ECCLESIASTICS AND ASCETICS

FINDING SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY IN FIFTH- AND SIXTH-CENTURY PALESTINE

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ABSTRACT

During the fifth and sixth centuries, the church in Palestine experienced considerable turmoil over christological divisions. In the midst of this controversy monks sometimes came into conflict with the established hierarchy of the church. As a source of spiritual authority distinct from ecclesiastical power circles, ascetics could support or undermine the work of a bishop. Drawing upon the works of John Rufus, Zachariah Scholasticus, and Barsanuphius and John of Gaza, this article explores the various models used to reconcile ecclesiastic and ascetic sources of spiritual authority. It examines these authors' perceptions of interactions between monks and bishops as they established and maintained their spiritual authority.

[1]   In the fifth and sixth centuries, Christians in Palestine faced considerable concern about the proper locus of spiritual authority in the context of ongoing christological controversy. Inhabitants of the province were divided over the christological settlement of the Council of Chalcedon (451 CE). Supporters had confidence in the compromise between Alexandrian and Antiochene christologies articulated by the council's definition, that Christ had two natures, one human and one divine, united in one person. Opponents of

the council feared that it had succumbed to the Nestorian heresy, allowing too much separation between the divine *logos* and the man Jesus.

[2]   The doctrinal differences in Palestine influenced the understanding of spiritual authority in the region. In the struggle for establishing correct christological doctrine, inhabitants of Palestine constructed competing paradigms for locating spiritual authority within the church. Spiritual authority in late antiquity was exercised by multiple institutions, including the ecclesiastical hierarchy, councils, and monastic leaders, and the proper relationship among these authorities was the subject of considerable debate. Bishops occupied a critical position in the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the eastern Mediterranean. Councils, summoned by imperial authority but largely shaped by the actions of certain bishops, offered judgment on the correct doctrine of the church. Individual bishops struggled with one another because of geographical competitiveness and theological conviction. Equally concerned about maintaining orthodoxy were monks. Bishops at times manipulated monks to secure their cause. Crowds of monks summoned by an individual bishop could serve as a physical threat to his opponents. Ascetic holy men, however, could not always be controlled by bishops. They could represent an independent source of spiritual authority outside the established ecclesiastical hierarchy.[1] They could use their spiritual authority to support or undermine local bishops. In other cases, bishops were recruited directly from monasteries and continued to live abstemiously following ordination, surrounded by their clergy in quasi-monastic

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[1] For the development of the institutions of the monastery and the episcopate, see Henry Chadwick, "Bishops and Monks" (*Studia Patristica* 24 [1993]), 45-61; and Conrad Leyser, *Authority and Asceticism from Augustine to Gregory the Great*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

communities.[2] The ascetic practices of these bishops became a favorite theme of later hagiographers.[3]

[3]   In the context of ongoing christological controversy and division within eastern Christianity, the relationship between ecclesiastic and ascetic authority is a fruitful avenue of investigation. In both monastic and episcopal circles this process of substantiating spiritual authority was critical if the ascetic, theological, and ecclesiastical accomplishments of one generation were to continue to shape the Christian community in the future. In response to competing views on the proper relationship between ascetic and ecclesiastic leaders, monastic writers depicted both holy men and bishops as acting out divinely ordained roles. These authors hoped that the carefully constructed models of bishop-monk interaction they dramatically depicted would dispel the troubling ambiguity that sometimes characterized real life exchanges. Nevertheless, the texts indicate that both leaders and laity continued to feel concern that sources of spiritual authority could come into conflict. This article explores how various authors constructed the roles of bishops and monks and substantiated their spiritual authority, clarifying the complex and sometimes contradictory expectations of the Christian inhabitants of fifth- and sixth-century Palestine.

[4]   An extraordinary abundance of textual evidence for the study of spiritual authority survives from fifth- and sixth-century Palestine. From the Judean desert there is the corpus of saints' lives composed by Cyril of Scythopolis and the rich physical remains of the Judean monasteries. This evidence has been competently interpreted by a number of scholars including Joseph Patrich, John Binns, and Yizhar Hirschfeld.[4] From the south, the region of Gaza,

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[2] Claudia Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 137-52, and Andrea Sterk, *Renouncing the World Yet Leading the Church. The Monk-Bishop in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003). See chapter nine for her analysis of hagiographical evidence from Palestine, including the relationship of monastery and episcopate in the works of Cyril of Scythopolis.

[3] Rapp, *Holy Bishops*, 293-97.

[4] Joseph Patrich, *Sabas, Leader of Palestinian Monasticism* (Washington: Dum-barton Oaks, 1995); John Binns, *Ascetics and Ambassadors of Christ: The Monasteries of Palestine 314-631* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); and

numerous texts are extant recording for us thoughts, attitudes, and events of the late fifth and early sixth centuries. There may be only modest archaeological finds in the region, but the number of authors we know and the breadth of their surviving texts make us feel we have discovered an archive. A new generation of scholars has begun to make the world that produced these texts visible for us, including Cornelia Horn, with her work on Peter the Iberian, and Jan-Eric Steppa, with his new book on John Rufus.[5] Many texts from the region of Palestine in this period deal directly with the issue of spiritual authority, from the ascetic exhortations of Isaiah of Gaza to the letters of Severus of Antioch. For this article I have chosen to analyze three groups of texts: the letters of Barsanuphius and John to the people of Gaza, the hagiography and polemical writings of John Rufus, and the *Ecclesiastical History* of Zachariah Scholasticus. These works, most originally composed in Greek, survive in a mixture of Greek manuscripts and Syriac translations.[6] The radically different flavors of these texts arise both from the genres of the works and the personalities and purposes of the authors. Each has a distinct understanding of the basis of spiritual authority within the church, and together they represent for us the variety of models available for interpreting ascetic-ecclesiastic interaction.

Yizhar Hirschfeld, *The Judean Monasteries in the Byzantine Period* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

[5] Cornelia Horn, "Weaving the Pilgrim's Crown: John Rufus's View of Peter the Iberian's Journeys in Late Antique Palestine," in *Symposium Syriacum VIII: The University of Sydney, Department of Semitic Studies, 26 June-1 July, 2000*, edited by R. Y. Ebied, Herman Tuele, Peter Hill, and Jozef Verheyden (Leuven: Peeters, 2004); "Empress Eudocia and the Monk Peter the Iberian. Patronage, Pilgrimage and the Love of a Foster-Mother in Fifth-Century Palestine," in *Internationale Zeitschrift für Byzantinistik*, edited by Walter Kaegi (Amsterdam: Verlag Adolf M. Hakkert, 2004); *Asceticism and Christological Controversy in Fifth-century Palestine: the Career of Peter the Iberian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); and Jan-Eric Steppa, *John Rufus and the World Vision of Anti-Chalcedonian Culture* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2002).

[6] It is critical that language does not create an artificial barrier, hindering the study of Palestinian monasticism. Greek and Syriac texts from the same period must be considered together.

[5]   So what do we find when we turn to these texts that survive from fifth- and sixth-century Palestine? How do they portray spiritual authority functioning in society? From a cursory reading of Barsanuphius' letters, the *Plerophoriae* of John Rufus, and Zachariah's *Ecclesiastical History*, one might never guess they come from the same geographic area and roughly the same time period. John Rufus was driven by the single purpose of discrediting the council of Chalcedon by gathering together dramatic signs and visions that confirm divine rejection of the council. Barsanuphius and his colleague, John of Gaza, on the other hand studiously avoided offering judgment on the controversial council, and they pled with their disciples to avoid discussing any doctrine. They assumed spiritual oversight of bishops and patriarchs, but used their own spiritual authority to augment power of those in ecclesiastical office. Zachariah dispassionately detailed the actions of monks, bishops and emperors, calmly noting who were 'believing,' that is, non-Chalcedonian, and who were 'synodists,' that is, Chalcedonian.[7]

BARSANUPHIUS AND JOHN OF GAZA

[6]   Barsanuphius and John were anchorites, who lived in neighboring cells attached to the monastery of Seridos outside the city of Gaza in the village of Tawatha. As enclosed anchorites who never left their cells or welcomed visitors, the two Old Men were remarkably involved in the civic and ecclesiastical affairs of Palestine. The text of over 850 letters they composed survives.[8] Barsanuphius and

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[7] For the response of eastern Christians to the Council of Chalcedon see John Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions: The Church 450-680 A.D.* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1989); and Patrick Gray, *The Defense of Chalcedon in the East (451-533)* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979).

[8] Barsanuphius and John, Correspondence, in *Barsanuphe et Jean de Gaza, Correspondance*, ed. and tr. by François Neyt, Paula de Angelis-Noah, and Lucien Regnault, Sources Chrétiennes 426, 427, 450, 451, 468 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2001, 2002). For an English translation of selected letters, see John Chryssavgis, *Letters from the Desert: A Selection of Questions and Responses by Barsanuphius and John* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003); for translation of the complete corpus, see John Chryssavgis, *Barsanuphius and John: Questions and*

John wrote letters of advice to a cross section of Palestinian society: monks, clergy, and lay people. Our investigation of the relationship between episcopal and ascetic spiritual authority begins with Barsanuphius and John's letters to bishops.[9]

[7]   The genre of letters offering advice shapes our picture of bishop/monk interaction. The preservation of the correspondence is selective: we have only summaries of the questions posed to Barsanuphius and John, but the full text of their responses. This record of a correspondence with bishops is far removed from the standard preservation of episcopal letters by church historians (as is done in the *Syriac Chronicle*, see below). The sixth-century monastic compiler of Barsanuphius and John's Correspondence treated the letters of bishops, including those of the patriarch of Jerusalem, no differently than he did the letters of a local layman. All were summarized and included only to introduce a letter from Barsanuphius or John. He considered the anchorites the true spiritual fathers whose writing was worth preserving; the bishops merely posed questions easily condensed. From the very composition of the text, it is clear (at least in the minds of the monks) that the spiritual authority of ascetics outweighed that of bishops.

Responses, 2 vols. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, forthcoming).

[9] The anchorites' interactions with bishops are summarized here in order to make comparison with the other texts analyzed in this article. For spiritual authority in the Correspondence of Barsanuphius and John, see Aryeh Kofsky, "The Byzantine Holy Person: The Case of Barsanuphius and John of Gaza," in *Saints and Role Models in Judaism and Christianity*, edited by Marcel Poorthius and Joshua Schwartz, 261-85 (Leiden: Brill, 2004); and Jennifer L. Hevelone-Harper, *Disciples of the Desert: Monks, Laity, and Spiritual Authority in Sixth-Century Gaza*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005. For Barsanuphius and John as intercessors for their disciples, see Claudia Rapp, "'For Next to God, You Are My Salvation': Reflections on the Rise of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," in *The Cult of the Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown*, edited by James Howard-Johnston and Paul Antony Hayward, 63-81 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). For spiritual authority in the letters of Barsanuphius and John to Dorotheos, see François Neyt, "A Form of Charismatic Authority," *Eastern Churches Review* 6 (1974): 52-65.

[8]   By entering into a correspondence with the anchorites, bishops acknowledged their own role as supplicants. No letters seeking to admonish the monks survive; rather, the compiler shows us bishops seeking guidance from anchorites, deliberately humbling themselves as disciples. In the content of their letters, as well as the form, Barsanuphius and John demonstrated confidence in their own spiritual authority over bishops. They instructed the bishops on how best to carry out their episcopal duties.[10] The anchorites rebuked bishops when they disagreed with their course of action.[11] They publicly condemned one bishop of Gaza who sought imperial help to regain his office after being deposed.[12] They advised the laity of Gaza about choosing a new bishop.[13] All these actions affirmed the model that anchorites advanced in the monastic life should exercise spiritual authority over even high-ranking bishops.

[9]   However, Barsanuphius and John did more than demonstrate their own spiritual authority over that of the bishops. They actually used their spiritual authority to support episcopal power. They very deliberately urged the laity of Gaza to submit to the patriarch of Jerusalem in their choice of a new bishop.[14] Barsanuphius and John served as spiritual fathers for both the bishop of Gaza and the patriarch of Jerusalem. When the discouraged patriarch contemplated flight, the anchorites counseled him to remain firm and resist this temptation.[15] They advised him, "This delivery to temptation has not happened without the permission of God. We will examine our heart in order to see which precept of God we have transgressed, and we will know that it is because of that that we have been delivered into temptation."[16] Although the anchorites spoke humbly in the first person plural to add gentleness to their correction, the identity of the sinner was without doubt. The message was clear: sin leads to more temptation and further despair. The anchorites did not offer any public challenge to high ecclesiastical office, but they used their own spiritual authority both to correct and to uphold bishops.

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[10] Barsanuphius and John, *Correspondence,* 804-22.
[11] Ibid. 825, 831-33.
[12] Ibid. 802-03.
[13] Ibid. 793-803.
[14] Ibid. 793, 795.
[15] Ibid. 823-24.
[16] Ibid. 825.

[10]   In the turbulent historical context of late antique Gaza, the anchorites Barsanuphius and John of Gaza were a very moderate pair. They did not seek to be engaged in the christological disputes that shook Palestine in the aftermath of Chalcedon. They were reluctant to condemn or to allow their disciples to condemn those accused of heresy.[17] Although they used the rhetoric of Non-Chalcedonians, loudly proclaiming their allegiance to 'Nicaea' alone, avoiding all reference to the Council of Chalcedon, and urging distance from so-called 'Nestorians,' they also urged submission to a Chalcedonian Patriarch of Jerusalem. Their moderation caused confusion in later generations as to their own christological position.[18]

JOHN RUFUS

[11]   The Arab writer from southern Palestine, John Rufus, did not share the moderation of Barsanuphius and John. He was a vehement advocate for the anti-Chalcedonian cause. He is the author of colorful polemical text entitled, "Testimonies and Revelations that God has made to the saints on the heresies about his nature and on the prevarication that took place at Chalcedon," shortened by modern scholars to *Plerophoriae*.[19] The work is a series of anecdotal proofs against Chalcedon recounting many miraculous signs condemning the council. Although John Rufus wrote originally in Greek, this text, like his hagiographical account of his spiritual father, Peter the Iberian, survives only in Syriac.[20]

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[17] Ibid. 58, 693-701.

[18] Confusion regarding Barsanuphius' christological position may have caused his name to be associated with heresy. When Pope Leo III (d. 816) accused Theodore the Studite (759-826) of admitting the heretics, Isaiah, Barsanuphius, and Dorotheos, to the ranks of the saints, Theodore proclaimed that there were three saints by these names as well as three heretics. See Siméon Vailhé, "Saint Barsanuphe" (*Echos d'Orient* 8 [1905]), 14-15.

[19] John Rufus, *Plerophoriae*, in *Jean Rufus. Plérophories, témoignages et révélations contre le concile de Chalcédoine*, ed. and tr. by F. Nau, PO 8.1 (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1912).

[20] John Rufus, *Vita Petri Iberi*, in *Petrus der Iberer. Ein Characterbild zur Kirchen- und Sittengeschichte des fünften Jahrhunderts,* ed. and tr. by R. Raabe (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1895). For the identification of John as the author of this text, see E. Schwartz, *Johannes Rufus, ein*

[12]   John's audience for the *Plerophoriae* was the monastic and lay population of the eastern empire that had already rejected the authority of the Council of Chalcedon. The antagonistic tone of this work would do little to persuade a convicted Chalcedonian or even to sway a committed moderate like Barsanuphius. Rather the text was intended to reinforce the belief system of a dedicated minority.[21] John affirmed the anti-Chalcedonian worldview with dramatic testimonies of divine revelations given to monastic holy men throughout Palestine and Egypt.

[13]   John Rufus was ambivalent about the spiritual authority of bishops. On the one hand he highlighted the episcopal authority of his spiritual father Peter the Iberian as Bishop of Maiuma. His hagiographical work, the *Life of Peter the Iberian*, cast the office of bishop in a more favorable light than did the *Plerophoriae*. The monk Peter resisted ordination, first because he did not wish to serve under the Patriarch Juvenal, who had betrayed orthodoxy by embracing Chalcedon.[22] He continued to resist being made bishop by the anti-Chalcedonian Patriarch Theodosius, however, because

monophysitischer Schriftsteller, Heidelberg 1912. For Peter the Iberian, see Kathleen M. Hay, "Evolution of Resistance: Peter the Iberian, Itinerant Bishop," in *Prayer and Spirituality in the Early Church*, eds. Pauline Allen, Raymond Canning, and Lawrence Cross (Everston Park, Queensland: Centre for Early Christian Studies, Australian Catholic University, 1998), 159-168; Aryeh Kofsky, "Peter the Iberian: Pilgrimage, Monasticism and Ecclesiastical Politics in Byzantine Palestine" (Liber Annuus 47 [1997]), 209-22; and Bernard Flusin, "Naissance d'une ville sainte: autour de la Vie de Pierre l'Ibère" (*Annuaire de L'Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, Section des Sciences Religieuses* 100 [1991-1992]), 365-69. For hagiographical accounts associated with Peter, see David M. Lang, "Peter the Iberian and his Biographers" (*Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 2 [1951]), 158-68. For John Rufus' view of the church, see Steppa*, John Rufus* and Volker Menze, "Die Stimme von Maiuma: Johannes Rufus, das Konzil von Chalcedon und die wahre Kirche," in *Literarische Konstituierung von Identifikationsfiguren in der Antike*, edited by Barbara Aland, Johannes Hahn, and Christian Ronning, 215-32 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

     [21] Steppa, *John Rufus*, 171-72. See also Aryeh Kofsky, "What Happened to the Monophysite Monasticism of Gaza?" in *Christian Gaza in Late Antiquity*, edited by Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony and Aryeh Kofsky, 183-94 (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

     [22] For reaction in Palestine to Juvenal's acceptance of Chalcedon, see E. Honigmann, "Juvenal of Jerusalem," (*DOP* 5 [1950]), 211-79.

he did not deem himself worthy of the office of bishop. While being forcibly taken to Jerusalem to be ordained, Peter briefly escaped and ran to throw himself from the roof, choosing death or disfigurement rather than ordination. A voice from heaven stopped him, saying, "Peter, Peter, if you do this, you have no part of me!"[23] Both texts emphasized that it was Peter's status as a bishop that allowed him to consecrate Timothy Aelurus as Patriarch of Alexandria in the place of the despised Chalcedonian patriarch, Proterius, imposed on Egypt by imperial force. As bishops, Peter and Timothy together served as the praiseworthy protagonists of John Rufus' works.

[14]   However, John Rufus fundamentally mistrusted bishops. His suspicion of most episcopal authority was tied to his rejection of the Council of Chalcedon. He saw it as a heretical action perpetrated by bishops. This message was repeated throughout the *Plerophoriae.* John's sentiments about episcopal power were epitomized in a vision he recounted, in which the apostle Paul appeared with a group of bishops. At his instruction the bishops washed their faces, revealing that they were afflicted with leprosy. Paul rebuked them saying, "Not one of you has been found pure."[24] Episcopal power was a façade covering the disease of heresy. Real spiritual authority rested not with ecclesiastical office, but with ascetic vigor and submission to a spiritual father. Although he claimed the conciliar authority of Nicaea and Ephesus, John had lost faith in bishops since Chalcedon. He saw monks as the guardians of orthodoxy in his day.

[15]   In fifth- and sixth-century Palestine there were not always clear-cut lines between the monastery and the bishop's *cathedra.* John's own spiritual father, Peter, was both an ascetic holy man fighting against the actions of bishops and at the same time the bishop of Maiuma. There is some evidence that John actually succeeded him in his episcopal see.[25] Therefore, John concluded that a bishop could exercise spiritual authority, but only if he were

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[23] John Rufus, *Vita Petri Iberi*, 54. After his ordination as bishop Peter attempts to avoid celebrating the sacrament. John related a eucharistic miracle that offered divine confirmation his episcopate.

[24] John Rufus, *Plerophoriae* 60.

[25] The title of the *Plerophoriae* attributes the work to John as bishop of Maiuma. For the argument that John never held this position, see Steppa, *John Rufus*, 18-19.

also a monk with a suitable ascetic pedigree. Spiritual authority originated in the monk's submission to a spiritual father. Ordination could augment the ecclesiastical status of a holy man, but not substitute for authentic spiritual authority based on a lifetime of ascetic discipleship.

THE *SYRIAC CHRONICLE*

[16] The *Syriac Chronicle* is an eclectic work covering the christological disagreements of the eastern empire in the fifth and sixth centuries, as well as the military struggle between the Persian and Byzantine Empires. The author of the text explicitly states that books three through six were drawn from "The Greek Chronicle of Zachariah the Rhetor."[26] Zachariah's *Ecclesiastical History* probably covered the second half of the fifth century (from 450-491), but the *Syriac Chronicle* continues through the reign of Justinian.[27] Therefore, when discussing the sections epitomized from Zachariah, I will name him explicitly as author. In the other cases I refer to the anonymous Syriac author (called pseudo-Zachariah) who drew upon Zachariah for his composition. The Syriac author of the work was self-conscious about his own desire to be a careful and considerate historian. He expressed this concern in his historiographical statement at the beginning of the *Chronicle*:

Now we beg that readers or hearers will not blame us, if we do not call the kings victorious and mighty, and the generals valiant and astute, and the bishops pious and blessed, and the monks

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[26] Ps.-Zachariah, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.7. For the Syriac epitome of Zachariah's *Ecclesiastical History* with a Latin translation, see E. W. Brooks, *Historia ecclesiastica Zachariae Rhetori vulgo adscripta*, CSCO, 83-84, 87-88, Scriptores Syri, ser. 3, t. 5-6 (Louvain & Paris: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1921-1929). English quotations in this article are taken from, F. J. Hamilton and E. W. Brooks, eds., *The Syriac Chronicle Known as That of Zachariah of Mitylene*, (London: Methuen & Co., 1899).

[27] The *Syriac Chronicle* was completed in 569. For dating see Hamilton and Brooks, *Syriac Chronicle*, 3-7. For Zachariah Scholasticus, see Lang, "Peter the Iberian;" E. Honigmann, "Patristic Studies," *Stud Test* 173 (1953): 194-204; K. Wegenast, "Zacharias Scholastikos," in *R-E* 9.2 (1967), cols. 2212-16; and Pauline Allen, "Zachariah Scholasticus and the *Historia Ecclesiastica* of Evagrius Scholasticus," *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 31.2 (1980): 471-88.

chaste and honorable of character, because it is our object to relate facts, following in the footsteps of the Holy Scriptures, and it is not our intention on our own account to praise and extol rulers with flattering words, or to revile and insult with rebuke those who believe differently.[28]

[17]   Although the Syriac author knows nothing of the nineteenth-century ideal of Rankian objectivity, for those accustomed to reading late antique historians with strong affections such as Eusebius and Zosimus, he appears remarkably even handed. He could describe the good qualities of a bishop: "He was just in his deeds, and showed kindness to the tillers of the soil, and was gentle towards them, and was not greedy after bribes. In his body he was chaste, and in outward matters he did much good to his church, and paid his debts."[29] The same bishop is then labeled as a 'Nestorian' and accused of persecuting 'believers.' As a non-Chalcedonian, the author of the *Syriac Chronicle* referred to all bishops and monks who reject the council as the 'believing.'

[18]   The *Syriac Chronicle* shows bishops locked in struggle over Christology. Unlike John Rufus, the author of the *Syriac Chronicle* viewed the office of bishop as neutral. Some bishops used their authority for good, some for evil. As we have seen, he even asserted that moral behavior and good Christology need not always coincide—a learned official described as 'believing' was also indicted for greed and lust.[30] Like bishops, monks worked both for the cause of orthodoxy and heresy. There is no distinction between the pious monks and apostate bishops as there is in the works of John Rufus.

[19]   According to the *Chronicle*, a contest was taking place for the soul of the empire. Bishops, emperor, and monks were involved in a power triangle.[31] Groups of monks publicly supported certain

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[28] Hamilton and Brooks, *Syriac Chronicle*, 16.

[29] Ibid. 204. See 205 for the description of Bishop Ephraium of Amida who was also described as just although he was "infected with the teachings of the Diphysites."

[30] Ps.-Zachariah, *Ecclesiastical History* 9.19.

[31] For other examples of the struggle between monks, bishops, and emperor over Christology, see James E. Goehring, "Chalcedonian Power Politics and the Demise of Pachomian Monasticism," Occasional Papers, The Institute for Antiquity and Christianity, The Claremont Graduate

bishops. Monks managed to gain direct access to the emperor, informing him of the behavior of bishops. Sometimes they actually arrived in Constantinople armed with documents to back up their case. The emperor then responded either positively or negatively. The petitions of monks proved effective in shaping imperial intervention in episcopal politics. Their ascetic zeal projected spiritual authority to an imperial audience. Zachariah related that when monks arrived at Basiliscus' court to plead on behalf of Timothy Aelurus, "the king, and the courtiers, and the queen were struck by admiration of them."[32]

[20]   This monastic involvement in bishop/emperor relations is an especially prominent motif in Zachariah's account struggle for the patriarchate of Alexandria. Although we are accustomed to thinking of Egyptian monks as using their force to serve the ambitions of the patriarchs, as in Athanasius' fourth-century *Life of Antony* or in the accounts of the council in Ephesus in 449, in the *Syriac Chronicle* the independence of monks served as a check on episcopal authority. One example will illustrate this pattern. After the death of Timothy Salophaciolus, Egyptian monks informed Zeno that John broke his oath to the emperor and bribed his way to the patriarchate.[33] The emperor responded to the request of the monks by removing John and reinstating Peter Mongus to whom the monks had remained loyal. The emperor required Peter to accept the *Henotikon* as a condition for keeping his see. Zachariah clearly detailed that Peter had monastic support for this action. 'Monks' and 'sisters' were with the throng who set Peter upon a chariot in celebration.[34] Ascetic holy men, Peter the Iberian and Isaiah of Gaza, who would later avoid complying with the emperor's summons to the capital because of their unease with the *Henotikon*, were shown here openly affirming the patriarch with other Palestinian monks.[35]

School, 1989, reprinted in *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 241-61.

[32] Hamilton and Brooks, *Syriac Chronicle,* 104.

[33] Ps.-Zachariah, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.6-7.

[34] Ibid. 5.7.

[35] Ibid. 5.9. See 6.3 for Peter and Isaiah's evasive maneuvering. See John Rufus, *Vita Petri Iberi* 103-04. For Isaiah of Gaza, see Hermann Keller, "L'abbé Isa ïe-le-Jeune" (*Irénikon* 16 [1939]), 113-26; Derwas Chitty, "Abba Isaiah" (*JTS* 22 [1971]): 47-72; and John Chryssavgis and

[21]   Just as the power of the monks helped Peter Mongus gain his
see, monastic resistance to his authority created problems for the
patriarch. Uneasy with his acceptance of the *Henotikon*, because it
did not explicitly condemn Chalcedon, a number of illustrious
monks withdrew from communion with Peter.[36] A monastic
emissary to the emperor complained that Peter had expelled the
monks from their monasteries.[37] This action triggered an imperial
investigation. Zachariah claimed that 30,000 monks assembled
outside the city in an effort to choose another bishop. The imperial
official attempting to defuse the situation feared civil war should
the monks enter Alexandria. Incidentally, Zachariah added that the
loyalty of the laity to Peter helped to frustrate the rebellion of the
monks.[38]

[22]   The author of the *Syriac Chronicle* highlighted the actions of
bishops. He prominently included many letters from one bishop to
another. However, a close reading of the text reveals that monastic
power served to limit episcopal power. Working with imperial
support, monks could support or undermine the authority of
bishops. Of course, attempting to balance episcopal and imperial
power was a difficult task. Sometimes the monks chose the wrong
side of the power struggle. When Emperor Anastasius deposed the
Chalcedonian patriarch of Constantinople, Macedonius, the monks
loyal to the patriarch were expelled as well.[39] The *Syriac Chronicle*
included a letter describing part of their fate: "On that same day

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Pachomios (Robert) Penkett, *Abba Isaiah of Scetis, Ascetic
Discourses* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2002).

[36] Ps.-Zachariah, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.1. The tension between the
monks and Peter stands in stark contrast to Timothy Aelurus' close
dependence on monastic support, see Christopher Haas, *Alexandria in
Late Antiquity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 260.
For Haas' treatment of Peter's episcopate, focusing on the divergent
factions in the Alexandrian church, see 316-30.

[37] Ps.-Zachariah, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.1-2.

[38] Ibid. Haas argues that the larger numbers of monks in the fifth
century strengthened their power and led to increased strife with the
patriarch, *Alexandria*, 260-61. For the Patriarch of Alexandria's
dependence on the laity and clergy, see 215-44. For Evagrius Scholasticus'
version of the events of Peter Mongus' patriarchate and his use of
Zachariah, see Allen, "Zachariah," 481-83.

[39] Ps.-Zachariah, *Ecclesiastical History* 7.7-8.

the king commanded, and the water which supplied the baths was cut off from their monasteries."[40] Implicit in this punishment was a criticism that the monks were not leading an austere life in the first place.

CONCLUSION

[23]   Christians living in Palestine during the fifth and sixth centuries understood that both monks and bishops held spiritual authority. In the open discord that followed the Council of Chalcedon, the laity grew accustomed to seeing those who exercised spiritual authority come into conflict: bishop turned against bishop and monks struggled with one another. Episcopal and ascetic forms of spiritual authority also competed. There were few clear-cut rules about how to resolve this dissension. Councils, expressing the authority of bishops, decreed that monks should be subservient to bishops in the ecclesiastical hierarchy.[41] However, monks, and probably many lay people, believed that ascetic piety was a safer guarantee of orthodox theology than episcopal office, which could easily open its occupant to corruption.

[24]   The writers considered here confirm the complexity of bishop/monk relations. The texts do not agree about the basic ranking of bishops and ascetic holy men. Each has a slightly different emphasis, revealing the multiplicity of models for resolving tensions between episcopal and ascetic authority in late antiquity. A variety of genres compounds the divergent views of episcopal and ascetic interactions. Each genre carries with it basic assumptions of how events should be narrated.

[25]   The Correspondence of Barsanuphius and John of Gaza introduced bishops as the disciples of monks. It assumed that the spiritual authority of anchorites outweighed even the office of patriarch. With this ranking taken as fundamental, the compiler of the text could afford to show the anchorites supporting the legitimate power of bishops, even when they might favor different christological paradigms. The anchorites preferred to keep a middle

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[40] Hamilton and Brooks, *Syriac Chronicle*, 171.

[41] At Chalcedon it was decreed that no monastery could be established without the local bishop's consent, Canon 4. This may have encouraged monastic resistance to the council. For other councils dealing with monastic jurisdiction see Chadwick, "Bishops and Monks," 59-60.

course in ongoing doctrinal controversies while focusing on personal piety, rather than allowing their disciples to become distracted by heated polemics. Because there was no challenge to their own authority from the clergy, Barsanuphius and John were generous advocates of episcopal authority. With a clearly defined hierarchy that recognized the authority of monks over bishops, competition between sources of spiritual authority was minimized, allowing for productive cooperation.

[26]   John Rufus agreed that the spiritual authority of ascetic holy men outweighed the power that ordination granted to bishops. However, where the Correspondence emphasized fruitful collaboration between monks and bishops, John Rufus saw inevitable strife. The examples of Peter the Iberian, Bishop of Maiuma, and Timothy Aelurus, Patriarch of Alexandria, admitted the possibility of combining an ascetic's authority with the office of bishop, but the overwhelming message of John's work was that such harmony was extremely rare. He believed that the majority of bishops had lost their spiritual authority, succumbing to heresy by supporting the Council of Chalcedon. Only the monks with their strident vigilance could guard orthodox teaching, fighting continuously with the established clerical hierarchy. The ultimate victory of the anti-Chalcedonian ascetics was assured by God, but there was no promise that the struggle would be easy.

[27]   The *Syriac Chronicle* of pseudo-Zachariah refused to answer directly whether the spiritual authority of monks outweighed that of bishops or vice versa. However, the genre of ecclesiastical history carried an inherent bias towards the activities of bishops. In the *Syriac Chronicle* bishops remained the central focus. With carefully cultivated balance, the author detailed the work of holy and heretical bishops. Although the author was not reticent in voicing his own anti-Chalcedonian perspective, he deliberately weighed good character traits against bad, operating out of a long established Greco-Roman historiographical tradition. Monks entered his narrative when they became involved with episcopal politics. With bishops and the emperor, they formed a triangle of authority shaping doctrinal matters (although the lay people were also present in this work to a more modest degree). Like bishops, the author of the *Syriac Chronicle* believed the monks could work for spiritual or worldly ends. Differences in morality and doctrine

characterized different groups of monks. The *Syriac Chronicle* is the only work to deliberately separate piety from correct theology.

[28]   These three approaches to reconciling episcopal and ascetic authority share a concern to locate spiritual authority in a recognizable system. They betray a general anxiety prevalent in the fifth and sixth centuries that multiple sources of spiritual authority would hinder the development of a much-desired doctrinal consensus. Geographically close to Egypt and Constantinople and connected to the rest of the late antique world through pilgrims visiting the holy sites, the people of Palestine in particular felt a need to hold competing sources of spiritual authority in balance. Writers such as Barsanuphius and John of Gaza, John Rufus, and pseudo-Zachariah, author of the *Syriac Chronicle,* differed in their strategies for reconciling episcopal and ascetic power, but all were conscious of the need to give guidance to the people whose traditional leaders might point them in separate directions.

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