through the social and familial ties which typified the Roman aristocracy, which were inspired by desert asceticism and Egyptian monastic texts, adapted for aristocratic needs and desires, and reinforced through mutual acceptance, expectations, and standards. Members of the aristocratic ascetic movement included not only Melania the Elder and Melania the Younger, but also Rufinus, Jerome, Paula, Olympias, Paulinus of Nola, Augustine, and Sulpicius Severus. Despite the sometimes theological disagreements between members of this group, their attitude toward what defined ascetic practice and the importance of asceticism within the Christian belief system, and their mutual communication about ascetic practice, indicated

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interplay between the East and West mediated through monastic literature, pilgrims, and exiles. See also Goehring 1999, 73-88.

their primary group membership within the aristocratic ascetic movement. Within the context of Late Antique aristocratic asceticism, women faced both particular expectations concerning ascetic abstinence, especially concerning sexual and familial practices, and benefits derived from ascetic success. Therefore, much of this project speaks specifically to Late Antique aristocratic female asceticism.[94]

Late Antique aristocratic female asceticism was a response to conceptions of the desert asceticism which began in fourth-century Egypt. The exact origins of Egyptian desert asceticism are obscure. Certainly by the mid-fourth century, a movement based on the idea of retreat from the world, and couched in ascetic Christian terms, had gained momentum in the Egyptian desert, and had attracted both anchorites, who sought solitary contemplation (though often with the support of a community), and coenobites, who lived in regulated monastic communities.[95] However, one text in particular was instrumental for both the introduction of desert asceticism to the aristocracy of the Roman Empire, particularly in the West, and the formation of the conceptions forming Late Antique aristocratic asceticism: Athanasius of Alexandria's *Life of Anthony*.

Athanasius, the then exiled Bishop of Alexandria, wrote a biography of an Egyptian ascetic known as the *Life of Antony* shortly after his subject's death in 356 CE. The *Life of Anthony* became a popular text throughout the Roman world, in both

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[94] I have tried to be consistent in the use of terminology throughout this project. However, although I often discuss the specific ascetic experiences of aristocratic women, the phrase "Late Antique aristocratic female asceticism" is particularly unwieldy, and so I have often used the term *aristocratic asceticism* to refer to the movement. The context should make the meaning of the term clear.

[95] For an overview of the growth of desert monasticism, see Rousseau 2010, 33-67. Goehring 1999 provides a more nuanced view of the difficulties in assessing the growth of desert asceticism; see especially 13-38 and 187-195.

its original Greek and in Latin translation: because of the familiarity of the author with the Christian aristocratic circle in the West, the *Life* was both accessible and popular. Indeed, the *Life of Anthony* was the inspiration for monastic literature composed by Athanasius' social contacts in the West, including Jerome's *Life of Paul the Hermit*, Sulpicius Severus' *Life of Martin of Tours*, and Paulinus of Nola's *Life of Ambrose*.[96] Biographies of desert ascetics were part of the same hagiographic genre to which the *Lausiac History* and the *Life of Melania the Younger* belonged.

Athanasius was well known in the West, in a large part due to the political controversy which surrounded him in the East. Athanasius was a virulent opponent of the Christological teachings of a local priest named Arius. Although Athanasius' stance was eventually vindicated, his fortune waxed and waned with the popularity of Arianism. In 335, after Athanasius refused to readmit Arius into the Alexandrian church, the Emperor Constantine exiled Athanasius to Trier, in Gaul, where he remained until the emperor's death in 337. Athanasius then returned to Alexandria, only to flee again in 339 after a rival Arian bishop was elected in Alexandria and violence broke out in the city. Athanasius spent seven years in Rome and the West, but returned to Alexandria in 346 after the death of his rival. Through these exiles, Athanasius spent a great deal of time in the West, making connections with the wealthy Christians who would later read and recommend his book.[97]

Because of Athanasius' connections, his anti-Arian *Life of Anthony* was translated very quickly into Latin: Evagrius of Antioch's Latin translation was

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96 Harmless 2004, 98.
97 Anatolios 2003, 1-31

composed before 373, and an even earlier, anonymous translation was already in existence.[98] Jerome, the famous Roman ascetic, was familiar with Evagrius from the time he spent in Syria, and perhaps introduced his translation to his aristocratic Christian circle. Jerome's hagiography, the *Life of Paul the Hermit*, was quite obviously Jerome's response to the *Life of Anthony*.[99] The popularity of the text throughout the empire is also evident in the many mentions of it in other authors' writings. [100] The earliest is that of Gregory of Nazianzus in 380, who considered the work to be a rule for monastic living in narrative form.[101] By about 400, Athanasius' work had become popular throughout the West; Jerome's friends Rufinus and Augustine referred to the text, as did Palladius.[102]

The most famous mention of the popularity of the *Life* is that of Augustine, who wrote about his conversation with an imperial officer from Trier named Ponticianus. Ponticianus told Augustine of his own conversion, noting that he was inspired by the life of Anthony, which he read about in a book he found in the house of some Christians.[103] Ponticianus noted that he converted to ascetic Christianity when he realized he had nothing else to gain from worldly involvement, having already reached the heights of civic favor as friends and servants of the emperor.

[98] *VA* introduction, 95-97.
[99] *VP*, 1.4.
[100] For a discussion of the authenticity of the *Life*, see *VA,* introduction, 27-35. Bartelink gives a convincing philological argument for the retention of Athanasius as the author, while Brakke 1995, 201-265, proves that the content of the *Life* accords well with Athanasius' philosophy as visible in his other attested works. The most serious recent refutation of Athanasius' authorship has come from Barnes 1986 arguing for the primacy of a Coptic *Life*. However, Brakke 1994b has convincingly refuted this. Nevertheless, the quick spread of the text and its popularity, especially in the Roman west, is more essential to the present argument than the authorship, and this is convincingly evident in the many contemporary mentions of the *Life* throughout the empire.
[101] Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orationes* 21.5.
[102] *HL* 8.
[103] Augustine, *Confessiones*, 8.14-15.

Like Ponticianus, the aristocratic circle of Christians who read the *Life of Anthony* had advanced to the highest secular honors possible and, like Ponticianus, they looked toward both Christianity and asceticism to define themselves, their community of friends, and their social status. This reference therefore reflects the way in which aristocratic Christians read the *Life of Anthony*, and interacted with Egyptian asceticism. Likewise, Gregory of Nazianzus' assertion that the work revealed a way of life suggests that the *Life of Anthony* may itself have inspired aristocratic Christians to the ascetic life. The writings of Jerome and later Rufinus, two core figures in Late Antique aristocratic asceticism, suggest that Egyptian monasticism was indeed an attractive way to articulate their social status.

According to Athanasius, Anthony was the first ascetic of Egypt; the *Life of Anthony* therefore presented the mythical foundation of desert asceticism.[104] Athanasius described Anthony as a solitary ascetic—an anchorite—who attracted attention through his extreme holiness. In reality, the monastic landscape in fourth-century Egypt was more varied: Athanasius' own description of Anthony's monastic foundation in the Eastern Desert represented a combined communal and anchoritic life. By the early- to mid-fifth century, when the *Lausiac History* and the *Life of Melania the Younger* were written, a variety of texts which provided more concrete information about Egyptian desert asceticism was available. Chief among these were Jerome's Latin translation of the Pachomian Rule and the *De institutis* and *Collationes* of John Cassian, a monk from the West who had traveled to Egypt in the

[104] Jerome later undercut Athanasius, claiming that Paul, the subject of his monastic biography, was the first ascetic. There is ample evidence to suggest that both claims are exaggerated, not simply because of the unreasonable claim that any one individual was responsible for the desert ascetic movement.

380s, and eventually returned to Gaul to found his own monastery.[105] These texts dealt with coenobitic monasticism, or the sort of communal living, defined by manual labor and collective religious practice within in the context of an institution administered by a clear hierarchy, which both typified the monastic foundations of Melania the Elder and Melania the Younger and inspired medieval European monasticism.

By the fifth century, institutional monasticism had become an accepted part of Christian practice throughout the Roman Empire. It was within this context of intense discussion and formation of aristocratic ascetic practice that Melania the Elder and Melania the Younger lived, and that Palladius and Gerontius respectively wrote their biographies. It is important to note that fifth-century monasticism was not, for the most part, standardized: there were many types of monasticism, and the contours of monastic and ascetic practice were still being negotiated. Thus, the *Lausiac History* and the *Life of Melania the Younger* are not representative of fifth-century monasticism—not to mention asceticism—generally. Instead, they represent specific interpretations of the particular practice of aristocratic asceticism which emphasized the benefits of asceticism to the authors' intended audiences and reflected the authors' own interpretations of aristocratic ascetic action.

[105] John Cassian, *Collationes* and *De institutis*.

Section 6
Synopsis of chapters

Both the *Lausiac History* and the *Life of Melania the Younger* used economic language throughout to describe participation in aristocratic asceticism. In Chapter 2, I explore the ways in which Palladius and Gerontius applied economic thought to ascetic conversion, emphasizing the anxiety toward wealth and personal property ownership inherent to the texts. In particular, I consider the description of renunciation as a financial transaction, in which wealth was exchanged for religious, and even heavenly, success. I also demonstrate the effects of the concerns of each authors' intended audience on the ways in which wealth and renunciation were treated. I connect these conclusions particularly to the stories of Melania the Elder and Melania the Younger and consider the impact of the authors' particular language on the construction of aristocratic asceticism.

In Chapter 3, I address the ways in which aristocratic asceticism appealed particularly to women. In this chapter, I draw upon the immense literature which considers the female ascetic movement in Late Antiquity from the perspective of gender and sexuality studies, while also providing a specifically economic and social reading of women's involvement in this particular movement. In particular, I explore the connections between women's sexuality, marriage, and childbirth, and the economic identities of women. I conclude that the negative attitude toward female sexuality embedded in the larger ascetic discourse allowed women to control their patrimonies more carefully, as they refused remarriage or motherhood. I also suggest that, in the descriptions of aristocratic ascetic women, the monastery

replaced the *domus* and *familia*, providing both a trans-generational store of wealth, as monastic communities both inherited and administered the land-based wealth attached to them at their foundations, and a guarantor of the memory of the monastic founder. The foundation of monasteries, therefore, was an attractive way for aristocratic Roman women to charitably renounce their wealth.

In the next two chapters, Chapters 4 and 5, I consider the benefits which aristocratic asceticism, and, more particularly, the foundation of monasteries, offered to wealth Roman matrons. These benefits were advertised in hagiographic biographies. In particular, I consider the contrast between the charitable renunciation undertaken by Melania the Elder and her granddaughter, Melania the Younger, and the ways in which each woman responded to the specific social, cultural, and historical moment in which she was living. In Chapter 4, I focus closely on the description of Melania the Elder's life in the *Lausiac History* to demonstrate how Melania the Elder was successful in integrating into the mostly male community of desert ascetics in Egypt. This chapter provides an overview of aristocratic charitable renunciation, and the connection between charity in Late Antiquity and classical eurergetism. I argue that her charitable gifts to that community, and especially her ministrations to the monks' needs after their flight to Palestine, established Melania the Elder as a leader in the community. Palladius suggested that Melania the Elder made social connections among the desert ascetic community through targeted charitable donations. I then compare Melania the Elder's social connections to those of her granddaughter, Melania the Younger, and

discuss why Melania the Elder's social network, in the end, worked against her ascetic program.

In Chapter 5, I turn to the *Life of Melania the Younger* to consider more closely the economic choices which adherence to asceticism, and particularly the foundation of monasteries, allowed. The political and social climate of the early fifth century is key to this argument, and to understanding Melania the Younger's geographic trajectory and investments. In the context of political instability and barbarian invasions in the West, Melania the Younger used the language of charitable renunciation to invest in the more stable East. I argue that Gerontius created the image of Melania as a rational actor who considered the benefits of asceticism; in doing so, he urged other aristocratic Christians to follow her lead. In contrast to Melania the Elder, who used her wealth to support the desert ascetic community, Melania the Younger used her wealth to found her own monastic communities. Together, Chapters 4 and 5 show that the authors of hagiographies, such as Palladius and Gerontius, not only explained the non-religious motivations which encouraged their subjects to renounce their wealth charitably and become involved in the aristocratic ascetic community, but also included them in their narratives for the express purpose of providing a rational motivation for ascetic practice to aristocratic audiences.

I approach the *Lausiac History* and the *Life of Melania the Younger* in order to explore broad questions about the economic agency of women in the context of Late Antique aristocratic Christian asceticism. I consider ascetic monasticism as an

economic and social system. Using theories drawn from economic history, social network theory, and gender studies, I conclude that wealthy Christian women in the late fourth and early fifth centuries gained attractive social and economic benefits through the charitable renunciation of their familial wealth. The authors of these texts described asceticism using economic language, suggesting that renunciation of wealth was a rational investment for their aristocratic audiences. Asceticism as described in such texts appealed to wealthy women in particular; the rhetoric of Christian asceticism allowed aristocratic Roman women, whose ability to manage their own images apart from familial control had been limited, to escape familial pressures and manage their wealth and status on their own terms. Such women used the charitable donation of their familial wealth to maintain and create social ties; their ascetic identities allowed them access to social networks otherwise unavailable to Roman matrons. However, the rhetoric of charitable renunciation also allowed such women to move their wealth out of troubled western estates and into new monastic estates they founded in the stable East, therefore making asceticism an economic choice with real material benefits. In aristocratic ascetic networks, charitable renunciation was in fact a luxury activity which offered a new outlet for the consolidation of wealth and expression of status.

This dissertation adds to current dialogue about wealth and poverty in the ancient world by specifically identifying the benefits of charity and arguing that renunciation was a powerful advertisement of wealth and status. In contrast to many studies of these hagiographic texts, which often take a theological or religious perspective, this project focuses on the practical realities of aristocratic asceticism,

and particularly considers the economic agency of women in the ancient world. By providing a cultural and social contextualization of late ancient hagiographic sources, my work contributes not only to the discipline of ancient history, but also to the diachronic study of religious systems, Mediterranean exchange, and the gendered economy.

Chapter 2

Talking Business:
Economic Language and the Rhetoric of Renunciation

By the late fourth century, members of the upper classes throughout the Roman Empire had begun to adopt aspects of Christian asceticism. Aristocratic interest in asceticism spurred the growth of a body of literature created for an aristocratic audience which addressed the relationship between Christian asceticism and poverty. The authors of such works sought to articulate the requirements of ascetic practice in a way which appealed to aristocratic audiences while still remaining germane to the concept of ascetic renunciation. Ascetic practice which disparaged wealth and extolled poverty presented a real challenge for aristocratic Christians. A strict disavowal of wealth was objectionable to many members of the aristocracy because their taste and habits had been shaped by their privilege. However, even for aristocratic Christians who desired to follow the core tenets of aristocratic asceticism, which included the charitable renunciation of wealth and the adoption of a humbler lifestyle, the disposal of wealth was in itself problematic. Biographies of aristocratic ascetics acted both as a glorification of ascetic practice and as a model for aristocratic Christians who wished to emulate the subjects of these biographies. The language of these biographies recognized the temptation which wealth posed for aristocratic audiences while at the same time

defining asceticism in terms more palatable to and possible for an aristocratic audience. Because conceptions of and attitudes toward wealth were at the heart of aristocratic ascetic literature, authors often used economic language to describe both worldly wealth and heavenly reward. Indeed, Gerontius and Palladius used the language of the fiscal economy to describe the religious economy, arguing that the renunciation of wealth brought spiritual profits. The use of such economic metaphors in biographies and other aristocratic ascetic literature served two functions. First, it embraced the concept that potential converts to asceticism used economic thought patterns when considering the ascetic life. They weighed the particular spiritual and worldly benefits in order to determine their involvement in the movement.[1]

Secondly, it disseminated economic information about asceticism to potential adherents and shaped their consideration of the costs and benefits of involvement in the aristocratic ascetic movement. In an economy where access to information was limited and costly, ascetic biographies, which were circulated through aristocratic social circles, were an effective way to communicate the ideology and beliefs which inspired and delineated economic behavior. Through ascetic biographies, authors created an argument for the personal spiritual, social and economic benefits of conversion to asceticism and communicated information about aristocratic asceticism. These biographies shaped the expectations of a group of aristocratic readers, thus defining ascetic behavior among the aristocratic Christians

[1] For an application of economic theories of consumer choice to religious affiliation, see Ekelund, Hébert and Tollison 2006, especially 13-68. Their concept of defining market, commodity, and demand in religious terms has been influential to my treatment of aristocratic asceticism throughout this project. See also Smith 1999 for an application of such thought to early Christianity.

who read them. In particular, Late Antique ascetic literature advertised voluntary poverty, brought about by ascetic renunciation, as opposed to the involuntary poverty suffered by the masses of the Roman Empire, as a sign of both religious piety *and* personal wealth and status. Because such biographies standardized behavior and expectations, aristocratic converts to asceticism understood both how to act and that they would garner spiritual, social, and economic benefits from other wealthy Christians, who had accepted the idea that asceticism was praiseworthy through their reading of these biographies.

Palladius and Gerontius, the authors of the *Lausiac History* and the *Life of Melania the Younger*, wrote their hagiographic biographies for identifiable aristocratic audiences (Section 1). However, they faced the difficulty of reconciling a model of asceticism germane to their audiences to the biblical and ascetic conception of wealth as a temptation and antithetical to Christian living. Gerontius, in particular, embraced the concept of wealth as dangerous which Athanasius had introduced in his *Life of Anthony* (Section 2). The result of such an attitude toward wealth was not a glorification of poverty as it was widely experienced in the ancient world, but instead a particular construction of voluntary poverty which, ironically, favored the very wealthy: aristocratic asceticism was based on the idea of charitable renunciation, and, because wealthy Christians had more wealth to renounce and donate, they were ideal ascetics (Section 3). Considering the tension between the ascetic injunction to voluntary poverty and the concerns of their wealthy audiences, Palladius and Gerontius presented different options to their aristocratic readers. Palladius, in his collection of hagiographic biographies, included stories of many

types of ascetic practice, suggesting that varying levels of charitable renunciation were acceptable. He assured his audience that wealth was acceptable, as long as it was used in a Christian manner (Section 4). Gerontius, on the other hand, argued that the complete voluntary poverty of his subject, Melania, was the ideal ascetic practice. However, he recommended voluntary poverty achieved through charitable renunciation to his audience by suggesting that the charitable use of wealth in this life represented an investment in heavenly treasure (Section 5). Thus, both Palladius and Gerontius used economic metaphors to discuss attitudes toward administration of wealth in their ascetic biographies.

Section 1
Water and Wine: Palladius and Gerontius' aristocratic audiences

Aristocratic ascetic literature, like most literature produced in the ancient Mediterranean, was a product of and produced for literate people with the leisure to read and the wealth to commission works; in other words, ascetic literature was written for the educated elite and the aristocracy.[2] Ascetic biographies therefore addressed the concerns of wealthy Romans, in both the Eastern and Western Empire.[3] From the perspective of this audience, ascetic literature presented ways of

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[2] For the decline in literacy in Late Antiquity, see Harris 1989, 285-322. In particular, he notes the relative utility of books and preaching in the spread of Christian ideas (299-303). See also Fox 1994, 126-148.

[3] Because of the Eastern origins of Christian asceticism and the fact that the movement continued to flourish in Egypt and the Holy Land, most aristocratic ascetic literature of the fourth and fifth centuries was written in Greek. In this form, it was available both the local ascetic communities, for which biographies of founders, for instance, had specific meaning, and educated Christians throughout the empire. However, much of this literature, including the *Life of Anthony* and the *Life of Melania the Younger*, was translated into Latin and therefore available to specifically western audiences who were unable to read Greek, including many aristocratic women. Of course, there was often a body of ascetic literature in the indigenous languages of Egypt and the Near East.

thinking about and using wealth while also addressing the outcomes of these economic thoughts and actions.

While neither Gerontius, the author of the *Life of Melania the Younger*, nor Palladius, the author of the *Lausiac History*, came from exceptionally wealthy backgrounds,[4] both were aware of their wealthy and powerful audiences, whom they addressed directly in the dedications of their works. In the introduction to the *Life of Melania*, Gerontius addressed a "holy priest" who had asked him to write a biography of Melania.[5] Although it is impossible to identify this priest with certainty, it seems likely that Gerontius may have written for Theodosius, the Bishop of Jerusalem.[6] If so, the text may represent a particular connection between Melania the Younger's Jerusalem monastery and Theodosius, a bishop who was supportive of the monastic movement in Jerusalem during a time when theological disputes made asceticism highly controversial.[7] At the same time, Melania's monastery nevertheless attracted wealthy and powerful individuals; Peter the Iberian, a prince of Georgia who had been raised in the imperial court in Constantinople, is an example.[8] Furthermore, Gerontius' connection to Melania the Younger still gave him social prominence. Gerontius likely traveled with Melania through North Africa and

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[4] Information about Gerontius' and Palladius' backgrounds is limited; we know practically nothing about Gerontius, other than that he was Melania the Younger's successor as superior her Mount of Olives monastery (Clark 1984, 13-16). Palladius was originally from Anatolia, but became a dedicated ascetic early in his life (Butler 1898, 2).
[5] *LM*, prologue.
[6] Clark 1984, 20-22. Cooper 2005 argued for a more reserved attribution of authorship (13-15); indeed, Clark continued to temper her attribution, calling Gerontius "presumably" the author (Clark 1996, 17)
[7] Clark 1984 17-24.
[8] Horn and Phoenix, lxxvi-lxxvii.

thus became familiar with his subject's high-class friends.[9]In committing the deeds of the founder of his monastery to writing, Gerontius noted that he hoped she would inspire virtue in others.[10] Throughout the *Life of Melania*, Gerontius argued that Melania the Younger should provide a model for aristocratic renunciation for his privileged audience: the priest to whom the work was dedicated, the monks of Melania's monastery, and Melania's aristocratic social circle.

Like Gerontius, Palladius also dedicated the *Lausiac History* to a patron. However, we know more about Palladius' wealthy patron, Lausus. Lausus was a chamberlain for the imperial court in Constantinople under Theodosius II. Palladius likely met Lausus through his connections to Constantinople. After living as a monk in Palestine and Egypt, where he met many of the monks whose biographies made up the *Lausiac History*, John Chrysostom, the Bishop of Constantinople (367-404) and a supporter of the eastern monastic movement, appointed Palladius as Bishop of Helenopolis, a Bithynian harbor town across the Gulf of İzmit from Constantinople. Palladius' loyalty to Chrysostom during the Origenist Controversy, which centered on a group of Egyptian ascetics Chrysostom supported, gave him particular prominence in Constantinople. Indeed, Palladius' first-hand knowledge of Egyptian monasticism—which was enhanced during the time he spent in exile in the Thebaid due to his support of Chrysostom[11]—moved Lausus to approach him about writing a collection of ascetic biographies.

[9] Clark 1984, 16-21; Gorce 1962, 54-62.
[10] *LM* Prologue.
[11] Butler 2-3.

Lausus was extraordinarily wealthy: he accumulated one of the most impressive collections of private sculpture known to antiquity and displayed it in an enormous personal palace on the main street of the ancient city, near the hippodrome.[12] However, Lausus was also a devout Christian who used his wealth for charitable ends; the Latin version of the *Life of Melania the Younger* named him as the patron of Melania's martyrion in Jerusalem.[13] Despite the fact that Lausus was a charitable Christian, he was certainly not frugal. Indeed, his penchant for lavish display may have prompted his commission of the *Lausiac History*. Lausus' collection and display of statues from throughout the empire, perhaps arranged or curated based on geography, was a clear parallel to the collection of monks' lives which he commissioned from Palladius. In a time when Egyptian asceticism was *en vogue* among the Christian aristocracy, Lausus "collected" the monks of Egypt in this assemblage of biographies and displayed them, as evidence of his knowledge and support of asceticism, to his wealthy friends. [14] Yet Lausus' very public displays of wealth put Palladius in an uncomfortable position: in some biographies, Palladius stressed abstinence from luxury and pleasure in the individual stories, yet his aim was to please his patron Lausus, who showed no interest in living an ascetic life himself.

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[12] Bardill 1997. Despite its common attribution, Bardill argues that the rotunda situated between the Palace of Antiochus and the hippodrome was likely not the Palace of Lausus. However, ancient descriptions of the location and later toponyms confirm that the palace was on the main street of the city in that general area, although perhaps closer to the Forum of Constantine. For the spatial organization of Constantinople in general, see Mango 2000.
[13] *LM* (Latin version), 41, 53, 55; Clark 1984, 136-138
[14] Bassett 2004, 100-102.

Through careful curation of these collected lives, Palladius managed to present the asceticism of the desert in a way which appealed to Lausus and the wealthy friends with whom he shared his collection. Palladius was very aware of his audience; he hoped that his stories would be "a guide to you [Lausus] and the ones with you and the ones under you and the most pious emperors."[15] The *Lausiac History* included many stories of extreme asceticism, from Macarius, who suffered a self-imposed penance of sitting amongst the mosquitos of the marshes of Scete,[16] to a monk of the Palestinian desert whose asceticism was so extreme that, while he was alive, "his body became mummified so that the sun shone through his bones."[17] Yet Palladius, ever aware of his ambitious and privileged audience, crafted a gentle guide. In his prologue to the work, Palladius spoke directly to the concerns that he imagined his aristocratic audience felt when considering the adoption of asceticism. Addressing Lausus, he wrote "Man up, then, I say, and do not fatten up your wealth; this you have already done, since you have lessened it willingly through donations to those in need because of this act's provision of virtue."[18] Palladius' expectations of Lausus, that he not seek more wealth and that he provide charitable donations, were restrained in relation to the stories of extreme asceticism his text contained. Palladius assured his wealthy audience that they could also live ascetic lives by using their income for charity.

[15] *LH* Prologue.
[16] *LH* 18.
[17] *LH* 48.
[18] *LH* Prologue.

Palladius even found a way to praise Lausus for his wealth and social standing. “If you acquire with reason and abstain with reason, you will not sin ever!” he wrote.

> For it is better to drink wine with reason than to drink water with vanity. And see the ones who drink wine with reason as holy men, and the ones who drink water without reason as impure men, and no longer blame wealth nor praise it, but consider blessed or wretched the judgment of ones who use wealth well or poorly.[19]

The metaphor of wine consumption allowed Palladius to address the issue of wealth and charity indirectly, without being vulgar. He comforted his wealthy audience by justifying their retention of status and wealth, praising them for their moderate consumption and enjoining Lausus and his friends to use their wealth thoughtfully, in a way which was befitting of their Christian beliefs. However, Palladius also set up a false dichotomy between moderate enjoyment of wealth and hypocritical charity, avoiding a third option: humble, non-hypocritical charitable renunciation. This dichotomy allowed Palladius to praise Lausus for his moderation without dwelling on his distinctly un-ascetic ways.[20] By focusing on the great potential of men like Lausus as charitable donors, Palladius not only pleased his patron, to whom he offered moderate charity as an alternative to strict asceticism, but also profited himself and other ascetics who benefitted from the charity of wealthy Christians.

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[19] *LH* Prologue. The idea of ascetic hypocrisy has biblical precedent in the story of the poor widow Mk. 12:41-43 (indeed, Palladius made a reference to this story in *LH* 10) and admonitions about almsgiving and fasting in Mt. 6:1-17.

[20] This dichotomy, however, held true in some ways. While the ascetics of Palladius’ biographies may not have drawn attention to themselves, Palladius’ work praised them for their asceticism. Indeed the praise for asceticism inherent in such hagiographies caused some anxiety among authors (see, for instance, Gerontius’ comments in the *LM*).

While Palladius comforted his wealthy audience by ensuring that thoughtful use of wealth was acceptable, Gerontius made clear in his address to his patron that his intent was to glorify Melania in order to inspire his audience to follow her strict ascetic regime. Gerontius' primary audience was the monks of Melania's monastery; Melania's friends and admirers, including the priest to whom the work was dedicated; and potential donors and supporters of the monastery, for whom the biography served as an institutional mythology, attesting to the sanctity of the foundation. Because of their orientation toward the monastery and Melania, these groups were more amenable to the idea of extreme renunciation than Palladius' wealthy, secular audience.

However, Gerontius still recognized the difficulty of asceticism and used both gentle metaphors and the language of profit to make his point. "I will come upon the spiritual meadow of the works of our blessed mother, Melania, and plucking the yielding flowers of her works, I will offer them to those who love hearing of her zeal for virtue and of the great profit for those wanting to place their spirits before God, the savior of all of us."[21] In order to make his bouquet of ascetic renunciation appealing to his audience, Gerontius, throughout the biography, pointed out the profit which asceticism could bring. The idea of asceticism as an investment in a promised return was, in fact, pervasive in the *Life of Melania*.

Both Gerontius and Palladius considered their aristocratic audiences as they crafted their narratives. Throughout the *Life of Melania* and the *Lausiac History*,

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[21] *LM*, Prologue.

Gerontius and Palladius created a representation of asceticism which made the practice appealing to a wealthy audience. While Palladius comforted his audience by promising that complete renunciation was not necessary as long as the aristocracy used their wealth within reason, Gerontius suggested instead that wealthy Christians should concentrate on the benefits they received from ascetic practice. However, both men used economic concepts—such as investment and risk assessment—to describe their subjects' asceticism and to suggest attitudes toward wealth to their aristocratic audiences.

Section 2
The Devil in the Mirror: Wealth as temptation

Proponents of asceticism among the artistocracy, like Gerontius and Palladius, faced a difficult task. In writing ascetic histories for aristocratic patrons, they attempted to convince men and women who had enjoyed and benefitted from immense wealth that, in biblical terms, their "love of money is a root of all kinds of evil."[22] Writing about wealth presented a two-fold problem for Late Antique ascetic authors. First, they had to make a convincing argument that wealth was detrimental to the spiritual wellbeing of their aristocratic audiences, although, for the Roman aristocracy, wealth had traditionally been a means of deriving social, political, and economic benefit. Therefore, in making such arguments, authors also had to be

[22] 1 Tim. 6:10 (all biblical quotations from NRSV).

sensitive to these benefits, especially considering that the authors themselves and the monastic institutions they represented received support from wealthy donors.[23]

Although the Roman world had a long history of respect and even glorification of restraint and humility—as opposed to ostentation—the condemnation of wealth in and of itself and the call to voluntary poverty was, to a great extent, a Christian ascetic innovation.[24] Therefore, while displays of wealth brought social opprobrium in the pre-Christian Roman world, wealth in itself was not vilified. The Roman ideal, as embodied by the quasi-mythical heroes of the Republic, was characterized by tenacity and temperance. The Roman virtue of moderation encompassed an attitude toward wealth which eschewed ostentation or luxurious indulgence;[25] there was shame in lack of self-control, which led to conditions such as unchaste character or bankruptcy.[26] Furthermore, in the Roman world, display of virtue often came about through an ordeal or point of contention, in which the proper emotions and restraint were demonstrated.[27] Christian asceticism also valued the display of virtue through triumph over diversity. Finally, cultured Romans had been educated through stories of stalwart men of the Republic, such as Cincinnatus, who had dutifully given up his political power for an

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[23] Both men, but Palladius in particular, were aware of the underlying tension between praise and humility inherent to hagiography. Both men went to pains to defend their writing by stating their humility and subjugating their work to the will of God. See *LH* Prologue and *LM* Prologue. See also Krueger 1999.
[24] For a description of this attitude and its connection to pre-Christian asceticism, see Francis 1995, 2. Asceticism certainly existed in the pre-Christian Mediterranean, and gained popularity during the second sophistic. See Finn 2009, 9-34; Francis 1995, 1-20 for a general introduction to philosophical asceticism in the ancient Mediterranean. "resistance to full participation in normative society" (Valantasis 2001, 549)
[25] Dalby 2000, 11-13.
[26] Kaster 2005, 44-45.
[27] Barton 2001, 35-38.

agrarian life.[28] Withdrawal from the city to the countryside, which underlay the ideology of romantic contemplation in the Roman world, was also an aspect of aristocratic asceticism in Late Antiquity.[29] However, traditional Roman ideas of virtue did not condemn wealth in and of itself the way many strict teachings of ascetic Christianity did. Thus, both Gerontius and Palladius, in their moderate attitudes toward wealth and condemnation of luxurious display, stood upon a foundation of condemnation of aristocratic luxury which dated back to the days of the Roman Republic.

Despite an ideology of moderation, imperial Roman culture offered many opportunities for display of financial success. From the lavish homes of the otherwise provincial Roman inhabitants of Pompeii[30] to the enormous statue collection of Lausus, Romans used conspicuous consumption to advertise their personal status and the success of their families, as wealth was the result of continuing social and political favor. Thus, wealth not only indicated the present success of an individual, but also his or her pedigree and the favored history of the family. Because of social status and political power were so closely associated with wealth, the disavowal of wealth was antithetical to the structures of power in the Late Empire. By the fifth century, the old senatorial families, such as the Valerii, to whom Melania the Younger and her husband Pinianus belonged, had become

[28]Brown 2012, 57-58 succinctly sums up Roman feelings concerning extensive wealth.
[29] See, for instance, Melania the Younger in the suburbs of Rome and Campania (*LM* 7; *LH* 61), or Cassiodorus at Squillace.
[30] Wallace-Hadrill 1990, 145-150; 190-192.

fabulously wealthy. The Valerii were members of the political elite in Rome,[31] but were also wealthy landowners.[32] In Late Antique Rome, vast wealth was a sign of a deep family history, and old senatorial families used their wealth to advertise this political power and preserve their status.

Nevertheless, Christian writers taught that wealth presented too great a threat to obedient followers of Christ. Beginning from early Christian writers such as Clement of Alexandria and the author of the *Shepherd of Hermas* and extending through proponents of the Late Antique ascetic movement including Athanasius and Augustine,[33] Christians used biblical passages to defend and articulate their attitudes toward wealth. They read certain sections of biblical texts, especially from the New Testament, as presenting personal wealth as a temptation which privileged the involvement in worldly concerns to the detriment of religious devotion.[34] Athanasius, the author of the *Life of Anthony*, which introduced many aristocratic Western Christians to ascetic practice, interpreted biblical passages as connecting wealth, which was associated with the temptation of the Devil, to worldly power. Gerontius subsequently used these themes to emphasize the threat which wealth posed and the necessity of mindful asceticism.

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[31] Melania the Younger was the granddaughter of two *praefecti urbis* and the great-granddaughter of another. Her uncle held the same post. Her husband, Pinianus, also a member of the *gens Valeria*, was the son of a *praefectus Urbis* (Gorce 1962, 20-36; Clark 1984, 83-85). See also Weber 1989 discusses the political identity of one obscure member of Melania's family, her uncle Albinus, in greater detail. See especially 474-478.

[32] Although Hillner (2003) argued that the Caelian mansion often ascribed to Melania the Younger belonged to another branch of the *gens Valeria*, she provided a helpful overview to the actions of the family in the city of Rome, 140-143

[33] For the *Shepherd of Hermas*, see Friesen 2008; for Augustine, see Evers 2010 207-298; Brown 2012, 63-65.

[34] See, for instance, Garrison 1993, Holman 2008, and Downs 2011 on 2 Clem.

Perhaps the biblical passage most often cited by Christian authors concerned with wealth was the story of Jesus' interaction with a rich young man. This story appeared in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.[35] According to the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus met a rich man who had followed all of the commandments of his teaching.

> Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." When the young man heard this word, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions. Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly I tell you, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astounded and said, "Then who can be saved?"[36]

In his response to this wealthy but committed follower, Jesus seemed to rank voluntary poverty as more critical to spiritual success than religious devotion and adherence to the laws of the Old Testament. That is, it appeared that a complete disavowal of worldly wealth part was of the new covenant which Jesus represented. Moreover, not only was the rich man to give away all his possessions, but Jesus called him to deny his family. The connection between the renunciation of wealth and the denial of family was a trope which many authors of ascetic literature adopted from this biblical passage, especially when their subject was a woman. During Late Antiquity, such biblical passages were used by authors to argue in favor of aristocratic asceticism.

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[35] Mt 19:16-30; Mk 10:17-31; Lk 18:22-30.
[36] Mt 19:16-30.

Along with renunciation of wealth and disavowal of the family, ascetic authors in Late Antiquity also read a third hallmark of asceticism into this passage: a rejection of political power. The version of this story told in the Gospel of Luke presented a more specific image of the rich young man, calling him a "ruler."[37] The connection between wealth and political power reflected the reality of life under the rule of the Roman Empire, but it also echoed the temptation of Jesus in the desert, in which the Devil offered Jesus dominion over worldly empires.[38] Likewise, the language of sanctity used in biblical literature often included the promise of the "kingdom" of heaven. This terminology further suggested a relationship between wealth and power. Thus, wealth was both a sign of and a result of involvement with worldly power, and a desire for power in this world was, in Christian teaching, a dismissal of immortal life; the two kingdoms, worldly and heavenly, were in opposition.[39]

Episodes from Late Antique hagiography, picking up on the biblical model, made a clear and unequivocal connection between wealth, the appeal of worldly power, and the temptation of the Devil. In the *Life of Anthony*, Athanasius suggested wealth was the one true temptation his heroic hermit faced. Wealth and all it represented—urbanity, power, comfort—were antithetical to the strict asceticism which the *Life of Anthony* advertised. Athanasius clearly expressed threat of wealth in an episode in which Anthony came across a large silver disk in the desert.[40] Considering the connection which Late Antique sources imagined between wealth

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[37] Lk 18:18: τις ἄρχων.
[38] Mt 4:8-10.
[39] See, for instance, Lk 16: 24-31.
[40] *LA* 11.2-4. Cf 7.13.

and power, it is significant that Athanasius imagined that greatest threat to Anthony's asceticism occurred while he moved away from the bustling life of the city, where his family held high stature, farther into the desert. The shining silver disk represented wealth;[41] but it also functioned as a mirror, allowing Anthony to physically see the Devil in it.[42] After Anthony identified the trickery of the Devil in this apparition, the Devil presented the ascetic with the temptation of actual gold, which Anthony also overcame. Athanasius was specific about the reality of this temptation:

> Then, while [Anthony] was traveling farther, he found no longer an apparition, but real gold[43] cast into the road. Whether the Devil was offering it, or whether some greater power, training the athlete and pointing out to the Devil that he would give no thought even to real gold, no one told us nor did we know it, except that it was gold that appeared. And Anthony was amazed at the amount of it, but, as if jumping over fire, thus he passed it by and did not turn back, but rather hastened so quickly along the race course that the place was hidden and he forgot about it.[44]

The vision of the mysterious appearance of the gleaming silver disk in the desert underlined the haunting temptation which wealth represented in the *Life of Anthony*; Anthony's ability to see the Devil in the dish was a sign of his sanctity and an indication that the recognition of temptation resulted in the possibility of self-

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[41] The use of the adjective ἀργοροῦ suggested wealth, as does the translation of the term δίσκος into Latin as *vasculus*, suggesting an expensive serving dish.

[42] Βλέπων τὸν ἐν αὐτῷ [δίσκῳ] διάβολον. For a discussion of the metaphor of the mirror elsewhere in Athanasius' writing and its connection to neoplatonism, see Hamilton 1980. Although Anthony did not see the Devil in the desert, he saw his reflection in the mirror; the term βλέπων denoted the act of seeing, not perception.

[43] Interestingly, this was the only time in the *Life of Anthony* when demons or the Devil were responsible for real material (ἀληθινὸν δὲ χρυσὸν), instead of an apparition (φαντασία) (although Athanasius himself contradicted this later in the *Life*, when Anthony asserted that the Devil "often pointed out the image of gold in the desert, just so that [Anthony] might touch and look at (βλέπω) it." (40.4)).

[44] *LA* 12.1-2.

control. Similarly, the gold offered by the Devil appeared to Anthony like fire—an element both necessary and dangerous. The image of gold appearing as fire represented the dual nature of wealth with which Late Antique ascetic authors struggled: money was both a necessity and a temptation.

Gerontius also articulated a connection between wealth, worldly power, and the Devil in the *Life of Melania the Younger*. According to him, at the beginning of her ascetic practice, Melania said

> We submitted ourselves to much suffering and struggle from the Devil, the Hater of Good, in the beginning, until we were able to thrust away the weight of so much wealth. We were upset and chafed, because our contest was not one with blood and flesh, but, as the apostle says, with the authorities, with the supreme rulers of this dark existence.[45]

Gerontius recounted a terrifying vision that Melania experienced in which her wealth, as a great fire, destroyed all that she had.

> One day…we had collected an unspeakable amount of gold so that we could send it for the service of the poor and the holy ones—45,000 pieces of gold! While I was going into the triclinium, I seemed, by the handicraft of the Devil, to set the house on fire with the amount of gold, just as with a flame.[46]

The comparison of the gold stacked in Melania's triclinium to fire was a direct reference to the gold in the desert with which the Devil tempted Anthony.[47] This comparison emphasized the danger which wealth posed. Anthony jumped over the gold as if running from a fire. In the case of Melania, on the other hand, the

[45] *LM* 16
[46] *LM* 17.
[47] *LA* 11.2-4.

comparison was even more apt: Gerontius later revealed that, during the Gothic siege of Rome, Melania's mansion, in which the gold flashed like fire, was burned to the ground.[48] On two levels, then, the fire which Melania saw represented the dangers of wealth: on the metaphorical level, the fire-like money represented the temptation and yearning which wealth inspired; and in a literal sense, wealth, such as that which Melania held in real estate, was susceptible to destruction and loss. The impermanence of wealth was a biblical model which ascetic literature, including the *Life of Melania*, emphasized.[49]

Gerontius also described how the Devil used Melania's great wealth to tempt her, just as he had tempted Jesus in the desert. He suggested that the temptation to keep wealth for personal pleasure was a problem for wealthy Christians like Melania. According to Gerontius, the Devil tempted Melania with the memory of pleasure which wealth brought. Melania told this story:

> We had some praiseworthy real estate, and on the property was a bath brilliant beyond anything on earth; for it had on one side the sea, and on the other, a diverse forest in which wild boar, deer, roe, and other animals grazed, so that the ones bathing, from the pool, saw boats sailing on the wind on one side and on the other the animals in the woods. Therefore, finding in this again an opportune pretext, the Devil hindered me with...the variety of statues there and the inestimable income in the estate itself, for there were 62 households around the bath.[50]

Gerontius provided a tempting description of Melania's luxurious estate, underlining for his audience the magnitude of temptation caused by wealth.

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[48] *LM* 14.
[49] See, for instance, Mt. 6:20; 13:22; 19:16-30. Mk. 10:21. Lk. 12:33; 18:18-30.
[50] *LM* 18.

Melania, however, rebuked the Devil by emphasizing the ephemeral nature of wealth; she said,

> "You will not hinder my race in this way, Devil. For what are these things that today exist but tomorrow will be destroyed by the barbarians, or by fire, or by time, or by some other state of affairs, in comparison to the eternal goods that exist forever and stretch out through infinite ages, which are bought through these corruptible things?" The hateful one, realizing that he had no power to fight against her, but rather that he, defeated, was granting her crowns beyond measure, was disgraced.[51]

Melania used the impermanence of wealth as justification for her defiance of the Devil's temptation, recalling the biblical passage, "Do not store up for yourselves treasure on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven."[52] Throughout the *Life of Melania*, the protagonist overcame the temptation of wealth by focusing on its ephemeral nature, especially in comparison to the treasures of heaven.

By echoing Athanasius, Gerontius presented Melania's vast wealth as the greatest hindrance to her salvation. Athanasius, in turn, like other ascetic writers, based his denigration of wealth upon biblical passages, including the story of Jesus and the wealthy young man. Although many Christians chose to interpret biblical condemnations of wealth more leniently, the biblical concept of the camel in the eye

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[51] *LM* 18.

[52] Mt. 6:19. James 5:1-6 reiterated the same message, but much more strongly. Unlike the verse from Matthew, which served as a warning, the verse from James openly denigrated the wealthy: "Come now, you rich people, weep and wail for the miseries that are coming to you. Your riches have rotted, and your clothes are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you, and it will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure for the last days. Listen! The wages of laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. You have lived on the earth in luxury and in pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the righteous one, who does not resist you.

of the needle would become a potent and terrifying image for Christians weighed down by worldly wealth. Indeed, Gerontius wrote that Melania had a dream in which she and her husband Pinianus were forced through a tiny crack in the wall of their luxurious mansion, only to find great relief upon having squeezed through it—a variation on the biblical axiom.[53] The popularity of asceticism among the Roman aristocracy had resulted in an ideological redefinition of wealth so radical that privileged Christians saw wealth as a threat not only to their status within their community, but also their eternal souls. Under such duress, they created a new model of economic status in which they, ironically, emulated the poor.

Section 3
Yours is the Kingdom: The problem of poverty in Late Antique Christianity

Jesus told his apostles, "You always have the poor with you."[54] The presence of the poor was a daily reality in the late Roman Empire, and a fact that even the very wealthy faced constantly. Indeed, our evidence for poverty in the ancient world comes almost exclusively from aristocratic or bureaucratic sources. The writing and consumption of literature was a luxury, and the voices of the poor were silent in ancient literature, our most prominent and eloquent source. When they were portrayed, it was only by a wealthier or more privileged author, and their presence depended on their utility to the story or to the author's point.[55] However, even the poor could not escape the bureaucracy of the Roman Empire, and they appear as

[53] *LM* 16. Indeed, for Brown, this episode is highlight of the *Life of Melania the Younger*. Brown 2012, 291-292.
[54] Jn. 12:8.
[55] Scholars of women in antiquity face much the same problem; see for instance Clark 1996, Clark 2001. Only in recent years have scholars of ancient literature started theorizing the poor in similar ways: Atkins and Osborne 2006.

slaves, orphans, widows, and the destitute in the many documentary sources from Roman Egypt.[56]

The definition of poverty and of the poor in the context of the late Roman Empire is, in and of itself, problematic. Because Roman systems of public support, such as the *annona*, were generally universally available to people of certain citizen statuses, there existed no official record of numbers of citizens, even of cities, who were poor or in need.[57] Rome had no official way to designate poverty. Yet, although scholars still disagree about the specifics of class structure in the Roman Empire, it is apparent that income inequality existed throughout the imperial period.[58] At times, the presence of a "poverty problem" was evident in history or literature. Often, the poor appeared as an ambiguous group, without individual identity or clear agency.[59] In these cases, the social pressure poverty exerted defined the poor; their existence, *en masse*, was meaningful for both Roman society as a whole and for the class which produced literary and historical texts. At other times, the poor appeared as individuals, either real or archetypal. In these cases, the poor were most often defined by their destitution, the difference between them and their

[56] Rathbone 2006.Even in the case of papyrological documentary evidence, it is not always possible to identify individuals as "poor."
[57] Morley 2006, 39. See also Brown 2012, 68-71 for a discussion of the impact of citizen status on Roman conceptions of poverty.
[58] For general conclusions on the growing prosperity of the wealthy during the imperial period and the related status of the poor, see Hopkins 2002, 204-208. A more detailed discussion of his model follows. Finley 1999, discussed the level of poverty likely faced by peasants (free landholders) and slaves, 107-109. Scheidel 2006 argued for a more moderate take on income inequality, reasoning that there must have been a large middle class supporting a small, very rich aristocracy. Yet Harris 2011 has recently argued that poverty was indeed widespread and deep in the Roman Empire. See Grigg 1980.
[59] De Ligt 2004.

aristocratic counterparts, or their reliance upon the aristocracy for help.[60] Because the Roman impoverished could not and did not speak for themselves, for modern scholars, poverty in the Roman world is defined through its relationship to the wealthy.[61]

Despite the relative absence of the poor in Late Roman literature, Christian literature paid special attention to the poor. The moral framework provided by the biblical texts demanded the poor be cared for: "There will never cease to be needy ones in your land, which is why I command you: Open your hand to the poor and needy kinsman in your land."[62] Jesus demonstrated such behavior in his acceptance of marginal members of society.[63] Early Christian writers adopted this attitude; Paul argued that wealthy Christians should share their wealth to alleviate the lot of the poor.[64] In Late Antiquity, powerful preachers peppered their sermons with injunctions to remember the poor. The most famous of these sermons are attributed to Augustine (Bishop of Hippo 395-430), who consistently urged his audience toward charity.[65] Yet Augustine's sermons were aimed at a community with the means to support the poor—he addressed an audience of Christians with the

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[60] This is especially the case in Christian literature. For the role ideology played in designating the poor in the ancient past, see Brown 2005, 517-521.
[61] Woolf 2006.
[62] Deut. 15:11.
[63] The general social and economic standing of the early Christian community is impossible to completely reconstruct. Later literature skews our view toward aristocratic subjects of literature, but Rohrbaugh 1984 argued that aristocratic, politically connected Christians were very rare exceptions; he summed up his conclusions on pages 543-543.
[64] See in particular 2 Cor. 9. See Friesen 2008 for a discussion of Paul's attitude toward poverty in his letters and the portrayal of Paul in *Acts of the Apostles*. The divergent attitudes toward wealth inequity are evidence that, while there was a general interest in the problem of wealth in early Christianity, and there was also a level of disagreement about Christian responsibility for social action.
[65] Brown 2002, 63-64; Brown 2012, 339-352.

financial ability to give charitably to support the poor and thereby guarantee social harmony. In these sermons, as in other Christian literature, the poor were a subject rather than an audience. Although the poor were not equal participants in the topic of their own wellbeing, Christian rhetoric at least recognized them as members of society.

The letters of Paul (first century CE) in particular called for the wealthy members of Christian communities to support the poor. He reminded readers of the sacrifice of Jesus for their benefit, suggesting that their own support of the poor would be both socially beneficial and a meaningful imitation of the sacrifice of Jesus.

> You know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich…. I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be fair balance.[66]

In associating concern for the poor with the character of their savior, Paul made a convincing argument that basic levels of social and economic equality should typify a Christian community. At the same time, he also created a precedent for the praise of charitable giving as an imitation of the sacrifice of Jesus. Yet Paul preached moderation for the wealthy: although he praised and expected charity for the good of the Christian community, he did not argue for complete renunciation or ascetic voluntary poverty. Paul's main concern for the Corinthians was the well-being of the Christian community.

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[66] 2 Cor. 8:9-14.

Paul's words placed a burden upon the wealthy of Christian communities to care for the poor. Yet many aristocratic Christians likely felt this burden not only when considering social obligations, but also their own salvation. Inspired by biblical passages which warned of the threat of wealth and the harsh ascetic rhetoric of Late Antiquity, they felt a deep spiritual need to realign their relationship to their worldly possessions. Although wealthy Christians had many options, the complete—or, at least, rhetorically complete—renunciation of worldly goods followed by a life of asceticism was characteristic of aristocratic ascetic narratives. The inclusive language of Christianity was so successful that it inspired wealthy Christians to, in fact, become like the poor.

Yet asceticism did not make the rich and poor equal—quite the opposite. Voluntary poverty through charitable renunciation was not the same as the inescapable, institutional poverty which many in the Roman Empire faced. In fact, the difference between the two was essential to Late Antique asceticism and its appeal to the aristocracy. In a paradigm in which renunciation was not only worthy of praise, but also resulted in elevated social status and influence within monastic communities, the wealthy were inherently favored. Because they had more to give up, their dramatic change in fortunes—albeit self-imposed—represented a greater sacrifice. Indeed, hagiographers often dramatized the transition to asceticism for their very wealthy subjects, focusing on the wealth and status of their subjects prior

to their asceticism in order to demonstrate the extent of their renunciation.[67] *Voluntary* poverty, therefore, was a sign of wealth and status. Within the paradigm of Christian asceticism, the poor did not have the personal worth to buy into the system. Ascetic literature, with its focus on the leisure classes, offered very few models for poor ascetics, and when authors did discuss the asceticism of lower-class individuals, they spoke of the freedom from worldly concerns that asceticism offered. For poor people, asceticism was not a sacrifice, but an amelioration of life.[68] The wealthy, however, could gain immense social capital through their charitable and ascetic actions. Thus, despite the language of humility and praise of poverty, Christian asceticism further crystalized the relative statuses of the rich and the poor. For the wealthy of the Roman Empire, Christian voluntary poverty provided a structure for the articulation of social status and power which did not rely on fickle imperial support or land liable to be invaded, but instead on the personal choice to undertake ostentatious generosity.

Nevertheless, the poor were integral to the practice of aristocratic asceticism: the wealthy needed objects of charity. Support of the less fortunate was a standard

[67] In both the *Life of Paul* and the *Life of Anthony*, the authors emphasize the wealth of their subjects prior to their renunciation. According to Athanasius, Anthony' family had "three hundred fertile and quite beautiful *arourai*" (*LA* 2.4). Cf. *LP* 4.

[68] In all of the *Lausiac History*, there are six examples of ascetics with clearly poor backgrounds. Of these, four were slaves or servants. Two examples are illustrative of the way in which aristocratic authors depicted poor ascetics. One, Moses, a servant, was such a wicked person that even his master drove him out. Upon his ascetic conversion, however, Moses left behind both his status as a servant and his murderous ways. In this case, Moses' low class reflected his defective character. (19) Palladius took the opposite tack with Sisinnius, a slave whom he described as "free in his faith" through Christ, "who leads us to true nobility." (49) Due to the nature of such ascetic literature, and the focus on the narrative ascetic renunciation (available only to the rich) as opposed to the axiomatic treatment of ascetic practice (available to both the rich and the poor by making them presumably indistinguishable), it is nearly impossible to identify ascetics who had previously lived as poor secular individuals, as authors tend to focus on the present ascetic life of monks. However, this trend in itself glorified the renunciation of the wealthy and dismissed the past experiences of most poor ascetics.

way to shed excess wealth in Late Antiquity; the wealthy demonstrated their devotion to Christianity and indifference to wealth by founding or supporting hospitals or monasteries which cared for the poor.[69] Charitable action toward the poor was such a popular component of asceticism that the suffering of the poor became the focus of Christian rhetoric: the more desperate the situation of the poor, the more heroic the financial help supplied by the wealthy.[70] Aristocratic renunciation depended upon the continued existence of the underclass and those in need, which both provided a charitable outlet for aristocratic renunciation and acted as a perpetual reminder of the suffering to which ascetics should aspire.[71]

With the rise in the popularity of asceticism among the Roman aristocracy and an emphasis on the threat which wealth posed to spiritual wellbeing, many aristocratic Christians embraced a range of outward displays of material humility as a sign of their religious devotion. Aristocratic asceticism was voluntary poverty typified by the charitable renunciation of personal wealth and was therefore, by definition, unavailable to the lower class. Aristocratic asceticism did not result in the equality of classes, nor did it systematically address the issue of poverty. Instead, wealthy ascetics found the paradigm of poverty a useful way to demonstrate their dedication. Through aristocratic asceticism, and particularly charitable renunciation, the aristocracy exploited the paradigm of poverty to entrench their social position.

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[69] See, for instance, Constable 2003, Wainwright 2006, Horden 2005, 362-365., Horden 2008, and Ferngren 2009. Cf. *LH* 6, 40, 68.

[70] Brown 2002 28-31; cf Rathbone 2006, 101; 114.

[71] See, for instance, *LH* 56 (Olympias), 62 (Pammachius), 66 (Verus), 67 (Magna). Indeed, Palladius mentioned charity for the poor most often in the context of biographies of wealthy Christians, suggesting that the contrast between wealth and poverty was rhetorically appealing.

Section 4
A Profitable Life: Variations on asceticism

In a construct of voluntary poverty in which the goal was not simply to be poor, but instead to practice calculated self-denial, the aristocracy faced choices about the extent of their renunciation. In Late Antiquity, ascetics engaged in a lively and sometimes vicious debate about the proper way to practice asceticism.[72] Gerontius and Palladius presented two distinctive interpretations of aristocratic renunciation. Gerontius praised the (theoretically) full renunciation of all worldly wealth by his subject, Melania the Younger, and suggested the same to his audience. Palladius, on the other hand, embraced a more lenient definition of asceticism, reassuring his aristocratic audience that a mindful use of wealth was an acceptable alternative to strict asceticism. Both men used rhetoric and told stories in their works which accorded to their respective views on aristocratic asceticism.

The model of renunciation and asceticism which Gerontius provided in the character of Melania the Younger was strictly austere; he called her renunciation "perfect" and praised her humility.[73] Through the *Life of Melania*, Gerontius argued that, ideally, a true ascetic would completely disavow and sell personal property in order to take up a life of poverty.[74] This version of aristocratic asceticism fit well with his intended audiences, the monks of the Holy Land monastery Melania had

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[72] The Origenist and Pelagian controversies were but two which affected Melania the Elder and Melania the Younger (Clark 1989); the controversy surrounding the death of Paula's daughter Blesilla on account of her extreme asceticism is another (Jerome *Ep*. 39).
[73] *LM* Prologue.
[74] Naturally, in creating this extreme character of Melania the Younger, Gerontius exaggerated the extent of her asceticism. For instance, Melania's mother Albina had to beg her daughter not to fast on Easter, according to Gerontius (*LM* 25).

founded as well as her larger aristocratic social circle. Both groups profited from Gerontius' praise of Melania as a perfect ascetic.

Palladius, however, faced the task of describing asceticism in a way that was appealing to his patron Lausus' wide aristocratic circle. While Palladius himself had chosen the monastic life, his audience had a variety of experiences and expectations that circumscribed their levels of dedication to asceticism. His goal in writing the *Lausiac History* was to explain Christian asceticism to this audience and appeal for their support, not to alienate the wealthy.

The diversity of Palladius' subjects aided him in the creation of an image of asceticism which appealed to Lausus' aristocratic circle in Constantinople. In general, the aristocratic characters in the *Lausiac History* followed a high-minded and noble ideal of asceticism which inspired a complete transformation. Isidore was an example of such a character. He was a prominent priest who connected the desert world of Egyptian asceticism to the bustling Mediterranean cities; he served as the gateway to asceticism for both Melania the Elder, whom he introduced to the Nitrian monks after they met in Alexandria, and to the narrative of the *Lausiac History*, as his story opened the collection and acted as a link between the prologue to Palladius' patron Lausus and the biographies of Egyptian desert ascetics. Although he was "of exceptional wealth and abundance of property," he "wore no linen except a headband, nor did he engage in bathing, nor did he consume meat." Nevertheless, he was "known to all the Senate in Rome and to the wives of the most

powerful men."[75] Isidore, as a wealthy and well-connected man, was a familiar character to Palladius' aristocratic audience, yet his inspiring asceticism made him a fitting subject for a collection of biographies of monks. Both Isidore and his *protégée*, Melania the Elder, served as models of aristocratic asceticism which Palladius' wealthy audience could imitate. Palladius' portrayal of such aristocratic characters paid homage to the exceptionalism of aristocratic renunciation while also glorifying aristocrats generally for their capacity for inspired action.

Most of Palladius' *Lausiac History* focused on such stories of exceptional asceticism. At the same time, Palladius included in his verbal journey through the Egyptian desert stories which illustrated the diversity of individual devotion to asceticism and that many different types of ascetic practice were praiseworthy. Palladius gave an indication of how Christians of lesser means—or wealthy Christians with different interpretations of renunciation—interacted with asceticism. In order to appeal to his aristocratic audience, Palladius accepted a more nuanced view of asceticism which did not strictly condemn wealth, but instead praised the good that wealth could do while warning of the temptations it represented.

Palladius had precedents for his lenient view on property ownership. Many early Christians condoned wealth ownership, from the writer of the *Acts of the Apostles* (first century CE), who considered wealthy, influential Christians to be essential to the survival of his religion,[76] to Clement of Alexandria (ca. 200 CE), who

[75] *LH* 1.
[76] Friesen 2008, 26-35.

argued that wealth was beneficial to both its owner and the community. Clement interpreted the biblical passage concerning the rich young man as accepting of wealth:

> Let it teach the prosperous that they must not neglect their salvation as if they had already been condemned, nor, on the contrary, must they throw their wealth into the sea,[77] nor must they consider it threatening and inimical to life, but they must learn some way to use wealth and acquire life[78]

Clement of Alexandria argued that wealth, in and of itself, did not threaten spiritual wellbeing. Like Palladius in the introduction to the *Lausiac History*, he urged wealthy Christians to consider their use of wealth. Clement did not believe that renunciation was necessary for Christians:

> It is not what some rashly take it to be, that it demands [one] to renounce personal property and to abstain from wealth, but to expel opinions about wealth from the soul, and desire for it, and overwhelming passion, and terror and sickness over it, and worries, the thorns of existence, which choke the seed of life.[79]

For Clement and other moderate Christians, the threat of wealth lay in its ability to distract the owner from his salvation. Mere ownership of wealth was a blessing, especially if used to honor God and assist Christian communities.

Palladius espoused a similar view in a series of stories he included in the *Lausiac History*. Several times, Palladius told the stories of merchants who had turned away from their previously profitable lives to devote themselves to

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[77] Cf. *LM* 38
[78] Clement of Alexandria, *Quis dives salvetur*? 25
[79] Clement of Alexandria, *Quis dives salvetur?* 10

monasticism. For Palladius and his aristocratic audience, the character of the merchant was stereotypically connected to the acquisition of wealth. In other words, the life of a merchant was the opposite of that of an ascetic: while the assumed purpose of a merchant was the acquisition of wealth through material exchange, the ideal ascetic was concerned with thoroughly divesting himself of wealth and avoiding material comforts. Therefore, within the context of ascetic literature, the conversion of merchants most clearly articulated the change in attitude toward wealth which asceticism necessitated.

Yet in telling the stories of merchants, Palladius stressed the continuity between their previous lives and their ascetic practice. In doing so, he presented asceticism as a viable alternative to the acquisition of wealth which brought its own valuable, if non-material, benefits. For instance, Palladius wrote of a merchant, Apollonius, who wandered the Egyptian desert, giving his wares at no cost to the holy monks:

> A man named Apollonius, who had been involved in business, renounced [that life] and made his home on Mount Nitria. But he was able neither to learn a craft nor to act as a scribe because of his age…. From his own money and from his households' labors, he bought all kinds of drugs and cell furnishings in Alexandria, and he supplied all the brotherhood in their illnesses. And it was possible to see him at daybreak until the ninth hour making a circuit of the monasteries and going door-to-door to see who was sick in bed; he carried dried grapes, pomegranates, eggs and fine bread, the things of which weak people need. He lived this way until old age and he found this sort of life profitable. When he died he left his stores to one like him, exhorting him to continue this service. For, with 5000 monks inhabiting the mountain and on account of the remoteness of the place, these house calls were necessary.[80]

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[80] *LH* 13.

In this story, Palladius played with the expectations of his audience: because Apollonius was too old to learn a craft, he could have been a liability to the community. Instead, Apollonius' specialized knowledge of trade was a benefit to his monastic community. He alone had the expertise and connections to provide luxuries—otherwise willfully avoided by the monks—to brothers in need. Indeed, Apollonius' monastic career choice was so essential to the monastic community that he left his stock to a successor to carry on his work. Apollonius' history of involvement in the world made his charitable donations and actions particularly beneficial to the monks. Of course, Apollonius received benefits as well. Palladius' play on words emphasized the similarity between Apollonius' past and present life: he found "this sort of way of life profitable." Palladius used economic language to heighten the experience of spirituality. The profits which Apollonius reaped were not physical, but, for Palladius' Christian audience, they were far more attractive.

While the story of Apollonius showed that there was a place in monastic practice for even the activities of merchants, Palladius also emphasized that there were a variety of ways in which wealthy people could act ascetically. Palladius told the story of an argument between the brothers Paesius and Isaias, sons of a successful merchant "on the Spanish route," to indicate the validity of different approaches to ascetic practice. When their father died, Paesius and Isaias divided their inheritance, "consisting of in the real estate which he owned, 5000 pieces of

money, clothes, and slaves,"[81] and discussed whether they should continue his trade:

> If we follow the market which our father traversed, then we have to leave our labors to others; perhaps we might fall upon the dangers posed by robbers or the sea. Then let us follow the monastic life, so that we may gain profit from our father's goods and not lose our souls.[82]

According to Palladius, Paesius and Isaias reached that conclusion that monasticism was a more profitable career than trade. Indeed, he presented the brothers' decision as an explicit risk assessment: the property gained through trade could be lost, but the spiritual profits of monasticism were assured. The language even mirrored that of Apollonius' story: they wanted to make profitable use of their father's fortune. Palladius exploited the contrast between what merchants and wealthy investors—such as his audience—would perceive as profitable investment and the reality of spiritual profit. The brothers' words made the balance of amassed wealth and spiritual wellbeing apparent.

However, according to Palladius, the two brothers made different choices about their asceticism.

> The prospect of monastic life was pleasing to them. But they found that one differed from the other….For [Paesius] dispersed everything to monasteries and churches and prisons. He learned a trade to earn his bread and applied himself to asceticism and prayer. But [Isaias] dispersed nothing, but made a monastery for himself and gathered together a few brothers. He welcomed every stranger, every invalid,

[81] *LH* 14.
[82] *Ibid*.

> every old man, every poor person; he prepared three tables every Sunday and Saturday. In this way he spent the money.[83]

In telling this story, Palladius expected his audience to compare the two brothers: Isaias kept his wealth, but administered it to charitable ends, showing restraint and generosity. However, he did not choose poverty, as his brother Paesius did, or "apply himself to asceticism." Isaias' monasticism was characterized by personal charitable action and use of wealth rather than by personal renunciation and abstinence. Paesius' lifestyle more closely mimicked that of the other monks in Palladius' collection of biographies: he had no money and instead relied on manual labor for his daily needs. Unlike Isaias, he rid himself completely of wealth through charitable donation to monasteries, and, instead of relying upon his patrimony for support, he applied himself to contemplative manual labor. He embraced a life of personal spiritual development instead of administration of property. Isaias and Paesius therefore represented two possible attitudes toward wealth: charitable use and voluntary avoidance of wealth.

Palladius used this story to assure his audience that both types of asceticism—both complete disavowal of wealth and charitable administration of property—were acceptable. Although the monks of the Egyptian desert clamored about the relative merits of the two brothers, Pambo, a famous Egyptian ascetic who, according to legend, communicated personally with God, was certain that both men were equally worthy of salvation:

[83] *Ibid*.

> I assure each of you that [Paesius], if he had not been so great an ascetic, would not have been worthy to be compared with the goodness of the other; [Isaias], again, giving rest the stranger, was refreshed with him.[84]

Through this story, Palladius demonstrated to his audience that the wealthy need not give up all their property and live in poverty; instead, they could use their great wealth to benefit the poor and ill and gain the same spiritual profits.

The stories of merchants which Palladius included in the *Lausiac History* emphasized the different goals to which merchants and ascetic aspired: while merchants sought worldly wealth, ascetics strived for treasure in heaven. However, in such stories, Palladius also highlighted the similarity not only of lifestyle—Apollonius, for instance, still provided the services of a merchant without seeking financial gain—but also of the relationship between action and reward. Just like merchants, ascetics provided specific services—either to the poor, in the case of Isaias, or to God, in the case of Paesius—in order to gain profit. Although, for ascetics, the anticipated profit was heavenly, Palladius also did not dismiss wealth out of hand. Indeed, he suggested that investment in the form of charitable donation was necessary for ascetic action: Apollonius invested his own stock and his knowledge of trade in order to better serve his monastic community. For Palladius, then, the ascetic and the merchant operated under similar economic principles: both considered their initial investment of wealth or talent against the heavenly or earthly profit they might gain. In demonstrating the similarity between the life of a merchant and that of an ascetic, Palladius addressed the concerns of his aristocratic

[84] *Ibid.*

audience: through these stories he assured his readers that neither profitable action nor worldly wealth was, in itself, problematic. Instead, both provided the basis for successful asceticism when combined with a fundamental shift in attitude toward personal wealth.

Section 5
Coins in a Salt Basket: Melania the Younger's struggle with wealth

Palladius employed a variety of models in order to reassure his aristocratic audience that complete renunciation was not necessary to live according to ascetic Christian values; they had a variety of choices. Gerontius, on the other hand, appealed to the anxiety his aristocratic audience felt toward wealth by rationalizing Melania's extreme asceticism as an informed investment in heavenly returns. Throughout the *Life of Melania*, Gerontius used the language of sale, exchange, and investment to characterize Melania's transition to an ascetic life distinguished for its voluntary poverty. While Palladius used economic language to illustrate the varieties of ascetic practice available to his aristocratic audience, Gerontius used the language of exchange to describe Melania's charitable renunciations and to inspire his audience to adhere to the ascetic life.[85]

The idea that voluntary disavowal of wealth was an investment in spiritual returns was already present in biblical passages. For instance, after Jesus demanded that the rich young man give up his wealth and family to be a true follower of Christ, Peter asked what the benefit of such sacrifice would be. Jesus promised Peter pride

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[85] Ironically, such a justification of asceticism was only necessary because Gerontius' readers did, in fact, care about their worldly wealth. The call to renounce property was revolutionary.

of place in heaven: "Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first."[86] In Jesus' response to Peter, gaining the kingdom of heaven was a return on an investment of worldly suffering and denial. Jesus assured Peter and the other apostles that they would have power and glory in heaven, because they have given it up on earth. Based on such biblical rationales, for the Late Roman Chrisitan aristocracy, their inherited ability to give up great wealth meant that their heavenly gain would be great.

Following such biblical passages, Gerontius explained Melania the Younger's renunciation of wealth as an investment in her spiritual life. In using the language of financial exchange, and especially references to trade over the sea, both Gerontius and Palladius also drew on a long history of employing maritime metaphors to describe the risks and benefits of economic action. Late Antique Christian writers from Augustine to Jerome had further adopted metaphors of trade to explain theological or moral aspects of Christianity. [87] Maritime symbols, such as the anchor or the ship of Saints Peter and Paul, representing the Church, were already widespread.[88] However, ascetic authors also used economic metaphors in a more dramatic way: because they were actually talking about the use of wealth, the

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[86] Mt. 19:29-30.
[87] Mrozek 1984.
[88] Such imagery was often tied to the identity of the apostles as fishermen and the symbolic value such symbols therefore took on. On the anchor, see Kennedy 1975. Indeed, Melania and Pininaus' Caelian mansion received its identification thanks to a lamp found on site representing Peter and Paul in a ship, which was inscribed with the name Severus Valerius. See Spier 2007, 249, Sessa 2012, 57-58.

metaphor of investment in heavenly fortunes also served to make spiritual wellbeing into a concrete commodity which could be bought, traded, or sold. By using such language, these ascetic authors sold the "product" of asceticism by promising their aristocratic audiences a specifically defined return on their investment. Gerontius used the economic language of profit, investment, and exchange to sell asceticism to his ascetic audience.

Gerontius consistently employed economic language throughout the *Life of Melania*. For instance, to illustrate Melania and Pinianus' return to Jerusalem from Egypt, he wrote, "The holy ones returned to Jerusalem carrying a full cargo of piety."[89] This short metaphor effectively signaled the rationale behind asceticism: Melania was a merchant, buying up piety through her donations on her travels and bringing it back to share with her monastic family. Yet the metaphor implied the proverbial sale of piety, the exploitation of sanctity as a good exchanged for personal benefit. The commoditization of heaven seemed antithetical to spiritual devotion, but in fact such a description of return on investment made a tidy argument for the renunciation of wealth. By using such language Gerontius attempted to convince his audience that the spiritual benefits they purchased with their wealth were a bargain. According to Gerontius, renunciation was a good investment of aristocratic wealth.

Using economic metaphors, Gerontius carefully crafted a world in which Melania divested her wealth for her benefit. He drew on biblical models to present

[89] *LM*, 40.

asceticism as an investment in future heavenly wealth. Early in his narration of her life, Gerontius used the ubiquitous biblical passage about the rich man to explain her asceticism. The use of a metaphor of wealth to describe the kingdom of heaven set up asceticism as a financial transaction: charitable renunciation achieved through the liquidation of personal property resulted in the purchase of heaven's treasure. Gerontius' patron and his other aristocratic readers held social positions which demanded economic administration. They were familiar with the terminology of investment and would have understood such biblical metaphors in this context.

Coupled with a negative idea of worldly wealth which was central to Late Antique asceticism, Gerontius' use of economic language to explain renunciationwas an elaborate negotiation. On the one hand, he denigrated the worth of worldly possessions in relation to spiritual "goods." In Gerontius' economic thought, there was an inverse relationship between the two: the lessening of worldly wealth promised a greater heavenly reward, while acquisition of worldly wealth lessened spiritual returns. Yet Gerontius' economic language also suggested that the indirect relationship between the two was akin to a purchase, in which worldly wealth was exchanged for heavenly reward. Gerontius described Melania and Pinianus' sale of their estates using a biblical verse: "They expected to scatter upon the earth whatever secure treasure they believed they were gathering in heaven."[90] He suggested that his readers should see Melania's sale of her estates as a financial investment, saying "The holy ones went away with great happiness, as they had

[90] *LM* 14, cf. Mt. 6:19-20.

traded for a spiritual profit."[91] In this description of Melania's liquidation of her property, Gerontius described a real financial exchange—Melania's sale of her estates in return for money—using an economic metaphor describing Melania's action as an investment in heavenly reward.

Melania attained the kingdom of heaven through renunciation, which she achieved through her impressive charity. However, this model of asceticism had unsavory undertones. After all, the idea of the kingdom of heaven as something which could be purchased cheapened eternal life, making it available only to the rich and powerful and suggesting morality or good works could be quantified through the extent of renunciation. Gerontius tackled this problem in the *Life of Melania*. When the Devil, in her thoughts, tempted Melania with a vision of her luxurious estate, she responded by bragging that she was giving up wealth in favor of heaven. However, Melania imagined that the Devil taunted this calculation, teasing, "What is the kingdom of heaven like, that it can be bought with so much money?"[92] Melania did not at first know how to respond to these insecurities, but, after praying, she said, "With these perishable things can be bought that about which the holy scripture says, 'Eye cannot see nor ear hear nor the heart of man perceive what God has prepared for the people who love him.'"[93] Instead of refuting the Devil's temptation, Gerontius appealed to the word of God, which Melania recited in her thoughts, to sanction the idea of the purchase of the kingdom of heaven. In her mind, Melania was comforted in the promise of heavenly reward. The fact that this entire

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[91] *Ibid*.
[92] *LM* 17.
[93] *Ibid.*

exchange took place "in [Melania's] thoughts"[94] suggested that Gerontius anticipated discomfort with his model of spiritual exchange. Nevertheless, he reasserted its legitimacy again and again throughout the *Life of Melania*.

Once Gerontius established renunciation as a spiritual investment, Melania—along with Gerontius' wealthy audience—was in an ideal position to buy her way into heaven. The idea of charitable renunciation as an investment in spiritual reward gave special power to wealthy Christians. Yet would-be ascetics had to find an outlet for their charity in order to embrace voluntary poverty: it cost a great deal to purchase the kingdom of heaven. In this reversal of expected norms, ascetics strove to gain the most poverty, and money became a liability. Thus, Gerontius characterized Melania's gifts to the famous ascetics of Egypt as somewhat underhanded: "Although all of the many holy anchorites and devoted virgins did not want to take it, the holy one left gold in their cells through a faithful trick; she considered the relief of the holy ones to be so great a spiritual gain and substantial reward for her soul."[95] Although Gerontius called the hidden money a "relief" for the monks, his use of the term "faithful trick" suggested otherwise. After all, through her charity to these ascetics, Melania both lessened her personal wealth and added to theirs, resulting in net gain for her. Indeed, Gerontius suggested that Melania was aware of this gain, as she considered this "relief" to be a reward. In the paradigm of Christian asceticism, poverty was worth more than gold, and avid followers struggled not for wealth and comfort, but to make the greatest personal sacrifice.

[94] *Ibid*.
[95] *LM* 38.

Gerontius emphasized the struggle for poverty in a curious episode from Melania's visit to Egypt. When she met a holy man called Abba Hephaistion, she tried to offer him a donation, which he would not take. In the meantime, Melania

> walked around the cell of the saint, looking at his supplies, and found that he owned nothing on earth except a mat and a basket holding some dry biscuits and a little basket of salt. And sorely pricked[96] at the innumerable heavenly wealth of the holy man, she hid the gold in the salt.[97]

According to Gerontius, Melania tried to get away from the monk, "fearing lest she should be found a thief…for what she had done." However, the man followed her,

> holding out the money and screeching, "Why do I want this?" The holy Melania said to him, "so that you may give it to those in need." But he swore that it could neither be taken nor given, because it was not at all possible for any of those in need to come there through the desert place. Thus after a long argument, [she] could not persuade him to take the gold, and the holy man threw it into the river. [98]

The comical interaction between Melania and the monk underlined their mutual desire to rid themselves of wealth. Gerontius' terminology suggested that Melania was jealous at the monk's three possessions—his "innumerable, heavenly wealth." She recognized his greater success, and tried to foist her burden of wealth onto him; the episode took the form of a contest between the two. Indeed, Gerontius stated that the monk would consider Melania a thief because of her donation, a notion which completely inverted worldly ideas of wealth.

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[96] The term Gerontius used, πάνυ κατανυγεῖσα, is a biblical term with two related meanings: the most proximal to the word's derivation is that of being irritated; however, it can also mean confused or stupefied. Based on the context and the usage of the word in the *Acts of the Apostles*, I have chosen here the former meaning.
[97] *LM* 38.
[98] *Ibid*.

The episode also presented Melania as more concerned with her own renunciation than the charitable effects of her donations: although the monk neither wanted the money for himself nor had the ability to pass it on to those in need, Melania insisted on divesting herself. Palladius told a similar story about Melania the Younger in the *Lausiac History*: although she sent a large sum of money to a monk named Dorotheus of the Thebaid, he only took three coins and gave the rest to an anchorite named Diocles to distribute.[99] In both cases, Melania's charity failed, yet her renunciation had succeeded. However, as Abba Hephaistion had no one to whom to give the gold, the tense situation between the two ended only when the monk rid both parties of the gold by throwing it into the Nile. The exchange between the two ascetics emphasized Gerontius' argument that renunciation of wealth was in fact investment in the future. Melania and the monk fought to *not* possess physical wealth in order to prove their spiritual richness.

Near the end of her life, according to Gerontius, Melania complained about objections to her extreme renunciation:

> When they saw that I was eager to genuinely fulfill the word which the Lord said to the rich man, "If you wish to be perfect, sell your possessions, and give to the poor, and take up your cross and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me," they said to me, "It is not necessary to be poor and live as an ascetic on account of the Lord, but to be moderate." But I recognized that they were fighting in this world for rulers who would perish and how, in reaching for greater honors, they were at risk until their deaths. If, therefore, they wear themselves out so on account of the flower of the pasture—for this is worldly glory—how much more should I strive to achieve the greater honor in heaven.[100]

[99] *LH* 58. Compare this episode to the exchange between Pambo and Melania the Elder in *LH* 10.
[100] *LM* 62.

Melania's detractors argued that her renunciation was extreme, but, in his biography, Gerontius characterized moderate renunciation as an indication fo interest in worldly power. At the same time, however, he used the language of economic transactions to argue for the benefits of asceticism to his wealthy audience. Using biblical precedents, Gerontius suggested that renunciation of worldly goods was in fact the purchase of eternal salvation. In this light, Melania's impressive charity and asceticism was an attractive and rational investment: the treasure of heaven was far more valuable than even Melania's great fortune. The comical story of the struggle between Melania and the monk over gold reversed the expectations of Gerontius' aristocratic audience, colorfully expressing the value of renunciation and asceticism through a struggle to achieve supreme poverty. Gerontius' pervasive use of economic language formed a powerful argument in support of the utility and benefits of aristocratic renunciation.

Section 6
Conclusions

Gerontius and Palladius constructed their ascetic biographies in order to inspire their aristocratic audiences to the ascetic life. Both men were sensitive to the concerns of this privileged class, and understood that, in order to present asceticism as a viable option, they had to articulate the benefits—both heavenly and worldly—which their audiences could enjoy. Considering the economic context of their hagiographic works and the biblical precedence for interpreting wealth as a temptation and charitable renunciation as a sign of sanctity, the authors chose two

divergent attitudes toward asceticism to impart to their audience. Palladius assured his extremely wealthy patron that asceticism need not mean complete renunciation. Gerontius, on the other hand, sold complete renunciation to his audience by calling it a wise investment in eternal treasure.

The literature of Late Antiquity, including Christian biographies like the *Lausiac History* and the *Life of Melania* were written for aristocratic audiences. The ascetic movement, however, denigrated personal wealth. For Christians involved in the movement, wealth was a threat. Yet their goal was not to live like the many impoverished inhabitants of the Roman Empire; instead, they embraced the poor as a reliable recipient of the divestment of their wealth. Aristocratic ascetics relied upon the continued existence of the underclasses. Furthermore, the ideology which considered renunciation a sacrifice implicitly favored the wealthy and shut the poor out of the ascetic movement. In giving up their great wealth, aristocrats made a great sacrifice: their poverty was chosen and therefore meaningful. Rather than putting the wealthy and the poor on equal footing, the ascetic movement instead crystalized the fact that the wealthy were in a position of power.

Both Palladius and Gerontius understood that, while economic, social, and political success characterized their aristocratic audiences, the ascetic paradigm demanded they renegotiate their relationship to worldly success. Gerontius used the language of economic exchange throughout the *Life of Melania* to argue that renunciation of worldly goods resulted in guaranteed salvation and therefore was a good use of money. He nevertheless realized his tenuous position: by calling charity

an investment in spiritual health, the wealthy retained a favored position through their ability to dramatically renounce their possessions. Palladius, on the other hand, included stories of merchants and wealthy aristocrats who embraced a wide range of ascetic practice, suggesting that patterns of a profitable life were acceptable for ascetics as long as their goal was spiritual reward. In the story of the merchant brothers Isaias and Paesius, he made explicitly clear his argument that many types of asceticism were suitable to gain the kingdom of heaven.

Both Palladius and Gerontius assumed that their aristocratic audiences would find strict asceticism difficult to consume. Palladius, writing for a primarily non-monastic audience, chose to present a wide range of ascetic practice to illustrate the variety of levels of devotion available to concerned Christians. Gerontius, whose audience included his wealthy patron, the monks of his monastery, and Melania the Younger's larger aristocratic social circle, instead spoke in metaphors about the utility of undertaking the costs associated with asceticism in order to garner its many benefits. By providing models of renunciation and asceticism, these authors gave their aristocratic audiences an explicit investment strategy with guaranteed returns: instead of hoarding wealth on earth, they could renounce wealth and give it as charity in order to store up treasure in heaven. As Gerontius' narrative in particular suggested, this model of asceticism was especially germane to aristocratic women like Melania the Younger. Indeed, his characterization of Melania as a wise administrator of her property showed that asceticism gave women a sphere in which to control their wealth in a way which

benefited them. However, in order to gain such control of their wealth, aristocratic women had to adhere to another tenet of asceticism: disavowal of family ties.

Chapter 3

A Death in the Family:
Ascetic Identities and Female Agency

In their ascetic biographies, Palladius and Gerontius presented an argument to their aristocratic audiences that asceticism was a profitable investment of time and money. In doing so, they espoused a complicated and seemingly contradictory attitude toward wealth: by defining aristocratic ascetic virtue as the renunciation of wealth, authors of aristocratic hagiography inherently favored the very wealthy. The *Lausiac History* and the *Life of Melania the Younger* treated connections to the family with similar ambiguity. Just as Jesus asked the rich young man to give up not only his wealth, but also his family to be a perfect follower, ascetic Christians demanded the renunciation of family ties.[1] Yet, as was the case with wealth, in order for the renunciation of family to be meaningful, the convert to asceticism must have come from the type of family background which conferred social, political, and economic benefit; their renunciation was defined by their rejection of these benefits accorded to them as an aristocratic member of society. Furthermore, because property passed through families, the renunciation of family ties marked a clear disjuncture from wealth for aristocratic women. While the renunciation of wealth was available *only* to people with disposable income to renounce, the renunciation of the family was

[1] Mt. 19:26.

universally available. It bore specific meaning for the aristocracy, as giving up family ties represented a rupture in the fabric of the institutions which made the Roman aristocracy cohesive.

Indeed, wealth and family were closely intertwined for the Late Roman aristocracy of which Melania the Elder and Melania the Younger were members. The Roman institution of the *gens*, or biological family based on common descent and pedigree, guaranteed the integrity of familial wealth and estates through legal inheritance. Heirs were also ensured a certain social status and political standing due to their familial identity. The *gens* therefore functioned as an economic institution which ensured property rights. The close functional association between family and wealth among the Roman aristocracy was reflected in ascetic literature for aristocrats: for wealthy Romans, the renunciation of wealth necessitated a renegotiation of relationship to family.

The pressure to renegotiate family relationships fell most heavily upon ascetic women. Unlike aristocratic men, whose identity was based upon their social and political associations, aristocratic women were defined by their familial roles: their ability to join families through marriage and to ensure the continuation of the *gens*, and thus familial estates and the memory of living family members, through childbirth. For aristocratic women, therefore, renunciation of family was closely tied to sexual abstinence, most usually in the form of dedicated virginity. Furthermore, while the renunciation of familial obligations was part of the hagiographic narrative for both male and female ascetics, the impact of renunciation of the family was

greater for women: it represented a loss of identity. Authors of ascetic biographies, such as Gerontius and Palladius, imagined the renunciation of the family as a turning point in their aristocratic female subjects' lives as they gave up their identities as wives and mothers.

Ascetic authors argued that, by giving up these familial identities, aristocratic women were able to adopt new ascetic identities as virgins and as founders of monasteries. They presented these ascetic identities as attractive and empowering, allowing women the agency to create their own social networks and control their own wealth. Women benefited from this control over their identities and so, Palladius and Gerontius argued, asceticism was an attractive alternative to traditional familial roles. Asceticism gave women a *choice* of association and institutional identity which the traditional family structure did not. By renegotiating their place in the biological *gens*, Roman women who chose asceticism also chose a different social identity, one which was often defined in opposition to the concerns of their families.

Embedded in ascetic narratives about female renunciation were the expectations which aristocratic women faced from their *gens*: as wives, they united families, and as mothers they ensured the stable continuation of both the social and economic institution which the *gens* represented. In the *Life of Melania the Younger*, Gerontius emphasized Melania's familial obligations and the objections of her family to her ascetic practice in order to demonstrate her struggle for her beliefs (section 1). This struggle arose out of the importance which ascetic belief ascribed to female

virginity. Indeed, ascetic attitudes toward virginity were deeply tied to conceptions of the relationship between family, wealth, and power: because the aristocratic Roman family represented personal social and economic success, aristocratic asceticism demanded a disavowal of family. Female virginity was a sign of such a disavowal (section 2). However, Melania the Younger was not a virgin; she gave birth to two children who died young. In consideration with other stories of childbirth and the death of children from the *Life of Melania the Younger* and the *Lausiac History*, it is clear that Gerontius included the story of the death of Melania's children to signal the end of her involvement with her wealthy Roman family and the beginning of her ascetic life (section 4). Indeed, Melania, like many other aristocratic women, only fully undertook ascetic practice after fulfilling her familial obligation to get married and bear children; thus, stories of marriage and childbirth included in aristocratic ascetic literature allowed authors to appeal to aristocratic women, who had often experienced marriage and motherhood, but who were also important supporters and patrons of the ascetic program (section 5). To such women, Gerontius suggested that monastic communities were an alternative to the traditional Roman family. While such monastic communities acted as stores of social and economic status, they also offered wealthy Roman women more personal control (section 6).

Section 1
Living in a Material World: Familial expectations in the *Life of Melania the Younger*

Gerontius began Melania the Younger's biography by noting that she came from a wealthy senatorial family—the expected introduction to an aristocratic Roman woman, given the importance of family to the construction of female identity. However, Gerontius at the same time signaled Melania's exceptional character by setting her up in opposition to that family: "This blessed woman, Melania, happened to be from the first class of the Roman Senate, but, from a young age, she longed for Christ and, wounded by love for God, she longed for bodily chastity."[2] The struggle between Melania, who was dedicated to life as an ascetic virgin, and her senatorial family was a focus of the *Life of Melania*. Gerontius presented it as a turning point in the young woman's life, an experience which determined her dedication to asceticism. According to Gerontius, Melania's parents were concerned with the familial obligations standard for Roman senatorial families: the production of an heir for the inheritance of their wealth and continuation of the *gens*. For this reason, her family was eager for her to enter into an aristocratic marriage which would solidify their social and economic status and produce children to inherit their estates.

Melania's family,[3] and especially, according to Gerontius, Melania's father Publicola, was concerned that her asceticism would weaken the standing of the *gens*, the conceptualization of the line of descent, which aristocratic Romans often traced

[2] *VM* 1.
[3] For Melania's family, see preface.

back to a legendary progenitor in the distant Republican past, and which connected prominent families through complex webs of mutual social and economic relationships. Melania's father was a member of the *gens Valeria Maxima* through his father, Valerius Maximus, who had served as urban prefect from 361 to 363. Publicola's mother, Melania the Elder, was a member of the *gens Antonia*; she was the granddaughter of a consul. Melania the Younger's mother, Albina, also was a member of the *gens Ceionia Albina*, a family which had first risen to prominence in the second century CE, but which had produced several high officials in fourth-century Rome; Albina's father, Ceionius Rufius Albinus, served as urban prefect from 389 to 391.[4] The marriage of Publicola and Albina represented the merging of the social and economic value which these two great families had gained over centuries.

Romans had two ways to conceive of the family: the *gens* and the *domus*. The *domus* was a basic economic unit of production; it included the nuclear family of a husband, a wife, and their children, as well as their slaves and dependents, often referred to as the *familia*.[5] For wealthy Romans like the *gens Valeria Maxima*, a *domus* could be much more extensive, possibly including thousands of slaves on estates in many provinces, freedmen, clients and other dependents living throughout the Roman Empire.[6] The *paterfamilias*, or senior male family member,

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[4] *PLRE* Albinus 15 (37-38). For more information on Melania the Younger's family, see Clark 1984, 83-85, Gorce 1962, 20-36.
[5] See Dixon 1988, 13-15; Saller 1984, for *familia* and *domus*. For a discussion of the practical use of both *paterfamilias* and *materfamilias*, see Saller 1999, 196-197. Saller uses legal texts of the late republic and principate to establish the meanings of these words in both the legal sense and in sentiment. However, as Hillner 2003 has demonstrated, Saller's conceptions of the complicated meanings of words denoting relationships of kinship and personal power remained applicable in Late Antiquity. For an extensive consideration of the family in Late Antiquity, see Sessa 2012, 174-207.
[6] Cooper 2007a, 96-97.

held legal authority over the entire *domus*.[7] The *domus* was thus an agglomeration of social and economic connections, often mediated through contracts, which could be inherited through the *gens* of the *paterfamilias*.

In contrast to the non-kin *domus*, the *gens* was biological pedigree, and represented the history of a family and an individual's ancestors. For aristocratic Romans, the biological relationships which the *gens* represented were an essential aspect of public identity: membership in a *gens* conferred status and wealth through birthright.[8] The social and economic benefits of membership in a respected patrician *gens* associated with a large *domus* were particularly advantageous in Late Antique Rome: the claims to antiquity wielded by the traditional Roman aristocracy garnered exceptional social and economic benefit.[9] In fact, the long history of these families meant that their wealth, accumulated over centuries of privilege, often far outstripped that of their up-start rivals.[10] The *gens* was thus an institution which stored accumulated social and economic value from generation to generation. It promised lasting benefit from economic success through inheritance and the continuation of an individual's memory through the Roman institution of the ancestral cult.[11] And as a guarantor of the perpetual value of accumulated goods and

[7] Shaw 1987, 33; Saller 1999, 194-195. See also Cooper 2007b, 21-23, for a discussion of the private economy in the Roman *domus*. Saller 2012, especially 189-191, 196-197 presents the most comprehensive study of the economic impact of Roman women.
[8] Saller 1984, 349-355; Dixon 1992, 24-26.
[9] Barnish 1988.
[10] Jones 1964, 554-557. These benefits persisted despite the fact that Late Antique families of senatorial rank bore heavy curial obligations (Jones 1964, 543-545).
[11] Dixon 1992, 108-115; Hillner 2003, 137-138.

social status, then, the *gens* was essential to the social and economic stability of the Roman world.[12]

For the *gens* to function, members had to trust that the status which they worked to accrue during their lives would pass to another generation. For this reason, marriage and the production of legitimate heirs were essential aspects of the social function of the *gens*. Women provided the link between generations, and a guarantee that the *gens* would successfully continue. In this context, women like Melania were extremely valuable to their male family members as wives, who could unite *gentes*, and as mothers, who ensured the continuation of the *gens* for another generation.

In Late Antique Rome, marriage was a contract negotiated by her father and her husband-to-be. The payment of a dowry from the father's family to the husband, the transfer of a woman from the household of her father to that of the husband, and the eventual birth of legitimate heirs to both families represented the fulfillment of the contractual obligations. In this contract, then, an aristocratic woman acted as a bond between two families. Marriage brought a woman's father a political, social, or economic alliance which was beneficial to him and to his family in general; the woman's husband gained similar benefits through his connection to his wife's family.[13] Thus, in the case of Melania the Elder, her marriage to Valerius Maximus united the *gens Valeria Maxima* to her own *gens Antonia*. Marriage also expanded the social identity of a woman, who was now defined not only by her father but also

[12] Shaw 1987, 19-23.
[13] Hallett 1984, 109-110; Shaw 1987, 33-39 43-44; Barnish 1988, 148; Arjava 1998.

by her husband. Furthermore, as a wife in her husband's household, she became a *materfamilias*, in charge of the function and certain members of that household.[14]

However, because a woman's marriage was a decision of her family for the benefit of her father and *gens*, the success of her marriage depended upon the fulfillment of her contractual obligations, including the production of an heir. Indeed, many aristocratic Romans experienced more than one marriage during their life. The high rate of remarriage evident in late Republican and imperial sources was a result of both the death of a spouse and the practice of divorce among the upper classes. [15] Divorce allowed a renegotiation of political and social relationships between families. There is some contested evidence that the rate of multiple marriage fell in Late Antiquity, possibly because of the influence of Christianity.[16] Indeed, many Christian women, including Olympias, Paula, and Melania the Elder, refused to be remarried after the death of their spouse.[17]

While a woman's value as a wife lay in her ability to unite two families, her potential as a mother guaranteed the continuation of the *gentes* of her father and her husband. As an institution, the *gens* depended upon sexual reproduction; indeed, it was defined in trans-generational terms, relating present family members

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[14] Brown 1986, 428; Alberici and Harlow 2007, 203. For Saller, *materfamilias* was an epithet applied based not on family status, but instead on perceived good character (Saller 1999). A man always retained final power—*patria postestas*—but the title of *materfamilias* generally reflected actual authority.
[15] For divorce in Late Antiquity, see Cooper 2007, 158-160. Arjava 1996 177-189 covered divorce in Late Antiquity considering Constantinian legal restrictions; see also G. Clark 1999, 6-27. For a study of the rate and practice of divorce at the end of the Roman Republic, see Bradley 1991, 156-176. Bradley's conclusions concerning the impact of marriage practices on the definition of the Roman family are still relevant to Late Antiquity. See also Hallett 1984, 236-240.
[16] Barnish 1988, 145
[17] *HL* 56; Jerome, *Ep*. 108; *HL* 49.

to their ancestors. For the *gens Valeria*, Melania the Younger—who was perhaps an only child[18]—represented the combined social connections of three *gentes*: the *gens Valeria Maxima* of her paternal grandfather, the *gens Antonia* of her paternal grandmother, and the *gens Ceionia Albina* of her mother. She also inherited estates from each of these families, giving her a very large personal value.[19] A woman's ability to produce an heir was valuable to her family as it solidified the social ties her marriage represented and ensured the perpetuation of the economic and social success of the present generation through inheritance. The ability of a woman to bear an heir was essential to the success of the Roman *gens* as a store of wealth and institution for its transmission.

Indeed, the Roman *gens* could only function as an economic institution if an heir was produced. On the one hand, *gens*-based inheritance was a transmission of real wealth, of estates made up of land, slaves, and other means of production. The Roman preference for inheritance based on kinship helped to ensure the stability of the great estates which formed the backbone of the economy.[20] On the other hand, the *gens* also ensured the inheritance of social prestige between generations.[21] The combined social and economic inheritance of the Roman *gens* secured the ability of heirs to manage large estates through many generations. The *gens* was an economic

[18] For a discussion of Melania's possible siblings, see Clark 1984, 90-91; see also *VM* 12, *HL* 54. Throughout the *Life of Melania the Younger*, Gerontius implied that Melania was an only child, perhaps to emphasize her inheritance.
[19] For Melania's personal control of familial wealth, see *VM* 1, 4, 11-15. Roman law was generally favorable to the right of wives and daughters to inherit. See Arjava 1999 63-75.
[20] Saller 1992, 161-162. For the role of estates in the Late Antique Roman economy, see Banaji 2007, 101-189. Using papyrological evidence from Egypt, Banaji argued that the traditional aristocratic landowners slowly lost ground to a new landed aristocracy which was more involved in the management of estates. For a consideration of the fate of estates in Italy during the fifth (and sixth) century, see Barnish 1987.
[21] Hillner 2003, 130-131; 134-135.

institution: because estates could, theoretically, be owned by a single *gens* in perpetuity, the concept of the *gens* guaranteed the continued existence and steady administration of the great senatorial estates of the Roman world. The Roman economy thus depended on the production of heirs to inherit estates and stabilize the Roman social structure, which favored status conferred through birthright.

Because of the importance of aristocratic marriages in consolidating social and economic power and the production of heirs, the social and economic identities of aristocratic women depended upon their relationship to their families in the patriarchal world of ancient Rome. According to Roman law, women were under the control of their fathers or husbands.[22] The wealth of a woman generally remained tied to her father rather than her husband, and thus was only transferred to biological heirs.[23] However, when fathers died, women could and did inherit property.[24] Under certain circumstances, such as the death of a husband or the lack of a legal heir, women exercised sole legal control over their property;[25] however, most women had only limited control over the economics of their families, or even the property they themselves legally owned. Despite the importance of a woman for

[22] Dixon 1988, 26-27; Saller 1984, 338-339.

[23] Cooper 2007a, 112-113; Nathan 2000, 82-83. An exception was the dowry, which the woman's husband administered on her behalf, although it remained attached to the woman (Dixon 1985, 158-170; Barnish 1988, 146; Saller 1994, 221-223). For a discussion of Christian views of the role of a woman in marriage, see Clark 1995, 361-363.

[24] Saller 1992, 174-176. Arjava 1999 argued that women on average received 40% of an inheritance between a son and a daughter (70), as laws in place in Late Antiquity mandated a fair inheritance for daughters. According to the *Life of Macrina*, Macrina and her eight siblings all received an equal share of her family's wealth (*VMac* 20). If Melania were indeed an only child, she was likely the heir to the entirety of her family's estates.

[25] These rights were instated during the Augustan family legislations, which gave a woman the right to function outside of familial control after she had given birth to three children (Thomas 1992, 116-118). The right of female property ownership continued to expand throughout the Principate and Late Antiquity. In 320, Constantine removed the limitations on women's property rights based on childbirth, thereby allowing women without children—and particularly ascetic women—to administer their own patrimonies (Cooper 2007a, 38; Drijvers 1987, 251; Evans-Grubbs 2009, 207).

the social and economic function of an aristocratic family, she had limited social and economic leverage outside of the context of her male family members

The family, defined as the *gens* and *domus*, was the basic social and economic units of the Roman world. In a pre-industrial society which depended almost entirely on agriculture, the family, not the individual or a non-kin corporation, usually represented the unit of production.[26] Families also defined an individual in his or her public life: people were known through their kin relationships to others, and those relationships could determine the opportunities available to an individual. In these two key ways of production and identity, kin relationships based on household production were essential to the wellbeing of the Roman economy.

In a world where a family was both social and economic insurance, women played an essential but circumscribed role in keeping the social and economic world of the Late Antique Mediterranean stable. Female asceticism threatened the dominant economic and social role of family in the Roman world: ascetic women, like Melania the Younger, who did not want to be married and have children, threatened the wellbeing of their *gens*. Thus, in presenting Melania's family history, Gerontius also introduced a central struggle in Melania's ascetic conversion between Melania's dedication to God and her obligations to her family.

[26] Shaw 1987, 10-16; Scheidel 2004, 752-753.

Section 2
Only Let My Body Be Free: Marriage and virginity in Late Antique Christianity

Melania's parents, according to Gerontius, were concerned with the familial obligations standard for Roman senatorial families: the production of an heir for the inheritance of their wealth and continuation of the *gens*. For this reason, her family was eager for her to enter into an aristocratic marriage which would solidify their social and economic status. He wrote, "Her parents, because they were distinguished members of the Roman Senate and were hoping for a succession of the *gens* through her, with much force joined her in marriage to her holy husband Pinianus, who was from a consular family."[27] Pinianus was a member of the *gens Valeria Severa*, a branch of the *gens Valeria* to which Melania's father belonged. Pinianus' father, Valerius Severus, like Melania's two grandfathers, had served as urban prefect of Rome, and his *gens* traced their origins back to the same Publius Valerius Publicola who had helped to overthrow the kings of Rome at the foundation of the Republic.[28] This marriage therefore united two parts of a venerable patrician *gens*, resulting in a couple with strong social connections and productive estates throughout the empire.

For Gerontius, this forced marriage presented a conflict for Melania between her desire to live as a virgin ascetic and obligations to her family. Such conflicts were a familiar trope in hagiographic literature about Late Antique female ascetics: ascetic literature set up virginity and aristocratic marriages as two opposing

[27] *VM* 1.
[28] Clark 1984, 85.

constructions of aristocratic female identity.[29] While aristocratic families defined women as daughters of powerful *gentes*, wives of prominent men, and the mothers of heirs, ascetic virginity, according to hagiographic biographies, allowed women to gain social acceptance for their own actions and their choice to abstain from the worldly esteem which marriage and childbirth brought. To ascetic authors, such as Palladius and Gerontius, the institution of aristocratic marriage existed to regulate sexual reproduction and familial wealth, both of which were antithetical to ascetic practice. In contrast, they imagined virginity to be both a sign of the ascetic struggle of the virgin woman and a sign of God's favor toward her, as both she and the ascetic men around her resisted the temptations of wealth and family. Within Late Antique hagiography, virginity was a way for women to construct their own identities, independent of their families.

By the late fourth century, dedicated virginity had become an accepted practice in Christian ascetic circles, providing an avenue for women to attain identities outside of their aristocratic families. According to Athanasius, in his *Letter to Virgins*, in order to attain this identity, women had to dedicate themselves to virgin life through a public vow, putting virginity on equal ground to marriage. That is both states of life were publically attested and specifically defined.[30] On the other hand, women were not linked to men through virginity as they were through marriage and childbearing. Because virginity separated a woman from her familial

[29] McNamara 1976, 149-151; Yarbrough 1976, 155-157; See also Kazhdan 1990, 131-133; Talbot 1990, 119-120, 126-127; Salzman 2002, 151-155; Cooper 2009, 192-194 for a discussion of the antagonism between the Roman household and asceticism focusing on women. Even when the parents of a girl chose to dedicate her to perpetual virginity, the family might object, as was the case of Asella (Jerome, *Ep.*24.3).
[30] Brakke 1995, 24-25.

roles, it offered a real alternative identity for Late Antique aristocratic women. Praise of sexual continence within Christianity had its origin in Christianity's mix of Jewish and Greek philosophical thought. The Pauline letters taught that it was best to remain unmarried if possible, but that marriage was no sin.[31] However, he also wrote that Christians should not "gratify the desires of the flesh."[32] Although biblical texts did not demand or even suggest sexual abstinence, Late Antique interpretations of the Pauline and Pastoral epistles highlighted the ascetic tendencies of the texts and used biblical precedent to promote ascetic programs.

As Christianity grew in popularity, and as Christians struggled to understand the relationship between the divine and human aspects of their savior, they also strove to nurture the divine aspects of their present existence at the expense of their human bodies and desires. Indeed, fourth-century male authors, such as Jerome and John Chrysostom, reinterpreted Paul's call to virginity as a response to inherently sinful human nature. John Chrysostom asserted that women who had taken the public vow of virginity could never marry.[33] Athanasius was more lenient, stating that dedicated virgins could only marry if they realized that they were freely breaking their contract. He warned sternly against the interference of family members.[34] Athanasius' disapproval of family interference with female asceticism was a response to the same concerns Gerontius addressed in the *Life of Melania the Younger*: while Christian women might desire to live as virgin ascetics, their families

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[31] I Cor. 7 1-8; 25-31.
[32] Gal. 1: 16-17; In addition, see Cahill 2000, especially 456-457, for an interpretation of Paul's concepts of female virtue.
[33] Clark 1986, 233-235; Clark 1989, 29-31.
[34] Brakke 1995, 25.

had good reason to force them to marry and bear children in order to carry on the *gens*. Aware of this clash between the familial obligations of aristocratic Romans and the aristocratic ascetic movement, Jerome urged couples who had fulfilled their objective of procreating to abstain,[35] a concept which Melania the Younger would successfully implement in her own marriage. As Christian asceticism taught the limitation of bodily pleasures and sexual reproduction, virginity became a socially viable option for aristocratic Roman women. However, because of the value of heirs within the Late Roman family, a woman's desire for virginity often conflicted with the duty to marry and bear children imposed on her by her *gens*.

Christian literature consistently praised ascetic women who were able to completely control their sexual experiences—even if they had to do it miraculously. The near-rape of holy virgins was a trope in Late Antique literature. For instance, when the angry citizens of Seleucia[36] got some young men drunk so that they would rape Thecla, God opened a rock and Thecla hid inside, taunting her would-be rapists until they repented.[37] Such stories suggested that intact virginity was not only a sign of the self-control and dedication to asceticism of the female characters, but also a sign of God's favor. They created the illusion of female control over sexuality for women who were living in a world in which they had little or no control over their own bodies and reproduction. These stories also suggested that there was a deep physical and spiritual difference between women who were virgins and women who were not, and that loss of virginity was a complete change in identity for a woman—

[35] Drijvers 1987, 250.
[36] That is, Seleucia ad Calycadnum in Pamphylia, a popular cult site to Thecla in Late Antiquity.
[37] *Acti Pauli et Theclae*, 11, 1-13.

again, despite the fact that women rarely had control over the preservation of their virginity in a world where arranged marriages, rape, and slavery were common. An identification as a virgin therefore revealed not only a deep personal commitment in the face of temptation, but also the support of God.

Indeed, biographers often depicted female ascetics as being particularly concerned about virginity. For instance, Gerontius wrote that, after her own separation from her family and conversion to asceticism, Melania actually bribed others to remain virgins: "Melania desired self-control so much that she persuaded many young men and women to abstain from an unchecked and unholy way of life through both money and warnings."[38] In addition, Melania's consistent attempt to live a chaste life allowed Gerontius to articulate the conflict between her and her family as an attempt by Melania to control her body and enact her agency over her own life.[39] Gerontius suggested that Melania's desire for continence despite the commands of her family was a legitimate struggle to which she remained devoted, even after she had lost her own virginity. In doing so, he legitimized the conversion of women from lives as members of aristocratic families to ascetics, intimating that the temptations and conflicts they experienced during such conversions validated

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[38] *VM* 29. This passage is interesting because of the relationship between sex and money it suggested. Gerontius assumed that Melania's personal abstinence from sex was a sign of her personal disavowal of worldly comforts—most notably, in her case, family and wealth. Indeed, for aristocratic women, sex and wealth were closely connected: their reproductive ability represented the stability of both their families and their familial estates, thus melding sexual reproduction and wealth. However, because Melania represented the potential for the continuation of her *gens* through the production of an heir, her abstinence from sex allowed her to inherit her father's wealth without concern for the financial wellbeing of her own heir. Thus, by forgoing reproduction, Melania had more options for her use of familial wealth (including the use of wealth to prod other to abstinence!). Thus, Melania's use of money to ensure the continuing virginity of her retinue was, in a way, germane to Gerontius' message about the connection between sex and money, while nevertheless destabilizing his image of Melania's own abstinence as representative of her asceticism.

[39] For an overall discussion of Melania's conflict with her family, see Cooper 2005, 11-13.

their statuses as ascetics and resulted in a deeper devotion to the cause of virginity. However, this passage also suggested a complicated relationship between virginity and wealth: Melania was willing to use her familial wealth, which she renounced through charitable donations, in order to ensure that young women and men remained virgins. For Melania, then, virginity, even when it was purchased, was a greater sign of ascetic success than voluntary poverty.

Because it was a sign of ascetic success and divine favor, virginity, within the Christian context, was also social capital. Virginity garnered aristocratic women praise and status from influential men within their social group:

> Although both sexes vied in the contest for exaltation-by-humiliation, women who converted from the secular to the "angelic" life won especially extravagant praise. They were more honored as ascetics than they were as mothers, wives, and daughters of the senatorial aristocracy. Not only did bishops and monks throng to meet them; empresses, on their golden thrones, begged them to converse.[40]

Successful ascetic women gained personal recognition from a wide variety of sources; their identity neither depended upon their family, nor did it benefit solely male family members.[41] The paradigm of female virginity disadvantaged a great number of women who were unable to maintain their virginity because of their promiscuous past[42]—although conversion from prostitution to abstinence was a hagiographic trope, such women were never identified as virgins. Women who had

[40] Clark 1986, 175.
[41] Indeed, Christianity was seen as a threat to the family, not only because of the breaking of lateral and procreative bonds through virginity, but also because of the potentially elevated place of women and the implicit reduction in male power. See MacDonald 2003, 157-172; 183-184.
[42] Clark 1995, 358; Elm 1991, 112. For a thorough discussion of the rhetoric of feminine influence, see Cooper 1992. For conversion from promiscuity, see Kazhdan 1990, 135-137.

fulfilled their familial obligations were likewise unable to achieve such a status. However, virginity did offer women a specific and attractive social identification in opposition to that generally available to them within the context of the Roman family.

Hagiographic narratives, such as the *Life of Melania the Younger*, therefore focused on women's desire for virginity, especially as constructed in contrast to aristocratic marriage. Gerontius presented virginity as appealing to Melania, although she could not pursue it because of pressure from her family to marry and have children. Because he wrote about a woman for an audience which included women, he imagined virginity as an attractive alternative to being defined by the family. However, ascetic authors also considered female virginity to be advantageous to men: it allowed men to avoid the temptation of sex, and to indicate their own lack of desire for wealth and family.

According to male authors, female virginity was valuable because it removed a threat of temptation or moral failing for ascetic men.[43] In hagiographic literature, women bore the brunt of blame for sexual sins because of their inherent appeal, which made them a constant threat to the ascetic men around them.[44] In a story from the *Lausiac History*, Palladius praised a woman as an ideal ascetic because she had lived her entire life locked alone in a tomb and seeing no one in order to keep from inadvertently tempting men with her attractive looks.[45] Likewise, in the *Life of*

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[43] Of course, close relationships between male and female ascetics could also raise suspicion; see Cain 2009, 110-124.
[44] Kazhdan 1990, 139-142.
[45] *HL* 5.

Anthony, the first temptation which the Devil presented to Anthony was the form of a naked woman.[46] Thus, while ascetic literature suggested that the choice to remain a virgin was difficult for women because of their familial obligations, for men, the desire for sex was the most prominent temptation to overcome. For ascetic women, their own sexuality was a threat to their eternal lives and the salvation of the men around them. The burden of continence fell heavily upon women, yet women could gain great praise for their dedication in keeping themselves—and the men around them—pure.

The conception that, by choosing virginity, female ascetics prevented the temptation of ascetic men exemplified an idea common in Late Antique hagiography: that female virginity benefited everyone. Thus, authors also urged men to preserve the virginity of their female family members as an indication of their own Christian belief.[47] In doing so, they suggested, men and their families would gain social benefits from the virginity of their female family members:

> Married, a daughter stood for a family's compromise with the dynastic needs of other families, its concession to them of heirs. Unmarried, the virgin stood as a symbol of all that was uncompromised and unmixed in affiliation, and thus by extension of all that was true.[48]

The dedication of a female family member could act as an advertisement of the values of male family members. For instance, when the famous ascetic Anthony dedicated his younger sister to perpetual virginity, he showed his withdrawal of the

[46] See, for instance, *VA* 5.
[47] Katz 2002, 115-118. For a general discussion of male control over women for male benefit, see Cooper 1999, 1-19; Burrus 1987, 2.
[48] Cooper 1999, 76.

world of political involvement. Although Anthony's dedication of his sister indicated his control over her first and foremost, it also signaled that Anthony was not willing to use her for his own political gain by contracting an aristocratic marriage for her.[49] The virginity of women thus was a statement not only of their personal chastity, but also of the family's Christian identity and unconcern with political affiliations.[50] Furthermore, Anthony's dedication of his sister to virginity represented his complete rejection of the world: he gave up both his family and his familial wealth.

Likewise, Palladius often emphasized the connection between giving up familial ties and giving up wealth. Palladius opened his collection of biographies by telling the story of Isidore, a prominent ascetic who greeted both Melania the Elder and Palladius upon their arrival to Egypt. He had been a member of a wealthy family, but had given up all his possessions. Moreover, he had distanced himself from his sisters by dedicating them to perpetual virginity. He refused to provide them with money, which they could have used for a dowry, and instead stated that he was saving them by taking away the temptations of wealth and family.[51] Isidore's story clearly mirrored that of Anthony, but it more clearly underlined the connection between familial wealth and female sexuality through his denial of support for them. Because it represented a disavowal of the family, female virginity also undermined the basic social and economic unit of the Roman world. Thus, male ascetics often renounced their familial wealth at the same time as they dedicated

[49] *VA* 3.
[50] Clark 1986, 178-179.
[51] *HL* 1.

their sisters to asceticism, as both actions demonstrated their rejection of the Roman family in favor of ascetic pursuits.

The connection between wealth and female fertility was at the heart of Melania's family's concerns: her parents desired an heir to inherit their wealth and social status, and therefore it was necessary that she be married to her aristocratic husband and have children. According to Gerontius, Melania recognized that her desire to maintain her virginity was contrary to her familial obligation to bear a child to inherit her wealth.[52] Melania therefore attempted to avoid her familial obligations by divesting herself of her wealth. She bargained with Pinianus, saying "All my possessions lie before you; from now on you are master of them to use as you wish. Only let my body be free, so that I may set it, untarnished, next to my soul before Christ on that fearful day."[53] However, Pinianus recognized the social importance of senatorial reproduction and the value of his marriage to Melania for both their families. He therefore refused Melania's offer. Within the context of the *gens Valeria*, to which Melania and Pinianus both belonged, Melania's familial wealth was worth nothing without an heir. By offering to transfer her wealth to Pinianus, Melania hoped she would be able to avoid the obligation to reproduce.

Sexual continence, and especially female virginity, was a defining feature of Late Antique Christian asceticism. On the one hand, it offered women an alternative to their traditional roles as wives and mothers.[54] Male ascetic authors often

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[52] For a discussion of the threats which aristocratic female asceticism posed to the Roman family structure, see Clark 1986, 177; Clark 1995, 373-375.
[53] *VM* 1.
[54] Burrus 1987, 2.

suggested that the public identity of a dedicated virgin was a sign of her personal devotion and dedication to asceticism, reflecting her own agency. On the other hand, a public identity as a virgin also circumscribed a woman's actions and defined her based on one aspect of asceticism that was often outside of the control of an individual woman. Male family members often controlled both a family member's dedication to virginity, just as they could demand a woman fulfill her familial obligations by marrying and bearing children. Because female virginity disrupted the traditional family structure of the Roman world, both the parents of ascetically-minded daughters and hagiographers faced a conflict between familial obligations and dedication to virginity.

Section 3
Take Away the Fruit of My Sin: Family as a temptation for female ascetics

Although Melania tried to retain her virginity after her marriage, her new husband, Pinianus, objected on account not of lust, but of commitment to his family: he understood that their parents expected them to produce heirs to inherit the familial wealth. Pinianus proposed a compromise: if Melania agreed to have two children "as successors to our possessions, then together we will both renounce the world"[55] and live a life of asceticism and continence afterward. Although Melania agreed to Pinianus' proposition, the way in which Gerontius narrated the story emphasized the opposition between Melania's ascetic desires and her actions, which were the result of familial expectations to appease his aristocratic audience. While

[55] *VM* 1.

Gerontius was careful to validate familial concerns, he heightened the conflict between Melania and her family by focusing on her attitude toward her children.

In Gerontius' narrative, Melania continued to vocally yearn for an ascetic life even after gave birth to her first child, a daughter. Gerontius used Melania's daughter to emphasize Melania's dedication to virginity. Melania and Pinianus' agreement had rested upon the importance of producing heirs capable of perpetuating the *gens*, yet, according to Gerontius, the couple dedicated this daughter to perpetual virginity, thus effectively excluding her as a potential heir.[56] The internal contradiction in this episode suggested that Gerontius added the dedication of this daughter to virginity to embellish the Melania's story. Melania's daughter died very young.[57] Although Melania's circumstances made it impossible for her to live her desired life of virginity, the dedication of her daughter to virginity represented Melania's devotion to asceticism.

As if to highlight Melania's desire for continence, Gerontius emphasized that, even after the birth of her daughter, she continued to pressure Pinianus to give up sex. Indeed, the birth of a child, a physical manifestation of her lack of virginity, seemed to drive Melania to even greater renunciation of material luxury. She refused to undress at the baths on account of her modesty and wore a hair shirt under her clothes.[58] Both of these practices emphasized Melania's denial of bodily comfort, demonstrating the repudiation of her sexuality. However, she finally did

[56] *Ibid*.
[57] *VM* 6. See Clark 1984, 85. Melania was married when she was 14 and began her renunciations at age 20, so the child could not have been more than 5, and very likely even younger.
[58] *VM* 4.

acquiesce to Pinianus' request that they have a second child, realizing that the spiritual value in converting her husband outweighed her distaste for the desires of her family.[59]

Melania was heavily pregnant with her second child at the time of the feast of Saint Lawrence, a patron saint of Rome who was purportedly martyred for giving his wealth to the poor and the church rather than the imperial government.[60] Despite her pregnancy, she spent the entire night kneeling in her chapel in veneration, crying, and praying that she might "be freed from the world and live the rest of her life in a solitary state."[61] According to Gerontius, God heard her prayer. Straightaway, Melania went into labor prematurely and gave birth to a baby boy. The child died immediately, just after he had been baptized. Melania interpreted his death as a sign from God that she could now live in continence with Pinianus and lead an ascetic life.[62] Indeed, Gerontius wrote that Melania and Pinianus both embraced the asceticism after the death of their child, and that Melania used his death as justification for dressing less extravagantly in public.[63]

In the story of Melania the Younger, the death of her son freed Melania from her worldly concerns. While alive, Melania's children represented a loss of virginity.

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[59] Cooper 1992, especially 162-164.
[60] Saint Lawrence was a popular soldier-saint and martyr, particularly associated with the city of Rome (see Grig 2004). However, the story that his martyrdom was the result of his charitable support of the poor made him a particularly appealing saint to Late Antique ascetics, who imagined their charity as a sign of their ascetic martyrdom to worldly luxuries.
[61] *VM* 4-5.
[62] Cf *HL* 61, "For if God had wanted us to have children, he would not have taken the ones I bore from me so early."
[63] *VM* 6. See Evans-Grubbs 2009, 205. It is important to note that Palladius presented a different version of Melania's asceticism, stating that her frustration with her marriage after the death of her two children caused her to renounce the world and threaten to leave Pinianus (*HL* 61).

In particular, the male child represented an heir to Melania and Pinianus' families, and an agent to carry on the legacy and memory of their *gens*. For Melania in particular, her son represented a hindrance to ascetic desires and a living memory of her worldly, sexual life. Gerontius used the short lives of Melania's two children—a potential liability to the story of strict asceticism he wished to tell—by setting them up as the alternative. As a member of the *gens Valeria*, Melania was expected to live the life of a Roman matron—a life of luxury and ease. In this paradigm, her two children would have brought her praise and honor. By discussing Melania's children, Gerontius demonstrated Melania's proximity to this life, heightening her feeling of temptation for, as he called it, "worldly glory."[64] In a way, then, the death of Melania's children represented her devotion to asceticism.

The death of Melania's son marked the end of her connections to her family. By that time, Melania had also convinced her husband and her family that her demands should be honored. While other ascetics' struggles with sexual temptation or the demons of the desert represented their separation from Roman society, Melania struggled against the apparatus of Roman political, social and economic life which the *gens* represented. Gerontius used the death of her children to indicate that Melania had overcome traditional definitions of femininity and the family to embrace new Christian conceptions.

Although such a reaction to a child's death was conflicted, including both the sadness of loss and the joy of a new ascetic life, such interpretations of personal loss

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[64] *VM* 3.

were acceptable in the context of a society in which infant death was common and which viewed God as very active in individual lives.[65] For instance, in the *Lausiac History*, Palladius told the story of a woman who had been a devoted ascetic for a decade and was a virgin. However, she slipped in her resolve, became pregnant, and bore a child.[66] She came to regret her relationship and the loss of her virginity, and she resented her child. Children were a physical sign of the loss of virginity—after all, children and virginity were, with one notable exception, mutually exclusive. She even tried to starve herself because of her shame. Distraught, she prayed,

> O great God, who bears the evil deeds of all creation, who does not seek the death or destruction of those who stumble, if you want me to be saved, show me your miraculous works in this, take away the fruit of my sin, to whom I have given birth, so that I do not hang myself or throw myself off a cliff.[67]

Just as was the case of Melania the Younger, God answered the woman's prayer: the child died, and the woman lived. Freed from her worldly concerns, the woman devoted herself even more eagerly to good works. Palladius concluded her story by stating, "I am writing this so that we do not look down upon those who genuinely repent."[68] Palladius' point in this story was not simply that the woman was a great ascetic, but instead that she was a great ascetic *in spite of* her sexual indiscretion. In

[65] Dixon 1988, 23-25; Evans-Grubbs 2009, 208-209. For an archaeological interpretation of infant burial practices, see Carroll 2012, 50-51.
[66] Cf *HL* 23. See also Schroeder 2012.
[67] *HL* 69.
[68] *Ibid*.

ascetic literature, pregnancy and childbearing were often signs of deep and abiding moral failing.[69]

Palladius clarified connection between sin and childbirth in a story about an unmarried woman who became pregnant. This story immediately followed the story of the ascetic who had borne a child and covered the same themes, suggesting that the two stories should be read together. The pregnant woman falsely accused a local cleric of being the father. The cleric prayed to be exonerated, and God granted his prayer. The girl went into labor, but could not bear the child. After spending three days "in hell," the girl confessed that she had falsely accused the priest. Immediately thereafter, she gave birth.[70] The close connection between the birth of the child and the admission of the girl's lie highlighted the very physical nature of the woman's sin. However, in this case, the birth of the child was brought about by the mother's admission of guilt, suggesting that confession had freed the mother of her sin, and thus the pains of childbirth. Thus, in this story, unlike the story of the ascetic, sin was manifest in the physicality of giving birth, which was prolonged by the mother's failure to admit her sin.

For Gerontius, the death of a child was less closely tied to the sin of procreation. Indeed, the *Life of Melania* included an episode in which Melania miraculously delivered a woman's stillborn child in the presence of a number of her ascetic sisters.[71] In the Latin version of the biography, Melania arrived while a

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[69] Burrus 1991, 245-246.
[70] *HL* 70.
[71] Melania did so by placing a belt upon the woman. The belt, according to Gerontius, had belonged to a famous male ascetic which Melania had known. Thus, while the type of miracle Melania

doctor was removing parts of the dead fetus. Melania rebuked her sisters for being disgusted and, despite the horrible scene, denied that such pain was the result of sin, instead noting the common origin of all humans from reproduction and childbirth.[72] In both the Greek and the Latin version of the *Life of Melania the Younger*, however, Melania also said to her sisters as they set out, "Let us go and visit the woman who is in danger, so that we might see the pains of the people who dwell in the world and know how much suffering God has spared us."[73] Although Gerontius did not connect the death of children and the sin of reproduction closely in the *Life of Melania the Younger*, as Palladius had in his work, he nevertheless suggested that Melania, who herself had undergone the pain of childbirth against her will, saw childbirth as a sign of the dangerous of living in the world.

Despite the different attitudes toward the death of children displayed in the *Life of Melania the Younger* and the *Lausiac History*, the connection between the will of God, the death of a child, and dedication to asceticism of Melania's story were common with Palladius' story of the ascetic who gave birth. It was also a common

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performed—the safe delivery of a woman from a dangerous childbirth—was fitting for a female ascetic, Gerontius nevertheless suggested that the power to heal was not Melania's, but an unnamed male saint's. It is noteworthy that the other miracle which Gerontius ascribed to Melania was the healing of a woman who, because of demonic possession, could not eat. Although, again, the subject of Melania's miracle was a woman, Melania healed her through the power of the martyrs. (*VM* 60-61; See Clark 1984, 146-147).

[72] Latin version, *VM* 61.Clark saw Melania's speech as a sign of Gerontius' desire to prove that Augustinian Christianity did not teach that sexual intercourse was inherently sinful, as the Pelagians, who believed humans were capable of overcoming original sin without the grace of God, had charged. Given the context of the biography and the fact that the speech was omitted in the Greek version, it was a weak rebuttal (1984, 147-148).

[73] *VM* 61. Cf. John Chyrostom, *De Virginitate*, 66-72, in which Chrysostom recommends virginity over the life of a married woman because of the stress of fertility and childbirth.

motif in stories of aristocratic asceticism,[74] as aristocratic Christians often faced similar familial pressures: one of Melania's aristocratic friends, Paulinus of Nola, and his wife also viewed the death of their infant child as a sign that they should become ascetics, although they turned to asceticism out of great sadness.[75] However, the death of the ascetic's child in Palladius' story also illustrated the connection between sexual temptation and involvement in the material world at the expense of spiritual wellbeing.

These attitudes toward the death of children and female virginity evident in these stories were deeply tied to anxiety about wealth and familial obligations. Another story from Palladius' *Lausiac History* hinted at the way in which concern and affection for family members could affect ascetic action. Palladius wrote of a wealthy woman who dedicated herself to virginity, but still retained her personal wealth, despite the objections of her male counterparts.

> She happened to have family from which she adopted her sister's daughter, to whom, night and day, she promised her possessions, as she had fallen from her heavenly desire. For this is a form of the Devil's deceit, causing us to labor in greed under pretext of love of family.[76]

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[74] Of course, many ascetic women had living children; Melania's grandmother, Melania the Elder, is a case in point. When she devoted herself to asceticism after the death of her husband, she left behind a young son in Rome under the guardianship of friends. However, the impact was different on the family. In the case of Melania the Elder the fact that she had already had children—and still had a surviving son—mitigated the blow to the family (*HL* 54). Furthermore, the *Life of Melania* partially rehabilitated the traditional female nature of Melania the Younger: later in her life, she saved a woman who was suffering from an infection caused by a miscarriage (Latin *VM* 60). In this way, Melania joined the ranks of childless ascetic saints who protected the fertility of women (Clark 1986, 79).

[75] Trout 1999, 84-85. See also Clark 1995, 356-357.

[76] *HL* 6.

According to Palladius, the needs of the virgin's adopted daughter were simply a pretense for the virgin to retain her riches, yet his language about love for family underscored the connection between this love of wealth and involvement in family affairs. A male companion eventually fooled the woman into giving up her riches to support a hospital. Palladius pointed out that was all for the best, as "the girl for whom she was providing for died childless after her marriage."[77] The death of the girl was a powerful sign of triumph over familial concerns. In this story, the virgin lost her family when she gave up her wealth, suggesting a close connection between the two. Indeed, even the biblical passage so often cited as the genesis of Christian asceticism, the story of Jesus and the rich young man, includes an injunction to give up not only all possessions, but also family ties, in order to be Christian.[78] Because childbirth was closely tied to the transmission of worldly wealth and status, virginity, as a disavowal of the family, was also a sign of disinterest in money and status.

Palladius suggested that the struggle between familial obligations and asceticism was particularly difficult for women not because of the specific societal expectations they faced to marry and bear children, but because of their inherent attraction to family relationships. For instance, an Egyptian ascetic Pior, like Isidore and Anthony, dedicated his sister to virginity when he became an ascetic. At the same time, as part of his ascetic devotion, he swore never to see any family member again. However, when she had reached old age his sister desired to see him one last

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[77] *Ibid*.
[78] Mt. 19: 26.

time. Pior finally begrudgingly acquiesced to her demands to meet—but kept his eyes closed for their entire meeting in order to adhere to his ascetic promises. Thus, despite an equally long life of ascetic devotion, Pior's sister's asceticism appeared trivial simply because of her desire to see her brother.[79] Just as male ascetic authors presented female virginity as an ascetic struggle, they imagined a choice between familial obligations and ascetic devotion to God as a struggle which was particular to female ascetics. Thus, in elaborating the conflict between a female ascetic and her familial obligations, hagiographers imagined the suffering and temptation of female ascetics as defined by their family identity—their relationship to the world.

Section 4
A Second Life: Matrons as ascetics

Because of concern for the *gens*, the struggle between familial obligations and ascetic life was particularly acute for aristocratic women. Indeed, aristocratic female ascetics were often women who had been married and even borne children: Melania the Elder, Melania the Younger, and Paula all fit into this category. Yet these women were an important part of the ascetic movement in the fourth and fifth centuries; indeed, their actions defined aristocratic asceticism in Rome, Constantinople, and the Holy Land. Thus, ascetic authors were interested not only in telling the stories of these women, who were often their friends or patronesses, but also in integrating their experiences into a construction of female asceticism which prized virginity. Ascetic authors faced a tension posed by virginity: although virginity was the female ascetic ideal, the women who made up their wealthy

[79] *HL* 39.

audiences could easily feel shut out of the ascetic project through an insistence on virginity as the defining characteristic of female asceticism.[80]

In the introduction to the work, Palladius stated outright that he intended to tell the stories of both men and women.[81] For Palladius, who collected the lives of many ascetics, the experiences of women added depth to his narrative: the sorts of struggles between familial obligations and ascetic desires which aristocratic women experienced were a unique part of Late Antique asceticism. Such struggles indicated that ascetic devotion was not simply a denial of worldly concerns, but instead represented a reorientation of personal values and a redefinition of the family. Aristocratic asceticism thus offered an alternative to the Roman family not only because it provided a source of social identity, but also because monasteries, as social and economic institutions, acted as a spiritual replacement for the Roman family, free from the obligations to marry and bear children which aristocratic ascetic women faced.

Although the first woman Palladius mentioned was a stereotypically heroic slave who died protecting her virginity,[82] the character of Palladius' friend Melania the Elder dominated the *Lausiac History*. Unlike the slave, Melania the Elder had not only been married before she became an ascetic, she had also borne four children, one of whom was still living when she dedicated herself to asceticism. Thus, while ascetic authors unashamedly praised virgin women, they also celebrated another

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[80] For a comparative argument of the impact of female audience members on the characterization of women in saints' lives, see Rapp 1996.
[81] *HL* prologue.
[82] *HL* 3.

group of women: wealthy Roman aristocratic matrons. Women such as Jerome's friend and financier Paula and John Chrysostom's Constantinopolitan partisan Olympias were powerful and wealthy aristocrats upon whose example an entire model of asceticism, wealthy female communities in urban settings, was built. Others, including Melania the Elder and Melania the Younger, spearheaded the construction of prominent monasteries in the Holy Land, thus establishing the desert as a place of display of wealth for the entire Roman Empire to see. Ascetic authors benefitted from validating their experiences and creating a space for them within the monastic construction of female sexuality. In particular, these women had the wealth and influence to garner support for the ascetic projects which authors promoted—and often served as patrons to the authors themselves.

These ascetic non-virgins were formidable characters. Because of their family connections, these women had powerful friends and supporters, both male and female. Furthermore, unlike dedicated virgins, Roman matrons who converted to a life of ascetic chastity made the decision as adult women and were more likely to have done so by their own volition.[83] They dedicated themselves to chastity after their families had contracted dynastic marriages for them, and the stories of their own choices to live ascetic lives showed an exceptional amount of personal agency. Under Roman law, such women enjoyed the benefits of marriage, including the financial stability of their husband's wealth as well as the extended social circle

[83] A woman in the Roman world was unlikely to be a 40-year-old virgin had the decision not been made for her in her youth. After all, with a very young age of marriage, and with marriage being determined by family, it is unlikely that a girl would be able to make the choice to remain a virgin *for life* and to convince her family to honor her wishes before they had contracted a marriage for her. Alberici and Harlow 2007, 198-199.

created by their union. At the same time, they garnered praise from devout Christians for their piety. Furthermore, even if they outwardly professed a desire to overcome worldly strictures of wealth, these women did not divorce themselves from their social status. The aristocratic lives of these women allowed their biographers to emphasize their miraculous devotion to asceticism; however, their aristocratic lives also allowed them the leisure to become involved in ascetic pursuits as well as the social connections necessary to form successful monastic communities.

Indeed, there were many aristocratic women who were exploring new ways to be both a Roman matron and a Christian woman as a result of the changing cultural and social dynamics of the Late Roman Empire. Christians also recognized and took advantage of the value of the fertility of female family members, while still considering the tenets of Christian asceticism. For instance, Jerome's companion Paula was a Roman woman of senatorial rank. Early in her life, she was married to Toxotius, a nobleman, with whom she had five children.[84] Although one of these, a daughter named Eustochium, was a dedicated virgin, two other daughters, Paulina and Blesilla, were married off to Roman noblemen in accordance with aristocratic practice.[85] At the same time, the Christian values of the family also informed these marriages: Paulina was married to one of Jerome's friends, Pammachius, who himself became an ascetic after Paulina's early death.[86] Likewise, Blesilla dedicated

[84] *HL* 61; Cain 2009, 36-37.
[85] Cain 2009, 74-75.
[86] Jerome, *Ep*. 66.

herself to strict asceticism after the early death of her husband.[87] Even for the most religious families, the marriage of daughters remained a valuable tool for forging aristocratic connections.

However, as Blesilla's story indicated, remarriage after the death of a spouse or divorce may have been less acceptable to Christians than it had been in the high imperial period. Certainly, some Christian teachings suggested that divorce and remarriage for political reasons was inappropriate.[88] Nevertheless, evidence for an appreciable drop in divorces or remarriages in Late Antiquity is shaky at best.[89] Indeed, another female patron of Jerome, Fabiola, divorced her first husband and was on her second marriage when Jerome visited Rome.[90] Although Christianity did have an impact on the Roman family, these changes were not absolute. Christians benefited from family ties just as pagans, and Christianity was in no way adverse to traditional families, nor to the exploitation of women and the domination of their individuality for the good of the family.

Particularly among aristocratic women, devotion after the death of a spouse was another way by which people who had been married became ascetics. Because of the age differential in Roman marriage, which favored the marriage of younger women to older men, many women found themselves widows at a young age.[91] The tenets of Christianity provided justification for widows who chose not to remarry.

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[87] Cain 2009, 74.
[88] See, for instance, Augustine *De bono viduitatis*; Clark 1986, 41-42; Clark 1989; Clark 2008; Nathan 2000, 107-110.
[89] Arjava 1996, 177-189.
[90] Jerome, *Ep*. 77.
[91] Shaw 1987, 33-38.

Indeed, this became more common among upper class women during Late Antiquity, who often felt they had dispelled their obligations to their families through their first marriages, especially if they produced children. For instance, despite her heritage as a member of both the *gens Valeria Maxima* and the *gens Antonia*. Melania the Elder did not remarry after the death of her husband, but instead dedicated herself to asceticism. Palladius recounted her conversion to asceticism: "Having been widowed when she was 22 years old, she was held worthy of the love of God, and, having spoken to no one—for she would have been prevented—…she quickly sailed to Alexandria, along with illustrious women and children."[92] Widows still did experience opposition; indeed, another famous ascetic, Olympias, was even pressured by the Emperor Theodosius to remarry.[93] Palladius also recorded the story of Magna, whom he did "not know what to call, a virgin or a widow. For having been joined by force to a husband by her own mother, she baited her husband and succeeded, so many say, in remaining untouched."[94] The variety of life experiences of these aristocratic women adorned Palladius' collection of ascetic biographies while, at the same time, making asceticism not only an attractive choice, but conceivable, to other such women.

Likewise, Palladius and Gerontius also included stories of married couples who devoted themselves to asceticism. For instance, Melania and Pinianus lived together as ascetics. Pinianus was not only a useful character for Gerontius, but also

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[92] *HL* 46.
[93] Elm 1994, 179-180.
[94] *HL* 67. Palladius mentioned many other widowed ascetics, interestingly often identifying them by their husband's names. Even in the ascetic world, a woman's dead husband could have more social value than her. *HL* 41.

represented a nuanced reading of the dangers of familial concerns and sexual temptation within the ascetic context. According to Gerontius, for devoted ascetics, family was no longer a temptation. The same was true of Amoun, a famous ascetic about whom Palladius wrote. Like Melania, he had been forced by his family to marry, but he had convinced his wife to adopt asceticism as well, reading to her from the books of the fathers as she could not read. Although Amoun and his wife lived apart, they still visited each other twice a year.[95] Palladius listed many other married Romans who became ascetics, such as Melania's cousin Avita and her husband Apronianus, who converted to asceticism along with their daughter Eunomia.[96] Melania and Pinianus and Amoun and his wife provided yet another model of ascetic living which Gerontius and Palladius' aristocratic audience may have found attractive.

The integration of Pinianus into Melania's ascetic life suggested that Melania had swapped out her biological, traditional aristocratic Roman family for a new family, her monastic family. The death of Melania's son redefined her relationship to her husband, her father, and their estate. Melania and Pinianus began to live in continence, although their families still disapproved. Gerontius told the story of Melania's struggles with her family and the death of her children as part of her conversion. Melania had ceased to be a wife and a mother; she was instead an ascetic. However, Melania's ascetic family *looked* like her biological family, and in fact included some of the same people, although it was qualitatively different. While

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[95] *HL* 8.
[96] *HL* 41.

ascetics may have dampened their own desires for wealth and social status, the ascetic world needed an alternative to the family as a way of storing and distributing value. Monasticism offered an alternative.

Section 5
A Very Affectionate Mother: The transformation of the Roman family

In Late Antique ascetic literature, monastic families functioned as a qualitatively different option which complemented the Roman *domus*, the basic economic and social unit of the Roman world: monastic communities worked both as a social unit which defined the identities of members as well as units of economic production and mutual support. Thus, in telling the story of Melania's family, Gerontius presented Melania's conversion as the conversion of the Roman world, an overturning of the established order. This Christian world favored charity over aristocratic luxury, monastic communities over family, and virginity over motherhood. Melania's two dead children in fact emphasized her ascetic nature: her daughter's dedicated virginity reflected Melania's own desires, while her son's death gave her the freedom from familial constraints and the financial means to found her new monastic family. Despite the language of asceticism used throughout the *Life of Melania*, which set up familial obligations in opposition to female asceticism, the Roman *domus* bore striking resemblance to the monastic communities which

Melania founded: according to ascetic literature, these communities became the *domus* for members.[97]

Many Roman women who devoted themselves to asceticism had been married and borne children, and thus had experienced life as a wife and mother. Asceticism had ways of integrating both of these experiences into monastic practice, thus both validating the experiences of women who had converted to asceticism later in life and linking the monastery to the Roman family. The experience of marriage was perhaps most vividly articulated in the metaphor of the bride of Christ, an identity most often attributed to dedicated virgins. This metaphor was effective because, in the Roman conception, marriage was the greatest change to a woman's personal identity. This metaphor put asceticism, and virginity, on equal terms. Moreover, it articulated a specific relationship of dependence and submission between ascetic women and God. The language of marriage was therefore pervasive in Christian discussions of asceticism, even if its use was often metaphoric.[98]

Women like Melania the Elder and Melania the Younger also retained their role as mother within the context of the monasteries they founded. Monastic communities still employed the language and ideology of relatedness embedded within the Roman family to articulate the connections between members. Women referred to each other as sisters, and looked up to their superiors as mothers. The non-literal use of familial epithets was by no means limited to monastic

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[97] Many scholars have written about the connection between the Roman model of the *domus* and monastic communities. See in particular Cooper 2007b, 8-9; Evans-Grubbs 2009; see also Talbot 1990, especially 120-121, for a comparative yet comprehensive discussion.
[98] Many scholars have written extensively on the bride of Christ metaphor. See particularly Clark 1986, 23-27; Elm 1991, 113; Cooper 1999, 45-67; Hunter 2000; Alberici and Harlow 2007, 200-203.

communities.[99] However, its use within monastic communities, as with its use in other contexts, signaled particular relationships of dependence, respect, and love. It also corresponded to the hierarchical relationships of the monastery, which closely resembled the Roman *domus*.[100] Despite the ideological opposition between Roman *domus* and monastic communities, the use of familial language within the monastic context suggested that monasteries adopted some of the same organization, roles, and functions as the Roman *domus*.

In some aristocratic monastic communities, members of a traditional *domus* continued their social and economic relationships in a different ideological context and with a different construction of identity. For instance, according to the *Life of Melania the Younger*, Melania did not completely divorce herself from her family. Along with her husband Pinianus, her mother, Albina, joined her in her ascetic practice and continued to play a parental role. According to Gerontius, Albina worried about how much her daughter was eating and persuaded her to take olive oil on Sundays.[101] This relationship mirrored that of Paula and Blesilla, another mother and daughter who lived together as monks. Paula had opposed the strict asceticism of her daughter Blesilla, but Blesilla had been ardent unto death.[102] According to ascetic literature, many ascetic Roman women lived in monastic communities along with their mothers, daughters, sisters, aunts, or cousins. It was thus not the biological family which asceticism replaced, but instead the society expectation that a wealthy Roman woman would produce an heir.

[99] Talbot 1990, 120-123; Horrell 2001; Rankin 2004, 312-313.
[100] Synek 2005, 60; Clark 1995, 368.
[101] *VM* 25.
[102] Jerome, *Ep*. 39.6. See also Cain 2009, 102-105; Cooper 1999, 68-69; Yarbrough 1976, 155.

Some monastic communities of women even included ascetics who had been slaves in the community leader's household prior to their conversion.[103] Male family members, including husbands, often lived in related communities.[104] In some cases, then, the monastic family was nearly identical in composition to the *domus*.[105] monastic communities therefore represented a shift in the ideology of the family rather than an overhaul of the family as an economic and social unit. Christianity offered a new way of thinking about familial relationships which nevertheless built upon the basic model of the Roman family, the *domus*.

However, unlike the Roman *domus*, monastic communities were not based on sexual reproduction or biological relationships. On the one hand, this was not a complete reversal from the conception of the Roman *domus*: *domus* included all members of a household, not all of whom were kin. On the other hand, monastic communities specifically disavowed one key aspect of the *domus* in that they prohibited sexual contact, while Roman family values promoted it for the sake of trans-generational stability. The theoretical erasure of sexual contact within monastic communities was in clear contrast to the stress which Roman culture placed on the aristocratic classes to reproduce: aristocratic women produced heirs, which guaranteed inheritance and thus stabilized the estate, while the reproduction of dependents and slaves added to the overall production of the estate. Monastic communities, on the other hand, were concerned with the control over sexual

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[103] *VO* 6; Elm 1991, 102-103.
[104] Evans-Grubbs 2009, 211-213; Elm 1994, 47-51.
[105] Clark 1986, 182-185; Talbot 1990, 121-123; Maier 1995, 51-53.

temptation and separation of the sexes.[106] Both *domus* and monastic communities regulated sexuality, but they did so in different ways and for different ends.[107]

While monastic communities avowedly did not reproduce, they nevertheless replaced the Roman *gens* as well. The *gens* depended on a quasi-mythical origin and the praise of admirable ancestors to bolster the esteem of present family members. Likewise, monastic communities also revered their founders as a validation of their present operations.[108] The *gens* also functioned as an institution which stored accumulated economic and social value throughout the generations for the benefit of their members. Monasteries functioned in exactly the same way, administering estates for the economic support of their members while also supplying them with a specific social identity linked to their membership in the community. The ideology of the monastic institution meant that these communities provided an alternative not only to the *domus* as a present and active unit of production, but also as the *gens*

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[106] See, for instance, *VM* 41; Melania was careful to set up her monastery so that the virgins there would not have to come in contact with men. Female communities could not be consistently sex-segregated, however; they required the regular visit of a priest to perform communion rites. Palladius included a story of a female Pachomian monastery which was completely cut off from contact with worldly men. One nun accidentally spoke to a tailor and was so shamed that she—and, incidentally, the tailor—took her life (*HL* 33). Such stories, however, suggest that heterosexual sexual temptation was a real problem, even within monastic communities. Indeed, the *Lausiac History* showed the variety of monastic practices when it came to the segregation of the sexes; see, for instance, *HL* 8, 28, and 59. See Wilfong 2007 for a discussion of sex and gender in Egyptian monasticism.

[107] The economic impact of Christian asceticism was very limited; although the overall demographic trend in Late Antiquity was downwards, philosophies urging sexual abstinence had no appreciable impact (Morony 2004, 181-183). Furthermore, aristocratic Roman families had likely long practiced forms of family limitation (Scheidel 2001, 1), such practices were not widespread (Frier 1994). Although monasticism did not have a widespread effect on Late Roman demography, and thus economy, prohibitions against sexual reproduction posed real problems for individual monastic institutions, which required a steady stream of converts to survive.

[108] The fact that Gerontius, the superior of the monastery which Melania founded, wrote her biography is one example. Likewise, Shenoute, the fifth-century founder of a large monastic community in Middle Egypt, was remembered both in a biography written by his successor, Besa, and the decoration of both the White and Red Monasteries (see Dilley 2008, especially 116-117). In later years, the memorialization of a founder was made easier by either a monastic will, or *typikon*,in the East or a more formalized rule in the West.

as an institution which served to save and pass on wealth—both economic and social.

Both Palladius and Gerontius discussed monastic communities as a replacement for the *gentes* which Melania the Elder and Melania the Younger left behind. According to Palladius, Melania the Elder converted her family, Albina and Melania the Younger, to asceticism, transferring them from her *gens* to her monastic family. At the same time, she invested the remainder of her money in her monastery in Jerusalem—just in time, for she died shortly thereafter leaving, according to Palladius, "both the monastery in Jerusalem and its endowment."[109] Thus, Melania the Elder turned her *gens* into a monastic community while also providing for the continuation of the institution before her death. Similarly, Melania the Younger endowed her monasteries and instated new leadership for them before her death.[110] In this way, both women created monastic communities which reflected the values of the Roman aristocracy, including a concern for stable inheritance of wealth and social status.

Melania also cultivated familial relationships with her communities. Upon her death, according to Gerontius, "All mourned grievously, but the virgins were most hurt, for they were bereaved of a very affectionate mother."[111] This passage and others suggested that Melania's monastic foundations were designed as multigenerational institutions. The death of the leader of the community was

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[109] *HL* 54.
[110] *VM* 68. Of course, this is according to Gerontius, who was her successor. So he had a vested interested in stressing her personal interest in her successor.
[111] *VM* 66. Cf. *VMac* 26, in which Gregory of Nyssa called Macrina a spiritual mother to her community of women.

mourned. However, the existence of the community was ensured through the guaranteed succession, as Gerontius, Melania's chosen successor, was quick to indicate. The assumption that monastic institutions would endure meant they were seen as a store of both wealth, through their endowments of land, buildings, implements, labor, and social and mercantile relationships; and the memory of founders and past notable members provided an institutional identity.

According to ascetic literature, because monastic communities were an effective replacement for the *gens*, women with the social and economic means to start a monastic foundation could reap the same benefits from that institution as they would have from their *gens* in the traditional Roman setting.[112] In a context in which women were not limited by familial obligations to marry and bear children, women could embrace a more diverse set of economic and social identities within the monastery. Indeed, ascetic authors portrayed a greater amount of female agency within the monastic setting than within the family. While ascetic women faced contention with their families and often gave in to familial demands,[113] they were the founders, financiers, and superiors of large and influential monastic

[112] For a discussion of benefits women experienced due to their devotion to asceticism, see Clark 1986, 43-52; Cooper 1999, 73-77; and especially Salzman 2002, 166-177. However, ascetic life could also put women at a disadvantage; see Elm 1994, 150.
[113] Monastic authors had an interest in portraying a conflict as part of the conversion of their subjects, as asceticism was conventionally described in terms of antagonism between worldly and heavenly concerns. Thus, even Gregory of Nyssa provided familial obligations as a conflict for his sister in his *Life of Macrina* (*VMac* 4-5). The contention which Olympias faced was perhaps greatest, as even the imperial government attempted to force her to remarry, depriving her of her property for a short time because of her refusal (Mayer 1999, 253)

foundations.[114] As ascetic institutions functioned by adopting familiar and useful trappings of secular society,

> within a monastic community, the *paterfamilias* could…be a mother…. To put it another way: the egalitarian provocation of the household model as found in the gospel tradition gave way to the monarchic family structure even in the ascetic context. But there was an important modification insofar as the top position was no longer completely gender-fixed.[115]

Of course, the gender separation of Christian monasticism also meant that women were often in charge of female communities, although they often answered to superior males;[116] in this way too aristocratic women gained authority within monastic communities which would otherwise be impossible for them. Monastic communities offered aristocratic women a replacement for the *gens* they left behind, but with a greater possibility that they, as women, would gain benefits traditionally reserved for men.

According to Gerontius, aristocratic women without children, such as Melania the Younger, could particularly benefit through the establishment of monastic communities as they controlled their own patrimonies. Monastic communities worked most effectively as a replacement of the *gens* if women were able to completely divorce themselves from familial obligations. They also flourished if founders had the financial means to provide a generous endowment.[117] By founding monasteries, Melania moved her wealth out of the traditional *gens*, and

[114] Cooper 2009, 196-197.
[115] Synek 2005, 60.
[116] LeMoine 1996, 238-241.
[117] Clark 1986, 188-189; For a discussion of inheritance of material property, see Arjava 1998, 151.

gained the benefit of the social identity of a founder of a monastery.[118] She also garnered praise both during and after her lifetime for her institutions, while her involvement in the *gens Valeria Maxima* had brought no such benefit. Thus, asceticism could be attractive to ambitious Roman women with the means to invest. They offered a substitution for the *gens* which emphasized women as not solely based on their sexuality, but also as founders and spiritual leaders.

If Melania's monastic foundations were a substitution for her *gens*, Gerontius, the later superior of the monastery she had founded, was a substitute for her son.[119] He became the administrator not only of the monasteries—Melania's estate—but also curator of her memory.[120] As the superior of Melania's monastic foundation, Gerontius represented the economic heir to the money which Melania had invested in her monastery and assured another generation of children to keep Melania's monastic family strong.[121] Through writing her biography, Gerontius also perpetuated Melania's memory and therefore fulfilled a second function of the *gens*: the memorialization of ancestors and the extension of their line into the future. Although Melania's biological line ended with the death of her daughter, the strength of Melania's monastic foundations ensured the continuation of her spiritual legacy and sacred memory.

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[118] Cooper 2005, 21-32. As founder, Melania was remembered not only through Gerontius' biography, but also in the building and the community itself.

[119] In remembering Melania in a biography, Gerontius not only fulfilled his "familial" duty, but also benefited his own memory and solidified the standing of the community upon whom his memory depended.

[120] *VM* 68; Talbot 1990, 124-126 discusses the continuing monastic identity of members of a community after death; see also Yasin 2005; Cain 2010, 117-118; 124-129 discusses Jerome's *Epitaphium Paulae* (*Ep*. 108) in such terms.

[121] Talbot 1990, 120-123.

Section 6
Conclusions

Although Melania had invested her time, money, and identity in the creation of monasteries for both men and women, and although she had replaced her biological family with a monastic community of virgins, Melania was surrounded by men as she lay on her deathbed. According to Gerontius, she would not have had it any other way: "that was always her prayer, to give up her spirit amongst holy men."[122] Through her disavowal of her family and her devotion to asceticism, Melania had become equal to the influential men of the local Christian hierarchy. Gerontius had noted this earlier in the *Life of Melania*, explaining that Melania had been allowed to visit the male monasteries at Kellia because "she had surpassed her female limits and had won a spirit which was masculine, or rather, a heavenly."[123] This sort of virtuous gender-bending was a literary commonplace, from the married martyr Perpetua's famous transformation into a male wrestler[124] to Sisinnius, who overcame his masculine lust by curbing the "feminine element" in the women who followed him.[125] The ideological sexlessness of monastic communities was, in fact, gendered masculine, as the virtues of the Roman world were defined as masculine attributes. Gerontius wrote that Serena, the cousin of Emperor Honorius, was excited to meet Melania because she had "demonstrat[ed] to everyone by her very deeds that before God, woman is not surpassed by man in anything that pertains to

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[122] *VM* 68. Although Gerontius used a substantive here (ἁγίων), he had previously indicated that these mourners were men (ἅγιοι ἄνδρες).
[123] *VM* 39.
[124] See McNamara 1976, 151-155; Clark 1986, 45.
[125] *HL* 49; See also Lampe 2003.

virtue, if her decision is strong."[126] Referring to ascetic women in masculine terms was a compliment to their virtue. "Once we recover from the shock of the [Church] fathers' andro-centric bias, we can see that they affirmed in the most positive terms of their culture (viz., terms of 'maleness') that female ascetics had shed those negative characteristics which, to their minds, marked out women."[127]

The image of holy men towering over Melania's deathbed proved that she had succeeded in ascetic terms. She had given up her identity as a Roman matron, which was based on marriage and reproduction. However, it also proved that Melania had succeeded socially, as the men who flocked to her—and who would carry on her work and curate her memory—were connected and influential players in the empire-wide Christian aristocracy. Thus, in disavowing her biological family in favor of charitable works and the foundation of monasteries, Melania gained an exalted social status which, in Gerontius' eyes at least, made her equal to the most holy men of the fifth century.

In the aristocratic Roman world, wealth and family were deeply connected: the *gens* was both a social construction of familial relationships and a transgenerational store of wealth. Thus, ascetic authors argued that in order to renounce wealth, aristocratic women had also to renounce their families and their obligations toward them, which they often often articulated in terms of sexual reproduction and childbirth. Connections to family members presented a particular temptation for women, as women derived their social status and public identity

[126] *VM* 12.
[127] Clark 1986, 43.

from their roles in the *gens* as wives and mothers. However, by renouncing their families, women also gained greater control over both their wealth and their social identities. Wealthy widows, if they chose not to remarry, legally inherited their husbands' wealth; if they had no children, they were also freed of the obligation to manage wealth for the good of their heirs. The social identities of women who chose not to marry or remarry could be constructed outside of marriage and motherhood. Asceticism thus offered strategies for women to enhance both their social standing and their wealth through the rhetoric of charity. For Melania the Elder, disavowal of familial obligations allowed her to travel to Egypt and create a social network of prominent male monks.

Chapter 4

The Society of the Desert: Christian Charity and Ascetic Social Networks

The authors of biographies of ascetic women focused on how ascetic practice conflicted with the roles of wife and mother traditionally expected of Late Roman aristocratic women. In particular, Palladius and Gerontius argued that, in contrast to the opportunities which family-based female identities offered to women, which were constrained by a long tradition, the cachet of asceticism presented a variety of options for aristocratic women. That conversion to asceticism brought social advantages has long been acknowledged:[1] because asceticism allowed aristocratic women to function outside of the constraints of familial expectations, it gave them access to a range of social relationships and identities unavailable to women who

[1] Clark's work has been especially strong in considering the social benefits which women gained from ascetic endeavors. See in particular Clark 1986, 175-208 ("Ascetic Renunciation and Feminine Advancement"), as well as 209-228 ("Authority and Humility: A Conflict in Values in Fourth-Century Female Monasticism"); 61-94 ("Piety, Propaganda, and Politics in the *Life of Melania the Younger*"); 95-123 ("Claims on the Bones of Saint Stephen: The Partisans of Melania and Eudocia"). Clark 1992 is entirely about the role of social networks in ascetic controversies; however, the first chapter, in which Clark provided an analysis of ascetic social networks, is particularly useful (11-42). Analyses of the many letters where aristocratic ascetics wrote to one another, such as Cain 2009, are inherently studies of social networks and interactions. Schor 2011 used social network theory to investigate Christological disputes in fifth-century Syria. For a network-based analysis of heresy and orthodoxy in second- and third-century Christianity, see Eshleman 2011. Clark and Schor's work has shown that social network theory is useful in analyzing conflict; few scholars of Late Antiquity have used network theory to discuss conversion or primary group membership. Therefore, of particular theoretical utility is Collar 2009, which provides an excellent explanation of the application of network theory to the study of religious conversion, although prior to our period. Patlagean 1977 offers a much more expansive view, connecting social networks explicitly to economic status; Chapter 2 (36-72) is most applicable to the present questions.

had more traditional roles. Ascetic biographies both reflected the range of identities ascetic women adopted and advertised the agency they gained through their ascetic conversion to female readers. However, there have been few comprehensive studies of the impact of the conversion to asceticism on the social life of aristocratic women, and fewer still which consider the woman's agency in the creation of ascetic social circles.[2] The goal of this chapter is to explore in greater detail the different methods which two senatorial women—both from the same family—used to gain social benefit from their ascetic conversion and their levels of success.

Although aristocratic converts to asceticism understood that their change in lifestyle brought new social opportunities, they faced a variety of choices concerning the construction of their ascetic identities and social groups. The aristocratic ascetic experience was therefore too varied to reduce to a single model. Even for aristocratic ascetics, who enjoyed latitude in their ascetic choices and associations, there was not a simple correlation between conversion and increased social status. Ascetic authors indicated that conversion could offer great social benefits in the form of bonds solidified through charitable action, prestige associated with the foundation of monastic communities, and increased access to the imperial and

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[2] The many obstacles to a study of ascetic social networking among Late Antique women are undoubtedly responsible for this paucity of studies. In particular, the type of material available skews heavily toward social networks centered on men; with the exception of very few letters, all available information about these women was written by men and therefore has a male perspective. Clark's work on Melania the Younger (1986, 23-95; "Devil's Gateway and Bride of Christ: Women in the Early Christian World" and "Piety, Propaganda, and Politics in the *Life of Melania the Younger*") most clearly overcomes these difficulties; to the extent that Clark (1992) addressed Melania the Elder, she very strongly indicated the centrality of this aristocratic woman in the creation of ascetic social networks; the present study owes much to this approach. However, in the *Origenist Controversy*, she focused almost exclusively on the social networks of men because they were perceived at the time to be the antagonists in the controversy. More recently Clark has addressed this issue explicitly by writing about the impact of a male view of a female social network. See particularly Clark 1998; Clark 2001. See also Jacobs 2000 and Shaw 1998.

ecclesiastic aristocracy. However, the creation of new ascetic social identities also posed great risks, as it exposed converts to the potential to make negative associations which could threaten their social standing in both the secular and ascetic worlds. This danger was especially acute for women, as the status of their gender in the Roman world often forced them to rely on individual men or male social networks.[3]

This chapter concentrates on the ways that Melania the Elder and her granddaughter, Melania the Younger, used their ascetic identities to expand their social circles. The different paths which the women chose affected both their immediate achievement in their ascetic projects and the memories and memorialization of these two women after their deaths. Like classical euergetism, Christian charity provided wealthy Romans with a way to both create meaningful social ties and propagate a lasting memory of their character (section 1). Palladius described Melania the Elder's charity to prominent Egyptian monks as a gift exchange which solidified her standing in the desert ascetic community (section 2). Melania the Elder's participation in the male monastic community of the desert and her ability to financially support an exiled community of monks made her a successful and influential player in the aristocratic ascetic world during her lifetime (section 3). Furthermore, Melania's relationship with her biographer, Palladius,

[3] Whereas men had more latitude to switch social networks or define their identities outside of monastic communities, women instead were defined by their relationships to men regardless of their status as an ascetic. For instance, both Jerome and Rufinus were from privileged families, but were not members of the senatorial aristocracy. However, through their involvement in theological disputes, their ascetic identities, and their relationship with aristocratic women—Paula and Melania the Elder respectively—they gained renown in both the Holy Land and in Rome. The public identities of Paula and Melania the Elder, however, were limited to being seen as the financiers and ascetic partners of these men.

ensured the commemoration of her charity, as did her granddaughter Melania the Younger's relationship with her biographer, Gerontius (section 4). Like Palladius, Gerontius emphasized the social relationships of his subject; however, Melania the Younger chose to associate with powerful secular figures, such as the Empress Eudocia, and with the memory of saints through her purchase of relics (section 5). However, Gerontius was careful not to mention Melania the Younger's relationship with Melania the Elder; the latter's association with the Origenist controversy which engulfed the Egyptian monastic world affected the way she was remembered (section 6). Despite her relationship with Eudocia, Gerontius stressed that Melania the Younger chose a different ascetic path: istead of concentrating on the creation of ascetic social networks, Melania the Younger used her charity to invest in monastic estates throughout the Eastern Roman Empire, effectively safeguarding her wealth from the instability and war caused by the invasions of the Visigoths and Vandals. Melania the Elder's social networks are the focus of this chapter; the next chapter will turn to Melania the Younger's economic investments.

Section 1
Carved in Stone: Euergetism and charity as investment in social capital

Although adherents were attracted to asceticism for a variety of reasons, conversion to ascetic Christianity was fundamentally a financial decision, as it represented a reorientation of the adherent's relationship with his or her wealth. Biographies of upper-class ascetics noted that they signaled their asceticism by publically disavowing their wealth; their renunciation had to be public to be part of their story. Their advertisement of their ascetic identities allowed the most famous

aristocratic Christians to form empire-wide networks based on similar beliefs and goals. It was therefore necessary for aristocratic ascetic renunciation to be public in order for it to be successful, as its spread depended on its visibility. On the other hand, because new converts based their ascetic practice on their observations, the public nature of aristocratic asceticism became integral to its nature. Aristocratic renunciation was characterized by its visibility, as adherents gained social rewards through public charity. Christian charity advertised primary group membership—in this case, the aristocratic ascetic movement—and the social and financial expectations associated with belonging to that group—in this case, renunciation. Indeed, group membership remains one of the most important predictors of charitable giving.[4] The Christian charity practiced by Late Antique ascetics helped to create a shared ascetic identity, as the wealthy publically undertook charity to advertise their ascetic identity and new converts imitated them. Public charity thus solidified the social networks which aristocratic Christians maintained.

The mechanics of the spread of Christianity, and thus the creation of the basic aristocratic social networks of aristocratic Christians, are frustratingly unclear.[5] However, it is clear that, by the mid-fourth century, a Christian identification served to bolster the standing of Roman aristocratic families, who acted as patrons to Christian clients and in turn depended on a Christian Roman emperor for support. Indeed, aristocratic Christians may have benefited from political perks or promotions: in some cases, Christian belief seems to have acted as an unspoken

[4] Ostrower 1995, 16.
[5] Hopkins 1998; Rives 2005.

prerequisite for particular imperial posts.[6] Shared Christian belief also solidified aristocratic networks, as the Roman aristocracy utilized Christian language and theological concepts to explore their connections.[7] A convincing quantification of numbers of Christians among the aristocracy of the Roman Empire—let alone the general population of the Roman Empire—has not yet been proposed, and thus it is impossible to speak specifically about the extent to which status as a Christian was a benefit in aristocratic social circles generally. However, a shared Christian identity was, in Late Antiquity, a defining feature for members of the Roman aristocracy.[8]

One of the ways in which aristocratic Romans advertised their Christian identity was through charitable donations or the establishment of charitable foundations. There was no single way in which Late Antique Christian acted charitably: some founded monasteries with membership restricted to other wealthy converts, some started hospitals to serve the general population, and some provided food or shelter to the poor. Many Christians focused their charitable donations on their home towns; others provided charity in many provinces. Yet all these patterns of Christian charity were part of a long history of Greco-Roman euergetism, the beneficent use of private funds for the public good, mostly through funding civic building projects or social welfare programs. In order to differentiate between two related, but separate practices, *euergetism* here refers to non-Christian philanthropy and *charity* refers to Christian philanthropy. *Philanthropy* is a general term which encompasses both practices. Each individual term represents a variety of practices,

[6] Drake 2011, 207. Jones 1964, 535-542.
[7] See, for example, Cain 2009, 30-33. See also Gallagher 1993 for the role of community in conversion narratives.
[8] Brown 1961. See also Salzman 2002, 1-19; Rohrbaugh 1984.

which were all typified by a rhetoric of selfless use of personal funds for the good of a larger, generally less privileged, community. Aristocratic families engaged in euergetistic action because of the many benefits it provided for them. By supporting the local community, the Roman aristocracy solidified both their social and economic statuses by creating a network of dependency. Their ability to financially fulfill the needs of their community also gave them political power.

Furthermore, euergetism was a guarantor of social memory dictated by the desire of the donor. The donor decided the type of service provided to the community and, through an accompanying inscription, he or she also determined the way in which that service was interpreted by the community. Thus, the euergetist was able to construct and control the way they were remembered in their communities. Buildings and inscriptions in stone lasted longer than the donor's lifetime, and the donation of prominent buildings—fountains, theaters, or even latrines—continued to benefit both the community and the euergetist's own family, whose name was connected to the building, long after the donor's death.[9] Indeed, an inscription commemorating a bath complex built by Melania the Elder, perhaps at her familial estates in Thagaste, included the patronness' name cleverly written as a telestich in a poem.[10]

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[9] The wealthy Athenian Herodes Atticus was the classic example of euergetism; Philostratus said of him, "Of all men he used his wealth the best" (*Vitae Sophistarum* 2.547); Zuiderhoek 2007, 198. For Roman euergetism generally, see Silver 2007.

[10] *Anthologia Latina* 109. See Cameron 1992; Evans-Grubbs 1987. Cameron argued that the inscription, and therefore the bath complex, ought to be ascribed to Melania the Elder; Evans-Grubbs had suggested Melania the Younger was a more likely candidate. Both agree that the bath was likely located at Thagaste; indeed, the Latin *Life of Melania the Younger* did describe a large estate which Melania owned there and which included a bath complex. However, the mentions of Cumae and

Euergetism allowed wealthy Romans to advertise their status while also creating networks of dependence which benefited them. Christian charity functioned similarly, and thus represented a reasonable investment for wealthy Christians renouncing their wealth. In the context of the vastly unequal economic system of the Late Roman Empire, in which the aristocratic class was far wealthier than the vast majority of the population,[11] wealth was productively invested not in wealth-producing enterprises but instead in the solidification of social ties.[12] Euergetism functioned as a contract with the community, and was therefore a productive investment of aristocratic capital in the establishment of social connections which could be exploited for political or economic gain.[13] Likewise, in return for the remembrance of a community, and the immortality that the remembrance offered, wealthy Romans spent large sums on civic monuments and upkeep. Their initial input was an investment in something which they believed was a reasonable purchase: long-lasting social status. Rather than desire a strictly economic return on their investment, euergetists realized that the added social status which philanthropic action brought them was worth more, in their world, than monetary profit.[14] While euergetism was the use of private money for public benefit which stimulated the Roman economy through investment in essential civil services, such investment was also an integral aspect of the advertisement and consolidation of status in the Roman world.

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sailors in the inscription also recall the description of Melania the Younger's bath on her estate in Campania, although the meaning of *indigenae* makes such a reading difficult.

[11] Scheidel and Friesen 2009.

[12] Finley 1999, 111.

[13] Van Bremen 1996, 53-54.

[14] Hopkins 1961, 247-248; Hopkins 1965, 12-13, 32; Silver 2007.

By the fourth century, the tradition of euergetism had become so essential to the function of Roman cities that it was codified in the form of liturgies, or civic duties for which the upper classes, known as the curial class, of the city were responsible.[15] However, unlike traditional euergetism, which prompted aristocrats to make innovative and ostentatious donations for their own benefit, the curial class chafed under the prescribed liturgies, who were already suffering from the effect on the economy of the political uncertainty which had necessitated an institution such as the liturgy.[16] Indeed, the aristocracy may have been attracted to Christian service precisely because it freed them from curial duties: late Roman laws, which were favorable to the Christian hierarchy, allowed exceptions from curial duties for bishops.[17]

Thus, by the fifth century, imperial law had stripped euergetism of its social value by making it compulsory; mandatory support of civic institutions could not be effectively described—and inscribed—as philanthropy. Christians turned to the church as an alternate way to demonstrate their wealth and gain the goodwill of the community. Furthermore, the fourth and fifth centuries were a period when traditional geographical centers of power were shifting and political ties could be a liability as imperial infighting affected individual fortunes. In such a climate, an alliance with local, stable Christian institutions solidified and advertised through

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[15] For a discussion of the curial class, see Jones 1964, 737-757. Jones suggested that property holdings worth of 300 *solidi* generally qualified a family as a member of the curial class (738).
[16] Kopeček 1974, 324-326. In particular, the combination of the Antonine plague, the economic contraction and inflation of the third century, and the political stability after the Severans disrupted networks of non-obligatory philanthropy in Roman cities and necessitated the codification of curial obligations.
[17] Gilliard 1984, 154-155.

charitable donations seemed like a fruitful investment. Indeed, charity took on particular utility and meaning—and thus popularity—precisely when the government and other institutions failed; under such circumstances, the stability of a local upper class and their ability to provide for the needs of the community when the government failed created a community dependency on philanthropy, which the wealthy could later exploit:

> Philanthropy is a social institution that takes on meaning in the context of…a mistrust of governmental power and large-scale bureaucracy…. Although instances of giving to support causes used by wealthy donors have been criticized as abusive of philanthropy, such giving is in fact typical, and not only among the aristocracy. The recognition that this is true is important not only for understanding philanthropy but also for accurately assessing its capabilities and limitations.[18]

Charitable donations built social relations locally by connecting aristocratic Christians to less wealthy Christians in a way similar to older forms of euergetism; those who benefited from charity supported the causes of those capable of giving. Charitable donations could also ingratiate lay Christians to their counterparts in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, both in their local congregations and across the empire, further integrating an aristocratic social group made up of both lay and religious Christians. By the fourth century, when many members of the imperial aristocracy were Christian, charity allowed them to advertise this aspect of their identity for political benefit. Philanthropic donations were integral to the aristocratic society of Romans and thus easily adopted by the Christian church.

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[18] Ostrower 1995, 8. For a study of the benefits of charitable giving in the modern world from an evolutionary biology point of view, considering human altruism, see Milinski, Semmann and Krambeck 2002.

Yet Christian charity generally took a form different from traditional euergetism. While patterns of land ownership and urbanization made the investment in ostentatious public building projects attractive for Roman euergetists, Christians often used their money for the more ephemeral support of the Christian community, such as support of the poor through food rations.[19] They were inspired by both their desire to imitate Jesus, who had fed the poor,[20] and the injunctions of ecclesiastical leaders.[21] By the early fifth century, when barbarians threatened the imperial heartland, church leaders, especially in the West, depended upon the financial support of wealthy Christians because the imperial government had retreated.[22] Yet individual wealthy Christians or Christian communities also created charitable institutions for the support of their local communities. For instance, many monasteries were involved in providing health care, and the establishment of a hospital became a cachet akin to a traditional euergetistic building program for a wealthy Christian. [23] When the poor relied on the Christian community for support rather than the social and political institutions of the city, the difference between civic euergetism and local Christian charity was small indeed.

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[19] Holman 2001, 64-98. Gregory of Nazianzus wrote that Basil ministered to the poor during a famine in Cappadocia in imitation of Christ (*Orationes* 43.34-36).
[20] Garrison 1993, 62-63. Cf. Mt. 15:32-39; Mk. 8:1-10; Jn. 6:1-13.
[21] Brown 2012, 355-358; see also Holman 2001, 58-62. For the role of pastoral rhetoric in the sacralization of money and therefore the injunction to charitably give in modern Christian communities, see Mundy and Davidson, 2011.
[22] The so-called *New Letters* of Augustine revealed a bishop who desperately needed both monetary and legal support to protect his poor flock from the chaos of the early fifth century. Brown 2012, 380-384.
[23] Crislip, A. 2005, 45-55; Horden 2005. Cf. *HL* 6, in which a priest coerced a wealthy woman into investing in a hospital after showing her cripples instead of the gemstones he promised; and *HL* 40, in which the ascetic Ephraim convinces the wealthy inhabitants of Edessa to entrust him with their money in order to build a hospital for plague victim.

One obvious difference between classical euergetism and Christian charity was the ideology behind the action. In particular, while euergetism suggested a privileging of the civic community over the individual, Christian charity demanded a level of empathy for the poor or needy in particular, rather than the needs of the community as a whole.[24] Christian charity, then, did not aim to create a unified civic identity, which the donor shared, but instead resulted in an emphasis of the difference between the wealthy donor and his or her disadvantaged beneficiaries. Accompanying this new concern for the poor was an ideology of self-sacrifice on the part of the donor which was absent from euergetism; among the aristocratic ascetic community, the same principles highlighted the praise of voluntary poverty, while at the same time concern for the institutional poor was cursory. Charity was one of an array of morally necessary practices available to wealthy Christians that allowed them to escape eternal punishment and gain reward. Thus, Christian charity was at its base a more individual, action which was carried out not on the behest of the government, as with Late Roman liturgies, but rather to fulfill the demands of the Gospels.

The rhetoric of Late Antique ascetic charity focused on the renunciation of the donor rather than the alleviation of the suffering of the beneficiaries. Although ascetics such as Melania the Younger often distributed some of their vast fortunes to the poor, their aim was to achieve freedom from material desires themselves. Their charity was presented and remembered as an ascetic disavowal of the temptations

[24] Ostrower 1995, 16.

of wealth and the trappings of worldly luxury.[25] Gerontius even suggested that Melania's distaste for wealth became so great while she undertook charitable renunciation that she even entrusted the distribution of her gold to an administrator in order to avoid handling the gold herself:

> Not wanting to distribute their remaining gold with their own hands, [Melania and Pinianus] gave it to the people who were responsible for the care of the poor. For they did not want to be seen by anyone while they were doing good works. For they had arrived at so great a scarcity that the holy [Melania] said, "When we first got here, we planned to enroll in the church's list and to be supported along with the poor according to the command." Thus, they had reached the pinnacle of poverty because the Lord became poor on our account and taken the form of a slave. So it happened that she first became an ascetic in Jerusalem, and she had nowhere to sleep except for some sacks, but one of the noble virgins gave her a pillow.[26]

While Gerontius stated that Melania followed biblical injunctions to practice asceticism privately, [27] Melania's renunciations left her poor enough to be worthy of charity herself. Yet asceticism and poverty were not the same. Melania's aim was renunciation of wealth, not poverty: Gerontius stated immediately that the narrative of his work was Melania's "perfect renunciation of the concerns of this life,"[28] in imitation of Jesus. Melania's asceticism depended upon both her wealth and her desire to give it up. In order to demonstrate her piety and her commitment, she needed her wealth.

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[25] The status differential between aristocratic Romans and the poor who received their charity was a hallmark of asceticism, a system which prized renunciation—the transition from one status to another—rather than a humble status by itself: Stark 2003; Holman 2001, vii: "The involuntary poor lived, day in and day out, with circumstances that might make a zealous monk green with envy." For the connection between ascetic beliefs and Christian charity, see Bird 1982.

[26] *VM* 35.

[27] This is a response to biblical injunctions: Mt. 6:1-18.

[28] *VM* prologue.

At the same time, despite the biblical injunctions, ascetic charity could be very visible and wide-ranging: Melania the Younger, for instance, favored the foundation of conspicuous and famous monasteries and churches throughout the empire, from Thagaste in North Africa to the holy Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. According to Gerontius, Melania's donations to her friend Alypius' church in Thagaste were so rich "although it had been very poor before, so that it aroused jealously toward the man on the part of the other bishops of the district"[29] In fact, Melania and her husband Pinianus's donations in North Africa were so ostentatious that the inhabitants of Hippo tried to force Pinianus to become their presbyter, presumably in order to take advantage of his wealth.[30] Gerontius glossed over this outcome of Melania's great charity, as it was evidence of the ostentatious display achieved through charity and the social support which resulted. Instead, he noted that Melania "seemed lightened a little from the weight of her possessions."[31]

Despite such emphasis on personal renunciation and selfless concern for the poor, Gerontius nevertheless told a story in which Christians benefited through their charity. Although the outcome of Melania and Pinianus' charity in Thagaste was not what they would have desired, they clearly gained social status from both the local citizens, who wanted to elect Pinianus bishop to benefit from his wealth, and the powerful bishop Alypius, who supported Pinianus in his flight, through their

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[29] *VM* 21.
[30] Augustine, *Ep*. 125-126. *Epistle* 125 was written to Alypius, the Bishop of Thagaste, assuring him that Augustine would deal with both the violence which had broken out in the city and the accusations that Melania, Pinianus, and Melania's mother Albina had lodged against Alypius and Augustine. *Epistle* 126 was addressed to Albina, promising that Pinianus would not be ordained against his will. Both letters suggested that the people of Hippo were jealous of Pinianus' wealth, and, seeing that he gave it away freely, thought that they would benefit from his ordination.
[31] *VM* 22.

donations. Indeed, recent research into modern philanthropy shows that philanthropy is a potent way to gain influence in a social group which makes up a powerful organization:

> The association between philanthropy and privilege means that philanthropic involvements are viewed as symbolic of the donor's personal success and affluence…. The connection between status and philanthropy may be related to the perspective that philanthropy represents of form of exchange that brings returns to the donor.[32]

Because Christian charity resulted in social returns as well as well as economic gain, it benefited individuals in a variety of contexts. Extensive charitable donations were a sign of Christian belief in which only the aristocracy could participate, and their discussion of it reinforced it as an indication of Christian belief. By valuing charity, aristocratic Christians made it socially worthwhile, which spurred more aristocratic Christians to act charitably to gain social favor. Charitable action was an investment which helped to cement the ascetic Christian community.

Christian charity thus offered a new option for both gaining social esteem and fulfilling the duties of a good Christian which existed outside the confines of the family. Traditionally, Romans could attain a very literal, biological immortality through procreation within the confines of the family. Dynastic marriages and a strong concern for the production of citizen children ensured a subsidiary insurance of immortality: the inheritance and continuing administration of the familial estate. The identification of the ephemeral individual with the lasting *gens* and the physical estate was the traditional Roman route to immortality.

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[32] Ostrower 1995, 36-37. For charity as mutually beneficial to donors and the poor in preindustrial societies, see van Leeuwen 1994.

Charity offered an alternative which was amenable to ascetics, and which fit into monastic conceptions of the family. Just as, according to Gerontius, Melania's senatorial relatives wanted the wealth of the Valerii to remain intact for the benefit of their family and the entire senatorial class, Melania wanted to use her wealth for the support of her new ascetic family, focused on the monasteries she founded in Thagaste and later Jerusalem. In order to support this family, Melania took on the role of a savvy administrator of a private estate. She retained control of her wealth, choosing (as wealthy Romans always had) to use some to support the larger community, but to use much of it for the support of her monastic family and the creation of a wealthy future for it.[33]

However, in the case of Melania the Younger, charitable action also allowed her to liquidate her estates; wealth no longer had to be tied up in familial estates, which had been passed down from generation to generation. Instead, Christian asceticism had redefined the family and opened familial investment up to the foundation of monasteries. The rhetoric of charity, and especially narrations of the difficulty in liquidating estates and distributing funds, also deconstructed the social obstacles to selling estates, as such stories suggested that donors struggled to achieve a moral good. Thus charity also offered a secondary, non-financial benefit for Christians: it allowed for the disintegration of wealth and family and therefore opened up more fruitful investment, not only in new social ties created within the context of a strong, aristocratic Christian network which stretched across the

[33] Cloke 1995, 167-175.

Mediterranean, but also in more profitable land and means of production. The rhetoric of charity provided a moral justification for investment in social returns.

Charity also gave women like Melania the Elder and Melania the Younger more choices about the use of their wealth, as they were no longer responsible for retaining it for their children. Ascetic authors suggested that, by claiming (and often enacting) charitable ends, women gained support for their control over familial estates, just as they had gained support for their choice to embrace sexual continence through their use of Christian rhetoric. While continence allowed widows like Melania the Elder to control their own wealth after the deaths of their husbands, remaining childless meant for Melania the Younger that she could use her wealth as she pleased rather than preserve it for her offspring. Christian charity provided a set of options—and institutional framework and a defined way of talking about investment—in which these women could deploy their wealth for their own social and economic benefit. The effect of Christian monasticism on constructions of Roman social status did impact the Roman economy; as a set of expectations and values or a way of conceiving of, organizing, and disseminating information which governed economic choices, Christian monasticism provided a context for investment, through charity, which resulted in and communicated social gain.

Section 2
Buying Friends: Melania the Elder and Pambo

Christian charity was a redefinition of the traditional Roman use of euergetism to cement relationships between aristocratic peers and to ingratiate

lower class clients to wealthy patrons. A story of a belated exchange of gifts which Palladius included in the *Lausiac History* illustrated the connection between classical euergetism and Christian charity, signaling a shift in aristocratic attitudes toward wealth. This story centered on the relationship between Melania the Elder, a rich Roman noblewoman who traveled to Egypt to dedicate herself to asceticism, and Pambo, a prominent Egyptian ascetic with a well-established following. Palladius used this constructed story to illustrate the role a renegotiation of wealth played in Melania's dedication to asceticism, as well as to indicate the importance of charitable renunciation in the establishment of beneficial ascetic social relationships.

According to Palladius, Melania the Elder arrived in Egypt in 372 with the intention of making massive charitable donations. He wrote that "taking all of her possessions and loading them on a ship…she quickly sailed to Alexandria. Having sold her belongings for gold, she went to the mountain of Nitria"[34] where she met many prominent Egyptian ascetics, including Pambo.[35] Pambo was man with a special connection to God, according to Palladius, and the mentor of the so-called Tall Brothers, a group of four monks from the thriving and diverse monastic settlement at Nitria, halfway between Alexandria and Roman Babylon-in-Egypt (modern Cairo). Pambo and the Tall Brothers would become close friends of Melania, and her prominent Aquileian partner, Rufinus. According to Palladius, this friendship began when Pambo became the first object of Melania's charity. Thus, the

[34] *HL* 46.
[35] *Ibid*. Melania chose to transport her property to Alexandria instead of selling it in Rome and transporting coin—the more economical option—in order to keep her decision to live an ascetic life secret from her family for as long as possible, according to Palladius.

story of Melania's renunciation provided both a narrative reflecting the way in which Melania wisely used her wealth to create social ties and a carefully constructed message about the danger of wealth and the importance of charity. The interaction between this idealized ascetic and the newly arrived Melania, still influenced by aristocratic Roman concerns, indicated to Palladius' audience the need for wealthy Romans to divest themselves of their wealth.

When Melania first traveled to Nitria, Palladius related, she brought with her a chest of silver coins. When she offered it to Pambo, of whom she had already heard, "staying seated and continuing to weave reeds, he blessed [her] in a word and said, 'May God give you a reward'"[36] Pambo then asked his companion to "'distribute this as funding for all of the brothers in Libya and the islands; for those monasteries are poorer.' He ordered him not to give it to any one in Egypt because that country was fertile."[37] With his description of Pambo, too engrossed in labor to interact with Melania, Palladius recalled a popular image of the Egyptian ascetic. He also noted that Pambo "was very suspicious of gold and silver, as scripture demands,"[38] thus explaining both Pambo's reaction to Melania's gift and his great godliness in his adherence to scriptural precepts. In fact, Pambo was so dismissive of Melania's generosity that he did not even ask it to be distributed to communities in Egypt, where Melania hoped to build a social network, but instead in places which were less fertile, both agriculturally and socially. Melania's attempt to create a social connection through her wealth had, according to Palladius, failed.

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[36] *HL* 10.
[37] *Ibid*.
[38] *Ibid*. Cf. Acts 3:6.

Melania was displeased with Pambo's response to her gift. Accustomed to aristocratic practices, Melania expected recognition of her generosity and a promise of social reciprocation, which was especially important as she attempted to integrate herself into the society of the desert.[39] She said,

> "My lord, just so you know, there are 300 silver coins." But without even looking up, he answered [her], "Child, the one to whom you brought them has no need of this measurement. For he measured the mountains, and he knows much better how many coins there are. If you gave them to me, you would have spoken well; but if you gave them to God, who did not look down on the two obols, then be quiet."[40]

Pambo's response to Melania overturned traditional Roman attitudes toward wealth and social relationships. While Melania imagined that her gift to Pambo would win her esteem with him, Pambo instead redefined her wealth as a gift to God, reminding both Melania and Palladius' audience of the true meaning and aim of Christian charity. Likewise, Palladius found it worthy of note that Pambo sent the silver to other monasteries which he deemed to be in more need, thus demonstrating the fact that the silver was not a gift to him, but charity to support the monastic program.[41]

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[39] For a comparison between this episode and traditional Roman euergetism, see Consolino 1989, 977-978. Indeed, Melania expected δόξα and τιμή from her gift, words traditionally associated with euergetistic displays (although the words are not exclusive to euergeticsm; cf. *HL* 34).

[40] *HL* 10.

[41] Pambo did not consider his monastery to be in need, likely as a show of asceticism: He and his followers had no need for money, a trope which also appeared in the *Life of Melania the Younger* (38). However, it was also likely true that monasteries like Pambo's, which were famous in Alexandria, were richer than those elsewhere, especially (as in this case) outside of Egypt proper. Indeed, Melania's trip to Pambo's monastery seemed almost like a package tour, something arranged through an agency (Isidore) in Alexandria for wealthy Christians interested in learning about monasticism. These monasteries likely were flush with tourist money, especially considering the ascetic nature of tourism to monasteries, in which charitable giving was an expectation.

Palladius' appeal to the scriptural story of the humble widow who gave two copper coins[42] provided biblical grounds for charitable giving. It also urged humility, thus clearly opposing charity to euergetism. Indeed, Melania's fortune compared to the widow's two coins seemed absurd, as did the idea of a chest full of 300 silver coins transported into the Egyptian desert for the benefit of a community ostensibly without desire for wealth. Indeed, the contrast between the meager but welcomed charity of the widow of the Gospels and Melania's massive chest of coin, lugged into the Egyptian desert, portrayed Melania's wealth as a burden—exactly as Pambo had interpreted it. It was only in Egypt that Melania the Elder became completely free of the goods which defined her past life and moved from the city into the desert. On the one hand, this story suggested that Melania's assumption that her wealth, in the form of charity, would ensure her social relationships was out of place in the ascetic Christian context. On the other hand, Pambo's assertion that Melania's donation was a gift to God, and that God would "give [her] a reward" in return showed that Christian charity could bind together the donor and God in a special kind of social relationship. Thus, Pambo's response to Melania, although terse, emphasized the value of charity for Palladius' audience.

Despite Pambo's response that Melania's gift appealed to God and not the ascetic himself, however, Palladius hinted that Melania's charity did, in fact, create a social bond between the matron and Pambo. Immediately after this passage, Palladius told of Pambo.

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[42] Mk. 12:42, Lk. 21:2.

> After a little while, the man of God died. He had no fever or illness, but he was sewing a basket. He was 70. He had sent for [Melania] when he had one last stich until the basket was complete. When he was about to die he said to [her], 'Take this basket from my hands, so that you can remember me; for I have nothing else to leave you.' Wrapping his body in linen cloth, she laid him to rest and buried him. She went away to the desert, keeping the basket with her until her death. [43]

Pambo's bequest of a humble basket to Melania turned Melania's original donation into an exchange of gifts, a basic form of economic transaction which signified that a social relationship was reciprocal.[44] The basket represented Pambo's poverty relative to Melania's lavish gift, thus juxtaposing the differing values of Egyptian asceticism and the Roman aristocracy. However, the basket had a metonymic function, representing Pambo's gift of asceticism to his disciples generally and to Melania specifically; in naming Melania as the recipient of Pambo's deathbed gift, Palladius indicated her favored status among the desert ascetics of Egypt. As a symbol of asceticism, Pambo's basket was a much more valuable gift than Melania's wealth; Palladius emphasized this point by stating that Melania kept Pambo's gift with her until her death, while Pambo had immediately passed on Melania's silver. Pambo's gift of the freshly finished basket, his last labor, also echoed Anthony's bequest of his cloak to Athanasius upon his deathbed, a (clearly fictional) moment Athanasius recounted in his *Life of Anthony*[45] in order to establish himself as Anthony's spiritual successor. Palladius thus chose Melania, not the Tall Brothers or

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[43] *HL* 10.
[44] Lie 1991, 222-223. See Zuiderhoek 2007 for an explanation of gift exchange in antiquity. For models of gift-giving and the continuing popularity of redemptive almsgiving, see Neil 2010. For a different sort of ascetic gift exchange, see *VM* 13: When Melania appealed to Serena, the mother-in-law of Emperor Honorius, for help in protecting her wealth from her family and liquidating her estates, she provided Serena with a gift in return. Although Serena would not let members of the court accept Melania's charity, she herself did acquiesce to take some of Melania's familial statues. She would not, however, buy Melania's house in exchange (*VM* 14).
[45] *VA* 91.

any of the other monks of the Egyptian desert, to be present at Pambo's deathbed[46] and to be the holy man's ascetic successor, a striking position for a wealthy Roman woman. By describing the relationship between Pambo and Melania through the exchange of material goods, Palladius indicated their relative statuses in the world of desert asceticism while also suggesting the attitude toward charity befitting of his aristocratic audience.

Like the story of Melania the Younger's altercation with the Egyptian monk, in which she and the ascetic competed for poverty,[47] the story of gift exchange between Pambo and Melania reversed aristocratic attitudes concerning wealth. While Melania expected her generous gift to be received as a sign of her friendship with Pambo, the ascetic dismissed the gift of coin as irrelevant to him and meaningful only in quality, not quantity, to God. In this paradigm, Melania's ability to give up great wealth was no more impressive than the charity of any Christian. Yet the story also highlighted the ambivalent attitude of ascetic Christianity toward aristocratic wealth by treating Melania's gift as meaningful in the end. Melania's donation of her riches, while perhaps ill executed, defined her relationship with Pambo, while her reformed attitude toward wealth, which caused her to value the humble reed basket which Pambo gave her on his deathbed, made her a worthy successor to the ascetic. It thus suggested to Palladius' audience that, while wealth

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[46] Gerontius' description of Melania the Younger's final moments, when the holy woman, so long defined by her relationship to her communities of virgins, was surrounded by holy men only, contrasted with this image from Palladius. The description of Melania the Elder carrying for and burying Pambo's body gave her pride of place: she took on the role of Pambo's family members while also showing her devotion to the ascetic.
[47] *VM* 38.

was useful in the establishment of ascetic social networks, a charitable renunciation made the wealthy worthy of joining the society of the desert.

Section 3
One of the Boys: Melania the Elder in Egypt

The story of Melania's and Pambo's gift exchange, although dramatized, indicated early in the *Lausiac History* that the Roman noblewoman would translate her status and prestige into an exceptional ascetic social circle. Melania was already a member of the senatorial aristocracy and well-connected throughout the empire. By the time Palladius met Melania in Palestine at the end of the fourth century, she had also become an essential member and financial supporter of a prominent group of Egyptian ascetics, despite her status as the only woman and one of the few aristocratic outsiders. Melania's charitable donations, made possible by her great inherited wealth, allowed her to productively invest in her ascetic social circle.

However, Melania's choice to use her charitable support to integrate into this group was risky. When she left for Egypt, Melania maintained some of her previous social ties, most notably with Paulinus of Nola, who was himself a dedicated ascetic and may have inspired Melania's asceticism. Yet her new social identity as an ascetic by definition forced her to leave behind many of her most potent social connections. In particular, Melania lost the social security which being a female member of a senatorial family guaranteed her: later in life she clashed with male family members over her decision to leave her son behind and pursue her own desires, thus

jeopardizing her relationship with her family and aristocratic friends.[48] Melania's conversion to asceticism allowed her to liberate both her social and her economic capital to invest as she pleased, but it also compromised her past relationships with non-ascetics, who were alienated by her charity and move to Egypt and Palestine.

Furthermore, Melania's almost single-minded devotion to her ascetic companion, Rufinus, and his theologically like-minded friends represented a lack of diversity in her social investments. On the one hand, Melania's complete financial, social, and political support of Rufinus, Isidore, and the Tall Brothers was what made her notable, both in ascetic circles and among the imperial aristocracy. Despite her status as a wealthy Roman woman, a liability in the desert, Melania was successful in parlaying her financial support of these anti-Arian, pro-Origen monks into exalted status. On the other hand, because of she was a woman in a world which emphasized masculine virtues, Melania's new status depended to a large extent on the success of her vocal male companions, something over which she had only very limited control. In making investments in social relations, Melania wagered much of her social capital on Rufinus.

Melania's choice to build social capital through conversion to asceticism was also risky because of her innovative approach. At the time when Melania the Elder began her ascetic journey, she had few models for aristocratic asceticism, let alone aristocratic female asceticism. Melania likely left Rome for Egypt around 372, the same year that Rufinus' friend from school, Jerome, travelled to the Syrian desert.[49]

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[48] Clark 1984, 89-90.
[49] Wilkinson 2012, 167.

Whether Melania and Rufinus were acquainted before they left Italy for Egypt is unclear; nevertheless, they became closely associated by the early 370s. Most ascetic women who preceded or were contemporary with Melania neither left their cities nor became integrated into male ascetic society; in many cases, their pre-ascetic social circles remained intact or expanded. For instance, Macrina's social circle was very ostentatiously limited to her family: her connection to her mother was a sign of her asceticism.[50] Paula, likewise, had an overwhelmingly female social circle, based to a large extent on her own family but also upon her status within the Roman society of ladies.[51] However, her close friendship with her ascetic mentor and the beneficiary of her charity, Jerome, to whom she was not related, set her apart from ascetics like Macrina. Such a relationship also made her an obvious parallel to Melania, as did her eventual pilgrimage to the Holy Land and foundation of a monastery there.[52] Olympias, on the other hand, had a large social circle of very powerful men who are not related to her. Olympias' social circle was almost exclusively urban and based in traditional power structures, such as the church hierarchy and the imperial court.[53] Like Melania, she made herself indispensable through her financial and social support of men who might otherwise lack these attributes. However, the social circle she created was less risky than that of Melania, as it was built upon long-established social structures rather than the innovative but controversial society of the desert, to which Melania was an outsider.

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[50] *VMac*, 5.
[51] Jerome, *Ep*. 108.
[52] Melania had left Rome sometime after the death of her husband, likely around 373, and fled to the Holy Land after the death of Athanasius, in 374. Paula, on the other hand, met Jerome in Rome in 382 and arrived in Bethlehem in 386 with him, after Jerome had used Melania as an example to persuade Paula (Wilkinson 2012).
[53] *VO*; Mayer 1999.

Even when compared to ascetic men, Melania was relatively innovative in her social investments. Jerome and Rufinus were among the first western Christians to travel to the East, to Egypt and Syria, to undertake the sort of desert asceticism which texts such as the *Life of Anthony* had only recently introduced to the Roman aristocracy. Indeed, Melania may have been inspired in her travels by her interaction with Athanasius, and more importantly the Egyptian monks who accompanied him, during his exile from Egypt which he spent in Rome.[54] One of the monks whom Melania likely met in Rome was Isidore, who brokered Melania's first relationships with desert ascetics.[55] Melania was part of the very beginning of a movement—Christian pilgrimage to monastic sites[56]—which would grow over the following decades to include men like John Cassian, whose record of Egyptian asceticism would deeply influence both Late Antique Gallic asceticism particularly and medieval western asceticism more generally,[57] and women like the pilgrim Egeria, who followed in Melania the Elder's footsteps a decade later,[58] and Melania's own granddaughter, Melania the Younger. Furthermore, Melania the Elder was ahead of her time in founding, with other Egyptian ascetics, a monastery in the Holy Land. Furthermore, she settled in Jerusalem, a city which Constantine had already selected for his beneficence. Rufinus followed her later, and then Jerome and Paula,

[54] Rousseau 2010, 80-83.
[55] *HL* 1-2; 10.
[56] Frank 2000, 1-16
[57] John Cassian collected his observations on Egyptian monasticism in the *De institutis* and the *Collationes*. Although the *Collationes* focused on conversations Cassian had with Egyptian monks, they were still influential for Western, and particularly Gallic, monasticism (18, e.g.). The *De institutis*, a description of monastic practice in Egypt and a proscription for its implementation in Gaul, contained more information directly relating to the import of monasticism from Egypt (see, in particular, 1.10, 2.2)
[58] *IE*.

who founded monasteries outside of Bethlehem. Rufinus and Melania's monasteries in Jerusalem inspired further monastic immigration to the city, establishing it as the defining Christian city to which Egeria traveled forty years after Constantine's initial building project.[59]

Although limited to aristocratic ascetics and desert monks, Melania's social circle at the height of her success was expansive, including numerous men from throughout the Roman Empire. Indeed, in the *Lausiac History*, Palladius suggested that Melania's previous relationships, especially with Isidore of Alexandria, were responsible for her—and, presumably, by extension, Rufinus'—initial introduction into desert society. According to Palladius, Melania and Isidore may have originally met in Rome: "He was known to all the Senate of Roman and the wives of the nobles, when first he came to Rome with the bishop Athanasius, and then with the bishop Demetrius."[60] The relationship between Melania and Isidore was mutually beneficial; while Isidore introduced Melania to desert society, Melania later provided support and a home for Isidore, who, because of a conflict with the bishop of Alexandria, fled Egypt to join Melania in Palestine.[61] Melania provided Isidore and other exiled monks with a safe home in a respected monastery; in this way Melania's social relationships strengthened under the adversity of Late Antiquity, as she was indispensable to her persecuted friends.[62] The monastic disputes which caused the flight to Palestine also further familiarized Christians throughout the Roman Empire

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[59] Wilkinson 1981, 36-53.
[60] *HL* 1.
[61] Clark 1992, 21.
[62] For the relationship between Melania the Elder and the Nitrian monks in the *Lausiac History*, see Hunt 1973, 466-467.

with desert asceticism, making the relationships which Melania nurtured with the monks of Egypt more valuable as aristocratic Christians became involved in the dispute, respecting and supporting the monks.

Palladius suggested that the monks to whom Isidore introduced Melania soon found the Roman matron a worthy companion: "She met Pambo, Arsisius, Sarapion the Great, and Paphnutius of Scete, Isidore the Confessor, bishop of Hermopolis,[63] and Dioscorus. And she spent time with them for half a year, circling the desert and visiting all the holy men."[64] Indeed, Palladius presented Melania as a center of the society of the desert, linking together stories of individual monks and connecting the monks to ascetic societies throughout the Roman Empire.[65] While Melania may have received a basket from Pambo on his deathbed, she also served as a spiritual mentor to the Constantinopolitan widow Olympias,[66] and was a close friend of Evagrius Ponticus, an aristocrat and prolific writer who had been taught by the Cappadocian fathers, but whose support of the teachings of Origen would become a focus of the controversy.[67]

However, Melania's success in the society of the Egyptian desert was short-lived: in 373, the Arian Emperor Valens began to persecute the Nicene monks of Egypt.[68] Melania, Rufinus, and their Egyptian friends were faced with the type of

[63] This is not the same as Isidore, the priest of Alexandria.
[64] *HL* 46.
[65] See, for instance, *HL* 5,9,10, and 18, in which Melania spoke of her relationship with Egyptian ascetics; *HL* 54, which described Melania's trip back to Rome and her conversion of family members and aristocratic women there; and *HL* 56, where Melania was named as Olympias' tutor.
[66] *HL* 41.
[67] Elm 1991, 114-118
[68] Lenski 2004, 95-103, 114-117; Clark 1992, 20-22; See also Paulinus of Nola, *Ep*. 29. On Melania's departure to Palestine, see Wilkinson 2012. For a timeline of events, see preface.

sectarian persecution which had—in the imaginings of Athanasius, at least—defined their model, Anthony of Egypt.[69] While Rufinus was, apparently, detained in Egypt,[70] Melania and a group of monks, including Isidore and the Tall Brothers, fled to Palestine, where Melania set up a monastery outside of Jerusalem.[71] Later, Rufinus joined them and became part of their monastic community. Melania was attracted to Egyptian monasticism because of the monks' social power, which depended on their reputation for a quasi-mystical religiosity and ideology which rejected the current order of the empire. At the same time, Egyptian monks were attracting the attention of jealous churchmen attempted to coopt the monks into their hierarchy, as they were distrustful of the monks' unconventional teachings and ways of life and wary lest the charismatic power of the men of the desert undermine their highly structured and curated social and political status within the new Christian hierarchy.[72] Theophilus, the Bishop of Alexandria, forced the Tall Brothers into ecclesiastic office[73]and had attempted to have Isidore appointed bishop of far-away Constantinople before the two had a more severe disagreement.[74] All these monks arrived in Jerusalem in 399, seeking refuge at Melania's monastery.[75]

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[69] Athanasius, a staunch anti-Arian, wrote a narrative which set up the desert ascetic Anthony in opposition to the Arians of Alexandria. See, in particular, *VA* 68-69 in which Anthony argued against the Arians. Athanasius suggested that his hero was persecuted as well (*VA* 46-47), and that he fought a persecution of Nicene Christians caused by the Arian Balacius (*VA* 82).

[70] Clark 1992, 21. Rufinus recorded his time in Egypt in his *Apologia contra Hieronymum* 2.15. However, Jerome's *Ep*. 5 from 374 expected Rufinus to be in Palestine with Melania.

[71] *HL* 46. For a map of Melania's travels, see preface.

[72] See, for instance, Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orationes* 42. See Sterk 2004, 119-140 for comment.

[73] Ammonius was a notable exception, according to Palladius. When Ammonius was taken to be installed as a priest, he cut off his ear in order that he be unacceptable for priesthood according to the biblical injunction that priests be "whole" (Lev. 21: 19-23). Ammonius escaped and received a new name: Ammonius Parotes, or Ammonius the Earless. (*HL* 11).

[74] Clark 1992, 46.

[75] Clark 1992, 44.

Melania was successful in establishing a thriving monastery in Jerusalem because she had the wealth for the initial investment and monks to populate it. In building this monastery, Melania invested not only in its physical structure, but also in the structure of social ties which the monastery guaranteed her. Although Melania had lived among the monks of Egypt, she had not been in charge of her own monastic community there. Her role as the founder of the monastery—and the chief financier of the operation—put Melania in a position of authority. She had gained this position through her social ties.

Palladius portrayed Melania in a position of humility in regard to monks, yet this humility rested upon Melania's superior financial position:

> After the prefect of Alexandria exiled Isidore and Pisimius and Adelphius and Paphnutius, and Pambo, with them also Ammonius the Earless, and twelve bishops and priests, to Palestine near Diocaesarea, she followed them and cared for them *with her own money*. I have met holy Pisimius and Isidore and Paphnoutius and Ammonius and they told me that, although they were not allowed to have servants, she brought them whatever they needed in the evenings wearing the dress of a servant girl.[76]

In this episode, not only was Melania dressed as a slave, but Palladius' repetition of the names of the famous men she served only humbled her position further. On the other hand, it was Melania's ingenuity and wealth which allowed her to support these famous ascetics instead of the other way around, as Palladius emphasized.

[76] *HL* 46. Emphasis added.

Indeed, Melania's wealth attracted a greedy proconsul, but her humility caused him to repent without harming her.[77]

As this passage showed, Melania's rank clearly shifted in Jerusalem according to Palladius. Although she continued to serve the Egyptian monks, she gained power through her wealth. With Rufinus, she became the superior of twin monasteries for female and male ascetics; according to Palladius, "For twenty-seven years, they both welcomed people who traveled to Jerusalem on account of a vow, bishops and monks and virgins, and they housed all the travelers at their own expense,"[78] thus providing charity not only for the monastic community, but also for wealthy pilgrims. In moving to Jerusalem, Melania retained her monastic social circle, ensuring she had a strong support for her monastery and strengthening their dependence upon her. At the same time, she moved into a landscape more open to the foundation of a monastery by a powerful and wealthy Roman woman. Melania's wise use of her wealth continued to benefit her social status.

By the time that Jerome, Paula, and their retinue arrived in the Holy Land and established their twin monasteries in Bethlehem in imitation of Melania and Rufinus, Melania's risks had paid off. Melania and Rufinus were at the head of an expansive and influential group of monks. Rufinus was not only financially dependent upon Melania, but indeed owed a good deal of his social influence to

[77] *Ibid*. According to Palladius, Melania was mistaken for a slave because of her humble clothing, but the exiled monks were not allowed servants. For this reason, she was arrested. However, she was released after she explained she was a Roman citizen but "a slave of Christ." Palladius noted that the judge was, in the end, impressed by her asceticism.
[78] *Ibid*.

her.[79] Even after Melania and Rufinus led the monks in a flight to Jerusalem to avoid persecution, they appeared to have won a battle: they and the monks were victims of persecution, like literary figures such as Anthony and Paul of Egypt, and like Jesus, whom such characters imitated. When, after the death of Valens in 378, persecution by Arian emperors ended, Melania and Rufinus were rewarded for their devotion by the monks they served. The two Italians came to the rescue in Jerusalem: Rufinus, in his staunch support of Origen and the rights of ascetics, had become the spiritual leader and mouthpiece of the monks; Melania's wealth, on the other hand, saved the community and allowed them to rebuild their foundations. Melania and Rufinus, at the head of a powerful and diverse Egyptian monastic community, had returned to the holy city of Jerusalem and brought new theological relevance to the Holy Land. Their social status in the ascetic world seemed too strong to be challenged.

However, Jerome had made connections of his own. Despite his attraction to asceticism—Jerome had attempted and only briefly succeeded in living as a desert ascetic in Syria[80]—he was deeply suspicious of the Egyptian monks with whom Rufinus and Melania kept company. While Melania's monastery followed a law which her friend and a known Origenist Evagrius Ponticus had written for her,[81] Jerome instead translated the rule of Pachomius, the famous abbot of the Tebbinisi

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[79] Clark, in her book *The Origenist Controversy*, set out to use social network theory to explain the impact of what was otherwise a rather personal spat between Rufinus and Jerome. In doing so, she carefully documented and outlined the social networks of the two men, focusing on the extent to which their ascetic success depended upon their friends and the support they received from them. Clark 1992, 20-26.
[80] For Jerome's own feelings on his early attempts at asceticism, see *Ep*. 2.
[81] Elm 1991.

coenobitic monastic foundation, for use in the monasteries he and Paula founded.[82] Indeed, Jerome had even written a biography of the monk Paul, whom he suggested rivaled Anthony as the first Egyptian anchorite, creating his own narrative of asceticism which undermined the authority of Anthony, a character which the Nitrian monks had clearly coopted.[83] Jerome also attacked Rufinus' relationship with Melania: he disparaged Rufinus for relying upon Melania not only for financial support, but also because she was more intelligent.[84] Because of the importance of social ties in the definition and condemnation of heresy, Melania had become a partisan of Origen's writings through her relationship with Rufinus and Evagrius.

Section 4
Remembering Melania: Saints and their biographers

Under such circumstances, one of Melania's social connections clearly paid off: Palladius and Melania were acquainted from Palladius' ascetic youth in Palestine, and therefore the author unabashedly supported both Melania and the Origenist cause in his *Lausiac History*.[85] Palladius introduced Rufinus as Melania's companion: "The most wellborn and staunch man of similar habits was with her: Rufinus, from the city of Aquileia in Italy. He was later deemed worthy of

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[82] Jerome, the *Rule of Pachomius*. See Rousseau 1999, 37-38; 48-63. The Pachomian rule included directions for communal practice and injunctions against interaction with the world and property ownership.
[83] *VP* 1: "Others say that Anthony was the first of this way of life, and the mass of people join this opinion… The disciples of Anthony…now affirm that Paul of Thebes was the inventor of these things, and I too approve this opinion…"
[84] *Ep. 53*; cf. *Ep.* 58, also addressed to Paulinus of Nola, in which Jerome told Paulinus that Jerusalem was too luxurious a place to practice asceticism. Kelly 1974, 192.
[85] For the relationship between Melania the Elder and Palladius, see Hunt 1973, 464-465. It is notable that the *Lausiac History* is one of the only pro-Origenist text which escaped the censure which caused many similar texts to be lost.

priesthood. You could not find a more philosophical and suitable man."[86] Likewise, Palladius barely took the time to dismiss Jerome,[87] although he made his feelings clear: "A certain Jerome from Dalmatia was a hindrance to [Paula]; for although she exceeded all the others in her abilities, being naturally well disposed, he bound her in his jealousy and dragged her into his own plot."[88] Throughout the *Lausiac History*, Palladius' goal was to praise his friend and supporter, Melania. He therefore avoided highlighting the charges of heresy which plagued her by focusing on Rufinus and Jerome.

However, Palladius' construction of the character of Melania—and, indeed, the monks of the desert more generally—reflected the contemporary measures of piety which he himself espoused. These measures included a reverence for Origen's works, as his particular brand of theology had deeply influenced Egyptian asceticism. For instance, Palladius wrote that Melania had read three million lines of Origen—more than any other author she enjoyed.[89] Likewise, Palladius emphasized Melania's close relationship with Evagrius Ponticus, despite the serious allegations of heresy.[90] Indeed, Palladius suggested that Melania inspired Evagrius' eventual

[86] *HL* 46.
[87] Hunt 1973, 478.
[88] *HL* 41.
[89] *HL* 55.
[90] Evagrius was closely associated with Origenism because of his translation and defense of Origen's writings; Clark 1992, 43-84. He was also a close friend of Melania's and, indeed, her biographer Palladius (*HL* 38). Six of his letters were addressed to her (*Ep*. 22, 31-32, 35-37) and he wrote a rule for her monastery (Elm 1991).

dedication to monasticism in Nitria after he had confessed his sins and temptations to her in Jerusalem.[91]

Such stories, which privileged the piety of Melania over that of her more famous male companions, were commonplace in the *Lausiac History*. Melania received by far the most attention of any of the characters in the work, often invading and dominating the biographies of other characters, such as Pambo, Or, and Silvania.[92] Palladius likely received a good deal of information about the Nitrian monks from Melania, which would account for her constant presence. However, his reliance on her as a source was also a result of their personal relationship. Palladius and Melania's relationship, in turn, was a function of Melania's particular status as the owner of the Jerusalem monastery *and* a Roman noblewoman; indeed, these two aspects of Melania's character allowed Palladius' aristocratic audience to see Melania as a fitting model for their charitable renunciations. Melania had attracted Palladius through her piety and her charity, just as he suggested she had Rufinus, Isidore, Evagrius, and Pambo. Indeed, in his introduction to Melania, Palladius described her foremost by her charity, a focus fitting for his aristocratic audience.

> No one avoided her good works, not in the East or the West or the north or the south. For, having given hospitality at her own expense for 37 years, she aided churches and monasteries and strangers and prisoners, getting financial sponsorship from members of her family and her own son and administrators. She persevered so long in this hospitality that she owned not a handful of land.[93]

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[91] *HL* 38. According to Palladius, Evagrius had fled to Jerusalem after being tempted by a beautiful woman in his native Constantinople. He fell sick at Melania's monastery because of his sin, but after confessing to her, she told him to travel to Egypt to undertake an ascetic penance.
[92] *HL* 9, 10, 55.
[93] *HL* 54. The exaggeration of a subject's voluntary poverty was a trope in ascetic literature.

In praising Melania's charity, Palladius demonstrated her success as an ascetic: she had in fact achieved voluntary poverty. Yet it was in gaining this poverty, through strategic charitable renunciations, that Melania gained fame and friends.

Palladius curated Melania's memory, and therefore was perhaps, in the end, Melania's most valuable friend. Recognizing the attraction which Melania, a wealthy Roman matron who successfully dedicated herself to asceticism, would have for his imperial audience, Palladius advertised his friend's life to his patron. Aware of the controversy around Melania and especially Rufinus, Palladius warned his patron against heretics[94] and boasted, by way of apology, that Melania and Rufinus "persuaded every heretic who did battle against the spirit to come to the church and honor the clergy of the place with gifts and food; and thus they continue without a scandal."[95] This interpretation of Melania and Rufinus was clearly Palladius' version of events; both Melania and Rufinus faced charges of heresy because of connections to Evagrius Ponticus and Origenism during their lifetimes.[96] Palladius carefully crafted Melania's character throughout the *Lausiac History* to argue her ascetic successes outweighed the controversy surrounding her social circle.

According to Palladius, Melania the Elder had left her monastery in Palestine only once, to guide her granddaughter Melania the Younger to an ascetic life and

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[94] *HL* Prologue. "As much as it is possible, avoid meetings with men who offer no benefit and who powder their faces unnaturally, even if they are orthodox—but especially if they are heretics!"
[95] *HL* 46.
[96] The charges of heresy against Rufinus lodged by Jerome were extensive and complex and largely outside the scope of this present study; see Clark 1992.

help her, he says explicitly, avoid heresy.[97] Melania the Elder guided her granddaughter, Melania the Younger, as she became a successful ascetic. Like her grandmother, Melania the Younger also pursued a social relationship with the curator of her memory: a monk of her monastery named Gerontius. Unlike her grandmother, Melania the Younger had no living children. Thus Gerontius represented both the continuation of Melania's line, as he succeeded her as superior of the monastery she founded in the Holy Land and was primarily responsible for shaping public memory of Melania the Younger through a hagiographic biography. For both Melania the Elder and her granddaughter, Melania the Younger, a relationship in a friend who would remember them in a flattering light was a wise investment.

Gerontius was very mindful of his role as the curator of Melania the Younger's memory. Perhaps because Melania was his sole subject, Gerontius addressed the issue of memorialization as a social process in his biography. Gerontius wanted to advertise the social benefits which asceticism brought to Melania the Younger to his prominent monastic audience, but he was also acutely aware that his writing of her *Life* and promotion of her sanctity was one of these social benefits—a problematic concept in a biography of a supposedly humble ascetic. This awareness put Gerontius into an awkward position faced by many biographers: Christian teaching demanded humility, yet Christian tradition benefited from the promotion of saintly individuals as an example for Christians to

[97] *HL* 54; this is clearly a reference to Jerome, Paula's companion, who had charged both Melania and Rufinus with unseemly action and heresy. See Clark 1992, 24.

follow. This problem was compounded for hagiographers of wealthy converts, as they had to justify the use of wealth for social and spiritual gain. Gerontius, following the tradition of hagiographers, countered this problem in two ways: first, he asserted clearly that God had called Melania to asceticism and him to write her biography, thereby cleansing himself and his subject from any accusation of a lack of humility.[98] Secondly, Gerontius emphasized his own humility and that of his subject: by asserting that his own skill as a writer was not sufficient to cover the deeds of Melania, he implied a humble approach, while he emphasized Melania's humility by saying that only he could write of her good works because only he, a good friend of the saint, could be aware of her beneficence. Indeed, Gerontius first appealed to the Bible in order to show that Melania was following precedent and modest in her great magnanimity:

> I can write part of her great successes, which she was eager to hide in a Gospel-like way. But when it is the voice of the Lord himself which says, "what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs ," because of it the virtues of the holy ones cannot be hidden; for even if the ones who did good deeds take them all and hide them, God, who fights for the salvation and edification of all, will bright their greatest successes into the light, not only on account of the benefit for those who listen, even as we have said, but also on account of the ones who fought unto death for him.[99]

In this single statement, Gerontius justified his praise of almsgiving, despite biblical precedent, by stating that God chose not only to give an example to Christians, but also to give Melania praise—social capital—for her dedication. He even likened this dedication through asceticism to martyrdom. In these words defending Gerontius'

[98] *HL* Prologue.
[99] *Ibid*.

memorialization of Melania, the author also justified the use of personal wealth to create social capital, thus setting the stage for the story he would tell in the following pages.

Section 5
All My Friends are Dead: Melania the Younger, the relics of martyrs, and the women of the court

Like her grandmother before her, Melania the Younger used charitable donations to create social ties. However, Melania the Younger took fewer social risks than her grandmother. While Melania the Elder had given up the majority of her former social ties to create an entirely new social circle, Melania the Younger used her newfound asceticism and charitable generosity to strengthen those ties which she already enjoyed as a wealthy, senatorial, Christian, Roman woman. For this reason, her social circle included fewer desert ascetics and instead was filled with the Late Antique Christian aristocracy interested in monasticism, from Paulinus of Nola to Augustine and even to Jerome, and members of the secular aristocracy, especially the women of the imperial court. In this way, Melania the Younger's social circle was a drastic contrast to her grandmother's. Thus, a comparison of these two social networks provides a useful example of the range of tactics which aristocrats used to benefit from their asceticism.

Unlike her grandmother, Melania the Younger was able to keep some connections to her family. She was not a widow, as Melania the Elder and Paula were, and her husband Pinianus was her constant companion in her ascetic undertakings. Likewise, Gerontius, to a certain extent, stressed the legacy of

asceticism which was part of Melania's family history, often mentioning that Melania's mother, Albina, was with her during her travels to distribute charity.[100] Although the familial resistance which Melania faced when she decided to use her patrimony for ascetic charity was a turning point of the narrative of her biography, Gerontius stressed that she nevertheless continued to rely upon family members, and the social bonds they represented, to achieve ascetic success.

Melania also relied heavily on the network of aristocratic ascetics which had risen to prominence a few decades earlier, during her grandmother's life. In particular, Gerontius stressed Melania's relationship with Augustine and his companion Alypius. Augustine was important for Melania in two ways. First, Augustine provided a home for Melania and Pinianus when they were forced to flee Rome. Indeed, throughout her life, Melania the Younger of often chose locations for monasteries based on the presence of members of her empire-wide social network. Connections between her family members, including her famous grandmother, and prominent North African Christians, such as Augustine, allowed her to move to North Africa and found monasteries on her familial property there. He was on hand for the foundation of Melania's first monastery at Thagaste in 410 and offered her valuable advice. Thus, for Gerontius, Melania's friendship with Augustine also validated her piety: he suggested that Augustine had acted as Melania's mentor, and thus bolstered both Melania's reputation and the reputation of her monastery, of which he was then superior. Melania made shrewd use of the social contacts which her family had cultivated, both through their senatorial status and through their

[100] *VM* 25, eg.

devotion to Christianity, to garner support as she converted to asceticism and charitably renounced her wealth. Thus, although Melania's family, and her father in particular, disapproved of Melania's liquidation of her estate and devotion to monasticism according to Gerontius, her status in Roman society, which she inherited from her family, in many ways made her actions possible.

The *Life of Melania the Younger* therefore displayed the tension between Melania's renunciation of her familial wealth and her reliance on familial social connections for support. In particular, Melania also used her great wealth to form new connections and to bolster her claims against her father, who tried to hinder her access to her inheritance. For instance, according to Gerontius, Melania the Younger was supported by Serena, the cousin of the Emperor Honorius and wife of Stilicho.[101] Gerontius wrote that Serena had long wished to meet Melania because of her asceticism, suggesting that Melania's way of life alone had attracted this social relationship.[102] However, it was far more likely that Serena was attracted to Melania's cause because the unclear ownership of property raised the threat of a slave revolt in the suburbs of Rome.[103] In the end, regardless, Gerontius suggested that Melania's connection to Serena was instrumental in her charity: it was only through the support of Honorius, which Melania won through her relationship with Serena, that Melania was able to gain control over her patrimony and use it for her charitable works.

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[101] Stilicho was a Vandal-born general in the Western army who was married to Serena, a relative of Theodosius. Their daughter married Honorius, the Emperor of the West. Salzman 2002, 191.
[102] *VM* 12.
[103] *VM* 10. According to Gerontius, Melania's slaves threatened to revolt if they were not given to Pininanus' brother, Severus. See Clark 1984, 100-102.

Like her grandmother before her, Melania's charitable mission and desire to found monasteries brought Melania across the Roman Empire, and , like her grandmother, she eventually settled in Jerusalem. Throughout this journey, Melania continued to foster social relationships with aristocratic Christians, particularly imperial women. In the East, Melania's miraculous conversion of her pagan uncle in 437 in Constantinople attracted the attention, according to Gerontius, of the Empress Eudocia:

> [Melania] received great benefit from everyone there [in Constantinople], especially the Christ-loving imperial ladies. And she edified the most pious Emperor Theodosius. And she begged him to free his wife so that she could worship at the holy places, which she greatly desired.[104]

Gerontius later called Melania the spiritual mother of Eudocia,[105] describing in detail a visit which Melania paid to the empress in Sidon and the eagerness of the empress to visit Melania in Jerusalem. Gerontius clearly had an interest in claiming Eudocia as a friend of Melania, as this social relationship provided evidence of Melania's prominence and favor, and therefore the benefits of asceticism.

However, Gerontius had a second reason for emphasizing Melania's friendship with Eudocia: the empress dedicated a marytrion to Saint Stephen in Jerusalem in 438 CE by depositing the bones of the martyr there, and Gerontius claimed that Melania was responsible for both the construction of the martyrion, which he said was associated with her monastery, and the procurement of the bones. Such a construction would have been a major coup for Melania both in her

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[104] *VM* 56.
[105] *VM* 58.

time and in the time when Gerontius was writing. The bones of Saint Stephen were discovered, in a dream, in the Holy Land in the early fifth century.[106] Within decades, stories of their power had spread from Georgia, where a prince who was raised in Theodosius' court in Constantinople praised Eudocia's veneration of them,[107] to the island of Minorca in the far west of the Mediterranean, where the *adventus* of the bones resulted in a miraculous conversion of the Jews inhabiting the island.[108] By the mid fifth century, the marytrion in Jerusalem which held the bones of Saint Stephen—and also, not coincidentally, as we shall see, the bones of the Empress Eudocia—was attracting pilgrims from throughout the empire.

Because the martyrion was such a prominent part of the sacred geography of Jerusalem, Gerontius hinted that it was part of Melania's monastery on the Mount of Olives:

> She was eager to build an oratory in the monastery and to place an altar in it, coming together, they would be worthy of participation in the holy mysteries…. There she laid the remains of the holy martyrs, that is, of the prophet Zechariah, and of the holy protomartyr Stephen, and of the holy Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, and others, whose names God knows.[109]

However, Eudocia had a strong claim to both the bones and the martyrion, as she was responsible for its dedication and was buried there. In order for Melania's claims to be taken seriously, Gerontius established a strong relationship between

[106]Clark 1986, 95-96; see also Bovon 2003, especially 262-263.
[107] John Rufus, *Life of Peter the Iberian*, 49.
[108] Severus of Minorca, *Epistola Severi*, 20.
[109] *VM* 48.

Melania and Eudocia[110] which explained Eudocia's close association with both the bones of Saint Stephen and the martyrion. For instance, the *Life of Melania* suggested theat Eudocia's only connection to the martyrion of Stephen was that she was present at the dedication.[111] In this narrative, Melania also usurped the funereal association between Eudocia and the bones of Saint Stephen: as she felt her death nearing, Melania went with Gerontius to the shrine of the martyrion to pray. Upon reading of the death of Stephen to her monastic community, she presaged her own death.[112] According to Gerontius, Melania the Younger was buried wearing clothing that had been owned by saints, and her head was resting on a pillow made of the hair of a martyr.[113] The saints whom Melania had honored by building the martyrion, including Stephen, were on hand to welcome her to heaven upon her death.[114] In the end, Gerontius' claims seem feeble at best. Nevertheless, they do suggest a further social relationship which Melania sought to pursue: a heavenly friendship with the saints advertised through an accumulation of relics.

The bones of Saint Stephen were part of a delicate net of authority which stretched throughout the Roman Empire. Although Melania likely neither brought the bones to Jerusalem nor constructed their final resting place, the emphasis on Melania's friendship with Eudocia and the dedication of the martyrion represented a very Christian form of social relationship based on a mutual respect for a saint and

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[110] *VM* 56. According to Gerontius, Eudocia and Melania endured a grueling trip through snow-covered Cappadocia together.
[111] *VM* 59. Eudocia hurt her foot during the ceremony, explaining the fact that Eudocia had to hurry home and leave Melania's side. Clark 1984, 118-119; 139-140.
[112] *VM* 64.
[113] *VM* 69.
[114] *VM* 70.

advertisement of status through care shown to his cult.[115] This relationship included not only a wealthy Christian ascetic, supposedly removed from the world and an empress in exile in the Holy Land on accusation of adultery, but also martyred saint previously known only for a brief biblical reference.[116] It is fitting that Melania's most salient social relationship was her claim to the bones of Saint Stephen, a material object whose value was intrinsic, but could be manipulated by the owner, rather than a person whose views could cause disruption to a social circle. She could shape the character of her partner to her will, as he was not a living human, whose corporality and will were inextricably bound, but instead a collection of bones which could be owned, sold, and traded, and whose power could be limited and tied specifically to Melania's by legend. While Melania's claims on the bones of Saint Stephen, her friendship with Eudocia and Serena, and her reliance on men like Paulinus of Nola and Augustine showed that she invested in social networks, Melania the Younger's choice of investments diverged from that of her grandmother: her great charitable work would involve investing in land, in goods, and in production, considering the real economic benefits of asceticism before the social benefits.

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[115] Paulinus of Nola created such a connection at his monastery in Nola, where he honored the local saint Felix through both architecture and literature. See, for instance, *Carmen* 21 (which, incidentally, also included a description of Melania the Elder). Cf. Trout 1999, 128-131.

[116] At the same time, it also connected Melania to the biblical past and to a wide geographic network connected through the bones of Saint Stephen. After their discovery in Jerusalem, Orosius brought the bones back from the Holy Land to Augustine in North Africa and Severus in Minorca, before arriving in Hispania himself.

Section 6
Forgetting Melania: Gerontius' selective memory

Melania the Younger was never as ambitious as her grandmother had been in the buying of social relationships through charity. However, the omission of one obvious social connection from her biography is glaring: Gerontius never once mentioned Melania the Elder by name.[117] Despite Palladius' careful curation of her memory, Melania the Elder was too tainted to be included in her own granddaughter's ascetic biography, despite the fact that Melania the Younger owed her ascetic dedication to her grandmother's example.[118] The *Life of Melania the Younger* provides the evidence that Melania the Elder's investments had failed.

Although Melania and Rufinus had carefully cultivated a powerful social network, including an eager biographer with the ear of the imperial aristocracy in Constantinople, Jerome's accusations against his old friend Rufinus were successful. In the end, Jerome became a respected father of the church, known for his Latin translations of the Bible and other Christian texts, which made the faith more accessible. Rufinus and Melania, on the other hand, despite the continued support of certain partisans, became all but forgotten heretics in the story of the rebellious monks of Egypt. In fact, their monasteries may have already failed before Melania the Younger even arrived in Jerusalem.[119]

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[117] For a discussion of the omission of Melania the Elder from the *Life of Melania the Younger*, see Clark 1984, 148-152.
[118] *HL* 54.
[119] Clark 1984, 149. See also Chin 2010.

Throughout the *Life of Melania the Younger*, gaps in the narrative or missing characters showed that Gerontius attempted to avoid the question of heresy, especially in monastic settings. Gerontius was keenly aware of the failure of Melania the Elder's memorialization due to the pressure of the Origenist heresy, of the dead saint's tenuous standing with orthodox Christians in the period of the Council of Chalcedon, and of the harm which accusations of heresy caused to her memory despite Palladius' careful biography. He had more invested in the memory of Melania the Younger than Palladius ever had in Melania the Elder: she was the founder of the monastery of which he was then superior. In writing her biography, he was both writing a history of his institution, which Melania and founded, and guaranteeing its future success through the ability of Melania's story to garner converts to asceticism and donations. In order for his memorialization of Melania the Younger to succeed, he had to erase all memory of Melania the Elder.

Thus, according to Gerontius, Melania the Younger was so zealous in her orthodoxy that she actually paid heretics to repent: "She brought so many Samaritans and Greeks and heretics to God by persuading them with money and advice."[120] Likewise, there was one allusion to Melania the Elder in her granddaughter's biography. Gerontius recalled:

> During the holy repetition with the other dead saints I said that name of a certain lady of consular status who lost her life abroad at the holy places. I mentioned her name in the holy Eucharistic offering along with those of saints now dead—for that was our custom…. Although that woman was in communion with us in our orthodoxy, she was said

[120] *VM* 29. Cf. Melania's bribes to ensure virgins remained sexually continent in the same section. Both *Samaritan* and *Greek* were ethnics used to denote paganism, although *Greek* may have been tied more closely to certain philosophical schools.

> by some to be a heretic. The blessed [Melania] was so irritated that she said to me then and there, quite frankly: 'By God, if you name her, I will no longer share the sacrifice with you.… Even now, since you have named her this one time, I will not participate"[121]

Gerontius understood the delicate nature of Melania the Younger's status as a monastic founder. He included this episode, which seemed to refer to and therefore defame Melania the Elder, to indicate Melania the Younger's dedication to orthodoxy: she was so disgusted at the mention of her grandmother's name that she would refuse communion.[122] Just as Melania banned her grandmother's name from her monastery, Gerontius banned it from her biography, further guaranteeing the failure of Melania the Elder's memorialization. By including this episode in the biography, Gerontius made it clear that it was Melania the Younger who made the decision not to accept Melania the Elder, not he as the author. By scrubbing Melania the Younger clean of her grandmother's name, Gerontius could thus add value to Melania's social life even after her death.

Gerontius' treatment of Melania the Elder was indicative of the tenor of Late Antique monastic politics: heresy was a death sentence for an enduring memory. It was a death sentence Melania the Younger herself barely escaped. Melania the Younger was only tangentially tinged by heresy—as any famous and influential

[121] *VM* 28; Clark 1984, 148-149.
[122] It is interesting to note, however, that Melania the Elder was not, in Gerontius' view, a heretic: he still included her name in the list of saints. Thus Gerontius appealed to Melania the Elder's partisans by suggesting that he accepted her, while Melania the Younger did not. This allowed him to state that Melania the Younger was strongly opposed not only to heresy, a threat to all ascetics at the time, but also to Melania the Elder, with whom she had a personal connection which could be problematic. On Melania the Elder's absence in the *Life of Melania the Younger*, see Hammond 1977, 380.

ascetic in Late Antiquity inevitably was.[123] No serious charges of heresy were ever entertained against her. Gerontius, however, was less careful about his own social relationships. He wrote the biography of Melania at the behest of Bishop Theodosius of Jerusalem, a supporter of the monks of Jerusalem. To men like Gerontius, Theodosius was a welcome contrast to his deposed predecessor, Juvenal, who had prosecuted the monks of Jerusalem. However Theodosius, like Gerontius, was a monophysite, a theological stance which quickly fell out of fashion not only in Jerusalem, but in all the Christian West and much of the East.[124] Melania's good memory lasted only as long as her biographer's theological orientation was acceptable to the general public.

Section 7
Conclusions

According to the *Lausiac History* and the *Life of Melania the Younger*, asceticism gave aristocratic women the ability to make choices about their social identities and associations by freeing their social identities from the bounds of familial roles and freeing their patrimonies for charitable investment. However it also exposed women to the risks associated with those choices. Both Melania the Elder and Melania the Younger used their charitable renunciations to create and solidify social networks throughout the Mediterranean world. By engaging in a type of Christian-oriented gift exchange, in which problematic wealth could be traded by

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[123] Clark 1984, 143-147. Gerontius was careful to curate Melania's memory, but his own monophysite beliefs were also clear in his biography. Moreover, there are some indications in the *Life of Melania the Younger* that Gerontius was careful to avoid any connection to Pelagianism; see Clark 1984, 146-148 on *VM* 61.
[124] Clark 1984, 19-21.

secular aristocrats for the legitimacy of asceticism offered by monks, wealthy Christians who managed their charity well became popular and famous ascetics. Their extended and renowned social networks offered ever more opportunities for charity and the creation of new social ties through mutual interest in the institution of aristocratic asceticism, as well as the promise of remembrance after death.

Melania the Elder's social network was a carefully pruned collection of charismatic ascetics of the Egyptian desert. Melania was very successful in integrating herself into a male network, a network with ascetic credibility, and a network of the Egyptian desert. She supported them in their need, making her ties to them even stronger. However, the accusations of one man—the erstwhile friend of her monastic partner—brought the entire network down. Melania had risked everything on her social investments, and she lost.

Melania the Elder was thus forgotten even by the biographer of her granddaughter, Melania the Younger. Although Melania the Younger had been reared in ascetic practice by her grandmother, she was far more conservative in her social networking. She relied on a few select family friends, such as her influential mentor Augustine, to provide monastic credibility. She also cultivated relationships with imperial women to guarantee political, social, and economic stability. Melania's investment in social ties returned very little to her lasting memory, but the foundations she had laid survived for another generation.

Asceticism gave women the ability to manage their familial estates to their own ends. By charitably renouncing wealth, women were actually able to make the

investments they chose, whether in social capital or in economic returns. However, innovative female ascetics, such as Melania the Elder and Melania the Younger, were not always successful in creating lasting social ties or economic foundations. Yet their use of family connections and inheritance within the monastic setting resulted in the continuation of their memories. Melania the Elder's investment in social connections solidified through charitable donations offered promising returns early in her ascetic career; however, her close relationship with Rufinus left her vulnerable to attacks on one prominent member of her social group, Rufinus. Melania the Younger, perhaps inspired by the fate of her grandmother but also facing very specific historical circumstances, chose a different strategy for investment through charitable foundations: by founding monasteries, Melania the Younger moved her wealth from familial estates in the Western Empire to monastic estates in the more economically and politically stable East.

Chapter 5

These Corruptible Goods:
Melania the Younger's monastic investments

Aristocratic Christians were attracted to asceticism for a variety of reasons. While Christian belief and the promise of spiritual returns prompted Roman aristocrats to choose certain types of euergetistic endeavors, for some converts, asceticism likely had particular appeal which exceeded its religious meaning. Asceticism allowed adherents to create new social networks based on a mutual concern for ascetic principles; in such networks, members were rewarded not only for their piety, but also for the extent of their renunciation. Ascetic networks thus clearly favored aristocratic, wealthy members, not only because of the possible extent of their charitable renunciation, but also because aristocrats were likely to already have empire-wide social connections which would aid in the creation of ascetic networks. Wealthy Romans were drawn to asceticism as an economic institution. Just as the existing social structures of Roman aristocracy had served to inform (and limit) the economic actions of the aristocracy, Christian asceticism provided a set of social expectations and religious rules which informed the use and investment of funds. While those rules and expectations did circumscribe economic investment, they also provided a clear framework in which economic action could be profitable not only in terms of the creation and

maintenance of social relationships, but also in terms of financial benefits.[1] The pervasive use of economic language authors used in Late Antique hagiographic biographies suggested that, while the promise of spiritual wellbeing was an aspect of the attraction of asceticism for wealthy Romans, the possibility of a sound economic investment was also a draw.

When she converted to asceticism in the late fourth century, Melania the Elder used her charitable donations to invest in social relationships. Melania was well known throughout the Roman Empire for her charity and association which the legendary monks of Egypt. However, Melania's investments did not bring lasting return because of the controversies in which her social circle was involved. Yet investment in social relationships was attractive to Melania the Elder, as she lived in a world in which great economic stratification limited the value of economic returns. In an agricultural economy in which the gap between the rich and the poor was as great as it was in Late Antiquity, the wealthy could live comfortably without the need to productively invest.[2] The excess funds created through charitable renunciation, then, were well spent on the creation of a stable social network.

In contrast, Melania the Elder's granddaughter, Melania the Younger, used her charity for economically beneficial means. By the time Melania the Younger converted to asceticism in the early fifth century, the Western Roman Empire had

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[1] The idea of Christian monasticism as a revolutionary economic system based on rationality and efficiency brought about by moral motivations was perhaps most strongly stated by Weber in his *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. For a recent reconsideration of the actual impact of medieval Christian asceticism on the modern economy, see Silber 1993.
[2] See Scheidel 2009. Bagnall 1992, 128; 141-143 also lays out a good background for the study of inequality in the Roman economy, although Bagnall also notes that Egypt may have operated differently from other parts of the empire. See also Rankin 2004.

become politically and economically unstable. Melania the Elder did not have to worry about her income, as her family owned prosperous estates throughout the empire. However, by the time Melania the Younger inherited those estates by the early fifth century, they were under threat of barbarian invasion. Melania therefore used the pretext of her charity to liquidate her familial estates and reinvest the money in productive monasteries in the more stable East. Melania continued to benefit from the economic stability which land ownership represented, as some of her estates continued to exist with only a few ascetic modifications. However, like her grandmother, Melania the Younger also benefited from the cachet which devotion to asceticism and the foundation of monastic institutions brought to fifth-century women.

Melania was motivated to found monasteries because of her religious belief; however, her decision to express this belief through the foundation of monasteries was also a choice which brought her economic benefit. Just as ancient economic action was embedded in the social, cultural, and legal institutions of the society, cultural institutions, such as aristocratic monasticism, inspired not only religious, but also economic action (section 1). Indeed, Late Antique Christian monasteries had a robust economic function and operated both efficiently and reasonably, seeking to ensure the wellbeing not only of the monks, but also of the local Christian community. Monastic estates not only functioned like aristocratic estates, they were sometimes formed by the same people (section 2). For Melania the Younger, the rhetoric of aristocratic asceticism, and particularly the model of the foundation of monasteries using familial wealth, provided an opportunity for her to sell her

familial estates in the West and reinvest the money in eastern monasteries without censure; she was further freed to undertake this action by the fact that she had no heirs to inherit the land (section 3). While Melania was attracted to the East, and particularly Jerusalem, because of its religious significance, it was also far more prosperous than the West. Furthermore, after the relocation of the imperial capital to Constantinople, the East allowed Melania proximity to the imperial court, where, according to Gerontius, she befriended an empress (section 4). However, Melania's most important impetus to move her wealth was the barbarian invasions in the West. Beginning especially with the sack of Rome by the Visigoths in 410, the Western Empire, the traditional seat of senatorial wealth, faced political instability, the devastation of land, a lack of labor, and plummeting land prices. Both Gerontius and Palladius noted the destruction caused by the barbarians (section 5). By charitably founding monasteries in the East, Melania made a wise investment in stable estates.

Section 1
The economy and society of aristocratic monasticism

The embeddedness of the Roman economy in social and cultural structures has been a topic of debate since Finley's *The Ancient Economy* provided a Weberian explanation for what the author perceived as a lack of productive growth in the classical economy.[3] Finley's model of the embedded economy, especially as it applied to the Roman Republic, envisioned an aristocratic class who were, for the most part, owners of the means of production and whose financial actions were

[3] Morris in Finley 1999 xv; xix-xxi.

limited by a set of aristocratic values which prized social relations over strict economic rationality. Inspired by Polanyi,[4] Finley suggested that the aristocratic economy was akin to a reciprocal exchange. The financial options reasonably open to aristocratic Romans were circumscribed by the social institutions in which they operated: the Roman aristocracy "lacked the will; that is to say, they were inhibited as a group (whatever the responses of a minority), by over-riding values…. Stated differently, a model of economic choices, an investment model, in antiquity would give considerable weight to this factor of status."[5] Finley argued that aristocratic Romans could not act in strictly economically rational ways because they had no concept of economic action outside of social concerns. According to Finley, Romans invested in social relationships and power, not in economically productive investments.

Finley was interested in the effect of social concerns and status on the economic decision-making of the ancient Greeks and Romans. However, the embedded economy effected both economic and social action: just as social and cultural values affected economic decision-making, economic thought was part of social, cultural, and even religious choices. Thus, the decision of Late Antique aristocratic women to convert to asceticism was inspired by a variety of motivations; however, because economic thought was embedded in the social and cultural institutions of the ancient world, economic considerations were part of

[4] Polanyi 1957 sets out Polanyi's general argument about the ancient world, which shaped Finley's view. See also Krippner and Alvarez 2007, 227-228; Lie 1991, 222. "Embeddedness" in the Roman economy continues to be an analytical tool, as it provides a context for considering the impact of legal and social institutions on economic action. See Andreau, France, and Pittia 2004.
[5] Finley 1999, 60.

ascetic conversion. Likewise, conversion to asceticism and charitable renunciation had real economic effects for converts—and these effects could include a growth in wealth.

The fact that the Roman economy was embedded in social relationships explains the intersection between ascetic beliefs, enforced through social relationships among aristocratic Christians, and individual economic actions. Asceticism offered a separate set of economic rules which promised social advancement and power within the institution. In other words, the institution of asceticism promised a certain set of guaranteed returns—which included both intangible benefits, such as social power, and tangible economic returns—for an economic investment. The modern scholarly emphasis on the spiritual benefits of asceticism impedes a conversation about the fact that some wealthy Christians also gained real, tangible social and economic benefits from their monastic foundations. Christian asceticism and the institution of monasticism offered for aristocratic Christians a set of values which guided their economic choices; however, it also provided an avenue for economic investment through the foundation of monasteries in the Late Antique Roman Empire.

On the one hand, the ideology of aristocratic Christian asceticism was very clear in its negativity toward personal financial gain. Ascetic authors praised the voluntary poverty of their once-wealthy subjects. According to Gerontius, when Melania the Younger visited Serena, she praised Melania to her retinue:

> Look at this woman whom we saw enjoying her worldly worth four years ago, but is now old in heavenly perception; and let us learn from her, so that our pious reckoning overpowers every pleasure of the body. Look at the one who, having trampled the tenderness of her childhood and her great wealth and the prick of her pride and, essentially, all the delights of this life, feared neither weakness of flesh nor voluntary poverty.[6]

According to Gerontius, Melania gained renown from Serena because of her voluntary poverty, and specifically because of the differential between her past worldly luxury and her present asceticism. The tenets of asceticism mandated that Melania give up her wealth; however, asceticism also offered her benefits, such as the praise and support of Serena, for adhering to this attitude toward wealth. In including this story in his biography, Gerontius communicated the benefits of asceticism to his aristocratic audience, creating an argument to support voluntary poverty among the aristocracy. In other words, the institution of asceticism, through ascetic literature, articulated a clear set of economic values as well as expected outcomes. In this way, it was similar to the types of aristocratic values which Finley argued limited economic growth in the Republic.

On the other hand, charitable action, and especially the establishment of monasteries, offered an actual economic benefit for the aristocracy. For women like Melania, the claim of charitable intentions allowed for greater latitude of economic choices. Thus, while Finley argued that the values and traditions of the ancient aristocracy limited economic innovation, the rise of asceticism among the upper classes of Rome allowed for a greater variety of investments. In and of itself,

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[6] *VM* 12.

asceticism did not revolutionize Roman economic thought or introduce values favoring production; however, according to hagiographic texts, it did allow for innovative ways for wealthy Romans to gain economic returns from their investments. The values of Christian asceticism presented in these texts provided a context for aristocratic investment in profitable institutions.

The investments of the Roman noblewoman Melania the Younger, described by her biographer Gerontius, were indicative of and, within the context of hagiography, advertisements for productive investment in monasteries. While Melania the Elder had focused on the social benefits offered by asceticism, Melania the Younger actually treated her charity as an economic investment. First, Melania organized her monasteries to resemble her familial estates which had been successful for hundreds of years. She endowed her monasteries to ensure they would be self-sufficient. However, Melania also stressed the independence of her monasteries—and therefore her authority, both spiritual and economic—from the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Gerontius thus espoused a specific vision of monastic authority, in which monastic superiors separated themselves from the power of the church in order to become more perfect Christians—an essential model for a monastic woman.[7] In these ways, Gerontius demonstrated Melania's understanding of the monastic economy, an important aspect of the ascetic who was once a wealthy Roman, so that she could make the most of her charitable donations. In doing so, he provided a model for his aristocratic readers: Melania was also interested in

[7] Leyser 2004; For women in authorities in monasteries, see Cooper 2005; See, in contrast, Sterk 2004.

protecting her investments, even during the destructive barbarian invasions. Melania prudently sold off her properties in the troubled West, always one step before the invading barbarians. She then used the money from these estates to purchase land for monasteries in the more politically and economically stable East. In founding these monasteries, Melania relied upon her aristocratic social circle of ascetic friends in order to ensure that her monasteries would be protected from attacks questioning her spirituality or her economic gains. Even the location of the foundation of her signature monastery on the Mount of Olives indicated Melania's economic awareness: Melania founded monasteries in the Holy Land, an area whose significance as the Christian center of the Eastern Roman Empire would support the continued existence of her monastery.

Section 2
Same as It Ever Was: The monastic economy

Late Antique monasticism was part of the productive economy of the Roman Empire. Monasteries were responsible for the upkeep of their own members,[8] and they fulfilled this responsibility in a variety of ways; there was no one model of the monastic economy in Late Antiquity. Most monasteries were also responsible for charitable actions which supported the local Christian communities.[9] This support demanded an excess of monastic wealth; stated differently, most monasteries needed to produce more than enough to be self-sufficient. While some monasteries

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[8] See, for instance, *HL* 32-33; John Cassian, *De institutis* 4.14-15.

[9] For instance, the Pachomian monasteries supported the local prison population (*HL* 32), and Ephraim devoted himself to the care of the sick (*HL* 40). See also Crislip 2005 and Horden 2005. For monastic charity in general, see Finn 2006, 90-115.

received a great deal of charity from wealthy locals, the imperial aristocracy, and even the imperial family,[10] allowing these foundations to act more as charitable redistribution centers than productive estates, most monasteries required a combination of productive activities and investments and shrewd administration of charitable donations in order to meet their social obligations. The expectations placed on monasteries thus forced them to produce wealth, just as the constant demand for euergetism had forced aristocratic estates to produce a surplus. Furthermore, the rules surrounding monastic life, especially those related to labor, suggested that monastic estates managed their production differently from aristocratic estates.

Charity was an important source of income for most monasteries. Some, like the monasteries which Melania founded in Thagaste,[11] were almost completely funded by aristocratic charity. Many successful monasteries benefited from the income brought by tourism. These monasteries attracted pilgrims of saints' cults, such as the healing saint Menas, whose shrine in the Nile Delta attracted thousands of visitors each year, or were well situated along pilgrimage routes to other Christian sites.[12] Melania's monastery in Jerusalem may likewise have derived

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[10] Melania the Younger's monastery in Jerusalem was an example of such a monastery: not only did it rely on Melania's endowment, but it received further investments from Melania's wealthy patron, Lausus (*VM* Latin version 41).

[11] *VM* 20. The fact that Melania had to endow these monasteries suggests that they were not completely supported by whatever productive industries in which they engaged. Unfortunately, the exact functions of and industries undertaken by the monasteries which Melania founded remained obscure in the *Life of Melania the Younger*; it is quite clear that Gerontius was interested in the actions of Melania, not in the function of her monasteries. Because no certainly identified archaeological remains of Melania's monasteries exist, there is no way to speak specifically about the function and organization of these monasteries (Clark 118-119).

[12] Davis 2001, 114-136.

income from tourism.[13] Such monasteries also benefited the local community, as the pilgrims who passed through bought supplies or paid to spend the night. Such monasteries, which were dependent upon large-scale charity or pilgrimage traffic, are disproportionally visible in sources due to their empire-wide fame and connection to known aristocratic donors.

However, most monasteries depended much more on the local economy and are thus less well known as foundations. For the most part, our knowledge of these more local foundations, often known throughout but not beyond a region or province, is limited to Egypt, where the immense amount of preserved data, both archaeological and documentary, helps to illuminate the lives of these lesser-known monasteries. Documentary evidence reveals a wide range of economic practices among these monasteries, from industrial production of goods to large-scale ownership and renting of land.[14] Unfortunately, much of the most in-depth documentary evidence from Egyptian monasteries comes from later centuries, especially the sixth through eighth.[15] Nevertheless, such information helps to fill in the gaps left by the earlier records, especially because contemporary sources, such as Palladius' description of Nitria in the *Lausiac History*[16] or the textual and

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[13] Cf. *HL* 61; Wilkinson 1981,185 n.1.
[14] For a general introduction to the study of the Egyptian monastic economy, see Wipszycka 1986.
[15] See, for instance, Clackson 2000 on the Monastery of Apollo at Bawit; Bachatly 1961 and Godlewski 1986 on the Monastery of Phoibammon at Thebes; Winlock et al. 1926 on the Monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes.
[16] *HL* 7.

archaeological evidence from the Shenoutian monasteries in Sohag,[17] complement these sources.

Palladius visited Nitria in Lower Egypt in the late fourth century and described it as a self-sufficient village, where monks worked diligently as part of their devotions, "either in the garden, or in the bakery, or in the butchery…. Doctors and cake makers also pass through this mountain. They use and sell wine. All of them work fine linen with their hands, so that they all are in need of nothing."[18] The description of linen manufacturing at Nitria is supported by evidence from later monasteries throughout Egypt: for instance, a loom was found in one of the cells at the seventh-century Monastery of Epiphanius in the Thebaid.[19] Indeed, Palladius recounted that a Pachomian monastery in Upper Egypt selected a particularly steadfast monk to travel to Alexandria, located about 800 kilometers downriver, "to sell their goods and purchase necessities."[20] Indeed, there is evidence from monasteries throughout Egypt of export of materials manufactured onsite to areas in Egypt and throughout the Roman Empire: for instance, monasteries in Upper Egypt manufactured linen for export to the Delta, while Delta monasteries shipped baskets south.[21]

[17] Emmel 2004; Layton 2007.
[18] *HL* 7.
[19] Winlock 1926, 68. See also Wipszycka 1965.
[20] *HL* 32. For long-distance trade in Pachomian monasteries, see Goehring 1996, 273-274. Cf. *HL* 13.
[21] Wipszycka 2009, 478.

Palladius described the economy of the Pachomian monasteries in Upper Egypt as bustling estates with a variety of industries:[22]

> In this monastery I found fifteen tailors, seven smiths, four carpenters, twelve camel drivers, and fifteen fullers. And they worked at every craft, providing for the women's monasteries and the prisons from the surplus[23].... At daybreak, laborers for the day get up and go to the butchery or the tables… One works the land as a farmer, another works the garden, another works the smithy, another works at the bakery, another works as a carpenter, another as a fuller, another works weaving large baskets, another as a tanner, another as a cobbler, another as a calligrapher, another weaves reeds.[24]

As Palladius' description showed, in addition to such production monasteries also owned land and property, which they farmed and rented out to support their communities.[25] Indeed, Palladius' characterization of the self-supporting Pachomian monasteries reflected the concerns of both monastic and secular estates during Late Antiquity; the Latin version of the *Life of Melania* described the self-sufficiency and thriving metallurgy industry at one of Melania's estates in North Africa, which she later converted into a monastery.[26] Comparative documentary evidence and contemporary descriptions suggested that the economic function of Late Antique

[22] For Pachomian monasteries as ascetic villages deeply involved in the "outside" world, see Goehring 1996.
[23] This suggests that women's monasteries were not involved in the type of manufacturing men's Pachomian monasteries were. Unfortunately, because most written evidence of monastic production came from male monastic contexts, it is difficult to ascertain whether this sort of relationship was common. Indeed, most of the female monasteries which Palladius mentioned were aristocratic monasteries, not necessarily dependent upon production. Cf. Clark 1986, 213, Jerome *Ep*. 108 described the work of Paula's aristocratic female monastery in Bethlehem.
[24] *HL* 32. Wipszycka 2009, 485 pointed out that the weaving of baskets was overrepresented in monastic texts because, as a feminine task, it showed the great humility of the monks who undertook it.
[25] Numerous tax receipts and rental contracts exist from the Thebaid monasteries, and in particular the seventh-century Monastery of Phoibammon, which indicate their economic function. Godlewski 1986; similar documents exist from the Monastery of Apollo at Bawit in Middle Egypt: Clackson 2000 and 2007.
[26] *VM* Latin 21; Allard 1907, 12; Clark 1984, 99.

monasteries was very similar to that of the large aristocratic estates of the Roman Empire.

In his short biography of Melania the Younger in the *Lausiac History*, Palladius described her monastery in a way which clarified how asceticism was practiced by the upper classes of Rome. Palladius extoled the virtue of Melania: "She…appointed for herself a daily portion of the work of her slaves, whom she had made ascetics with her."[27] While Palladius' point was to demonstrate Melania's humility, the fact that Melania's virtues were evident in her changed relationship to her slaves argued that aristocratic monasteries may have simply been a redefinition of existing households. In other words, Melania translated her estates into monasteries without changing their personnel, but by simply converting her slaves to asceticism.[28] Such a practice also explained the origin of Melania's monks, which seemed puzzling. For instance, Gerontius recorded that Melania's monasteries in Thagaste were home to 80 men and 130 women,[29] while also describing the city as "small and extremely poor."[30] Although Gerontius probably exaggerated the provincial nature of Thagaste,[31] the demographic realities of the ancient world would have made the removal of so many young men and women from the reproductive pool of citizens disastrous. However, if Melania had only converted the

[27] *HL* 61.
[28] It is important to note that these converted slaves still likely remained slaves, and thus were bound to the monastery. Although Melania the Younger supposedly freed many of her slaves, Palladius noted that not all were sold (*HL* 61).
[29] *VM* 22.
[30] *VM* 21.
[31] Thagaste was, after all, the birthplace of Augustine (Shaw 1987, 8).

slaves of her property to monks of her monastery, the local population of the city would not have been so grievously affected.

The 210 inhabitants of Melania's monasteries at Thagaste could easily have staffed the provincial estate which Melania's family owned in the region.[32] Wealthy landowners like Melania owned thousands of slaves throughout the empire. For instance, Palladius wrote that Melania the Younger "freed 8000 slaves who were willing, for the others were not willing, but preferred to be slaves to her brother."[33] Palladius included this aspect of Melania's charitable renunciations in order to stress the generosity of his subject: Melania was willing both to free her slaves and to give her valuable property to her brother.[34] He therefore had reason to exaggerate the number of slaves Melania owned; in a time when a medium-sized city might have 5,000 inhabitants,[35] 8,000 slaves seems extravagant.[36] However, Melania, like any solidly upper-class Roman, owned several large and luxurious estates,[37] and these estates, at least in the West,[38] where most of Melania's wealth

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[32] The Latin version of the *Life of Melania the Younger* emphasized the great size of this estate (*VM* 21). Indeed, the Latin *Life* was often more extravagant in its claims of Melania's wealth, but was also more likely to include useful information about Melania's estates.
[33] *HL* 61. In this passage, Palladius skimmed over the tense relationship between Melania and her brother Severus, which almost caused a slave revolt on her Appian property (*VM* 10). Palladius had less to gain than Gerontius from the tension between Melania the Younger and her family, especially because his friend Melania the Elder was one of the members of the family whom Gerontius found truly problematic.
[34] Slaves were indeed valuable; Allard provided a rather unfortunate description of the situation, apologizing for Melania's inability to free all the slaves by pointing out that she had already given up millions of *francs* worth of property! (1907, 27)
[35] Scheidel 2007, 10-15
[36] MacMullen, for instance, estimated that in North Africa, where Melania's largest monastery was located, about 5-10% of the population was enslaved. The presence of senatorial *latifundia* meant that up to 25% of Italy's population was slaves. (1987, 365-366). By exaggerating the number of slaves Melania owned, however, Palladius emphasized the extent of her wealth.
[37] At the very least, Melania must have owned eight estates according to the *Life of Melania*, including both her home in the city of Rome and the suburban estate (Gerontius listed land in six provinces besides Rome (*VM* 11, 20). Palladius added four provinces to this number (*HL* 61), while Gerontius

lay, operated based on slave labor. The Latin version of the *Life of Melania the Younger* stated that there were "sixty villages with 400 slaves"[39]on Melania's favorite estate in Campania. This luxurious estate meant for upper class leisure activities was located in a rich agricultural region, and therefore the staff of this estate was probably not standard; nevertheless it would only take 20 such estates to reach the number of 8000 slaves that Palladius suggested. Melania certainly owned many slaves, and, despite what Palladius said about her generosity in freeing them, she may have retained many slaves on the estates she kept in Campania, Sicily, and Africa, where most of the empire's slaves were held—and where Melania founded monasteries early in her monastic career.

The *Lausiac History* provided more evidence for this form of monastery. Palladius wrote that

> [Melania] had with her her mother Albina, who was similarly an ascetic and who had dispersed her own property on her own. They were inhabiting their country estates, sometimes in Sicily, other times in Campania, with fifteen eunuchs and 60 virgins, who were both

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suggested that Melania had more than one estate to sell in Spain (*VM* 37), bringing the number to at least 13. It is likely that such an old and wealthy family owned more estates, however, as it was usual for senatorial families to own several estates in senatorial provinces such as Hispania, Italy, and North Africa.

[38] Egypt's agrarian economy functioned differently than that of western provinces. Patterns of landholding and taxations were different (Bagnall 1985 and 1992), and labor was contracted through rents rather than slaveholding (Temin 2004).

[39] *VM* 21. Rampolla argued that each of the sixty "villages" must have had 400 slaves—meaning that Melania would have had a total of 24,000 slaves on that estate alone. Although the language of the Latin version of the *Life* is unclear (*sexaginta villas…habentes quadringentenos servos agricultores*), this number of slaves on a single estate in Campania is clearly untenable. The Greek *Life* did not include an estimation of the number of slaves, but did mention the sixty dwellings on the estate, calling them ἐποίκια. Although the number of farmsteads (*villae*; ἐποίκια) may seem extravagant for 400 slaves, ἐποίκια in particular could refer simply to family-sized dwellings. In that case, the habitation of 60 houses by 400 slaves seems reasonable. For more on villa-estates, see Banaji 2007, 172-174.

> slaves and free. And her husband lived with 30 monks, undertaking both industry in the garden and holy conversations.[40]

The language of this passage confirmed that some of the ascetics with Melania were *still* slaves and had not been freed. Indeed, Palladius made an explicit contrast between the slave and free inhabitants of the monastery, which emphasized the fact that both slaves and freedmen could join monasteries.[41] His tone furthermore indicated that this manner of ascetic living was, if not expected among upper class families, at least not worthy of special comment. The presence of eunuchs was suggestive of Melania and Albina's past luxurious life—and the similarity their present ascetic life bore to it. Unfortunately, Palladius gave no further indication of who the free women who lived with Melania and Albina were and what their relationship to the family was and had been before they joined the monastery. The origin of the relationship between these women and Melania, and the role these women played in the life of the monastery may have reflected a fundamental difference between Melania's monastery and her estates.

The relationship between the owner of the monastery and the workforce was also very different from the relationship between the estate owner and the estate. The ideological underpinnings of asceticism stressed labor as part of ascetic contemplation or renunciation, and so members of monastic communities at all levels took part in some sort of communal practice. In Palladius' description of Melania's familial monastery in Campania, Pinianus busied himself by working in his

[40] *HL* 61. The juxtaposition of Pinianus' manual labor and intellectual pursuits was, of course, not out of place in ascetic literature. However, the romanticization of farm work—an underlying assumption in aristocratic ascetic literature—started much earlier. See, for instance, Reay 2005 on Cato.
[41] Cf. *VO* 6.

garden, just as Gerontius asserted that Melania worked alongside her slaves in Thagaste. Of course, these were idealized images of aristocratic ascetics, created to praise their humility. Gerontius wrote that Melania strictly refused the superiorship of the monastery she had founded because of her deep humility and her desire to serve the members of the monastery.[42] However, with her great wealth, she undermined the authority of the superior she herself had appointed by providing the members of the monastery with small comforts not strictly allowed to them.[43] Although Gerontius included this story to emphasize Melania's generosity, it also indicated the not-exactly-equal status of the wealthy founders of monasteries, even if they had theoretically relinquished control of their property.

Based on the numbers of slaves Melania must have held throughout the Roman Empire, her propensity to found monasteries on the locations of her slave-run estates, and the real difficulty of quickly procuring dozens of monks to start monasteries from free local populations,[44] it seems likely that freed slaves made up at least a portion of the monks at Melania's monasteries. If so, these monastic foundations resembled aristocratic estates not only in their economic function—both agricultural production and the manufacture of materials—but also in the human means of production they employed. Monasteries were therefore not a particularly innovative addition to the Late Roman economy. According to Palladius, Melania retained and continued to live on her estates in Campania and Sicily for

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[42] *VM* 41.
[43] *Ibid*.
[44] Clark 1986 ("Authority and Humility") 215-216 discussed the impact of personal ownership on authority, suggesting that the fact that female monasteries were made up of family members, dependents, and slaves gave aristocratic women control of monastic foundations. Cf. Clark 1984 100.

some time after her initial conversion to asceticism and before her move to Africa.[45] She used the income of the estates "in sponsorship of monasteries"[46]—perhaps the monasteries she had founded on those very estates and populated with the slaves of those estates. Indeed, these monastic estates likely functioned very much like the secular estates they replaced.

Yet, despite the fact that Gerontius asserted Melania and Pinianus' devotion to asceticism, Palladius, whose goal as an author was to make asceticism attractive to a very wealthy audience, betrayed the luxurious life which the ascetics Melania, Albina, and Pinianus continued to live on their luxurious estates in southern Italy. But he did so in such a way as to make luxury sound ascetic, and to reassure his wealthy audience that asceticism need not interfere overmuch with their present lives. As he did throughout his work, Palladius emphasized the importance of using wealth responsibly, and argued that charity was one possible way to achieve an ascetic life and therefore salvation. He recalled time which he spent visiting the family: "She honored us greatly when we came to Rome although there were many of us… refreshing us with hospitality and ethereal traveling supplies, very joyfully harvesting eternal life with the Godly works of their excellent lifestyle."[47] This gesture was familiar: the practice of giving housing and aid to members of one's social network, however expanded, was expected in the Roman world and was reflected in the aristocratic foundation of charitable hospitals and hostels.[48] Indeed,

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[45] *VM* 19.
[46] *HL* 61. Palladius used the word χορηγίαν, a word with clear connections to pagan civic euergetism, to describe Melania's support of the monasteries.
[47] *Ibid*.
[48] See Horden 2005.

Melania and Pinianus also relied upon their ascetic friends' hospitality, spending time in Sicily with Rufinus before they left for Africa[49] and likely expecting to visit Paulinus in Nola.[50] Melania was acting like a proper wealthy Roman woman, and Palladius, because of his status and relationship to her grandmother, was part of her social circle. However, Palladius' experience with Melania in Southern Italy, as well as his description of the types of monasteries Melania, Albina, and Pinianus operated on their luxury estates, suggested that Melania had not renounced every aspect of her past life.

Melania's charitable renunciation demanded that she give up her estates; however, passages throughout aristocratic ascetic literature suggested that aristocratic asceticism relied upon existing estates, and their enslaved staff, to function. Thus, asceticism allowed Melania to have the best of both worlds: she benefited from the social and spiritual rewards of renunciation, but she did not, in fact, renounce her wealth as stored in her estates. Likewise, Melania received constant praise from Serena and Eudocia, and from Palladius and Gerontius, for her ascetic lifestyle; however, she clearly did not give up her aristocratic lifestyle completely. In many cases, Melania continued to live in the same places, with the same people, as she had prior to her conversion. Indeed, Melania's renunciation of wealth was even dubious: although Gerontius repeatedly asserted that Melania had given up all her wealth and was poorer than many of the people she served, she nevertheless always had the funds to build another monastery, purchase more

[49] Clark 1984, 109.
[50] *VM* Latin, 34. Because of the barbarian invasions, they could not stay. Coster 1959, 151.

relics, or make a long journey.[51] Aristocratic asceticism was thus a reorientation of personal life and attitudes toward wealth. Although Melania preserved her estates—the source of her wealth—with few changes, asceticism also allowed for a reorganization of wealth, as renunciation provided an excuse to sell unwanted familial estates and reinvest the proceeds into monastic foundations in the Eastern Empire.

Section 3
Monasticism as investment: A means of controlling wealth

The choice to be ascetic, for aristocratic women in particular, resulted in a renegotiation with family and familial wealth. In the case of Melania the Younger, the death of her two children left her with vast amounts of familial wealth which could not be passed on. Thus, after her conversion to asceticism, Melania faced a second choice: how to manage this wealth. According to the *Life of Melania the Younger*, Melania both fought for her wealth and was a shrewd administrator of it. Although ascetic teachings extolled poverty, wealth was nevertheless an important part of early Christian asceticism. Late Antique monasteries needed investments to survive and thrive, but they also needed to be financially successful in order to undertake charity. Likewise, for aristocratic Romans, vast wealth was a prerequisite for vast renunciation and remarkable charity. Melania needed to control her familial wealth in order to be a successful ascetic.

[51] See, for instance, *VM* 30, 35, 49. Although the rhetoric of asceticism demanded complete renunciation, it is clear throughout that the renunciation of these wealthy ascetics was by no means complete. This leads to amusing internal contradictions.

Women such as Melania, however, could support themselves using their familial wealth while at the same time renouncing their obligations to their biological families. This process was neither easy nor straightforward: Melania had to fight to maintain her patrimony, even involving the imperial family; she also continued to depend on her husband, and her husband's financial support, even after they had both dedicated themselves to asceticism.[52] However, Melania persevered, not only because she needed her familial wealth in order to maintain herself, but she also needed it for the practice of charity. Charity represented Melania's investment in her social status as an ascetic Christian and economic returns from her familial lands as well as her investment in a new type of family: the monasteries which she and Pinianus founded.

Melania's brand of ascetic belief, as described by Gerontius, provided a mechanism for Melania to gain control over her wealth. Because of the strong emphasis Christian asceticism placed on renunciation of wealth, it allowed, for the first time, individual members of aristocratic families to choose to break up the huge familial estates which typified aristocratic wealth in the Roman Empire. By "giving up" her wealth to found monasteries, Melania achieved two goals. First, she asserted her own control over the wealth of the *gens* by donating her familial assets to monastic institutions—which operated under her and praised her as their founder.[53] Indeed, the very tenor of the *Life of Melania the Younger*, which focused on the Roman noblewoman rather than her ascetic husband or successful father, is

[52] Gerontius emphasized the antagonism between Melania and her family up to the time of the death of her father and her two children; afterward, despite Melania's continuing involvement with her family, such a conflict was no longer narratologically useful.
[53] For praise of Melania as founder, see *VM* 64-65.

evidence of the power which control over wealth and ability to make charitable donations could have for a Late Antique woman. Secondly, asceticism provided a pretext, or at the very least a context, for the large-scale liquidation of venerable familial estates, some of which had been in families for centuries. Because of the emphasis on familial obligations in the Roman world, estates had been preserved to provide inheritance. However, liquidation of these estates could have great advantages: owners could invest in more productive land or industries. Asceticism allowed Romans to make more productive financial choices by providing an opportunity to break away from one social context, for instance, the aristocratic family, with the support of another, a monastic community. The ascetic economy was certainly embedded in social practices; those practices, however, were opposed to previous traditions, and therefore they provided the aristocracy with a chance to invest innovatively.

By the time of her father's death, Melania and Pinianus were quite a wealthy couple. The Greek version of the *Life of Melania* stated that Pinianus' income was 120,000 pieces of gold annually, while the Latin version ascribed this income to Melania's estates.[54] With this income alone Melania and Pinianus were comfortably in the middle bracket of the Roman senatorial class, and the amount was more than

[54] *VM* 15. There is some confusion as to exactly what Gerontius meant by 120,000 [pieces] of gold (χρυσοῦ μυριάδας δώδεκα). Rampolla was certain that Melania's family must have been among the very wealthiest in the Roman Empire, and so he imagined that Gerontius had meant 120,000 pounds of gold, a mind-bogglingly large income for a year (in today's market, about three billion dollars). Clark, on the other hand, interpreted the gold as referring to solidi, a much more likely conclusion (Clark 1984, 95-96). For a comparison between Melania's wealth and that of other contemporary aristocratic families, see Cameron 1999, 492-499. For a comparison from Republican Rome, see Rosenstein 2008. Although the exaggeration in such figures is obvious, Scheidel nicely articulated the patterns of exaggeration in his 1996 article. For perspective, Bagnall calculated that the imperial government collected around 2,000,000 solidi per year from taxes on Egyptian produce (1985, 305).

sufficient for the charity Gerontius described. However, both spouses likely had a similar income; 240,000 solidi, or over 3,000 pounds of gold, a year would put Pinianus and Melania's income among the greatest in the Roman Empire at the time.[55] These huge sums of money were the income of Melania and Pinianus' estates alone. Gerontius called the moveable goods of the couple "so great that they exceed measure."[56] Indeed, Melania's grandmother, Melania the Elder, had funded her entire charitable project through the sale of her moveable goods, which might include, for instance, furnishings and jewelry.[57] The capital locked away in the land, equipment, buildings, livestock and slaves must have been much greater.

Indeed, the extent of Melania and Pinianus' wealth made their charity seem insignificant. According to Gerontius, Melania and Pinianus "dispersed coin in various regions, through one man 40,000, through another 30,000, and through another 20,000, and through another 10,000, and the rest as the Lord aided them in doing."[58] However this admittedly fabricated number of 100,000 coins, a sum meant to indicate the depth of Melania's charity, fell short of her yearly income, and did not even begin to touch Pininanus'. For perspective, Paul the Deacon wrote that it took Gregory the Great 80 pounds of gold to support 3,000 monks for a year.[59] Using this calculation, Pinianus could have supported 62,500 monks a year on his income alone! By combining Melania's income with Pinianus', assuming his was similar, the

[55] Allard 1907, 17; Clark 1984, 94.
[56] *VM* 15.
[57] *HL* 46.
[58] *Ibid*.
[59] This number is slightly problematic to use; Gregory lived 150 years after Melania, but Paul lived 300 years later. However, this figure, as Clark pointed out, at least provided a starting point (1984, 96).

number jumps to 125,000. Furthermore, if the couple did indeed sell all their estates, and the estates were worth roughly five times their yearly income, Melania and Pinianus could have supported 625,000 monks for a year—more than 1% of the *total* population of the *entire Roman Empire*[60]—or enough to fully support three monasteries the size of that founded in Thagaste (the largest of Melania's foundations, according to Gerontius) for 100 years without any productive labor or investment at all. Simply put, it is inconceivable that Melania sold her estates simply in order to supply charity. It would have been nearly impossible for her to distribute that sort of money during her lifetime. At any rate, if she were truly concerned for the upkeep of her monasteries, she would have been better off keeping the money invested in the monastic estate, as the yearly income from estates far exceeded their resale value within a lifetime.[61]

In other words, selling familial estates simply to get money for charity would have been an economically *irrational* choice. It would also have been contrary to Melania's own investment practices. Gerontius suggested that Melania was practical enough economically to endow her monasteries so that they would not have to worry about funding.[62] According to Gerontius, Augustine himself advised Melania to do so:

> When the holy ones decided to sell all their property, the most holy and greatest bishops in Africa—I mean the holy Augustine and his

[60] Scheidel 2007, 6.
[61] While the money from the principal could have supported three monasteries the size of Thagaste for 100 years, allowing monasteries founded on the estates to continue to administer them would have supported nearly 600 such monasteries indefinitely, assuming good management, no financial crises, and a steady workforce.
[62] Giardina 1988, 133-134.

> brother Alypius and Aurelius of Carthage—advised them, saying, "however much money you now give to the monasteries will be spent in a short time. If you want to have undying memory in heaven and on earth, give each monastery both a house and revenue."[63]

In addition to endowing the monasteries she had founded, Melania also bought and endowed other monasteries, expanding her own holdings. According to Gerontius, Augustine stressed that Melania would be honored both on heaven and on earth for endowing her monasteries, thus bringing together the spiritual, social, and economic benefits which investment in monasticism offered.

Gerontius was careful to point out that Melania's intentions were charitable, and that in the end she donated her new estates to the communities who lived there: "Having bought the ascetic abodes of monks and virgins, they gave them as gifts to the people who were living in them, also giving to each place a suitable amount of gold."[64] However, in founding several monasteries and purchasing others, Melania may have been reinvesting her money from troubled estates into another form of real estate, real estate which came with its own complement of spiritually motivated laborers.

Rather than purely charitable goals, then, Melania must have had another motivation for using her asceticism to either transfer ownership of or liquidate her familial estates. Gerontius' focus on the familial opposition which Melania faced in her asceticism suggested that Melania's liquidation of her estates may have been a response to the claims of her family; by relinquishing private ownership of her

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[63] *VM* 20.
[64] *VM* 19.

estates, and thus disassociating the estates from her family, Melania undermined any attempts of family members to challenge the ownership of their childless kinswoman. Her charitable use of the estates further hindered familial claims: challenging charitable donations could bring social opprobrium.[65] Melania sought to protect her patrimony from the claims of two men in particular: her father, Publicola, and Pinianus' brother, Severus.

According to Gerontius, Melania's father, Publicola, did not accept his daughter's asceticism at first. Although Gerontius did not suggest that Publicola finally provided Melania with her inheritance because of his death-bed acceptance of her asceticism, it was only after the death of her father that Melania and Pinianus began to sell their property. Publicola's vocal disdain for his daughter's charitable ways throughout his life was likely based in his concern for the continuation of the *gens*. Publicola's own mother sold her personal possessions and founded monasteries, leaving Publicola to be adopted. However, he had still inherited a wealthy estate and became an important member of the Roman aristocracy.[66] Publicola chose to be both a good Christian and a good Roman senator, and Melania's choice to sell the familial lands was contrary to this balance. According to Gerontius, Publicola had a change of heart on his deathbed and accepted his daughter's calling, giving her "the power to fulfill her yearning for God as she chose."[67]

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[65] For instance, Gerontius suggested that Serena wished to sanction Pinianus' brother Severus for interfering in the charitable actions of Melania and Pinianus (*VM* 12).
[66] *HL* 56.
[67] *VM* 7.

Severus, however, proved a more enduring threat. While Palladius wrote that Melania had given some of her slaves, who wished to remain in the family, to her brother,[68] Gerontius asserted that Severus incited a slave revolt on Melania's suburban estate on the Appian Way, in an attempt to claim the couple's slaves as his own.[69] Gerontius suggested that Severus lay claim to both Melania and Pinianus' property; the estate on which the slaves supposedly revolted belonged to Melania's family. However, Gerontius saw the slave revolt as a real threat to Melania's property rights. He suggested that the incident was tied to the attempts of Melania's father, Publicola, to block Melania from claiming her inheritance and then renouncing it through charity:[70]

> For it was suspected that [Publicola] wanted to take their property and give it to the other children because of his desire to hinder them from their heavenly purpose…. since he wanted to take all their goods—their many and great possessions—for himself, and how each of their senatorial relatives had plans on their possessions, through which they wanted to become wealthy.[71]

What claim Severus could have had over that estate was unclear, although the revolt may have served as a warning to the couple rather than an actual attempt at the property. Yet Pinianus and Melania's decision to sell the estates and reinvest the

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[68] *HL* 61.
[69] *VM* 10.
[70] The familial relationships between Publicola, Severus, Melania and Pinianus are conflated in this section. Although Severus was Pinianus' brother, Gerontius suggested that he believed he had a right to Melania's slaves (although Gerontius also suggested that he was interested in stirring up trouble for Melania). The implicit connection between Publicola and Severus was not familial; Gerontius insinuated that they were connected by their desire for Melania's wealth. However, in the *Lausiac History*, Palladius attributed the actions of Severus to Melania's brother (*HL* 61). Gerontius never mentioned any sibling for Melania, although Publicola's following words hint that she may have had a brother. Perhaps Gerontius, wanting to stress that Melania was the end of her *gens* line, removed a brother from this story and inserted Pinianus' brother, Severus, in his stead.
[71] *VM* 12.

money in monasteries, which they controlled but did not own, cut Severus off from his possible inheritance. To Gerontius, both Severus and Publicola represented the familial opposition and obsession with wealth which hindered the asceticism of the couple and threatened Melania's control over her familial wealth.

Melania turned to Serena, the wife of the general Stilicho and cousin of the Western Emperor Honorius, for support. The prospect of a slave revolt so close to Rome—a city which was already in a vulnerable position because of the conspicuous lack of imperial governmental presence in the city and the threat of barbarian raids—was frightening enough for Serena to offer her help. Yet Gerontius also reported that Serena pitied Melania and Pinianus because of Publicola's actions.[72] The mention of Publicola, which seems out of place after his deathbed acceptance of his daughter's asceticism, reinforced the idea that familial claims on Melania's patrimony were a primary concern for Serena. Melania's visit to the Empress Serena was not solely concerned with the possibility of a slave revolt; instead, she may have also petitioned for *venia aetatis*, or the legal ability for an individual under the age of majority, 25, to sell his or her property.[73] This explanation clarified why Gerontius brought up the death of Publicola again, despite having resolved the issue of the familial relationship between the two. The right of *venia aetatis* would have helped to ensure Melania's legal claim to her family's property while also allowing her to legally liquidate her estates. Gerontius couched

[72] *VM* 12. The suggestion that Melania had siblings was problematic. Clark 1984, 90-91 pointed out that both Palladius and, perhaps, the Syriac version of the life mentioned an episode in which Melania the Elder brings Publicola's young son to Sicily. However, the Syriac is less straightforward, and suggests the entire episode may be confused. On the other hand, Gerontius, coming to the aid of his heroine, may have reason to gloss over the presence of other possible claimants to the fortune.
[73] Clark 1984, 86-92; Clark 1986, 69; Cooper 2007, 24-25. For Melania's family, see preface.

the episode in terms of the empress' respect of Melania's asceticism: although Melania would not uncover her head "even if she were about to lose all her possessions"[74] Serena was moved by Melania's pious appearance. Thus, Gerontius' long treatment of Melania's visit with Serena, which focused on Serena's respect of Melania, supported Melania's attempts to protect her patrimony against familial claims.

Gerontius' focus on Serena's support for Melania's charity suggested that Melania likely petitioned Serena for more than simply aid against Severus. Contemporary Roman laws placed a limit on how much of their patrimony wealthy Roman widows could use for charitable ends, including the foundation of monasteries. The legislation was a response to the fear that ascetic renunciation would bankrupt not only the aristocratic families of Rome, but also the city itself.[75] The civic infrastructure of Rome suffered as local euergetism lost ground and the aristocracy made charitable donations to foundations throughout the empire. Gerontius suggested that Serena strongly supported Melania's charitable program, and Serena's acquiescence to Melania's plan gave it credence to both her family and to the audience. On the other hand, the true point of Melania's claim was nevertheless to gain control over her wealth. This desire for wealth was in stark contrast to Melania's avowed asceticism, however, and required explanation.

[74] *VM* 11. This is, of course, ironic, because Melania approached Serena only to protect her wealth, and because her asceticism, of which her head covering was a sign, was supposed to include a disinterest in material wealth.

[75] "It was not merely the shabby dress, unkempt hair, or unpleasant odor of those who had renounced the world that constituted the offense: there were the larger social problems of money diverted from family inheritances, and of eligible women refusing to serve as the social cement binding noble families in marriage." (Clark 1986, 177).

Gerontius' account was contradictory, but Melania's desire to control her patrimony was clear.

Serena appealed to her cousin, the emperor Honorius, to help Melania sell her property as quickly as possible:

> [Serena] straightaway notified her truly pious, Christ-loving, most holy brother,[76] the Emperor Honorius, that he should proclaim an ordinance in each province so that, by the power of the governors and magistrates, they should sell [Melania and Pinian's] properties and also through their power should remit the revenues from the lands to them.[77]

Honorius was willing to help Melania circumvent the laws capping aristocratic charity and supported her in selling her estates, probably allowing her to use the infrastructure of the imperial government to remit funds from the sale to her in Rome.[78] Melania's ascetic plans garnered the support of the imperial family, allowing her to sell of her estates and reinvest the wealth in her charitable actions.

According to Gerontius, Melania also tried to sell her Roman townhouse, the house which was most representative her past life of luxury, to Serena:

> And when they had gone back to the house in which they were staying, they discussed what thanks to offer to the empress since she had helped them so much; but since no one of the Roman senators had the means to buy the house of holy Pinianus, they made clear to the

[76] Honorius was Serena's biological cousin and son-in-law (Salzman 2006, 354). For a timeline of events, see preface.
[77] *VM* 12.
[78] The existence of banking systems in the Roman world has traditionally been hotly contested, although the consensus now indicates the large-scale use of financial tools such as credit in the absence of a commercialized banking sector. See, for instance, Harris 2006, 10-11 on "personal" banks in the Roman world and the reliance of the aristocracy on credit. The imperial family would have been particularly well situated to aid friends by extending credit; it seems likely this was part of Melania's deal with Serena. Furthermore, the imperial government likely had connections to individuals willing to by estates, a boon during the barbarian invasions.

aforementioned empress through the holy bishops that she could buy it.[79]

Although Gerontius stated that their desire to thank the empress inspired Melania and Pinianus' attempt to sell their property to her, this episode also served as a metaphor for the fall of the house of the Valerii. Melania and Pinianus were cutting their ties to Rome, and therefore to the Roman roots of their families. The attempted sale of their house was a sign of the reinvention of family without family history. Gerontius' assertion that they selected Serena specifically as a potential buyer also suggested a connection between the *gens Valeria* and imperial power; with the sale of their house, Melania and Pinianus were free of the need to be involved in politics.

However, Serena did not buy the house. "But the empress, who did not want to do that, said to the intermediaries, 'I think that I do not have the ability to buy this house at a fair price.'"[80] By including the reason Serena gave for not wanting to purchase the house, Gerontius emphasized the wealth of Melania and Pinianus. Serena was no match for Melania in terms of either wealth or ascetic status. Serena's excuse may have been a valid one: archaeological excavations on the posh Celian have uncovered a luxurious fourth-century *domus* which has been identified as the home of a Christian branch of the *gens Valeria Severa*.[81] Certainly Gerontius had a vested interest in exaggerating the wealth of his subjects: the more they were able to give away, according to Gerontius' spiritual accounting practices, the more saintly they were. Yet, in retelling this episode, Gerontius glossed over a less savory aspect

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[79] *VM* 14.
[80] *Ibid*.
[81] On the house of the Valerii on the Celian, see Brenk 1999. Hillner 2003 argued that this house could not conclusively be identified with the one named in the *Life of Melania the Younger*.

of Melania and Pinianus' wealth: they were involved in the dirty affair of selling property for the best possible price; if they wished to show gratitude to Serena, they could have given her the house. This awkward attitude toward economically advantageous sale for charitable ends was heighted by the fact that this luxurious *domus* was later burnt to the ground and replaced by Pinianus' relatives with the *Xenodochium Valeriorum*, a charitable institution.[82]

The relationship between Melania and Serena set a precedent throughout the *Life of Melania the Younger*. Melania consistently relied upon both her social relationships and the wealth of her family to undertake successful asceticism. For instance, Melania depended upon the support of both Augustine and Alypius—as well as her husband Pinianus, who was by her side throughout her dedications and whose death inspired her final foundation—for her success as a monastic superior. The intertwining of social and economic reasons for the founding of monasteries in certain locations was quite obvious in Melania's choice to settle in North Africa: not only did she have powerful ascetic friends there, but she also owned estates in the region which she could easily turn into support for her monastery. Likewise, Melania's choice to found a monastery in Jerusalem clearly mirrored that of her grandmother. Indeed, especially in the case of Melania the Younger, the ascetic matron's choices of where, when, and how to found and endow monasteries showed her understanding of imperial-scale economic changes.

[82] Clark 1984, 97-98; Giardina 1988, 29.

Melania's attempted sale of her Celian mansion, travel to familial estates in Campania and Sicily, and foundation of monasteries in North Africa were part of the general movement away from Rome which shaped her biography. Melania's estates dictated her path, as she moved from estate to estate, leaving them sold or transformed into monasteries in her wake. Her social connections also prompted this movement, as she depended upon ascetic friends such as Paulinus in Nola,[83] Rufinus in Sicily,[84] and Augustine in Thagaste[85] in order to succeed.[86] This movement was prompted by her asceticism: she longed to leave the city and its temptations[87] and to visit Egypt, the Holy Land, and sites in Asia Minor because of her interest in desert asceticism.[88] It was also made possible by her asceticism, which provided a justification for Melania's sale of estates in Britain, Gaul, and Hispania which had been in her family for generations. Finally, Melania's movement had a clear directionality: she moved away from the troubled West, using the legal support of Honorius to liquidate her estates there, to the thriving East, where Melania forsook her relationship with the troubled Western noblewoman Serena for what was, according to Gerontius, a more profitable relationship with Eudocia. Melania's charity thus gave her a context—or a pretext—for a redefinition of her social network and reinvestment of her wealth. This reinvestment led to real economic returns for Melania and her monasteries.

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[83] *VM* 19.
[84] Rufinus, *Homilies on Numbers*, preface.
[85] *VM* 20.
[86] For a map of Melania's travels, see preface.
[87] *VM* 6.
[88] *VM* 37.

Section 4
The Wealth of the East: Melania the Younger in Egypt and the Holy Land

If Gerontius' estimation of Melania and Pinianus' income can be trusted, their estates throughout the Roman Empire were quite productive. The rate of sale for landed estates was low compared to yearly incomes,[89] especially during Late Antiquity, when a number of factors led to large-scale abandonment of productive land in the Western Empire, driving land prices down dramatically.[90] Wealthy landowners were therefore dissuaded from liquidating their estates and investing wealth in agriculture, industry, or productive loans. Although the difficulty in selling large estates may have been somewhat mitigated by the support of the imperial family, Melania still faced real obstacles to liquidating her landed wealth. Finding buyers for large estates would have been exceedingly difficult.[91] Even when buyers were present, it was difficult to remit payments to Rome; there was a low circulation of coin, despite the use of a gold currency,[92] and Melania often traveled to locations where credit was probably not available.[93] For all these reasons, the sale of landed estates and reinvestment of the proceeds was generally not an economically advantageous choice during Late Antiquity. However, Melania's decision to break with the senatorial custom of amassing huge, dispersed estates and relying on their revenues as income was a result of the specific situation of the early fifth century:

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[89] Geraghty 2007, 1059.
[90] Jones 1958, 5; Three major factors seem to have been the main causes of the desertion of land in the Western Empire: the lasting impact of the political instability of the Crisis of the Third Century; the fall of some ancient senatorial families and the rise of provincial and *nouveau riche* families in Rome; and the demographic crisis caused by the Antonine Plague (Antonio 1979, 906-907).
[91] Duncan-Jones 1990, 121-142.
[92] Banaji 2001, 39-40.
[93] Harris 2006, 13.

the lack of strong imperial leadership in the Western Empire and the invasion of the Visigoths and Vandals. In these specific circumstances, Melania's sale of her estates in the Western Roman Empire and her purchase of lands and establishment of monasteries in the Eastern Roman Empire was an economically rational choice. Furthermore, although it is impossible to give an economic value to the success of Melania's monasteries, Melania and her foundations likely benefited in the long term from her abandonment of her western estates and investment in the East.

One general trend which Melania's sale of estates reflected was the relative health of the Western and Eastern Roman Empires. The Roman East had always been less homogenous than the West. While the West was almost exclusively non-urban and tribal before the expansion of the Romans, the East was a highly urbanized area ruled almost entirely by advanced states—each with their own economic and cultural structures—which the Romans had conquered.[94] This historical difference, as well as the realities of the environment, meant that most senatorial estates had been located in the West, clearly tying the western provinces to the wellbeing of the city of Rome.[95] The East, on the other hand, experienced an intensification of agricultural development only in Late Antiquity.[96] When Diocletian reorganized the Roman Empire and the city of Rome had ceased to be an imperial center, the West started a political and economic decline which was only worsened when Constantine founded a new capital in the East and eventually moved the heart

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[94] Because of the relative urbanism of the East and the presence of similar bureaucratic states, the Roman Empire more readily exploited western land. See Frye 2003.
[95] Duncan-Jones 1990, 121-142.
[96] Bang 2007, 15-17.

of the empire there.[97] At the turn of the fourth century, the East was the more stable and thriving half of the Roman Empire.

However, Melania's family, like most senatorial families, held land almost exclusively in the West. Gerontius listed Melania's estates in "Spain, Campania, Sicily, Africa, Mauretania, Britain, and other lands,"[98] as well as Numidia.[99] Palladius added "the Spains and Aquitaine and Tarragona and the Gauls"[100] to this list. According to the *Life of Melania the Younger*, she eventually sold all these estates, with the exception of her estates in North Africa, which she had converted into a monastery.[101] The money from the sale of these estates went overwhelming to the East. In addition to the monasteries Melania founded in North Africa and the Holy Land, Gerontius chronicled Melania's personal charity in Egypt, Asia Minor, and Constantinople. Gerontius extoled Melania's charity in "Mesopotamia and the rest of Syria, and all Palestine and the parts of Egypt, and the Pentapolis.[102] Palladius added Antioch.[103] The long-Christian East provided a more salient context for ascetic charity, despite the relative urbanization and wealth of the eastern provinces. Melania moved her money from the troubled West to the more stable eastern

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[97] For a discussion of the tenacity of the Eastern Roman Empire during the period of the barbarian invasions, and the role of Christianity in that tenacity, see Frend 1972, 5-8. For the role of barbarian invasions in the economy of the Roman West in the fourth and fifth centuries, see Barnish 1986. For a discussion of the collapse of the Western Roman economy and its impact, see Wickham 1984, 15-20.
[98] *VM* 11.
[99] *VM* 20.
[100] *HL* 61. For a map of Melania's familial estates, see preface.
[101] *VM* 20. The *Life of Melania the Younger* was not entirely clear on this point. Melania lived as a monk on her Campanian estates, but Gerontius suggested that she eventually sold these estates with the rest of her western holdings.
[102] *VM* 19.
[103] *HL* 61. For a map of Melania's charitable donations, see preface.

provinces, where her charitable contributions garnered popularity among the Christian aristocracy.

The East had a strong spiritual appeal: it was not only highly Christianized, it was also the setting for the biblical story which defined the faith. More particularly, for ascetics, Christian monasticism had begun as a uniquely eastern enterprise. The type of desert monasticism which was introduced to Rome through the *Life of Anthony* was specific to the Egyptian desert. Prominent westerners like John Cassian and Melania the Elder traveled to Egypt to learn about and practice Christian monasticism; the physical experience of the landscape was an essential component to the monastic experience.[104] Although the biblical history of Egypt was limited, the fame of the Egyptian monks attracted both pilgrims and adherents to the province. The early rhetoric of Christian asceticism, with its notion of withdrawal to the desert, favored the geographically unique region. There had been efforts to found monasteries in the West, of course. However, as the choices of both Melania the Younger and her grandmother, Melania the Elder, showed, the East held special meaning for select ascetic Christians at the same time as the growth of pilgrimage in the region, and the establishment of monasteries in the East was a cachet even for wealthy westerners.

Both women eventually settled in the Holy Land, which was appealing particularly because of its biblical history. The development of this region depended to a large extent on Constantine. Although Constantine had founded his new capital,

[104] Frank 2000, 69-78.

Constantinople, as a Christian city, he also recognized the religious potential of the city of Jerusalem. His mother's successful pilgrimage there, during which she found the cross on which Jesus died, had sparked interest in the religious wealth of the Holy Land.[105] Constantine undertook a building campaign in Jerusalem, which, at the time, was a relatively inconsequential provincial city. Through his campaign, he ensured that the city was not solely Roman, but obviously Christian. As pilgrims traveled to Egypt to learn and experience monasticism, they traveled to Jerusalem to learn and experience Christianity. The famous pilgrim Egeria spent three years traveling through the Holy Land with the Bible as her guidebook; the Holy Land brought the narrative of salvation to life.[106] The Mount of Olives, where both Melania the Elder and Melania the Younger eventually founded monasteries, was the site of Jesus' prayer the night of his betrayal.[107] That biblical story made the Mount of Olives the most desirable monastic real estate in the Roman Empire. Only through the sale of her Western estates could Melania afford to take advantage of the semiotics of the Mount of Olives.

While ascetic authors often focused on the unique religious landscape of the desert or the holy cities of Palestine, even Constantinople was preferable to Rome. Ever since Constantine's foundation of Constantinople as a new, Christian capital, Rome, once the center of the empire, grew more and more provincial. More importantly, the Roman aristocracy remained more stubbornly pagan,[108] looking

[105] Wilkinson 1971, 54 ff. For an archaeological approach to the non-aristocratic monasteries of Palestine, see Bar 2005.
[106] *IE*.
[107] Mt. 26:39.
[108] Brown 1961; see also Cooper 1992.

back at the illustrious history of the city for their social identity. Gerontius emphasized this image of Rome was clear in the *Life of Melania the Younger*. The first several chapters of Melania's life, which took place in the city, were obsessed with wealth and luxury. Rome represented the history of Melania's family, and the attempts of her family members to control her future. As soon as Publicola had died and Melania gained secure control of her inheritance, she and Pinianus moved to their Appian villa.[109] Their withdrawal from worldly affairs was thus geographically mirrored in their withdrawal from the city of Rome.[110] As the ascetic couple fled farther and farther from Rome—from Campania to Sicily to North Africa to Egypt and finally to Jerusalem—they grew in their ascetic devotion. Thus, in the *Life of Melania the Younger*, distance from Rome was, metaphorically, directly related to ascetic piety.

Even after settling for good in Jerusalem, however, Melania did not stop traveling: she took an extended trip to Constantinople, where she ingratiated herself to the Eastern Roman Empress Eudocia and the court, including Lausus. For members of old senatorial families, such as Melania, Christian charity provided a timely and essential opening to the new eastern aristocracy. Melania's family, the *gens Valeria*, was an ancient senatorial family whose wellbeing was traditionally tied to the city of Rome; it was through relationships with the Roman government that the *gens Valeria* had, over the previous hundreds of years, able to amass immense landholdings, wealth and authority. Their impressive, expensive mansion

[109] *VM* 6.
[110] Cf. *VA* 3-6.

on the Celian is evidence that the *gens Valeria* also primarily used the city of Rome as the theater for the display of their wealth. They relied on their ancient connections to the government of the city of Rome to explain their lasting relevance.

However, by the early fifth century, the imperial government had largely abandoned Rome; the fate of the city was sealed by the sack of Rome by the Visigoths in 410 CE. Even Melania's meeting with Serena took place during the Western Emperor Honorius' rare visit to the city in 404.[111] Therefore, the city of Rome was no longer an ideal location for remembering the political importance of the *gens Valeria*. Although the Roman senate, where the *gens Valeria* got its illustrious start, was actually growing stronger in the absence of the imperial government,[112] the *Life of Melania* showed that cultivation of relationships with the imperial government had become an important strategy for the *gens Valeria*. Rome was no longer an imperial capital, and therefore was not an ideal location for advertisement of status. Only shortly after Melania fled the city of Rome, while she was still in Italy, the city was sacked by the Visigoths in 410 CE. Public monuments, the showpieces of the Roman aristocracy, were looted to pay off the invaders. More than any other circumstance, the sack of Rome was a deathblow to the privileged status of the Roman aristocracy.

Although the praise Gerontius asserted that Serena had for Melania indicated an ongoing relationship, even this social connection to the western imperial family could not last long. Serena's fate was tied to that of the city of Rome. Serena was

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[111] Clark 1984, 101.
[112] Chenault 2008. 69-86.

married to Stilicho, the Vandal general of the western forces. Together, they were quasi-regents of the Western Roman Empire during the tenure of the child Emperor Honorius. At the time of Serena's marriage, this relationship seemed politically advantageous. Indeed, Stilicho led armies which kept the barbarians at bay through the early years of the fifth century.[113] However, by 408, a group of Visigoths led by Alaric—once a soldier under Stilicho's command—had reached the gates of Rome. They demanded a ransom for the city. Stretched thin as numerous barbarian groups threatened the West, Stilicho urged the Roman Senate to accept Alaric's demands.[114] Although the Romans did choose to follow Stilicho's advice, he and Serena were nevertheless blamed for the attack of the barbarians and were put to death in 408.[115] Without the strong defense Stilicho's impressive army supplied, the Visigoths, despite the Roman government's eagerness to meet their demands for ransom, sacked the city in 410.[116]

Melania suffered during this period as well. The Roman government was hard pressed to meet the demands of the Visigoths, and they turned to the wealth of senatorial families for support. Gerontius recalled the demands of the government in a distinctly unflattering light: "The prefect of the city, who was most vehemently pagan, decided with the entire Senate to decree their property for the public treasury."[117] Gerontius did not mention the emergency the city faced; indeed, Melania seemed completely uninterested in aiding her fellow citizens, despite her

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[113] Jones 1964, 197-200.
[114] Coster 1959, 155.
[115] Demandt and Brummer 1977, 480; 500.
[116] For a timeline of events and a map of the invasions of the Visigoths and Vandals, see preface.
[117] *VM* 19. Allard saw this is the primary motivating factor for Melania's asceticism (1907, 23).

ardent pursuit of charity in the Eastern Mediterranean. Gerontius was careful to note the prefect was a pagan, however, and therefore unworthy of Melania's aid and liable to act greedily. In the end, the crisis of the city saved Melania: "It happened through God's foresight that the people rose up against him due to a shortage of bread. And thus he, dragged away, was killed in the middle of the city; all the rest then were afraid and kept quiet."[118] Gerontius presented the crisis of Rome during the siege of the city by the Visigoths with a surprisingly lack of empathy for the starving citizens and a clear assumption that the masses were upset—as was just, in his view—by the attempt of the prefect to confiscate Melania's property. Despite the fact that Gerontius portrayed this as a personal attack on Melania, the ascetic was not even in the city.[119] In Gerontius' view, the fate of the city of Rome was unimportant to the narrative, which focused on Melania gaining control of her wealth and founding monasteries in the East.

After the sack of Rome in 410, Rome was clearly no longer the place to gain and display aristocratic status. Palladius wrote:

> A hurricane of barbarians set upon Rome, which was laid down in prophecies long ago, and it did not spare even the bronze statues in the forum, but plundering all in barbaric madness delivered them to

[118] *Ibid*. Clark 1984, 102-104.

[119] Indeed, Melania may have left the city because of this riot. According to Roman law, private property could not be confiscated unless the owner was the subject of a suit, suggesting that Melania was, in fact, in legal trouble in the city. Melania seems to have attracted the anger of the civil authorities through her connection to the princess Serena, who had likely been executed already. Perhaps Melania's flight from the city and subsequent charity were not so much related to her ascetic leanings but instead were advantageous: she fled to avoid trail and confiscation of her wealth. Although Melania escaped civic censure at this point, both the barbarian invasions and her tainted political ties gave her good reason to leave Rome and reconsider her investments. Clark 1984, 105-108.

> destruction, so that Rome – which for 1200 years was lovingly beautified – was ruined.[120]

In contrast with the Christian East, Rome represented a past based on political fame rather than spiritual gain. The city was in shambles; the eastern emperors had been more successful in buying off barbarian invaders (often sending them westward in the process), and Constantinople was a growing and wealthy city. At the same time, the *nouveau riche* of Constantinople did not rely on their Roman identity to gain status. The antiquity of the *gens Valeria* and its long political service to the people of Rome was no longer sufficient for high status. Instead, Constantinople offered another avenue for gaining and advertisement of aristocratic status: Christianity. Constantinople had been founded as a Christian Rome, and even Constantine had used his wealth to build Christian—not only civil—buildings for the public good. Ancient euergetism was changing, and nowhere more so than the newly chic eastern empire. For a woman like Melania, for whom Rome was no longer safe, Christian charity offered the best option for gaining status in the East.

Section 5
The Mouth of the Lion: Barbarians invade the Western Empire

The terrifying circumstances which Gerontius discussed with so little sympathy succinctly described the main reason that the West had lost its attraction: barbarian invasions completely devastated the West.[121] In particular, the barbarian invasions destroyed the agricultural economy of the West. The threat of violence

[120] *HL* 54.
[121] For instance, Gerontius told of an island which the barbarians blockaded and Melania ransomed. In this story, the barbarians caused disruption of transport, destruction of land, and death of citizens (*VM* 19). See Barnish1987.

suspended trade which brought the goods produced on the estates to Rome. The constant warfare disrupted the function of individual estates and destroyed farmland. When estate staff fled, barbarians settled on the land themselves. The instability of the imperial government, which was linked to the barbarian invasions, threatened the ability of wealthy senators to maintain their estates.[122] Melania therefore sold at exactly the right moment: the soon-to-be embattled imperial government was on her side and was still strong enough to command help from the provinces with the sale of her estates, while the barbarian invasions had not yet devastated land prices.[123]

Through a series of mismanaged alliances, many Germanic tribes who had long served in the armies of the Roman Empire crossed into imperial land. In this period in the Western Empire, the Vandals and the Visigoths were particularly destructive. The Vandals eventually pushed into Gaul and then Spain by 410, and by 430 had established an independent kingdom in North Africa. The Visigoths marched on Rome in 408. After laying siege to the city for three years under the commander Alaric, they sacked Rome in 410, perhaps aided by a traitorous Stilicho.[124]

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[122] Jones 1964, 812-823.
[123] In his discussion of the renunciations of the renunciations of Melania and Pinianus, Brown (2012, 294) asserted that "We can only conjecture *why* Pinianus and Melania did what they did from 405 onward…. It could not have been at a worse time. The social and political state of Italy ensured that their action had a resonance far beyond what had been normal in more peaceful times." Although he never clearly articulated it, Brown's position seems to be that Melania and Pinianus' choice to liquidate their estates was unwise—or even foolish, as he depicted them as fumbling "eccentrics" (296) whose actions caused many of the issues Rome faced. If nothing else, Brown applauded the lengths the couple went to in order to sell their estates; I argue that their tenacity was a result of their belief that they would benefit.
[124] Salzman 2006, 356. For a timeline of events, see preface.

In response to the barbarian invasions, Melania moved her investments from the troubled West into the more stable East through her investments in monasteries.[125] In fact, Melania's travels and charitable donations aligned perfectly with the destructive invasions. Melania's attraction to the ascetic life coincided exactly with the invasions of the Vandals and Visigoths, and her estates in the western provinces lay in their path. Gerontius suggested that Melania took the impending invasions into account when she sold her lands:

> Having sold the properties around Rome and Italy and Spain and Campania, they set sail for Africa. And straightaway Alaric occupied the properties which the holy ones sold. And everyone gave glory to the Lord of all, saying, "Blessed are they who anticipated these things and sold their goods before the arrival of the barbarians."[126]

Gerontius presented Melania's sale of her lands in Spain, which the Vandals threatened, and Italy, which was under siege by the Visigoths, as providential. Melania's movement from west to east, according to Gerontius, was a sign that God was protecting both her interests and her wealth.

In Palladius' version of events, it is even clearer that the barbarian invasions inspired Melania's decision to sell her land, and that her charity was therefore financially rational. Palladius stated that Melania "sold her properties in the Spains and Aquitaine and Tarragona and the Gauls and, retaining for herself only those in

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[125] For a map showing Melania's familial estates, which she sold, Melania's investments in the East, and the path of the barbarian invasions, see preface.
[126] *VM* 19.

Sicily and Campania[127] and Africa, she used them for the support of monasteries."[128] Sicily, and Africa were (as of yet) untouched by the invasions: Melania and her family fled to Sicily and then Africa because they had estates and friends there. The other areas Palladius mentioned, however, were devastated by the invasions. Palladius even acknowledged that Melania saved her wealth from the barbarians when she invested in Eastern monasteries. "She sent the silver and the gold across the sea to the East: 10,000 coins to Egypt and the Thebaid, to Antioch and its region 10,000 coins, to Palestine 15,000 coins...all these things and four times more…she snatched from the mouth of the lion Alaric by her faith."[129] Not only did Palladius' statement show that Melania moved her money away from the threat of the barbarians, but also emphasizes the fact that she sent the money specifically to the East. Furthermore, Palladius' sentiment that Melania's faith saved her wealth echoed that of Gerontius. Both men suggested that Melania's *financial* success as a founder of a monastery in the East was the result of God's favor.

The barbarian invasions caused real problems for landowners. Gerontius noted that Melania and Pinianus had to sell their luxurious mansion on the Celian in Rome—the house which Serena had refused to buy—for "less than nothing"[130] because it was burned during the sack of Rome.[131] Another story related to the

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[127] Gerontius included Campania on the list of property which Melania sold, which seems more reasonable, as the Visigoths did threaten that area as well. Indeed, estates taken by barbarians during the fifth-century invasions were repatriated by law later in the century. For the destruction of land around Rome during the barbarian invasions, see Barnish 1987. For the treatment of senatorial estates in the area see Frye 2003.
[128] *HL* 61.
[129] *Ibid.*
[130] *VM 14.*
[131] *Ibid*.

liquidation of Melania's estate showed the range of issues which the barbarian invasions caused for landowners:

> Because of the invasion of the barbarians, they were not able to sell all of their lands, but a small portion of them remained unsold. A man faithful (to them) was able to sell some part of it in the peaceful parts of Spain and, collecting a little money from it, brought it to the holy ones in Jerusalem.[132]

Melania's unsold land was in the peaceful parts of Spain, and yet still yielded only "a little money." This passage explained this drop in value: Melania's faithful servant in Spain had to physically bring the money to her, and she, in turn, brought it to Egypt with her to distribute to the monks there.[133] Melania's conversion with Serena suggested that, previously, Melania had been able to rely on the imperial government to remit funds, likely without any significant movement of coin. In this way, Melania was able to effectively liquidate her estates and invest in the East. However, there were two reasons why she could no longer do so: the barbarians threatened the imperial infrastructure in the western provinces, and the imperial family members who had supported Melania had fatally fallen out of favor. Her servant had to risk transporting coin to reach Melania,[134] who had retreated to Jerusalem, to bring her proceeds from the estate in Spain to support her charity in the West.

The inclusion of this particular story emphasized the relative success Melania had in selling her lands in the troubled West and investing in the East: Gerontius

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[132] *VM* 37.
[133] *Ibid*.
[134] On the risk of transport, see Bang 2007, 28.

thought it worthy of note that Melania had not gotten a good price on the land in Spain. The arrival of Melania's agent in Jerusalem highlighted the difference between Melania's past and present location. She was safe in the East and well positioned to take advantage of the religious symbolism and political position of the center of the Christian world. On the surface, Melania had freed herself from the bounds of materialism. She had once said to the devil,

> For how are these things, that exist today and tomorrow will be laid waste by barbarians, or by fire, or by time, or by some other circumstance, which were bought with corruptible things, compared to eternal goods that are everlasting and which stretch out over infinite ages?[135]

However, by investing her money in monasteries, Melania in fact saved her wealth from the threats that she listed. Melania purported to have invested only in the spiritual returns of charity; however, her charitable actions brought their own social and economic returns during her life.

In the end, Melania's words to her fellow monks might best sum up her choice to invest in monasticism:

> How many people have been taken as captives by the barbarians and have lost their freedom! And how many people have fallen under imperial anger and have been robbed of their goods and their lives! And how many have been left poor by their parents, and others also, having fallen under false accusation and thievery suddenly become poor instead of wealthy! It is no great thing, if we, for these reasons, consider the incorruptible and untainted goods before worldly ones.[136]

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[135] *VM* 18.
[136] *VM* 62.

This statement enumerates the difficulties of Melania's fifth-century world: barbarian invasions and imperial vagrancies caused trouble for the vulnerable senatorial class of Rome and threatened the stability of their great estates. Melania's primary motivation for liquidating her estates may indeed have been religious; however, the impossibility of managing them efficiently caused her to exchange her familial estates in favor of safer means of gaining social influence among the Christian aristocracy.

Section 6
Conclusions

Melania's first act of renunciation was a metaphor to her relationship with her wealth. According to Gerontius, "she began to wear under her fine silks a coarse woolen himation."[137] Although she appeared wealthy, her wealth hid her asceticism from those who would try to stop it. She paid off her attendants at the baths not to tell her parents she had not bathed publicly.[138] However, the reality of her asceticism was the opposite: Melania's overt charity and her skilled cultivation of her Christian ascetic image masked her shrewd management of her vast wealth for her own economic and social benefit and for the benefit of her ascetic families.

By selling her estates and using the proceeds for charitable activities and the foundation of monasteries, Melania the Younger asserted her independence from her family and gained social status and spiritual returns. The social and spiritual benefits of charity were probably the most convincing to a Roman noblewoman like

[137] *VM* 4.
[138] *VM* 2.

Melania, but Melania likely also sought economic returns from her charitable action. The money Melania expended on gaining social and spiritual recognition was money well spent, but Melania's economic savvy was evident to her biographer. The economic choices Melania made were rational given her desire for personal control of her wealth, her concern for the support of her new spiritual family, the situation in the West of the empire. At the same time, Melania's own standard of living was likely limited not by her lack of personal wealth, which was a literary and social construction, but by her choice to abstain from luxury. Thus, Melania's poverty was truly voluntary.

Melania therefore served as an example of the correct use of aristocratic wealth for Gerontius' audience. Melania had used her wealth to further her asceticism. Investing money from the sale of western lands in eastern monasteries kept her wealth safe from the barbarian invasions. By creating a new monastic family, Melania was able to assert more control over her holdings. Her social status was elevated: Melania demanded obedience from her followers. She gained social capital through her new role as the superior of monasteries and a recognized holy woman. Melania made friends with Eudocia and welcomed her into her monastery and enjoyed her presence at the dedication ceremony of a martyrion which Melania had built. Melania's close relationship with the empress shows the benefits Melania received from founding monasteries. However, Melania also gained economic benefits. Monasteries were functioning estates; indeed, they were sometimes comprised of the same land, tools, and staff as the estates Melania owned before her

conversion. Monasteries boasted a religiously motivated workforce[139] and the protection afforded by social opprobrium piled upon anyone who threatened orthodox monasteries. Some, like Melania's monastery on the Mount of Olives, were located in areas where pilgrimage added to their coffers. Melania liquidated her real estate—located in dangerous parts of the empire—and, by becoming the founder and superior of monasteries throughout the East, gained social capital, greater control over her own investments, and a safer income from monastic estates that were not threatened by invasions and failing infrastructure.

[139] Crislip 2005b, 150; 155.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Section 1
The benefits of asceticism

Gerontius ended his biography of Melania the Younger by imagining her entrance into heaven.

> The holy angels admitted her with exultation; for, in her corruptible body, she had mimicked their detachment. Likewise, the holy prophets and apostles, whose lives and teachings she had fulfilled in her works, also received her into their chorus with much delight. And the holy martyrs, whose memory she had glorified and whose struggles she patiently and voluntarily endured, greeted her with much rejoicing.[1]

In this passage, Gerontius echoed the message he had promoted throughout the text: asceticism on earth would merit reward in heaven. He portrayed Melania as comparable to prophets, martyrs, and angels because of her life of renunciation and voluntary poverty.

Gerontius here emphasized the spiritual rewards of asceticism, and, indeed, there *was* a strong religious component in the choice of aristocratic men and women such as Melania the Younger to live ascetic lives. However, even within this passage,

[1] *VM* 70.

the non-religious aspects of aristocratic asceticism are evident. For instance, Gerontius spoke of Melania's detachment, which implied her previous attachment to worldly wealth. Likewise, here, as elsewhere in this work, Gerontius spoke of Melania's voluntary poverty and suffering, concepts which were only open to people of means. Gerontius recalled Melania's glorification of the martyrs, which she achieved through her financial ability to procure their relics and erect a martyrion to hold them near her monastery in Jerusalem. Melania was capable of acting as an aristocratic ascetic, and therefore merited the companionship of the angels and heavenly treasure *because of* her wealth, not *despite* it. Fundamentally aristocratic ways of being were embedded in the ascetic practice which texts like the *Life of Melania the Younger* described.

Throughout the *Life of Melania the Younger* and the *Lausiac History* by Palladius, the inherently material and aristocratic nature of asceticism was apparent. Scholars have traditionally approached fourth- and fifth-century hagiographic texts to better understand the specifically Christian culture of Late Antique asceticism and the monastic movement. The aim of this project was to consider the non-spiritual benefits which authors discussed in their biographies of famous ascetics and, through this lens, to consider the tensions between wealth and poverty, and between investment and renunciation, inherent in these texts. The *Lausiac History* and the *Life of Melania the Younger* reflected not only Christian spirituality and practice, but also the complexity of the practice of aristocratic asceticism within the context of the Late Roman Empire.

Gerontius and Palladius emphasized the many material and social ways in which Melania the Younger and her grandmother, Melania the Elder, were rewarded for their dedication to asceticism. In both the *Lausiac History* and the *Life of Melania the Younger*, the authors stressed the relationship between the renunciation of earthly wealth and praiseworthy asceticism, noting, in particular, the biblical promise of “treasure in heaven” as a reward for living a life of voluntary poverty. Indeed, both Gerontius and Palladius used the language of the marketplace to describe charity: they suggested renunciation of wealth was an “investment” and that spiritual rewards were “profit.” As a result, both texts portrayed wealth as both a threat to spiritual wellbeing and necessary for the praiseworthy charitable renunciation they portrayed in their narratives. This contradictory attitude was reflected in ascetic anxiety about the idea of buying heaven by using worldly wealth. One of the defining features of Late Antique aristocratic asceticism was a proscribed attitude toward wealth, and therefore authors of ascetic biographies often used economic language to describe ascetic action.

Ascetic attitudes toward wealth affected aristocratic women in a particular way: because wealth, social status, and family were closely tied in Late Antique Rome, and because women were associated with the familial roles of wife and mother, women, according to ascetic authors, not only had to renounce their wealth, but also had to disavow their familial obligations in order to live ascetically. Perhaps one of the best studied aspects of Late Antique hagiography has been the portrayal of women in such texts. Authors often portrayed a struggle between familial obligations and a desire for ascetic renunciation as a turning point in a convert’s life.

However, Gerontius and Palladius both argued that asceticism offered women, and particular, aristocratic women, one specific benefit: by leaving behind the roles of wife and mother, ascetic women could gain control over both their social identities and their familial wealth. Furthermore, both authors suggested that aristocratic women could gain a new, ascetic family through their renunciation of their biological families. Within the context of the monastic family, women had authority over their families and control over their wealth. In this way, aristocratic women who had devoted themselves to asceticism, such as Melania the Elder and Melania the Younger, were particularly good subjects for authors interested in portraying the benefits of asceticism, as the contrast between their experiences as matrons and their experiences as ascetics highlighted the positive changes asceticism brought for women.

In the *Lausiac History*, Palladius emphasized the social benefits which asceticism brought to his friend Melania the Elder. He suggested that Melania the Elder's dedication to asceticism brought her membership in an exclusive ascetic social circle of Egyptian ascetics, which included Pambo, the Tall Brothers, and Evagrius Ponticus. In particular, he indicated that Melania established social ties to these notable ascetics through charitable donations and, most importantly, through her ability to financially support exiled Egyptian monks in Palestine. Therefore, Melania's great wealth allowed her to be socially successful as an ascetic. Although her relationship with these Egyptian monks made her notable during her life, her memory was tainted by the heresies in which they were implicated.

On the other hand, according to Gerontius, Melania the Younger used her ascetic ties to appeal to the imperial family, including Serena and Eudocia. However, Gerontius focused more on the economic benefits of Melania's asceticism, suggesting that her dedication to charity allowed her to sell her family's estates in the Western Empire and invest in the East, thus saving her wealth from the barbarian invasions. The monastery which Melania founded in North Africa comprised her familial estate there, while her donations in Egypt and Palestine allowed her to invest productively in land, institutions, and social relationships in the flourishing Eastern Empire. By endowing her monasteries and investing in attractions such as land on the Mount of Olives and the bones of famous martyrs, Melania ensured that her monastic foundations—the substitutes for her Roman *gens*—would profit even after her death.

The contrast between Melania the Elder and her granddaughter, Melania the Younger, demonstrates that a wide variety of ascetic strategies, bringing different types of benefits, were available to aristocratic women. Melania the Elder used charitable gifts to cultivate social relationships with prominent Egyptian ascetics. Because of her wealth, she was able to support them when they were forced into exile. However, Melania's strategy of creating social ties through charity was problematic, as she was associated with the charges of heresy leveled against her companion, Rufinus, and other prominent monks. In the end, not even Gerontius, her granddaughter's biographer, commemorated her good works.

Melania the Younger's choice to focus on the foundation of monasteries in the East rather than the creation of social ties with a specific group of ascetics as her grandmother had was prompted by the specific context of the mid-fifth century. Melania the Elder, when she began her renunciations shortly after 370, was at the forefront of the aristocratic ascetic movement, yet her wealth allowed her to successfully integrate into male-dominated social networks in the Egyptian desert. By the time Melania the Younger adopted asceticism, 35 years later in around 405, the Roman Empire had changed profoundly: barbarian invasions threatened Rome itself. Thus, rather than invest in social networks of ascetics, Melania the Younger used the language of charity to liquidate her familial estates in the West and invest in more profitable foundations—monasteries which functioned as estates—in the East. These foundations brought Melania both income for continued investment and the social standing to contract profitable friendships with members of the imperial family and the Constantinopolitan aristocracy.

In the *Lausiac History* and the *Life of Melania the Younger*, Palladius and Gerontius appealed to their aristocratic audiences by presenting the social and economic benefits which asceticism brought to their aristocratic female subjects alongside the spiritual fulfillment which asceticism promised. The stories that these authors told, then, represented an interpretation of Melania the Elder's and Melania the Younger's asceticism which stressed the benefits which an ascetic life could offer to aristocratic Romans, both men and women. As such, they reflected both the concerns which their authors imagined their aristocratic audiences had in considering devotion to asceticism as well as the actual motivations which inspired

aristocratic women to become involved in the ascetic movement. However, they also reflected the adaptability of asceticism, which offered benefits to both Melania the Elder, who used her charitable renunciation as traditional euergetism, to establish social ties, and Melania the Younger, who used the language of charity to shift her great familial wealth from the troubled West to the profitable East.

Section 2
Key concepts of this project

The outcomes of this project suggest that hagiography can be usefully read as social history that reflects not only religious concerns, but also the social and economic motivations which inspired Late Antique Christians to live ascetically. These motivations appealed to common elements in Late Roman aristocratic decision making not limited to ascetic Christians. Therefore, hagiography can illuminate the relationship between socially and economically motivated actions among the Late Antique aristocracy as well as the specific institutions within Late Antique Roman society which both fostered and took advantage of these motivations. Moreover, this project critically assesses the role which Late Antique hagiography ascribed to religious motivations in the conversion to asceticism. Hagiographic biographies suggested that aristocratic Roman women were attracted to charitable renunciation for a variety of reasons, from the freedom from familial obligations that ascetic emphasis on sexual continence justified to the ability to form social identities outside of the *gens* to a greater control over familial wealth. Similarly, this project argues that hagiography advertised a Christian ascetic lifestyle which was appealing to wealthy audiences. Thus, Late Antique hagiography

was both descriptive, representing the lives or memories of the subjects of the biographies, and proscriptive, as biographies demonstrated ways to live ascetically. As such, it represented an argument for the merits of asceticism and focused on the motivations for ascetic living. Although religious belief was certainly the primary inspiration for Late Antique asceticism, the variety of reasons why asceticism was appealing to aristocratic Christians indicated that religious belief was only one factor in the spread of both asceticism and Christianity, and that some incentives for conversion were deeply embedded in Late Roman culture, rather than being specific to Christian asceticism.

This project has focused on the biographies of women and showed that, for the audiences of the *Lausiac History* and the *Life of Melania the Elder*, the experiences, choices, and actions of women were compelling. Women were an integral part of the Late Antique aristocratic ascetic movement, and both Palladius and Gerontius stressed that asceticism offered particular benefits to women. Yet both texts were written by and dedicated to men, suggesting that both male authors and male audiences were interested in women's agency and motivation and found the stories of their renunciation compelling. Indeed, although the role of gender and female sexuality in these texts has been fruitfully considered, including in this study, the extent to which the gender of the subjects of these texts affected the narrative was remarkably limited. Furthermore, ascetic women were often described as manly, suggesting that a consideration of masculinity and asceticism would illuminate attitudes toward aristocratic ascetic women in Late Antiquity.

More importantly, perhaps, the authorial interest in women's stores indicates that both authors and audiences were comfortable with women as economic actors and models of sanctity. In other words, the characters of Melania the Elder and Melania the Younger were not just images of a women constructed by a men, but images of women who were inspiring and approachable for both men and women. For Palladius and Gerontius, these women were suitable models for a broad range of people, from Palladius' wealthy patron Lausus to the monks of the monasteries of the Holy Land. Just as the *Lausiac History* and the *Life of Melania the Younger* were not simply "women's literature," the characters of Melania the Elder and Melania the Younger were not simply flat personalities, the descriptions of whom represented the way male authors thought about women, but instead were dynamic players whose motivations and experiences held broad appeal.

By addressing the treatment of the economic agency of women in Late Antique texts written by and for male audiences, this project has sought to consider both the interest in and utility of the stories of women for such audiences. However, it has also considered the intersection between narrative and reality and between the historical past and the past imagined both by ancient authors and modern historians. While the motivations and concerns of authors obscured the specifics of the experienced biographies of Melania the Elder and Melania the Younger, these written biographies not only reflected aspects of the culture in which they were composed, but also the underlying institutions which shaped the lives of aristocratic Christians in Late Antiquity.

Section 3
Future directions

The *Life of Melania the Younger* and the *Lausiac History* are dynamic texts not often read together as social history. They provide both a depth of information about the motivations of aristocratic ascetics and a broad range of ascetic experience. However, Melania the Elder and Melania the Younger were part of a much broader aristocratic ascetic movement which appealed to men and women alike throughout the empire. Their stories would be enriched through a consideration of other biographies and information about women who chose similar paths of charitable renunciation.

In particular, the lives of the ascetic women Paula and Olympias were similar to the lives of Melania the Elder and Melania the Younger, while the story of Macriana provides a contrast. Written by her brother, Gregory of Nyssa, the *Life of Macrina* chronicled the fourth-century ascetic Macrina's conversion after the death of her fiancé and her foundation of a monastery on an estate owned by her family. Unlike both Melania the Elder and Melania the Younger, Macrina remained on her familial estates throughout her ascetic life. Although the economic model of her asceticism was similar to that of Melania the Younger, Macrina's story exhibits none of the geographic range of Melania's. Likewise, the role of Macrina's family in her conversion, the foundation of her monastery, and the curation of her memory set her apart from both Melania the Elder and Melania the Younger.

Like Macrina, Olympias was a widow (and perhaps a virgin) who dedicated herself to asceticism in her native city. She lived in Constantinople and was a staunch supporter of John Chrysostom. Her story was recorded in the *Life of Olympias*, an anonymous fifth-century biography, a short biography in the *Lausiac History*, which connected her directly to Melania the Elder, and a series of letters Chrysostom wrote to her. Her use of charity to foster social connections, including her friendship with Chrysostom, closely tracked that of Melania the Elder. However, Olympias also provided the parallel to Melania the Younger, as her charitable renunciation exhibited a fierce desire to control and administer her familial property.

Finally, Jerome's friend and companion Paula provided an obvious parallel to Melania the Elder. Paula is known primarily though her correspondence with Jerome; Jerome's Letter 108, otherwise known as the *Epitaphium Sanctae Paulae*, provided a hagiographic biography of Jerome's companion.[2] Like Melania the Elder, Paula began her ascetic renunciations in the city of Rome after the death of her husband. She was joined in her asceticism by family members, including her daughters Blesilla and Eustochium, the latter of whom was dedicated to virginity from an early age. Paula's life-long relationship with Jerome, whom she supported financially in his foundation of monasteries, was closely comparable to the relationship between Melania the Elder and Rufinus. Likewise, like Melania the Elder, Paula left Rome for the Eastern Empire, where she founded a monastery in

[2] Cain's recent work on the *Epitaphium Sanctae Paulae* in particular makes this document more accessible to the type of study I propose: Cain 2013 (forthcoming).

the Holy Land, in Bethlehem. However, unlike Melania the Elder, Paula's biography was written by her friend and beneficiary, Jerome, shedding light onto the ways in which hagiography promoted specific lifestyles.

A consideration of the lives of these five women in particular, and wealthy ascetic women generally, demonstrates the utility of female characters in exploring ideas of charitable renunciation and the economic choices that underlay philanthropy in the fourth and fifth centuries. Indeed, the biographies of these women displayed the intersection between the rhetoric of the threat and utility of wealth, voluntary poverty, regard toward the poor, charitable giving, social status, and economic investment. Recently, Brown's 2012 book, *The Eye of the Needle*,[3] has opened ancient texts up to the study of the rhetoric of wealth and poverty, which has been part of modern historical inquiry for the past half century. However, there has not yet been a pointed consideration of the motivations for charitable giving; Brown wrote, ""Vivid though it is, the *Life of Melania the Younger* disappoints us on one crucial point. With the benefit of hindsight, it takes for granted the motives of Pinianus and Melania in doing what they did. The *Life* never explains why they made their great renunciation."[4] This project seeks to address this gap in the understanding of charity in Late Antique hagiography. Although the limitations historians of the ancient world face in approaching this topic based on available evidence are daunting, the type of evidence which textual sources dealing with Late Antique asceticism offer allows this sort of inquiry in the study of the ancient world.

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[3] Brown 2012.
[4] Brown 2012, 293-294.

In particular, the question of the relationship between the rhetoric of charity, conceptions of charitable action, and the Late Antique ascetic anxiety toward wealth and status is crucial: in order to untangle contemporary practice from hagiographic sources, a better theorization of charity in the Late Antique context—and particularly a pan-Mediterranean Christian context—must be the starting point. Within hagiographic sources, charity was seen as an indication of moral or religious fortitude of the donor, and, specifically in the case of ascetic donors, a sign of personal disavowal of worldly wealth. However, charity was also an advertisement of wealth and status, something which was antithetical to ascetic practice. For the donor, then, charity had two contradictory benefits: it advertised both wealth and status, but also personal disinterest in those attributes. Interestingly, in Late Antique ascetic sources, there is very little information either about the beneficiaries of charity or the effect of charity. The focus was on the act of giving and the character of the donor.

The intersection between wealth, poverty, status, and charity is a topic which bears a strong affinity to discussions of the post-2008 economic climate in the United States and, to a lesser extent, the European Union. In the United States a strong rhetoric of the power of philanthropy to support the needs of society has developed in the wake of a fiscal crisis which resulted in distrust of institutions and shrinking government support for social safety nets. In considering both early Christian charity and modern charitable donations, moral and religious underpinnings of charitable giving dominate the rhetoric, suggesting a singularly selfless motivation for charitable use of wealth. At the same time, critiques of major

American charities have arisen out of the same distrust of institutions which is manifest in attitudes toward government spending. Despite politically motivated suggestions that private charity could support the growing underclasses of the United States, the focus remains on well-known charitable foundations or donors rather than considering the efficacy of charitable foundations and activities. Indeed, the rhetoric of charity which surrounds the present growth in American philanthropy, and which is reflected in the growing distrust of charitable institutions, has a parallel in Late Antique hagiographies.

With a development in the study of charity in 21st-century America, a new study of the motivations for giving among Christian ascetics in the Late Roman Empire has something to add to a modern conversation, while contemporary interest in charitable motivations would make a similar study of ancient sources appealing. In particular, new theories of the relationship between institutions, charitable action by individuals, motivation to give, and real or perceived primary group membership may illuminate the relationship between ancient hagiographic texts, their authors and audiences, and attitudes toward charity.

Charitable action is, by definition, subjective; harsh criticisms of charities in the present-day media underscore the concept that morality of action depends not solely on the intention of the actor, but also on the perception of the public. Late Antique attitudes toward charitable action as articulated in the pages of ascetic biographies bear witness to the shifting nature of charity, but also suggest that a well-constructed rhetoric of charity, in itself, was a powerful motivation for

charitable action of the type advertised. The *Life of Melania the Younger* and the *Lausiac History* both addressed the creation of a model of charity among the Late Antique aristocracy that came to define ascetic devotion in the Late Antique Mediterranean.

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