

THE RISE AND FUNCTION OF THE HOLY MAN IN LATE ANTIQUITY*

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To study the position of the holy man in Late Roman society is to risk telling in one's own words a story that has often been excellently told before. In vivid essays, Norman Baynes has brought the lives of the saints to the attention of the social and religious historian of Late Antiquity.¹ The patient work of the Bollandists has increased and clarified a substantial dossier of authentic narratives.² These lives have provided the social historian with most of what he knows of the life of the average man in the Eastern Empire.³ They illuminate the variety and interaction of the local cultures of the Near East.⁴ The holy men themselves have been carefully studied, both as figures in the great Christological controversies of the fifth and sixth centuries,⁵ and as the arbiters of the distinctive traditions of Byzantine piety and ascetic theology.⁶

The intention of this paper is to follow well known paths of scholarship on all these topics, while asking two basic questions: why did the holy man come to play such an important rôle in the society of the fifth and sixth centuries? What light do his activities throw on the values and functioning of a society that was prepared to concede him such importance? It is as well to ask such elementary questions. For there is a danger that the holy man may be taken for granted as part of the Byzantine scene. Most explanations of his position are deceptively easy.

In the first place, because many social historians have been led to such evidence mainly to satisfy their interest in the life of the lower classes of the Later Empire, they have tended to stress the spectacular occasions on which the holy man intervened to lighten the lot of the humble and oppressed: his open-handed charity, his courageous action as the spokesman of popular grievances—these have been held sufficient to explain the rôle of the holy man. The holy man's popularity is explained as a product of the oppression and conflict that the social historian often tends to see as a blatant feature of East Roman society.

Such a view sees too little of the life of the holy man. It was through the hard business

* A first draft of this paper was read at Professor Momigliano's Seminar in London. I owe to the work of Dr. Mary Douglas an inspiration that has guided me towards this, and related, topics; and the unflagging enthusiasm and acuteness of Professor Momigliano—with that of Mrs S. C. Humphreys—have instilled into me a salutary *esprit d'escalier*, in raising problems worth following through for many years to come.

I have adopted the following abbreviations for recurrent citations:

A.P. = *Apophthegmata Patrum. Patrologia Graeca* LXV, 71–440 (by name and number of the saying and column).

H.L. = Palladius, *Historia Lusiaca*, ed. C. H. Butler, *Texts and Studies* VI, 2, 1904.

H.R. = Theodoret, *Historia Religiosa, Patrologia Graeca* LXXXII, 1283–1496 (by column).

Sym. Styl. = H. Hilgenfeld, 'Syrische Lebensbeschreibung des heiligen Symeons' in H. Lietzmann, *Das Leben des heiligen Symeon Stylites* (Texte und Untersuchungen xxxii, 4), 1908, 80–187.

V. Alex. = *Vie d'Alexandre l'Acémète*, ed. J. de Stoop, *Patrologia Orientalis* VI, 659–701.

V. Dan. = *Vita Danielis*, ed. H. Delehaye, *Les Saints Stylites* (1923), 1–94.

V. Euthym. = Cyril of Scythopolis, *Vita Euthymii*, ed. Eduard Schwartz, *Kyrrillos von Skythopolis* (Texte und Untersuchungen XLIX, 2), 1939.

V. Hyp. = Callinicus, *Vita Hypatii*, Teubner 1895.

V. Sab. = Cyril of Scythopolis, *Vita Sabae*, ed. Eduard Schwartz, *Kyrrillos von Skythopolis*, o.c.

V. Sym. Jun. = *Vita Symeonis Junioris*, ed. P. van den Ven, *La vie ancienne de saint Syméon Stylite le Jeune*, I, 1962.

V. Theod. = *Vita Theodori Syceotae* ed. Th. Ioannou, *Μνημεία ἀγιολογικά* (1884), 361–495.

Admirable translations and commentaries are available for most of these, and others besides, by E. Dawes and N. H. Baynes, *Three Byzantine Saints*, 1948 (*V. Dan.* and *V. Theod.*); by A. J. Festugière, *Les Moines d'Orient* I–IV, 1961–65 (*V. Hyp.* and *V. Dan.* in vol. II; *V. Euthym.* in vol. III/1; and *V. Sab.* in vol. III/2), and by van den Ven, ed. cit. II, 1970, 1–248 (*V. Sym. Jun.*).

¹ N. H. Baynes, 'The Thought World of East Rome', *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays* (1960), 24–46; 'The Pratum Spirituale', 261–270.

² e.g. F. Halkin, 'L'hagiographie byzantine au service de l'histoire', *XIIIth International Congress of Byzantine Studies*, (Oxford 1960), Main Papers XI, 1–10.

³ E. Patlagean, 'À Byzance: ancienne hagiographie et histoire sociale', *Annales* XXIII, 1968, 106–123, is the most thought-provoking study.

⁴ P. Peeters, *Le trésors orientaux de l'hagiographie byzantine* (1950).

⁵ H. Bacht, 'Die Rolle des orientalischen Mönchtums in den kirchenpolitischen Auseinandersetzungen um Chalkedon (431–519)', *Das Konzil von Chalkedon* II, 1954, 193–314.

⁶ K. Holl, *Enthusiasmus und Bussgewalt beim griechischen Mönchtum* (1898); A. Vööbus, *A History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient*, II (Louvain 1960); *La Théologie de la Vie monastique* (Théologie 49,

of living his life for twenty-four hours in the day, through catering for the day-to-day needs of his locality, through allowing his person to be charged with the normal hopes and fears of his fellow men, that the holy man gained the power in society that enabled him to carry off the occasional *coup de théâtre*. Dramatic interventions of holy men in the high politics of the Empire were long remembered.⁷ But they illustrate the prestige that the holy man had already gained, they do not explain it. They were rather like the cashing of a big cheque on a reputation; and, like all forms of power in Late Roman society, this reputation was built up by hard, unobtrusive (and so, for us, partly obscure) work among those who needed constant and unspectacular ministrations.⁸

Secondly, it is a simple matter for the religious historian to use the literature of the ascetic world to evoke the feelings that crystallised around the holy man. Here was a man who had conquered his body in spectacular feats of mortification. He had gained power over the demons, and so over the diseases, the bad weather, the manifest disorders of a material world ruled by the demons. His prayers alone could open the gates of heaven to the timorous believer.⁹ Yet a description of the power attributed to the holy man cannot, of itself, explain why, at a precise time, the majority of men were prepared to see a small number of their fellows in so dramatic a light. Furthermore, the picture stands *in vacuo*. To leave it like that is to miss an opportunity. In studying both the most admired and the most detested figures in any society, we can see, as seldom through other evidence, the nature of the average man's expectations and hopes for himself. It is for the historian, therefore, to analyse this image as a product of the society around the holy man. Instead of retailing the image of the holy man as sufficient in itself to explain his appeal to the average Late Roman, we should use the image like a mirror, to catch, from a surprising angle, another glimpse of the average Late Roman.

Lastly, the rise of the holy man to such eminence in the later empire has long been attributed, in the sweeping and derogatory perspective of many classical scholars, from Gibbon onwards,¹⁰ to the decline of Greek civilisation in the Near East. For just as the lives of saints have been quarried by the social historian for evidence of the life of the man in the street, so have they been used, in this past century, as a sort of bathyscope, that enables the religious historian to penetrate into what he regards as hitherto untouched depths of popular superstition; it is assumed that the study of such documents must necessarily be akin to deep-sea diving.¹¹ This impression was reinforced, at the turn of the century, by the influence of a Darwinian theory of evolution that dominated the anthropological study of religion. 'Popular' belief was treated as the belief of populations at a lower stage of moral and intellectual evolution. This approach produced an exceptionally static and élitist view of ancient belief: beneath a Graeco-Roman élite, the populations of the Mediterranean and the Near East were each thought of as living at a lower stage of evolution—a stage that was basically similar to other lower stages of evolution in different areas and different ages.¹² Hence the ease with which some of the very best monographs

Lyon 1961); D. Chitty, *The Desert a City* (1966). Brevity has determined that this list should be not a guide to the vast literature, but rather the expression of my debt to those works cited.

⁷ Libanius, *Oratio* 1, 2 (ed. A. F. Norman, *Libanius' Autobiography* (1965), 2-3) shows how the reputation of a local family depended on members who were famous 'in the oratory which opposes itself to the ill-temper of governors'. The circles around holy men delighted in similar incidents: *V. Theod.* c. 142: 'The consul (Bonosus) stood but did not bend his neck, so the saint took hold of the hair of his forehead and pulled it and in this way bent his head down . . . We who were present were thunderstruck and terrified at the just man's daring'.

⁸ Macedonius boldly halted the military commissioners on their way to punish the city of Antioch in 387 (*H.R.* 1404 C); but he had already created a *clientèle* among the military—he had impressed a general on a hunt, and had prophesied for Count Lupicinus on the outcome of grain-speculations (*H.R.* 1404 B). Alexander the Sleepless, who attempted to rebuke officials without such preparation, was summarily exiled both from Antioch

(*V. Alex.* c. 39-40, 687-9) and Constantinople (*V. Hyp.* c. 41).

⁹ N. H. Baynes, in Baynes and Dawes (o.c., see note *), pp. ix-xii.

¹⁰ E. Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* ch. 37: 'If it be possible to measure the interval between the philosophic writings of Cicero and the sacred legend of Theodoret, between the character of Cato and that of Simeon, we may appreciate the memorable revolution which was accomplished in the Roman empire within a period of five hundred years.'

¹¹ This has been rebutted, and most acutely, in only one study known to me: Patlagean, art. cit. (n. 3), 106-10.

¹² e.g. F. Steinleitner, *Die Beicht im Zusammenhang mit der sakralen Rechtspflege in der Antike* (1913), 99. 'Diese Glaube [on the relation between sin and illness] ist für alle niederen Stufen ethischer Betrachtung charakteristisch'—not surprisingly, therefore, the religious practices of the nineteenth-century Aargau (p. 127, n. 1) conclude a monograph on second-century Asia Minor!

in the *Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten* pass, in their footnotes, from cuneiform texts, through the folklore of Ancient and Modern Greece, to the gnarled practices of near-contemporary Swiss and German villages.

The modern historian of Late Roman culture is too often the unwitting heir of this monotonous perspective. For it is this view of 'popular' belief that has lent authority to the opinion, proposed by Rostovtzeff and elaborated as the guiding-line of many modern interpretations of the cultural changes of Late Antiquity, that the end of the ancient world was marked by the rapid democratization of the culture of the Graeco-Roman élite, and so by a catastrophic dilution of the religious ideas of an enlightened minority, by the beliefs of the more primitive majority of the provincials. Like an antediluvian sea bed placed by some convulsion at the crest of a mountain range, the hagiographical literature of Late Antiquity is treated as representing the intrusion into the upper classes of the Roman world of ideas whose rightful place was among the more primitive masses of the Near East.¹³

To take issue with such a view would involve rewriting the social and religious history of the Roman world. It is sufficient to say, in connection with the holy man, that this explanation of the arrival of the holy man, though temptingly simple, throws no light whatever on his continuing function in Late Roman society. It places too much emphasis on the origins of certain ideas, without paying attention to the distinctive manner in which these ideas were combined and used for new purposes in the Late Roman period. It is as if an archaeologist should attempt to use a rude piece of Late Roman village craftsmanship to explain the style of a masterpiece such as the Ravenna mosaics.¹⁴

Altogether, the student of Late Roman society can no longer be content with *prima facie* conclusions from the evidence. He must be prepared to be wary and undramatic. If we are to understand the position of the holy man in this period, it might be as well to begin by treating him as one of those many surprising devices by which men in a vigorous and sophisticated society (as the East Roman Empire of the fifth and sixth centuries now appears to have been) set about the delicate business of living.

First we must find our holy man. There was little doubt about this for Late Roman men: Syria was the great province for ascetic stars.¹⁵ This fact in itself calls for explanation. Egypt was the cradle of monasticism. It was in Egypt that the theory and practice of the ascetic life reached its highest pitch of articulateness and sophistication. Yet the holy men who minted the ideal of the saint in society came from Syria, and, later, from Asia Minor and Palestine—not from Egypt. This lacuna has little to do with the isolation of Egypt under the Monophysite Patriarchs: such isolation has been exaggerated.¹⁶ Rather, the holy man in Egypt did not impinge on society around him in the same way as in other provinces. Egypt provides the first evidence for the formation of a lay and clerical clientèle around the holy man;¹⁷ the violences of the monks in Egypt are notorious:¹⁸ yet the ferocious independence, the flamboyant ascetic practices, the rapid rise and fall of reputations, and the constant symbiosis with the life of the surrounding villages—these are the distinctively Syrian features that were welcomed in Byzantine society.¹⁹ They were virtuoso cadenzas on the sober score first written by 'The Great Men' of Egypt.

¹³ Festugière, *Les Moines d'Orient* I, 21: 'Ce que Gilbert Murray a nommé "the failure of nerve" à propos du goût de l'irrationnel dans le Bas-Empire, ne doit pas être regardé comme une décadence des esprits cultivés (à preuve Plotin, Ambroise, Augustin, Boèce, Cassiodore) que comme l'apparition, dans la littérature... des croyances et des sentiments du vulgaire.'

¹⁴ A. Grabar, *Christian Iconography* (1969), 65, rightly criticises an account of the growth of the Late Antique portrait by an author who 'chiefly stressed this simplification, which he attributed to the influence of artisans who came from the masses and to poorly defined "oriental influences"...' The historians of Late Antique art are, on the whole, more sophisticated in their approach to such problems than are the historians of Late Roman society.

¹⁵ *V. Alex.* c. 6, p. 661.

¹⁶ Rectified by C. Detlef G. Müller, 'Die koptische

Kirche zwischen Chalkedon und dem Arabereinmarsch', *Zft. f. Kirchengesch.* LXXXV, 1964, 271-308; M. P. Roncaglia, 'La chiesa copta dopo il Concilio di Chalcedonia: monofisismo reale o monofisismo nominale?', *Rend. Ist. Lomb.* CII, 1968, 493-514.

¹⁷ H. I. Bell, *Jews and Christians in Egypt* (1924), ch. III ('The correspondence of Paphnutius'), 100-20; cf. *A.P. Daniel* 3 (95), 153C.

¹⁸ See recently, J. Barns, 'Schenute as an Historical Source', *Actes du Xème Congrès International des Papyrologues*, 1964, at pp. 153-4 and 157.

¹⁹ G. Tchalenko, *Villages antiques de la Syrie du Nord* I, 1953, 226 (on Symeon Stylites): 'Sa vie est un exemple typique du monachisme syrien qui savait concilier l'isolement et la discipline la plus sévère avec la participation directe à toutes les manifestations de la vie temporelle et religieuse, en contact journalier avec le peuple.'

This difference is written into the landscape and climate of the two areas. In Egypt, the antithesis between desert and settled land—between ἔρημος and οἰκουμένη—was stark enough in reality (the rainfall of Egypt is 1.1 inches per year) and absolute in the imagination of the Egyptians. The links between the holy man and society constantly yielded to the pressure of this great fact. To survive at all in the hostile environment of such a desert, the Egyptian had to transplant into it the tenacious and all-absorbing routines of the villages of the οἰκουμένη. To live at all, a man had to remain in one place, earning his living from manual labour, from pottery and reed-weaving.²⁰ Groups had to reproduce exactly, on the fringe of the desert, the closed-in, embattled aspect of the fortified villages of Upper Egypt. The monastery of Pachomius was called quite simply The Village.²¹ The Egyptian desert, therefore, exercised a discreet and irresistible pressure in the direction of an inward-looking and earnest attention to the hard business of survival. It stimulated a rapid elaboration of the skills of organisation, an emphasis on stability and introspection, a piling up, in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, of an unrivalled collection of proverbial wisdom.²² As many an Egyptian anecdote shows, the free floating ideal of the ‘angelic life’—the δῆμῦ ἀ δῆμάλῳ κῆ—that summed up the style of Syrian asceticism, was not viable in the πανέρημος of Egypt.²³ In the Syrian provinces, ἔρημος and οἰκουμένη were not sharply contrasted. Instead, they interlocked like the pieces of a jigsaw. Theodoret wrote of Osrhoene, χώρα δὲ πανπόλλη μὲν οἰκουμένη πανπόλλη δὲ ἀοικήτος τε καὶ ἔρημος,²⁴ and of his own territory of Cyrrhus—‘It includes many high mountains, some wholly bare, and some covered with unproductive vegetation.’²⁵

The desert of Syria was never true desert. In the steppelands of Chalcis, occasional showers ensured that water was always near the surface; the ruins of deserted Roman forts trapped enough to support a hermit all the year round.²⁶ The mountains had the same quality. To go to the ἔρημος in Syria was to wander into the ever present fringe of the οἰκουμένη; it was not to disappear into another, unimaginable world. The desert was a standing challenge on the very edge of the village: ‘The ravens that fed Elijah cry, Leave the plough.’²⁷

Yet, just because the desert was more mild, the human contrast between the man in the desert and the man in the world was heightened. The Egyptian had to take the habits of the οἰκουμένη with him if he were to survive at all. The Syrian could live with his desert as long as he was prepared to merge into it, to adopt the total informality and lack of structure of wild life, to keep constantly on the move in search of food and water, to live off roots,²⁸ to be equated with the beasts and especially with the birds—ambivalent symbols, for Late Roman men, of both the free and the demonic.²⁹ The ascetics of Syria called themselves the τῦραιῖ—the men of the mountains—and the ραΐῖ—the shepherds. Many simply merged back into the semi-nomadic fringe of the life of the Fertile Crescent. The Beduin were among the first clients of many Syrian and Palestinian holy men.³⁰ Many a holy man had lived this free and rootless life before. Symeon Stylites had guarded his brother’s herds on the mountains around Şiş (near Nicopolis): deeply under-Christianised, his early piety was moved by ancient memories of sacrifice and prophecy on the high places.³¹ Near to the coast, the distinction between ἔρημος and οἰκουμένη was one of height. The hermit deliberately placed himself on the mountain tops, as a usurper of the power of the ba‘alīm.³² From such tops, he could look down on prosperous villages and on the farmers working on the slopes.³³ He belonged to a world that was not so much antithetical

²⁰ e.g. *A.P.* Esias 5, 181B—sharecropping; Isidore 7 (20), 221B—sale of pots; John the Persian 2 (50), 237—working flax; Lucius (75), 253C—earns 16 νομίσματα per day; Megethius 1, 30D—is totally independent on 3 baskets a day. See P. Brown, ‘The Social Background to the early Ascetic Movement’ (to appear).

²¹ A. Veilleux, *La liturgie dans le cénobitisme pachômien au IV^{ème} siècle* (Studia Anselmiana 57, 1968), 186, n. 91.

²² See *A.P.* Zeno 3 (38), 176C on the Egyptian pride in scrupulous self-examination.

²³ See Vööbus, o.c. (n. 6), ch. IX, 292–315.

²⁴ *H.R.* 1305 C.

²⁵ Theodoret, *Ep.* 42.

²⁶ A. Poidebard, *La trace de Rome dans le désert de Syrie; le limes de Trajan à la conquête arabe* (1934), 13–16 and Vööbus, o.c. (n. 6), 165, n. 21.

²⁷ Vööbus, o.c. 151, n. 24.

²⁸ Vividly described by Cyril of Scythopolis, esp. *V. Cyriaci* c. 8 (Festugière, o.c. (n. 13), p. 44).

²⁹ Vööbus, o.c. (n. 6), 25–27; and *V. Sab.* c. 27.

³⁰ *H.R.* 1360 C–D; 1476 D (Symeon Stylites and the Beduin); *V. Euthym.* c. 15; *V. Alex.* c. 33, p. 683.

³¹ *Sym. Styl.* cc. 2–5, ll. 80–2.

³² *H.R.* 1453B: καὶ τὸν ὑπαιθρον βίον ζηλώσας κορυφῆν ἐτέραν κατέλαβε κώμης τινὸς ὑπερκειμένην cf. *H.R.* 1365 B; 1417 C; 1456 D; 1488 A.

³³ *H.R.* 1340 C–D.

to village life as marginal. He was known to the hunter: he too was on the mountainside 'to stalk his god',³⁴

To the fluidity and the informality of the life of the individual in the desert, we should add the fluidity of the village population of Syria. Then as now, massive under-employment was the norm of peasant life.³⁵ After the harvest and the threshing, the crowd would build up throughout the high summer and autumn. The development of the olive plantations around the Limestone Massif produced a reservoir of mobile manpower: a fluid population was mobilized from November to April to deal with the olive harvest.³⁶ In between it produced the gangs of skilled craftsmen that roamed the mountain villages, whose fine products still impress the archaeologist.³⁷ The same men also built the reputation of the Syrian holy man.³⁸ The crowd is an essential element in the life of the holy man in Syria.³⁹ In the late summer, the unemployed would stream from the villages to the death-bed of the holy man (in the hope of snatching his body as a relic).⁴⁰ Later, mass-meetings were held at the foot of the column of Saint Symeon Stylites at Telnesin.⁴¹ To the ever mobile crowd, we should add the traveller.⁴² The villages around Antioch supplied themselves at great fairs.⁴³ It was at one such fair, at Imma (Yeni Şehir, still a caravanserai village), on the road from Antioch to Berrhoea, that one holy man first made his reputation.⁴⁴ Jewish peddlers carried the news to Cyrrhus that one hermit kept tame lions.⁴⁵ The most important travellers, for the reputation of the holy man, were the soldiers of the garrisons of inland Syria.⁴⁶ The soldiers were strangers themselves; like the holy man they were notorious intruders into the settled patterns of social relationships; they were the most influential single group among the clientèle of the holy man.⁴⁷

Recruitment to the ascetic life betrays the same deep informality. A holy man could collect up to one hundred followers in a season.⁴⁸ Some drew on the great fluidity of misery: gangs of blind unemployed settled around one such.⁴⁹ Sudden conglomerations of this kind could survive only by going wild. Alexander the Sleepless lived with four hundred followers by roaming the steppeland for a year, until hunger drove them down to Palmyra. The townsmen shut the gates against his band: for what they saw was the old curse of the Fertile Crescent in a new form—a Beduinisation of the ascetic life.⁵⁰

All this was no recommendation for the holy man to the settled population. For the ecclesiastical authorities, Syria was notoriously the Wild and Woolly West of ascetic heresy: the Manichaean elect and, later, the Messalian monks were brutally contained by the bishops.⁵¹ The hermit, an unattached stranger on the edge of the village,⁵² had an uphill task to allay initial hostility and suspicion: he could be framed in a murder;⁵³ he was often held responsible for pregnancies among the village girls;⁵⁴ he had the evil eye.⁵⁵ To understand how so unlikely a candidate for eminence gained his position in Syrian society, as elsewhere, we should look more closely at the problems of the οἰκουμένη, especially, at the conditions of village life in the eastern provinces in the fourth and fifth centuries.

The evidence that we have for the Syrian countryside suggests strongly that, in the

³⁴ *H.R.* 1404 B.

³⁵ M. du Buit, 'Note sur la Palestine byzantine', in Festugière, *Les Moines* (above, n. 13), III/1, 47.

³⁶ Tchalenko, o.c. (n. 19), 70.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 419-421, n. 3.

³⁸ *H.R.* 1400 D: Macedonius had to move to avoid the crowds: 'Ἐποίησεν δὲ τοῦτο, οὐ τὰ χωρία δυσχεραίνων ἀλλὰ τῶν ὡς αὐτὸν συνιόντων καὶ πάντοθεν συνδεδόντων ἀποδιδράσκων τὰ πλήθη.'

³⁹ The miracles of Symeon Stylites are crowd-phenomena: *Sym. Styl.* c. 61, p. 111, 13; 65, p. 113, 34-114, 4 and especially c. 109, pp. 156-8. For the rôle of the crowd in such a situation, see E. Peterson, *Eis theós. Epigraphische, formgeschichtliche und religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen* (1926), esp. 181-95.

⁴⁰ *H.R.* 1433 C.

⁴¹ See Peters, *Le tréfonds . . .*, (cit. n. 4), 124, n. 1, on the great festival at the foot of the column timed for July 27th.

⁴² Tchalenko, o.c. (n. 19), 373.

⁴³ Libanius, *Or.* xi, 230.

⁴⁴ *H.R.* 1365 B; Tchalenko, o.c. 23, n. 1; and 93.

⁴⁵ *H.R.* 1375 D.

⁴⁶ L. Harmand (cited below, n. 60), 150-6. These were later maintained to guard the cities from the Isaurian raids: *Sym. Styl.* c. 8, p. 85, 14 and n. 5. Theodoret, *Comm. in Ezech.* 3, 17 (PG LXXXI, 848 C) describes watchtowers to give warning of such raids.

⁴⁷ *H.R.* 1329 B on the close relations of Marcianus of Cyrrhus with a general at Berrhoea; and *Sym. Styl.* c. 9, p. 86, 12.

⁴⁸ *H.R.* 1308 B.

⁴⁹ *H.R.* 1456 B.

⁵⁰ *V. Alex.* c. 34-35, pp. 684-6.

⁵¹ Vööbus, o.c. (n. 6), 120-123; and P. Brown, 'The Diffusion of Manichaeism in the Roman Empire', *JRS* LIX, 1969, 96 (= *Religion and Society in the Age of St. Augustine*, 1971, 104).

⁵² *H.R.* 1360 C—in a little house by the threshing-floors.

⁵³ *H.R.* 1365 B.

⁵⁴ *A.P.* Macarius the Egyptian 1 (80), 257 C.

⁵⁵ *Marc le Diacre, Vie de Porphyre*, ed. Grégoire-Kugener (1930), c. 19, p. 16 and 95; *V. Alex.* cc. 11, p. 665 and 40, p. 689.

fourth and fifth centuries, the villagers of those areas where the holy man was to be most active were passing through a crisis of leadership. The prosperity of the Syrian countryside shows every sign of increasing, and with it the population.⁵⁶ Whether we read Libanius, Theodoret or the inspired evocation of a distinctive area by Tchalenko, we are in a world of thriving villages: the holy man is regularly settled beside the κώμη . . . μεγίστη καὶ πολυάνθρωπος.⁵⁷ The archaeological and epigraphic evidence points to an increase of a new class of independent and self-respecting farmers—ἑσθλῆς ἐγ γεωργεῖς,⁵⁸ to the break-up of the previous great estates, and consequently to the emergence of a new more egalitarian society, whose solid and unpretentious farmhouses survive to this day.⁵⁹ The holy man did not arise from any *misère* of the country folk, as is too often stated.

Nor does *misère* explain the appearance of that other figure on the Syrian scene, the rural patron, the προστάτης.⁶⁰ Too sombre a preoccupation with the long term evils of the growth of rural patronage (for which the evidence is effectively limited, for the fifth century, to Gaul and Egypt only) has led us to neglect the excellent evidence that we do have, from Syria, for the immediate and unspectacular roots of a patron's activity in a village.⁶¹ From the *De patrociniis* of Libanius and the *Historia Religiosa* of Theodoret it is possible, as seldom elsewhere, to see the patron as a necessary figure of village life.

Patronage was a fact of life. What Libanius regretted was that it was being exercised by the wrong people⁶²—by the military to the exclusion of the traditional leaders of society, the urban landowners of Antioch 'even though these are villages of noble men, men well able to stretch out a helping hand to those in distress'—καὶ τῶν οἴων τε ὄντων χεῖρα ὀρέξει λυπουμένοις.⁶³ What the patron could offer, was power on the spot. Δύναμις is a central element in the rôle of the patron.⁶⁴ By means of such δύναμις, he could help the villagers to conduct their relations with the outside world: he would forward their lawsuits;⁶⁵ his protection might cover their feuds with other villages;⁶⁶ he might arrange for them to meet tax demands, and not necessarily to evade them.⁶⁷ The patron appears as a disruptive figure only when his activities threaten the traditional links between the village and the outside world—when he had gained a strong enough position, that is, to intercept rents and taxes.⁶⁸ But the bond between village and patron was strengthened by services offered within the village itself. Libanius describes the good patron: he is a man who would use his δύναμις to smooth over the thorny issues of village life. He would provide—and help distribute—the all-important water supply of the village.⁶⁹ He would arrange the cancelling of debts.⁷⁰ He could settle disputes among the villagers on the spot, and so save them the long trek to the local town to conduct their litigation.⁷¹ To offer such services was time-consuming. Libanius and many urban landowners only paid lip service to the ideal of the 'good patron'. They did not want duties that took them far into the countryside, away from the politics of the city and the delights of the great suburban villas at Daphne. They

⁵⁶ R. Rémondon, *La crise de l'empire romain* (1964), 302–308, provides an excellent survey of recent studies and discoveries; and, now, E. Patlagean, 'Sur la limitation de la fécondité dans la haute époque byzantine,' *Annales* xxiv, 1969, 1353–69 esp. at p. 1368.

⁵⁷ Gindaros, *H.R.* 1313 C, and *Sym. Styl.* c. 98, 143–4; Nicerta, *H.R.* 1325 D; Teleda (Tel 'Ade) *H.R.* 1340 D; Immai (see n. 44) 1365 A.

⁵⁸ L. Robert, *Hellenica* xi–xii, 1960, esp. 321–27 on inscriptions in the Hauran.

⁵⁹ Tchalenko, o.c. (n. 19), 317 and 385 ff.

⁶⁰ See Libanius, *Or.* xlvii in L. Harmand, *Libanius, Discours sur les patronages. Texte traduit, annoté et commenté*, 1955 (cited henceforth in this edition). I owe to W. Liebeschuetz's forthcoming *Antioch: City and Imperial Administration in the Later Roman Empire*, a different perspective from that adopted by Harmand.

⁶¹ Harmand, esp. p. 181, tends to conflate the evidence from Salvia of Marseilles with that of Syrian conditions.

⁶² *Or.* xlvii, 6–7 (p. 16, 20–33).

⁶³ *Or.* xlvii, 11 (p. 17, 24).

⁶⁴ Harmand, p. 123. This is what the traditional

landowners were thought to lack: *Or.* xlvii, 22 (p. 19, 30): τί οὖν, φησίν, εἰ τῆς χρείας ἐλάττων ὁ τὸν ἄγρον ἔχων εἴη καὶ δεοὶ δυνατωτέρας κεφαλῆς;

⁶⁵ *Or.* xlvii, 13 (pp. 17–8).

⁶⁶ *Or.* xlvii, 4 (p. 15, 28–30).

⁶⁷ See p. on *H.R.* 1420 C–1421 B.

⁶⁸ *Or.* xlvii, 4 (p. 15, 25); 6 (p. 16, 23–7).

⁶⁹ *Or.* xlvii, 19 (p. 19, 9–10). It is notable (if not very surprising) that the most memorable miracles of holy men affected just this issue—the finding, diverting, distributing of water: e.g. *H.R.* 1389 A ὡς περ ὑπὸ χεῖρα ἔχων τὴν τῶν ὑδάτων φάραγ; 1392 D; *Sym. Styl.* c. 72, p. 119.

⁷⁰ *Or.* xlvii, 19 (p. 19, 10–12); *Sym. Styl.* c. 57, p. 108, 27.

⁷¹ *Or.* xlvii, 19 (p. 19, 12–4); cf. H. I. Bell, V. Martin, E. G. Turner and D. Van Berchem, *The Abinnaeus Archive. Papers of a Roman Officer in the reign of Constantius II*, 1962, no. 28, p. 77: 'For my intention was to go up to the city . . . but first of all I have written to you, my master, to do me justice.' cf. H. Braunert, *Die Binnenwanderung. Studien zur Sozialgeschichte Ägyptens* (Bonner Historische Forschungen, 28), 1964, 144.

were outclassed by the military. The military often possessed δύναμις in the form of a garrison in the neighbourhood of the village;⁷² they enjoyed exceptional facilities for transport—a decisive element in the exercise of power in the Roman world; they dug themselves in vigorously at the expense of the traditional landowners by being sensitive to the needs of the villagers. The hard work of patronage, which Libanius dismissed contemptuously as ‘slaving for the country folk’, was the only way in which men whose careers lay on the fringe of the traditional landed aristocracy could gain access to the one permanent source of wealth and prestige in the ancient world, to the land.⁷³ We can even watch the rise of a patron. Abraham the hermit came to a pagan village in the Lebanon. It was, Theodoret was careful to point out (in exactly the same terms as Libanius had done), a village of many owners—a village, that is, of independent farmers. He rented a house and settled down as an agent for the walnut crop. He sang the Psalms. His neighbours promptly blocked the entrance of his house with refuse. But, when the tax collector came, it was Abraham who was able through friends in Apamea to arrange a loan for the village. From then on he was declared to be προστάτης of the village.⁷⁴

This process does not show peasants fleeing to an over-mighty protector, as has too often been supposed: rather, it points to a relationship which in its initial stages was strictly bilateral. Very often it was the village who called the tune. Patronage was the lever by which the astute and self-confident farmers of Late Roman Syria and Egypt managed to shift the structure of land-holding to their advantage, by exploiting the rivalries of prospective patrons.⁷⁵ Jewish tenants of Libanius, Ἰουδαῖοι τῶν πάντων, got the better of him by promptly paying court to a general.⁷⁶ The mutual exploitation of the relations of patronage became acute in the late fourth century. What Libanius complained of was a ‘hunting after patrons’ among the villagers of Syria.⁷⁷ This was because the new προστάτης filled a gap in rural society. Villagers needed a hinge-man, a man who belonged to the outside world, and yet could place his δύναμις, his know-how and (let us not forget) his culture and values at the disposal of the villagers.⁷⁸ The crisis of the late Roman empire is precisely the crisis by which the traditional hinge-man withdrew from the village scene. In Syria, as in Egypt, it appears that substantial landowners, who had connections with the city and the Imperial government, resided less often on the threshold of the village. In the Limestone Massif, the large villas, the demesnes and the ostentatious family tombs of the Roman citizens of the second and third century disappear.⁷⁹ They are replaced by a self-confident and idiosyncratic local style:⁸⁰ ‘vor allem zerrissen nun auch mehr und mehr die geistigen Fäden zwischen Stadt und Land.’⁸¹ It was the villagers who had to look around to recreate, with the human material that lay to hand, the vital figure of the hinge-man.⁸²

Furthermore an effective patron was essential to the internal working of the villages at a time of growing prosperity. Communities of small farmers on the make needed an arbitrator to settle their disputes. The villagers of the Limestone Massif appear to have

⁷² Harmand, 148–68, esp. pp. 155–6; cf. R. Rémondon, ‘Militaires et civils dans une campagne égyptienne au temps de Constance II’, *Journal des Savants* 1965, 132–43.

⁷³ Libanius, *Or.* xxxix, esp. 10 (Förster III, p. 270), where a friend of Libanius is consoled for having as an enemy Mixidemus, a lawyer who had gained his wealth by this and other distasteful means.

⁷⁴ *H.R.* 1420 C—1421 B.

⁷⁵ Rémondon, *La crise* (above, n. 56), 303–4.

⁷⁶ *Or.* XLVII, 13 (pp. 17, 39–18, 10).

⁷⁷ *Or.* XLVII, 17 (p. 18, 36).

⁷⁸ See R. Redfield, *The Little Community and Peasant Society and Culture* (Phoenix Books, Chicago, 1960), esp. *Peasant Society and Culture*, pp. 36–8.

⁷⁹ Tchalenko, o.c. (n. 19), 408–9.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 142.

⁸¹ Braunert, o.c. (n. 71), 291.

⁸² In this context, it is important to stress that the ascetic movement in Syria was far from being a movement of the lower classes. Its leading figures would have come from families used to exercising the powers of the good patron: e.g. Marcianus of Cyrrhus, a local notable and former courtier, an

acquaintance of a general at Berroea, uncle to a πρωτεύων of Cyrrhus (*H.R.* 1324 D; 1329 B and 1333 D). Symeon was a comfortable farmer, who could feed the village poor off his land, and needed a camel to carry his valuables to a monastery: *Sym. Styl.* cc. 11–13, pp. 86–87. His *impresario*, the περιοδεύτης Bassus, came from a curial family of Edessa: *Sym. Styl.* c. 51, p. 104, 26 and n. 4. To speak of the early monks as simple and ignorant peasants, is to forget both that, whatever their former education, they depended for their position precisely on standing *outside* culture (see below, p. 91 f.), and that many came from a local aristocracy which was well-lettered in Syriac. To prefer the desert to a Late Roman town and Syriac to Greek is quite credible for such a man, and no sign that he is a country bumpkin of low social standing. If anything, the rise of asceticism in Syria is a sign not of a brutal ‘democratization’ of the upper classes, so much as of a ‘fragmentation’ of what had liked to consider itself a homogeneous urban aristocracy, so that generals and abbots came to compete with men like Libanius.

needed this service most acutely. The prosperity of the individual houses contrasts significantly with the total absence, before the late fifth century, of any sign of communal building. The sense of community was weak. Private water-cisterns relieved the villages of the hills from the hard discipline of cooperation imposed on the peasantry of Egypt by the river Nile.⁸³ Villages that were only governed by a council of elders, that is by their equals, threatened to explode without the intervention of an influential outsider.⁸⁴ As in the modern Near East, a village with a weak patron was a village made intolerable by quarrels: the ideal was a patron 'during whose days none could open his mouth'.⁸⁵

Rural patronage in Syria was not a symptom of decline. It was like the governor of an engine, in that it enabled the inland villages to pass through a period of rising prosperity without over-heating. It is a significant facet of that seismic shift that enabled new classes in the empire to make their creativity felt by throwing up new forms of social relations, and by moulding to their own advantage the old features of public life.

It is precisely at this point that the holy man came to the fore as a figure in village society and in the relation between the village and the outside world. For what men expected of the holy man coincides with what they sought in the rural patron. The *Historia Religiosa* of Theodoret deserves careful attention from this point of view. It was written to validate and publicise the local traditions surrounding the holy men of Syria, and so it reflects all the more faithfully what Theodoret and his informants wanted from a holy man.⁸⁶ They knew exactly what they wanted—a version of the good patron of Libanius, a man with sufficient power to 'reach out a hand to those in distress'.

Above everything, the holy man is a man of power. In Theodoret's account, the Syrian countryside is shown dotted with figures of supernatural δύναμις quite as palpable, as localized and as authenticated by popular acclamation, as were the garrison posts and the large farmhouses. To visit a holy man was to go to where power was.⁸⁷ The *Historia Religiosa* is a study of power in action—χάρις ἐνεργοῦσα.⁸⁸ Hence the emphasis even on the detail of the stylized gestures by which this power was shown.⁸⁹ Theodoret's account of his holy men in action are as precisely delineated as a Late Antique artist's formal representation of the gestures of Christ as He performs His miracles. The scene is grouped around the hand of the holy man—an ancient and compact symbol of power.⁹⁰ Hence a certain monotony in the account, and even a misleading *sprezzatura*. There are few long miracle stories. That this is so is due to no Hellenic humanism on the bishop's part,⁹¹ but rather to his serious preoccupation with the absorbing topic of power.⁹² The miracle is felt to be secondary: for it was merely a proof of power—like good coin, summarily minted and passed into circulation to demonstrate the untapped bullion of power at the disposal of the holy man.⁹³

These miracles are of the sort that assume that the holy man is there to play a role in society based on his power. Furthermore, just as the miracle demonstrates a hidden, intangible nucleus of power, so the miracle story is often no more than a pointer to the many more occasions on which the holy man has already used his position in society. The miracle condenses and validates a situation built up by more discreet means. We must examine two groups of miracles in the light of this caution—the curse and the exorcism. Both are sufficiently colourful to have been misleading.

The Syrians were notable cursers. We begin the *Historia Religiosa* with Jacob of

⁸³ See Tchalenko, o.c. (n. 19), 46 ff.; *Sym. Styl.* c. 65, p. 113, 26—a rain-miracle fills these cisterns. Olive-harvesting made cooperation desirable, without creating year-long habits of communal work; see Tchalenko, 386.

⁸⁴ See Tchalenko, 317 on the egalitarian tone of the farmhouses at Bamuqqa. Frequent Late Roman inscriptions against envy and the evil eye are not an argument for neighbourliness among Syrian householders: E. Peterson, o.c. (n. 39), 34-6 and L. Robert, *Hellenica* XI-XII, 1960, 298, n. 1 and p. 299; and XIII, 1965, 265-71.

⁸⁵ Hamed Ammar, *Growing up in an Egyptian Village. Silwa, province of Aswan*, 1954, 80.

⁸⁶ Peeters, o.c. (n. 4), 95. See also P. Canivet, 'Theodoret et le Monachisme syrien avant le concile

de Chalcedoine', *Théologie de la Vie Monastique cit.* n. (6), 241-282; A. J. Festugière, *Antioche païenne et chrétienne* (1959), part II, esp. 244-506.

⁸⁷ H.R. 1364 D: it was a power in Heaven that reached its zenith after death: 'Εγὼ δὲ τῆς οὐν δυναστείας αὐτοῦ καὶ πρεσβείας ἀπολαῦσαι ἀντιβολῶ.

⁸⁸ H.R. 1392 D.

⁸⁹ H.R. 1312 C and 1328 D.

⁹⁰ O. Weinreich, *Antike Heilungswunder* (1909), 13; 29-30; 49.

⁹¹ As assumed in A. Adnes-P. Canivet, 'Guérisons miraculeuses et exorcisme dans l'*Histoire Philothée* de Theodoret', *Rev. Hist. Religions* CLXXI, 1967, 53-82.

⁹² H.R. 1365 D: ἱκανὸν γὰρ ἦν τὸ θαῦμα δεῖξαι τὴν παρὰ τῷ θεῷ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς παρηρησαν.

⁹³ H.R. 1360 C: οἶόν τινα χαρακτηριστῆρα.

Nisibis. He cursed laundry girls, so that their long tresses floated down the river like autumn leaves.⁹⁴ He cursed a Persian judge who had given an unjust judgment, so that a boulder exploded beside him.⁹⁵ From the toppling walls of Nisibis, he cursed the army of the King of Kings himself.⁹⁶ Yet, in the majority of cases, the exercise of the curse points backwards to the position of the holy man as an arbitrator and mediator.⁹⁷ The vengeance of God falls only on the man whose case the holy man has rejected.⁹⁸ Thus Symeon Stylites 'prophesied' the death, within nineteen days, of an opponent of Theodoret.⁹⁹ Had the bishop made one of his rare journeys to Telnesin precisely in order to place his law suit before the holy man, as so many had done? ¹⁰⁰ Again, the holy man could lift the vengeance of God from a man who sought his mediation. A peasant whose grain was menaced by fire (sent, so they said, from Heaven) was enabled by the local holy man to make his peace with angry neighbours, whose grain he had appropriated on the communal threshing floor; ¹⁰¹—this was a seasonal grievance among villagers, to which any local patron must have been inured.¹⁰² Successful mediation passed off without a curse: it is only through a few memorable instances of failure, therefore, that we can glimpse the day to day activity of a man like Symeon Stylites. He is not as unlike Libanius as we might think. Symeon, also, stands up for the oppressed guilds of Antioch; ¹⁰³ Symeon, also, has a soft spot for deserving young men in danger of forcible enrolment in the town council.¹⁰⁴ We should, at least, be no more credulous than our late Romans. The curse merely highlighted a δύναμις, a power, created by hard work and exercised by much the same skills as those practised by any other effective patron.

Exorcism takes us into deeper waters. When little girls played games in fourth-century Syria, they played at monks and demons: one, dressed in rags, would put her little friends into stitches of laughter by exorcising them.¹⁰⁵ The history of exorcism in the ancient world has been carefully studied.¹⁰⁶ Modern anthropological studies may help the historian to see the wood for the trees.¹⁰⁷ These studies have recently stressed the relation between the possessed and the community, represented, in this case, by the exorcist. In this relationship the anthropologists have tended to single out as significant the *aspect théâtral* that links both parties.¹⁰⁸ Highly individual though the experience of possession may be, its handling tends to be acted out as a duet between the possessed and the non-possessed. In such a duet, each side has a rôle; each unconsciously follows a score. The dialogue between the possessed and the community, therefore, tends to have the stylised, articulated quality of an operetta. Possession and its working through is a way in which a small community can both admit and control disruptive experiences by playing them out.

This is particularly true of exorcism in the Late Roman period. For, compared with many African tribes, the Late Roman operetta is, with few exceptions,¹⁰⁹ brutally simple. It is on the theme of violence and authority. By exorcism, the holy man asserts the authority of his god over the demonic in the possessed. The dialogue between the exorcist and the possessed locates and measures precisely the power of the holy man. The demon in one possessed 'had the rank of a World Ruler'; only Paul the Simple could command him.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, the dialogue is worked out as a controlled explosion and interchange of violence.¹¹¹ The demon in the possessed abuses, and even attacks the holy man: ¹¹² and the

⁹⁴ *H.R.* 1296 A.

⁹⁵ *H.R.* 1297 B.

⁹⁶ *H.R.* 1304 D.

⁹⁷ See esp. *A.P.* Gelasius 2, 148 CD—on Symeon Stylites.

⁹⁸ *Sym. Styl.* c. 77, 124–125—a decision in favour of a poor man's right to his cucumber-patch.

⁹⁹ *H.R.* 1486 A.

¹⁰⁰ *Sym. Styl.* c. 55, p. 107, 18.

¹⁰¹ *H.R.* 1360 C-D.

¹⁰² *Abinnaeus Archive* (cit. n. 71), no. 50, p. 109: 'The same Aion, after I had finished winnowing the threshing floor, carried off my own corn and took it away to his own place, and carried off my half share . . . Having neither fear of God nor of you, my lord . . .'

¹⁰³ *Sym. Styl.* c. 92, p. 135.

¹⁰⁴ *Sym. Styl.* c. 95, pp. 137–8.

¹⁰⁵ *H.R.* 1384

¹⁰⁶ s.v. 'Exorzismus' (K. Thraede), *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* VII, 1969, 44–117.

¹⁰⁷ See most recently, *Spirit Mediumship and Society in Africa* (ed. John Beattie and John Middleton, 1969).

¹⁰⁸ See M. Leiris, *La possession et ses aspects théâtraux chez les Ethiopiens de Gondar* (1958).

¹⁰⁹ *V. Sym. Jun.* c. 118 provides a fascinating exception: the acting out of a woman whose demon thought of itself as more married to her than her husband.

¹¹⁰ *H.L.* c. XXII, 11–13.

¹¹¹ e.g. *V. Theod.* c. 46.

¹¹² e.g. *A.P.* Daniel 3 (95), 156A; *V. Theod.* c. 71. That the 'demon' is an articulation of a relationship crystallized towards the holy man, is indicated by the way in which it was believed that the same 'demon' could 'pass' from one client to another, who were strangers to each other: *V. Dan.* c. 33.

holy man shows his power, by being able to bring into the open and ride out so much pent-up rebellion and anger.¹¹³ It is a dramatic articulation of the idea of the power of the holy man.¹¹⁴

This was plainly the sort of operetta which Late Roman men felt that they needed to play out to a happy ending. Violence was a constant problem in Late Roman society, all the more so as this society's image of itself had been so resolutely urban and civilian. Violence in society had long been articulated in terms of the demonic. For such a society, the holy man was very necessary. Like the shaman of Siberian tribes, he could master, by diagnosing, by entering into relation with, by solemnly overpowering, those inexplicit undertones of aggression, envy and mutual recrimination that build up so easily in the relatively small groups, with which the historian of exorcism deals.¹¹⁵ The traditional idiom of possession both enabled the forces to be pinpointed, and designated a man able to resolve them. The many villages that called in Theodore of Sykeon, for instance, lived through dramatic crises of 'possessed' disruption, followed by reintegration gained through an assertion of authority over the demons on the part of the holy man. Significantly enough, the crisis in these particular villages was generally provoked by some enterprising villager who, it was held, had attempted to alter to his personal advantage the immemorial boundaries of the village. Actual physical violence among the villagers was usually imminent on these occasions;¹¹⁶ but the resolution of the crisis took the form of a rousing opera in which the holy man challenged and mastered the demonic in the village.

'When Theodore drew nigh to the village the spirits which were afflicting men felt his presence and met him howling out these words: "O violence! why have you come here, you iron eater, why have you quitted Galatia and come into Gordiane? There was no need for you to cross the frontier. We know why you have come, but we shall not obey you as did the demons of Galatia; for we are much tougher than they and not milder." When he rebuked them they at once held their peace . . . But one very wicked spirit which was in a woman resisted and would not come out. Then the Saint caught hold of the woman's hair and shook her violently and rebuked the spirit by the sign of the Cross and by prayer to God and finally said, "I will not give way to you nor will I leave this spot until you come out of her!" Then the spirit began to shriek and said, "O violence, you are burning me, iron eater! I am coming out, I will not resist you . . ." And through the grace of God they (the spirits) were all collected, and to some who saw them they looked like flying bluebottles or hares or dormice, and they entered into the place where the stones had been dug out, which the Saint then sealed with prayer and the sign of the Cross, bade the men fill up the hole and restore it as it was before . . . And from that time on that place and the inhabitants of the village and all the neighbourhood remained safe from harm.'¹¹⁷ Far from being bizarre fragments of folk-lore, such incidents have a social context: they condense—in the same manner as did the belief in the curse of the holy man—a widespread preoccupation among small, fissile communities to find some figure who would resolve tension and explosions of violence in their community.

The evidence all points to the vital importance of the holy man as a mediator in village life. Anthony was immediately mobbed: he became 'a doctor to all Egypt'; 'χαρίν τε ἐν τῷ λαλεῖν ἐδίδου [ὁ θεός] τῷ Ἀντωνίῳ καὶ οὕτω πολλοὺς μὲν λυπουμένους παρεμυθεῖτο,

¹¹³ *V. Theod.* c. 84, 108 and 132.

¹¹⁴ *H.R.* 1329 D, by which the authority of the holy man is shown even at a distance.

¹¹⁵ S. M. Shirokogoroff, *The Psycho-Mental complex of the Tungus* (1935), esp. 264-268. That it was a genuine group-experience is shown by the articulation of a mass-panic by a possessed man in Trier, and its successful pacification, by St. Martin: Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini* c. 18, 2 (*CSEL* 1, p. 127): 'tum confensus est decem daemones secum fuisse, qui rumorem hunc per populum dispersissent, ut hoc saltem metu ex illo Martinus oppido fugaretur: barbaros nihil minus quam de irruptione cogitare. ita cum haec immundus spiritus in media ecclesia fateretur, metu et turbatione praesenti civitas liberata est.' Moments of uncertainty about

authority were also pin-pointed: in the late seventh century, a 'demon' in Rome would not be expelled; he was called 'Philippicus'—the name of a usurper at Constantinople against Anastasius II: (the name, also, of the holy man): *Analecta Bollandiana* xi, 1892, 233-41.

¹¹⁶ See esp. *V. Theod.* c. 114: 'They grew mad against the householder and rushed to burn down him and his household as being responsible for their ill-fortune. But as this attempt was foiled by those who held the highest positions in the village and wished to restore peace, they sent to the monastery begging the saint and servant of Christ, Theodore, to come to the village and free them from the evils that had befallen them.' Cf. *V. Theod.* c. 116.

¹¹⁷ *V. Theod.* c. 43.

ἄλλους δὲ μαχομένους διήλλαττεν εἰς φιλίαν . . . ' ¹¹⁸ The holy man of sixth-century Asia Minor continued this tradition: 'when men were at enmity with each other or had a grievance one against another he reconciled them, and those who were engaged in lawsuits he sought to bring to a better mind counselling them not to wrong each other.'¹¹⁹ It was by the intervention of such men that the villagers sought a sense of communal identity. He placed some check on the strong centripetal tendencies of Late Roman agricultural life. The holy man, for instance, insisted that misfortune should be coped with by ceremonies that emphasized the communal activity of the village. Villages attacked by were-women in the Lebanon were told to get themselves all baptised and to take collective ritual measures.¹²⁰ By the sixth century, we have already entered a world of carefully organized village processions, through which the holy man recaptured, by solemn junketing, the ancient ideal of the great benefactor, presiding over the good cheer—the εὐφροσύνη—of a united community.¹²¹ Above all, the holy man insisted that misfortune could be averted only by penance, and that penance meant, quite concretely, a 'new deal' among the villagers.¹²² It is here that we meet Symeon Stylites at work. What we know of Symeon's activity as a mediator in the villages is all the more impressive as our main source takes it entirely for granted. The Syrian author of the panegyric most readily available to us was plainly concerned to add exotic trimmings to a local reputation so firmly established as hardly to bear repeating: Persian princesses, merchants from central Asia, Yemeni sheiks ¹²³—these interested the writer and his audience more than did the constant trickle of delegations from neighbouring villages, headed by their priest and elders, who trooped up the side of the mountain to hear 'the lion roar' as to how they should order their affairs.¹²⁴ It is only in passing that we learn that Symeon had lawsuits entrusted to his arbitration;¹²⁵ that his curse had sanctioned water rationing in a large lowland village (and even then, one enterprising farmer had slipped out of church on Sunday to have a sly dip at the fountain);¹²⁶ and that he had negotiated an agreement on the collection of tithes—a thinly Christianized version of the running battle between urban landowners and villagers as to exactly how much of the crop should be taken and when it should be harvested.¹²⁷

Fortunately, we also have a letter from the priests and notables of one village, acknowledging the commands of Symeon. They are extraordinarily detailed. They would cancel debts. They would observe their neighbours' boundaries.¹²⁸ They would loan money at low rates of interest.¹²⁹ This last is the most revealing: rather than do away with interest, Symeon and the villagers plainly preferred the subtle network of mutual advantage and obligation created in the village by frequent loans at moderate rates of interest, to having no loan at all.¹³⁰ Symeon Stylites was 'the wall',¹³¹ 'the tower'—and, in a less classical epithet, equally suited to the needs of the hard and ebullient world of the Syrian villages, he was The Lion.¹³² 'The oppressed shuddered at his memory . . . and sighed to

¹¹⁸ Athanasus, *Vita Antonii* c. 14 (PG xxvi, 865 A).

¹¹⁹ *V. Theod.* c. 147. Theodore was, for part of his life at least, a bishop. Such was the normal function of the *audientia episcopalis*: *H.R.* 1356 D—it was a bishop's life: καὶ οὖν μὲν τῶν ζυγομαχοῦντων τὰς ἐρίδας διαλύων; cf. Possidius, *Vita Augustini*, c. xix and P. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (1967), 195–6. In the towns, such a duty was a compromising corvée, and the *rabbi* often did it better, see John Chrysostom, *Adversus Judaeos* 1, 3 (PG XLVIII, 847 ff.). The holy man occasionally fell foul of the clergy through competing with this jurisdiction: *V. Alex.* c. 40, p. 689. The holy man could offer resolution, even in the towns, on the more intangible tensions articulated by sorcery-accusations, in those areas of society where they were most prevalent: see P. Brown, 'Sorcery, Demons and the Rise of Christianity', *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations* (Association of Social Anthropologists, no. 9), 1970, 17 ff. at pp. 20–6 and 32–3 (= *Religion and Society in the Age of Saint Augustine*, 1971, pp. 123–31). See *H.L.* xvii, 6–7; *Sym. Styl.* c. 76, p. 124, 4; *V. Hyp.* c. 12, 15, 22 and 28; *V. Euthym.* c. 57 (ended, significantly, with a village-banquet); *V. Theod.* c. 35 and 38.

¹²⁰ *Sym. Styl.* c. 97, 140–3, cf. c. 73, pp. 119–20 and 75, pp. 121–2.

¹²¹ *V. Euthym.* cc. 45 and 57, with Festugière, *Moines d'Orient* III/1, 121, n. 147 and L. Robert, *Hellenica* x, 1955, 199–200.

¹²² *Sym. Styl.*, *Vorschriften und Ermahnungen*, p. 181, 27.

¹²³ *Sym. Styl.* cc. 66–70, pp. 114–8; 101–7, pp. 146–56. Further testimony, surely, to the rôle of the merchant in spreading the reputation of saints: see inf. n. 186.

¹²⁴ *Sym. Styl.* c. 72, p. 119—from seven days' journey away; c. 73, pp. 119–20 and c. 75, pp. 121–2.

¹²⁵ *Sym. Styl.* c. 55, p. 107, 18: it was a *charisma* bestowed on him by the prophet Elijah—some indication of the difficulty of the job! c. 81, p. 127, 28.

¹²⁶ *Sym. Styl.* c. 98, pp. 143–4, at Gindaros; cf. *H.R.* 1313 C and above, n.

¹²⁷ Compare *H.R.* 1413 B.

¹²⁸ *Sym. Styl.* 'Brief des Cosmas', p. 186, 17.

¹²⁹ *Sym. Styl.* c. 57, p. 108, 33; 'Vorschr. und Ermahnungen', p. 183, 23.

¹³⁰ *Sym. Styl.*, 'Brief des Cosmas', p. 187, 4.

¹³¹ *Sym. Styl.*, 'Brief des Cosmas', p. 184, 32.

¹³² Used of God—from *Amos*, 3, 8: *Sym. Styl.*, *Vorschr. und Ermahnungen*, p. 180, 14.

each other in their sorrow . . . whom shall we beg now to awaken the lion, who sleeps now in the slumber of death, before whose roar the oppressors trembled, at the sound of whose mighty voice they slunk like foxes into their holes'.¹³³ In a word, Symeon, the model holy man of the early Byzantine world, was the 'good patron' writ large.

The holy man first established a position for himself in Late Roman society in the Syria of the fourth and fifth centuries, in conditions that we are fortunate to be able to trace in considerable detail. Such conditions were distinctive in Syria; but they were not exclusively Syrian. They were to be found elsewhere in the Eastern Empire. Thus, in Asia Minor, we also find, in a slightly later period, the development of a society of prosperous and obstreperous villages.¹³⁴ In Asia Minor, also, ἔρημος and οἰκουμένη interlocked in a manner that echoed Syrian conditions: the Olympus range at Prusa (Brousse), ringed by bandit-patrols in the second century A.D., came to shelter influential colonies of hermits throughout Byzantine times.¹³⁵ It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the villages of sixth-century Asia Minor should produce holy men of similar stature and accomplishments to those produced by similar conditions in Syria in the fourth and fifth centuries.

We can, therefore, trace the 'rise' of the holy man back into the narrow exigencies of the village-communities of the eastern Mediterranean. Yet, we can never simply reduce the holy-man to the rôle of a charismatic *Ombudsman* in a tension-ridden countryside. There were elements in his power that stretched far beyond a village setting: he played a rôle that was applicable to urban conditions; his person summed up widespread ideals, common to Byzantine culture as a whole, in town and country alike; he could be approached, therefore, to minister to needs both more intimate and more universal than arbitration on the loans and boundaries of farmers.

In the second part of this paper, therefore, we must survey the holy man at work in Byzantine society at large. We must first examine those elements in his position that were most valued by his contemporaries, in Syria and elsewhere; and then we must touch upon the personal needs that he was thought to satisfy. Both in geographical range and in time-scale, such an examination must take us far beyond the Syria of Symeon Stylites, as far as Constantinople in the High Middle Ages. Yet the examination will do no more than trace the further circulation of the quite distinctive 'coinage', first 'minted' by the Syrian holy-men known to us from Theodoret of Cyrhus.

We can know, from our Syrian evidence, what problems the holy man was increasingly called upon to resolve. We still have to explain why, when faced with a choice of possible arbitrators and leaders, the villagers—and, to a lesser extent, the townsfolk—picked on the unlikely figure of the lone hermit, in so many different areas and for so many centuries. We may come a little closer to the appeal of the holy man if, like the inquisitive layman in the *Historia Religiosa*, we climb up the ladder to Symeon Stylites and pose the crucial question: 'Are you human?'¹³⁶ The answer for the sociologist was quite definitely, 'no.' In Late Roman society, the holy man was deliberately not human. He was the 'stranger' *par excellence*. Now it has been observed, in the study of many small communities, that the burden of difficult or unpopular decisions inevitably comes to rest on the individual who is the 'stranger'—the churchman in a chapel village in Wales, the dissociated medium in an African tribe.¹³⁷

The life of the holy man (and especially in Syria) is marked by so many histrionic feats of self-mortification that it is easy, at first sight, to miss the deep social significance of asceticism as a long drawn out, solemn ritual of dissociation—of becoming the total stranger.¹³⁸ For the society around him, the holy man is the one man who can stand outside

¹³³ *Sym. Styl.* c. 128, p. 173, 6.

¹³⁴ Justinian, *Nov.* 24, 1 . . . κώμαι μέγιστα . . . καὶ πολυάνθρωποι καὶ πολλάκις πρὸς αὐτοὺς (i.e. τοὺς δημοσίους φόρους) στασιάζουσαι.

¹³⁵ L. Robert, *Etudes anatoliennes* (1937), 99–107; see *Vita Sancti Iohannicii* II, 5, *Acta Sanctorum Novembris*, II (1894), p. 337 A, and commentary at pp. 322–5.

¹³⁶ *H.R.* 1481 B: ἄνθρωπος εἴ ἢ ἀσώματος φύσις;

¹³⁷ See esp. G. Kingsley-Garbett, 'Spirit Mediums as Mediators in Valley Kore-kore Society', *Spirit*

Mediumship and Society (o.c. (n. 10), 104–27.

¹³⁸ Vööbus, o.c. (n. 6), 299 is unduly impressed by the 'hyperasceticism' of the Syrian hermits. Rather, men constantly in contact with the surrounding society—see Tchalenko cited in n. 19—needed to act out a more elaborate and dramatically 'inhuman' ritual, if they were to maintain their position as 'the stranger'. Symeon, significantly, would have been 'ashamed' had he been seen on ground-level: *Sym. Styl.*, c. 116, p. 163, 16–19.

the ties of family, and of economic interest;¹³⁹ whose attitude to food itself rejected all the ties of solidarity to kin and village that, in the peasant societies of the Near East, had always been expressed by the gesture of eating.¹⁴⁰ He was thought of as a man who owed nothing to society. He fled women and bishops, not because he might have found the society of either particularly agreeable, but because both threatened to rivet him to a distinct place in society. His very powers, as we shall see, were entirely self-created. The holy man is frequently confused with the θεῖος ἀνὴρ of late classical times, merely because both share an ability to perform miracles. This is a superficial parallel: for while the θεῖος ἀνὴρ continued to draw his powers from a bottomless sense of occult wisdom preserved for him in and by society—whether this is the παλαιὸς λόγος of the Neo-Platonists, the Egyptian temple lore of the astrologer or the *Torah* of the Rabbi¹⁴¹—the holy man drew his powers from outside the human race: by going to live in the desert, in close identification with an animal kingdom that stood, in the imagination of contemporaries, for the opposite pole of all human society.¹⁴² Perched on his column, nearer to the demons of the upper air than to human beings, Symeon was objectivity personified.

It is one of the most marked features of Late Roman society that it needed objective mediators, and that it was prepared to invest a human being with such a position. It was as a 'stranger' that Ephraim was able to administer food supplies in Edessa during a famine, for none of the locals could trust one another.¹⁴³ He kept his reputation as a stranger to the last. After twenty years of active life in Edessa, he insisted that he should be buried in the stranger's plot.¹⁴⁴ One of the sober delights of the Byzantine historian is to study the astuteness with which the great stars among the holy men avoided committing themselves to any one faction in the Eastern Empire.¹⁴⁵ Constantinople, it was agreed, was the toughest consignment for such a man.¹⁴⁶ Take Daniel the Stylite in the late fifth century. Daniel's reputation owes little to his feats as a thaumaturgist. It was solidly based on a dogged defence of his status as a total stranger in a faction ridden city.¹⁴⁷ To begin with, he had the advantage of speaking only Syriac—his orthodoxy, therefore, was impenetrable.¹⁴⁸ Soon his clientèle embraced representatives of the conflicting factions of the previous generation.¹⁴⁹ Later, his blessing validated the purges that marked the rise of the Isaurians at the expense of the Goths;¹⁵⁰ and, behind this blessing, there lay a heavy work of reconciliation, and the burying of hatchets among conflicting generals through the mediation of the holy man.¹⁵¹ Like Symeon, he decided lawsuits; but this time, the holy man provided the sanction for international arbitration.¹⁵² Throughout, Daniel avoided being placed. He refused to be ordained by the patriarch. He held out until it was recognized that he was ordained 'by the hand of God' alone:¹⁵³ it was a free-standing position which only the Emperor enjoyed.¹⁵⁴ During the crisis of the usurpation of Basiliscus, Daniel showed his gifts at their full stretch. Not only did he show himself a master of the arts of peaceful protest marches,¹⁵⁵ he discreetly set the pace of the negotiations between Basiliscus and the patriarch by a sleight of hand. A patrician lady wished to be blessed so that she would bear a son. Of course

¹³⁹ *Sym. Styl.* c. 38, p. 100, 2.

¹⁴⁰ *Sym. Styl.* c. 17, p. 90, 26: Symeon even rejected the Eucharist if it tied him to his fellow-monks.

¹⁴¹ See the most illuminating discussion of J. Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia* iv, 1969, 297-402, whose rabbis resemble the θεῖος ἀνὴρ of Late Antique paganism far more than either resemble the holy man.

¹⁴² See P. Brown, 'The Formation of the Holy Man' (to appear).

¹⁴³ *H.L.* xl, 2: Apollonius of Tyana did the same, and, also, as a total 'stranger', 'dissociated' by the Pythagorean vow of silence: Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii* i, 15 (Loeb edn. i, pp. 38-42). Cf. Severinus of Noricum, Eugippius, *Vita Severini* iii, 2. He, also, was so total a stranger to Noricum, as to be believed by some to be a fugitive slave: *ibid.*, appendix c. 9. Severinus has kept us guessing up to the present: see F. Lotter, *Deutsches Archiv* xxiv, 1968, 309 and F. Prinz, *ibid.* xxv, 1969, 531.

¹⁴⁴ *Vööbus*, 91.

¹⁴⁵ As did the influential Marcianus; *H.R.* 1332 C

—a stroke of diplomacy appreciated by Festugière, o.c. (n. 13), 254. Marcianus even ensured that no one party had his body for burial! *H.R.* 1336 A.

¹⁴⁶ *V. Dan.* c. 57.

¹⁴⁷ The parallel of Rasputin, adduced by Delehay (o.c. note *, p. lv), is trivial compared with the diplomacy required of Daniel. For the pressures to which a holy man was subject in Constantinople, see *V. Hyp.* c. 32—trick questions posed by Nestorius; c. 39—tactical lobbying by supporters of Nestorius!

¹⁴⁸ *V. Dan.* c. 17.

¹⁴⁹ *V. Dan.* cc. 31-32: Cyrus of Panopolis and Gelanios, a supporter of the eunuch Chrysaphius.

¹⁵⁰ *V. Dan.* cc. 55 and 65.

¹⁵¹ *V. Dan.* c. 49.

¹⁵² *V. Dan.* c. 51.

¹⁵³ *V. Dan.* c. 43.

¹⁵⁴ On the 'Hand of God', see A. Grabar, 'Recherches sur les sources juives de l'art paléochrétien (III)', *Cahiers archéologiques* xiv, 1964, 49-57, at 53-7.

¹⁵⁵ *V. Dan.* c. 75.

Daniel would bless her, provided, he said—in the crowded audience hall—provided that she called the boy . . . Zeno.¹⁵⁶ Zeno, the fallen Emperor, was rallying his forces in the east. Only a holy man could thus mention the unmentionable. The *dénouement* shows how both sides needed such a stranger in their midst if they were to save face. A Byzantine emperor could never be seen to give way to his patriarch. So both Emperor and patriarch ended up, stretched full length, at the feet of the holy man.¹⁵⁷ It was by such astute devices that church and state in the Eastern Empire preserved the great myth of unanimity.

The rise of the holy man as the bearer of objectivity in society is, of course, a final playing out of the long history of oracles and divination in the ancient world. The 'god-bearing' hermit usurped the position of the oracle and was known to have done so. 'While the Great One (Anthony) is still alive . . . go to him . . . and wait until Anthony comes out from the cave and refer the case to him. And whatever he says to you, go by his decision, for God speaks to you by him.'¹⁵⁸ John of Lycopolis had a hall to house one hundred consultants at a time.¹⁵⁹ The lonely cells of the recluses of Egypt have been revealed, by the archaeologist, to have been well-furnished consulting rooms.¹⁶⁰

That this should have happened takes us to the heart of the religious revolution of Late Antiquity. Yet we should stress some of the significant differences between the old oracle and the new 'stranger'. The distinctive feature of the Late Roman holy man is that he gained the position of a stranger among men without being possessed by a god. The old *προφήτης* tended to be dissociated from his fellows by losing his identity: 'and the spirit of the Lord will come upon thee, and thou shalt prophesy with him, and shalt be turned into another man.'¹⁶¹ The Late Roman holy man kept his identity intact. His very real position as an arbiter in society made it essential that he should keep his wits about him.¹⁶² An exacting and frankly histrionic ritual of dissociation replaced the trance.¹⁶³

This is the sign of a shift in a whole society, towards greater explicitness and harder boundaries. Breaching the identity by trance was treated with genuine distaste—it was demonic.¹⁶⁴ What men needed more in the Later Empire was the acting out of clearly defined rôles by figures with a function in society. The portraiture of the age shows that a philosopher had to be seen to be a philosopher.¹⁶⁵ In this ritual of self-definition, the holy man led the field. The imperial ceremonial, which attracts the attention of most historians, was but an intermittent flickering compared with the lifetime's work of true professionals at self-definition. In a procession in Rome, Constantius II stood bolt upright and refrained, for a few hours, from spitting¹⁶⁶: but Symeon Stylites stood without moving his feet for nights on end,¹⁶⁷ and Macarius the Egyptian had not spat since he was baptized.¹⁶⁸ It is perhaps one of the most faithful indications of the whole style of Late Roman society that the objectivity that men so desperately needed was less often vested in impersonal institutions, such as the oracle site, or in depersonalized figures, such as the possessed medium, but was only thought acceptable in a man who could be closely observed to be in the act of forging total dissociation in himself, by hammering it out like cold metalwork, from a lifetime of asceticism.¹⁶⁹

It is here that we see most clearly the moulding force of the expectations and practices

¹⁵⁶ *V. Dan.* c. 82.

¹⁵⁷ *V. Dan.* c. 83.

¹⁵⁸ *H.L.* xx, 7, 10.

¹⁵⁹ *H.L.* xxv, 4 and Festugière, *Les Moines* (cit. n. 13) I, p. 46.

¹⁶⁰ S. Sauneron, *Bull. de l'Inst. fr. d'Anch. orientale* LXVII, 1969, 110, on the hermitages at Esna.

¹⁶¹ *I Samuel* 10, 6.

¹⁶² *H.R.* 1369 C-1373 A-B, on Aphraat the Persian. His guarded and homely parables, delivered in pidgin-Greek, are rightly relished by Festugière, o.c. (n. 13), 259-60, as part of a long tradition.

¹⁶³ Salamanes of Capesana, who was transported, cell and all, from his adopted village to his native village and back again, was the ideal of a man impassive but not in a trance: *H.R.* 1428 D-1429 C.

¹⁶⁴ J. Fontaine, 'Démons et sibylles: la peinture des possédés dans la poésie de Prudence', *Mélanges Jean Bayet*, 1964, 196-213. On the possible implications of such a shift, Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols*.

Explorations in Cosmology, 1970, 65-98, which forms an admirable starting-point for many trains of thought relevant to the historian of Late Antiquity.

¹⁶⁵ See esp. Helga von Heintze, 'Vir gravis et sanctus, Bildniskopf eines spätantiken Philosophen', *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* VI, 1963, 35-53.

¹⁶⁶ Ammianus Marcellinus, xvi, 10, 10.

¹⁶⁷ *Sym. Styl.* c. 10, p. 86, 20.

¹⁶⁸ *H.L.* xviii, 28.

¹⁶⁹ Closely observed: a layman counted Symeon bending to his toes in prayer 1244 times, then gave up! *H.R.* 1481 A. Meticulously recorded: on the circumstantial accounts of the exact periods of asceticism 'done' (ἐποίησεν) by the holy men, see Festugière, *Moines*, cit. (n. 13) III/1, 68, n. 1. This was because a holy man's claims on God—and so on his clientèle—depended directly on the πόννοι he had been assumed to have undergone (cf. below, n. 182). *H.R.* 1417 C ὁ δὲ ἀγωνοθέτης τοῖς πόννοις τὴν χάριν ἐπεμέτρησεν sums up the backbone of every account of the powers of a Late Roman holy man.

of Late Roman society in forming the image and the habits of the holy man. The holy man stands so still because he is pleading for men before the King of Kings in the *consistorium* of heaven.¹⁷⁰ Men entrusted themselves to him because he was thought to have won his way to intimacy with God—παρρησία. This word has a long history.¹⁷¹ It was only in Syria in the fourth century that it took on the final harsh contours that the word implied in Byzantine piety.¹⁷² For the παρρησία enjoyed by the Byzantine saint is subtly different from the delicate artifice of intimacy affected by rulers and their circle in Hellenistic times. It was a dizzy privilege, earned by a lifetime of tremulous obedience and hard work at the court of an absolute monarch. 'One day the old man took a fig-seed, and said to his disciples . . . "Listen, my children, if God in His mercy shows His favour to this seed and gives this bare rock power to give forth fruit, then know that God has given me the Kingdom of Heaven as His reward"'.¹⁷³

The power so gained was the reward of service. The labours of the holy man echo the 'sweat'—the *sudor*—of the new nobility of service of the East Roman estate.¹⁷⁴ Power gained in this way had to be seen to exist. After Martin's first miracle, 'ab hoc primum tempore beati viri nomen enituit, ut qui sanctus iam ab omnibus habebatur, potens etiam et vere apostolicus haberetur.'¹⁷⁵ Continuing a classical habit, sharpened by Late Roman conditions, the *potens* needed a crowd. 'As the holy man with the crowd approached the palace of Hebdomon, a Goth leant out of a window and, seeing the holy man carried along, he dissolved with laughter and shouted, "See here is our new consul!"'¹⁷⁶ He fell out. But he was right. The holy man was able, while remaining a stranger, to draw on himself, in a great surge, the ancient theatrical sense of the masses of the towns, which had found so many new forms of expression in the Late Roman period.¹⁷⁷

We are perhaps unduly interested in consuls. The ceremonial life of the East Roman towns had always happened a little below the brittle rituals of the capital. The charioteer, the athlete and the gladiator were more firmly rooted in the imagination of the average man. The theatre remained the main source of the styles of public life.¹⁷⁸ It is worthwhile stressing this: so many of the ideas and forms of expression in the early Church can be precisely located in the crucial area of ancient show-business.¹⁷⁹ The reputation of the holy man (and earlier of the martyr, frankly identified with the gladiator), rested on the bed-rock of long established popular attitudes.¹⁸⁰ The holy man was the 'athlete'.¹⁸¹ This is far more than a turn of phrase. By spectacular labours, by frequent victories in intense competition, by an enviable mobility, the athlete summed up for the average Late Roman, as effectively as did the figure of Napoleon for a Julien Sorel or a Raskolnikov, the figure of the self-made man—ἀπό πρώτης ηλικίας εἰς τὰς ὁδοῦς τῆς ἀρετῆς τραπεῖς ἰδρῶσι [καὶ πό]-νοις ἐκτίσαστο τὴν εὐκλεῆ δόξαν.¹⁸² In the literature surrounding the holy man we breathe the

¹⁷⁰ *H.R.* 1452 B, cf. Neusner, o.c. (n. 141), 327 for Jewish parallels.

¹⁷¹ E. Peterson, 'Zur Bedeutungsgeschichte von Παρρησία,' *Festschrift Reinhold Seeberg* 1, 1929, 283–97.

¹⁷² See Holl, o.c., 185–90 on sixth-century Palestinian usage. This is exactly paralleled in Theodoret, *H.R.* The newly discovered Manichaean codex, a translation from a Syrian environment, shows the frankly social meaning of the word: *Pap. Colon.* inv. no. 4780, 102, 5–11, (*Zeitsch. für Papyr. und Epigr.* v, 2, 1970, 177, n. 201) ἐν τε τῶι πλοῦτῳ αὐτῶν καὶ τῆι παρρησίᾳ καὶ τοῖς χρήμασι. In Egypt, by contrast, it remained a negative quality: *A.P.* Agatho 1 (8), 109 A; Daniel 8, 160 B and *Festugière, Moïses* III/1, 66, n. 27.

¹⁷³ Cyril of Scythopolis, *Life of John the Hesychast* c. 25 (*Festugière*, op. cit. III/3, 32).

¹⁷⁴ See the career of Flavius Philippus: *AJP* LXXXIII, 1962, 247–64.

¹⁷⁵ Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini* 7, 7 (*CSEL* 1, 118, 11).

¹⁷⁶ *V. Dan.* c. 75.

¹⁷⁷ See esp. Ramsay MacMullen, 'Some Pictures in Ammianus Marcellinus', *The Art Bulletin* XLVI, 1964, 435–55.

¹⁷⁸ It was recognized in military manuals that the personnel of the theatre provided the skilled leadership

for all public ceremonies: *Griechische Kriegsschriftsteller* (ed. H. Köchly and W. Rüstow, 1855) II, 2, 55.

¹⁷⁹ A fact almost too large to be seen, and so seldom applied to precise details: now recognized by Grabar, o.c. (n. 14), 16.

¹⁸⁰ For the parallels in expression, see L. Robert, *Hellenica* XI–XII, 1960, 355–8.

¹⁸¹ Canivet, o.c. (n. 86), 247.

¹⁸² Le Bas-Waddington, no. 1620, 7–10, discussed, with further examples, by L. Robert, *Hellenica* XI–XII, 1960, 347 and XIII, 1965, 141. Compare *A.P.* Arsenius, 5 (49), 89 A, the comment of a cultivated man on Egyptian holy men: ἀπὸ τῶν ἰδίων πόνων ἐκτίσαστο τὰς ἀρετὰς. One hardly need add that competition between holy men had a similar full-blooded quality: despite elaborate self-abasement, some hoped to be 'stars'. In *V. Hyp.* c. 42, the Devil told one: 'You are more just than all the others. You have practised asceticism more than they. Jesus loves you and lives in you and speaks by your mouth . . .' The Devil, in fact, had revealed to the poor young man the banal *recipe* for all Byzantine hagiography! *V. sup.* n. 169, and P. Brown, 'The Formation of the Holy Man . . .' for rivalry, 'framing', sorcery, even attempted assassination by rival holy men.

same heavy air. Like Henry James at the amphitheatre of Arles, the reader of the lives of the Byzantine saints can imagine 'the murmurs and shudders, the thick voice of the circus that died away fifteen hundred years ago'.

We are faced, therefore, with a delicate and enthralling situation. For here was power in society that was blatantly based on 'achieved status'. It could never be pinned down satisfactorily in any recognized niche in the hierarchy of church or state. A woman dreamt that her daughter could be healed at a monastery. On her arrival, they brought her the abbot. 'No,' she said, 'that is not the man I saw. Bring me the red-faced one with warts on his knees.'¹⁸³ The Byzantine empire must be thought of as ringed with holy men, each of whose resources were as firmly hidden in the courts of heaven, as fortunes in a Geneva bank. The resources, as we have seen for Syria, were a matter of local opinion. They could become issues of local pride. Of course no Emperor could have his child exorcised at Constantinople, wrote a Copt; but in Schiit, 'they are great men in the religious life and we believe that God will grant her healing by their prayers.'¹⁸⁴ Galatian pilgrims knew about Theodore of Sykeon. 'They spoke about him in the holy city and in the monasteries to those they chanced to meet and said, "We have a holy father in our country who by one single prayer can fill the whole world with rain".'¹⁸⁵ The diffusion of the reputation of holy men in the Later Empire is as absorbing and as delicate an aspect of ancient mobility as is the better known topic of the diffusion of the oriental cults.¹⁸⁶ In such a situation, there was even room for delightful paradox. At any given time, no one could know for certain which man enjoyed most *παρρησία* in the court of heaven: he might be a doctor in Alexandria;¹⁸⁷ a simple farmer in an Egyptian village;¹⁸⁸ even—who knows?—an inspector of brothels in Monemvasia.¹⁸⁹

Much of the contrasting developments of western Europe and Byzantium in the Middle Ages can be summed up as a prolonged debate on the precise *locus* of spiritual power. In western Europe, the circle of spiritual power was drawn from a single *locus*. The clergy stood unchallenged, under the awesome shadows of the long-dead heroes of the faith. Even in fourth-century North Africa, a province which bears so close a resemblance in many ways to Asia Minor and Syria, the relic of the dead martyr, patronized by the bishop of the town, was the sole centre of *χάρις ἐνεργουῦσα* in the towns. Men who claimed to heal were dismissed as frauds.¹⁹⁰ In Byzantium, the *locus* of spiritual power wavered as paradoxically as did the fluid society in which it was exercised. With only a passing challenge, from the Iconoclast Emperors, the charge that surrounded the 'God-bearing man' of the fourth and fifth centuries readily spilt over to invest the 'God-shadowed' image with much the same efficacy.¹⁹¹ In Byzantium there was a proliferation of little centres of power that competed with the vested hierarchy of Church and State. The clear outlines of the meticulously articulated imperial bureaucracy strike the casual observer of the Byzantine scene:¹⁹² but they were incessantly obfuscated by a fibrous growth of informal, unarticulated relationships—relations between patron and client, between spiritual brothers, between fellow godparents.¹⁹³ In much the same way, on the edge of the hierarchical structure of the Byzantine church spiritual power flickered in and out like Saint Elmo's fire. The bishops might wield the *mysterium tremendum* of the Eucharistic sacrifice. In the hands of a courageous bishop this could be no mean weapon, as the career of Ambrose of Milan shows:¹⁹⁴ in this detail, as in so much else, Ambrose is part of a common early Byzantine world, that followed the Imperial Court from Antioch to Trier. But it was the holy man

¹⁸³ H.R. 1340 A.

¹⁸⁴ N. Giron, *Légendes coptes*, 1907, 51.

¹⁸⁵ V. Theod., c. 50.

¹⁸⁶ To the examples of Symeon's reputation, spread by Syrian merchants, v. sup. n. 123. We could add that of John of Lycopolis, spread by members of the family of Theodosius I, see P. Devos, *Analecta Bollandiana* LXXXVII, 1969, 189–212, and of St. Phocas of Sinope, spread throughout the Mediterranean by Black Sea sailors: Asterus of Amasea, *Hom. ix. in S. Phocam* (PG XL, 309–312).

¹⁸⁷ A.P. Anton. 25, 84 B.

¹⁸⁸ A.P. Eucharistos 1 (24), 169 A.

¹⁸⁹ Paul of Monemvasia, *Ψυχωφέλις ιστορίαι*, see G.

Schirò, *Riv. di cultura class. e medievale* VII, 1965, 1006–16.

¹⁹⁰ See P. Brown, o.c. (n. 119), 413–14.

¹⁹¹ See P. Brown, 'A Dark-Age Crisis: the significance of the Iconoclast Controversy' (to appear).

¹⁹² As it struck, and misled, Western medieval statesmen: R. W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (Pelican History of the Church 2, 1970), 75–6.

¹⁹³ See esp. H. G. Beck, 'Byzantinische Gefolgschaftswesen', *Sitzungsberichte d. bayer. Akad. der Wiss.* 1955, no. 5.

¹⁹⁴ Ambrose, *Ep.* 41, 28.

who, through his unassessible *παρρησία* with God, kept his grip on the keys of heaven. In the tenth century, a patriarch might try to browbeat the Tsar of Bulgaria by threatening to use his *παρρησία* to stand against him at the Day of Judgment.¹⁹⁵ But half of Constantinople was convinced that, on that dread day, the patriarch himself stood a very slim chance. They had already invested their hopes in more reliable professionals: the dying Emperor had committed to three hundred holy men a book containing the list of his sins. After days of incessant prayer the list was found expunged!¹⁹⁶ In such a society, a Hildebrand was inconceivable.

Earlier in the Middle Ages, Byzantine attitudes already puzzled Western observers. Had the protospatharius Theodore been properly shriven by a priest? The delegate of the most holy see of old Rome said: 'What was the name of your confessor?' 'I don't know. I only know that he was in the Imperial Chancellery. He became a monk. He did (*fecit!*) forty years on a pillar.' 'But was he a priest?' 'I don't know, he was a holy old man, and I put my trust in the man . . .'¹⁹⁷

With this incident, we return to the holy man at his humble routine. An analysis of his rôle in terms of the conditions and aims of the exercise of power in Late Roman society can only take us so far; for it restricts us to particular environments and to occasional circumstances. The universal and enduring appeal of the holy man, throughout Late Antiquity and the Byzantine Middle Ages, takes us into more intimate places. Briefly, it was with the help of the holy man, that the East Roman hoped to cope with 'life's casuistry'.¹⁹⁸ To appreciate what light this rôle throws on the mood of Late Roman society, we should look more carefully at the holy man in action with his clientele, as healer and as confessor.¹⁹⁹

Faced by so many accounts of the miraculous, the historian of late antiquity usually relieves the strain placed on his own credulity by vastly inflating the credulity of his subjects. It is possible to say, with Lucian, that 'that pair of tyrants, Hope and Fear' account for so widespread a belief in miracles. To be content with such a judgment is of no help to the historian whatsoever. He has to seize the precise and individual character of an age. What we have is of great value—abundant evidence, not of *why* men sought cures in the way they did, but of *what* kind of cure satisfied them.²⁰⁰ The history of what constitutes a 'cure' in a given society is a history of that society's values: for the rhythm of the cure shows what is acceptable in that society as a plausible way of giving form, and so the hope of resolution. to what is experienced—in all ages—as the nebulous and intractable fact of suffering and misfortune. For the Late Roman period the question can be answered quite succinctly. Cures effected by the holy man almost invariably involved a process of 'focussing'. Exorcism was the classic cure associated with the holy man; for it involved both the formal designation of an authoritative healing agent, on which the sufferer and his companions could focus their hopes, and the equally precise isolation and extrusion—often in a satisfactorily visible form—of the disturbing element.²⁰¹ Other forms of healing follow the same rhythm. Many are connected with the administration of an innocuous *placebo* that is charged with the blessing of the holy man.²⁰² The blessing gives reality and efficacy to what were thought of as the inscrutable workings of providence. Water is given, 'πίε τοῦτον καὶ τῆς θείας ἐπικουρίας αἰσθήσῃ'.²⁰³ To dismiss such practices as a legacy of magical beliefs is singularly unhelpful.²⁰⁴ The fastidious label obscures both the poignant need of sufferers, in all ages, our own included, to focus their hopes on a single agent of cure;²⁰⁵ and it ignores the fact that the vesting of the object is merely a minor case of the whole movement of Late Roman opinion which, as we have seen, was towards charging the person of the holy man

¹⁹⁵ Nicholas Mysticus, *Ep.* 5 (*PG* cxi, 56 C).

¹⁹⁶ *Theophanes Continuatus*, ed. Bonn. 439–440.

¹⁹⁷ Mansi, *Concilia* xvi, 150 D (Synod of A.D. 869).

¹⁹⁸ Baynes, 'The Hellenistic Civilisation and East Rome', *o.c.* (n. 1), 5. 'It was on life's casuistry—on the moral problems of the individual in a dangerous world—that attention was concentrated.'

¹⁹⁹ Fairy von Lillienfeld, 'Anthropos Pneumaticus—Pater Pneumatophorus', *Studia Patristica* v, *Texte und Untersuchungen* lxxx, 1962, 382–92, is particularly revealing: see p. 282: 'Begrift man ihn recht (this aspect of the rôle of the holy man), so möchte man die inneren Gründe jener erstaunlichen

Blüte des Mönchtums im 4. Jahrhundert espüren können.'

²⁰⁰ See P. Brown, 'Holy Men at Work: Cure and therapy in Late Antiquity' (to appear).

²⁰¹ e.g. *V. Theod.* cc. 84, 86 and 108.

²⁰² e.g. *Sym. Styl.* cc. 27, p. 95; 31, p. 97, 8; 34, p. 98, 14; 35, p. 98, 30.

²⁰³ *H.R.* 1409 C.

²⁰⁴ As K. Holl, 'Der Anteil der Styliten am Aufkommen der Bilderverehrung', *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte*, II, 1928, pp. 388–98 (at p. 395).

²⁰⁵ C. Binger, *The Doctor's Job*,

himself with utterly objective, inalienable power.²⁰⁶ As we have seen, the holy man was expected to establish himself almost as a 'blessed object' in the midst of his fellows. Merely to see a holy man stirred East Romans deeply.²⁰⁷ Right down to his rigid stance, his figure was a precipitate of the unfulfilled needs of an ill-orientated and highly competitive society. What needs, therefore, did his person fulfil?

In the first place, the holy man resolved a dilemma inherent in early Christian piety. Like the emperor, God was at one and the same time remote and unflinching, and yet, ideally, the ever-loving Father of his people. Contemporaries had some chilling visions of the justice of such a God. 'It seemed to me that I was standing before someone on a high throne. Many thousands stood round him, begging and pleading with him; but he remained unbending. Then I saw a lady robed in purple come before him, who fell to the ground saying, "At least give a favourable answer for my sake." But He (Christ) remained no less inflexible.'²⁰⁸ Next day, the terrible earthquakes began. The holy man carried the burden of making such a distant God relevant to the particularity of human needs. In his person, the acute ambivalence of a Christian God was summed up in a manageable and approachable form: for the holy man was both συμπαθητικός, easily moved to tears of compassion, and, at the same time, the heir of the Hebrew prophets. As Elias said, in a vision, to Symeon, 'I am he who in my zeal closed up the rains of Heaven, who gave over Ahab and Jezebel to be devoured by dogs, who slew the priests of Baal.'²⁰⁹ He could be seen to distribute, with satisfying speed and precision, the blessings and chastisements of an unplumbed divine providence. He could be approached directly, as God never could be.²¹⁰ To ask Symeon Stylites to pray for rain was an object lesson in the ability of one man to render manageable and intelligible the dumb hostility of a Syrian drought. Symeon knew why it was happening.²¹¹ He knew what to do about it. The little delegation, chanting its *Kyrie Eleisons*, would be able to focus its hopes on this figure, standing with outstretched arms above them, as, predictably enough, the thunder of the delayed autumn storm rolled nearer.²¹²

Secondly, the holy man was the professional in a world of amateurs. The values of the Christian man of the world, the κοσμικός, were, as it were, rendered safe and efficacious by being drained into him. For the piety of the average Byzantine was essentially a piety of discontinuous moments of contrition, κατάνυξις.²¹³ To seize the spiritual climate of the sixth century, we should not look at the impassive figures of the mosaics but at the illuminations of the *Vienna Genesis*. Here we pass, suddenly, from the delightful *mondanité* of a banquet scene to the shattering grief of the burial of Jacob.^{213a} Byzantines expected, occasionally, to weep for their own death in sin in that way: 'And by the grace of God the hearts of the faithful people were so touched to the quick that they watered the ground with their tears.'²¹⁴ But the κοσμικός knew that such storms of emotion would be wasted on the distant vault of heaven. The holy man was different from him. He had opened his whole life to that bitter tide. 'When he prayed, Hypatios was continually touched with contrition. He wept and cried so hard to God that we, who were weeping, were seized with awe and dread.'²¹⁵ Only such a man could hope to commit the case of the penitent to God.

Hence, thirdly, the importance of the holy man as an allayer of anxiety. It would be inaccurate to call Late Romans exceptionally guilt-ridden men: it is rather that they were acutely anxious to control and delimit guilt. Caught between a bottomless God and an archaic system of public penance, laymen flocked to the holy man to know whether there

²⁰⁶ The artistic development of the reliquaries associated with the Stylite saints shows the same evolution: see Tchalenko, o.c. (n. 19), III, 17-8: 'il n'y a probablement dans ses dessins géométriques nulle maladresse, nulle inexpérience primitive, mais, semble-t-il, l'expression finale d'un penchant que les Syriens ont souvent montré pour l'image religieuse abstraite'—and, one might add, for the 'abstract holy man'; v. sup. n. 163.

²⁰⁷ I. Hausscherr, *Penthos* (Orientalia Christiana Analecta 132), 1944, 81-5.

²⁰⁸ John Moschus, *Pratum Spirituale* c. 50, PG LXXXVII, 2905 B.

²⁰⁹ *Sym. Styl.*, c. 80, p. 127, 4.

²¹⁰ e.g. *H.R.* 1384 A.

²¹¹ Hence so many of Symeon's 'prophecies' were, rather, 'explanations': a drought of two years was a 'good beating' for certain sins; that of 36 days, merely a 'switching' by God. *H.R.* 1486 A.

²¹² *Sym. Styl.* cc. 109-110, 156-60—a vivid scene.

²¹³ See Festugière, *Les Moines* III/1, 107. n. 111 and Hausherr, o.c. (n. 207), 14-17. Compare the interesting study of P. Rousset, 'Recherches sur l'émotivité à l'époque romaine', *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* II, 1959, esp. pp. 58-65.

^{213a} See now P. Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*, 1971, p. 159, ill. 105; p. 187, ill. 126; p. 191.

²¹⁴ *V. Dan.* c. 31.

²¹⁵ *V. Hyp.* c. 27.

was anything at all that they could do, in their small way.²¹⁶ ‘Can a man be saved?’ This was the blunt question of the κοσμικός.²¹⁷ Not every answer was reassuring. For the holy man wielded the harsh surgery of the ascetic ἀπώταξις: for many, total death to the world was regarded as the only remedy for sin.²¹⁸ Villagers who asked the question too often found themselves joining the nucleus of a monastic community, such as grew up with surprising and significant rapidity around the local holy man in Syria and Palestine.²¹⁹

What most clients received, however, was a measured penance,²²⁰ a blessing and the far from negligible reassurance that the forgiveness of their sins would be made manifest by increased political success.²²¹ One such interview stands for them all.²²² The patrician Petronas had been sleeping with a slave girl. He fell ill. Visits to the great incubatory shrine of Saints Cosmas and Damian at Constantinople had had no effect. Typically he needed a precise, focussed relationship with a holy man. ‘Holy father I am dying.’ ‘A Christian man does not die.’ ‘I am a Christian all right, but I have never behaved like a Christian. An evil-looking Ethiopian with a horribly eager look on him came up to me in a dream, and said: “You are mine”.’²²³ After the interview, Petronas enjoyed his first night of good sleep—with eight pounds of gold off his conscience by way of a fee. From that time, the two men were thought of as inseparable. They even died on the same day.²²⁴ The abiding link established, in this way, between the layman and his πατήρ πνευματικός is one of the most profound and touching features of Byzantine lay piety.²²⁵ On death, the spiritual father would draw up and place in the hands of his son a safe conduct to heaven.²²⁶

Fourthly, the allaying of anxiety made a holy man the *décisionnaire universel* of his locality. ‘The inhabitants [of Medaba across the Jordan] were in the habit of going up to visit our holy father Sabas to gain from him all kinds of spiritual consolation.’²²⁷ His judgment decided how Christian ethics might be applied. Should a Christian have baths?²²⁸ Should he consult a doctor?²²⁹ Where, in his new church, should a donor place the sign of the cross and where the delightful late Hellenistic foliage of fashionable mosaics?²³⁰ Altogether, we get a very wrong impression if we look only at the miraculous element in the holy man’s relations with his clients. In his relation to contemporary medical science, for instance, the holy man appears far more often than we might at first sight suppose in a merely supporting rôle.²³¹ Much as the προστάτης, the patron, was thought of as intervening not to disrupt the law but to make it work in particular cases, so the blessing of the holy man did not suspend the normal workings of Byzantine science and their sophisticated methods of dealing with life in the world, but merely strengthened the processes of decision-making involved in the application of these skills. ‘Again if any required medical treatment of certain illnesses or surgery or a purging draught or hot springs, this God-inspired man would prescribe the best thing for each . . . He might even recommend one to have recourse to surgery and he would always state clearly which doctor they should employ. In other cases he would dissuade those who wished to undergo an operation or take some medical treatment and would recommend rather to go to hot springs, and would name the springs to which they should go. Or he would prevent those who wished to go to the hot springs at Dablioi or to take the waters, say, at Apsoda, and would advise them rather to drink a purging draught instead under a doctor whom he would name.’²³²

²¹⁶ See esp. K. Holl, ch. III (‘Die Binde- und Lösegewalt des Mönchtums’), esp. 287–301.

²¹⁷ A.P. Mios 3 (51) 301 D: εἰ ἄρα δέχεται μετάνοιαν ὁ θεός (the question of a στρατηγόμενος).

²¹⁸ H.L. xxxv, 5–6: with John of Lycopolis, lay clients were given preference: they were slaves playing truant from their owner, the Devil!

²¹⁹ e.g. V. Euthym. c. 8.

²²⁰ A.P. Lot 2, 256 B—can decide the extent of penance for a caster of love-spells: v. Holl. o.c., 315–8.

²²¹ For *not* to be blessed by a holy man was a setback for any Byzantine politician: see the charming story in John of Nikiu, c. 89 (ed. Zotenberg, *Extraits des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Nationale* xxiv, 1, p. 488)—a holy man refused to bless the future Emperor Anastasius because, as a future Emperor, he no longer needed further blessing.

²²² F. Halkin, ‘Saint Antoine le Jeune et Pétronas

vainqueur des Arabes en 863,’ *Analecta Bollandiana* LXII, 1944, 187–225.

²²³ Ibid. c. 10, p. 216.

²²⁴ Ibid. c. 20, p. 223.

²²⁵ e.g. A.P. Daniel 3 (95); 153 C: the πρωτεύων of Babylon has his favourite monk.

²²⁶ A. Dmitrevsky, *Opisanie liturgiĭeskich rukopisej chranjaščichsja v bibliotekach pravoslavnogo vostoka II*, 1901, 580.

²²⁷ V. Sab. c. 45.

²²⁸ e.g. V. Theod. c. 137.

²²⁹ See the fascinating series of answers to clients by the sixth-century hermit Varsanuphius cited by Chitty, o.c. (n. 6), 137, whose complete edition is appearing in *Patrologia Orientalis*.

²³⁰ Nilus, *Ep. ad Olympiodorum*, PG LXXIX, 577 D.

²³¹ e.g. V. Hyp. c. 40.

²³² V. Theod. cc. 145–146.

The little Theodoret long remembered his visits to holy men. 'Daniel used to say, "That boy will be a bishop."' But old Peter would not agree with him, knowing how much my parents doted on me. Often he used to put me on his knees and feed me grapes and bread.²³³ A scene like this takes us closer than do a hundred miracles, to the appeal of the holy man in Late Roman society.

The rise of the holy man is the *leitmotiv* of the religious revolution of Late Antiquity. A study of the holy man's actual activities might lead us to question whether this revolution can any longer be fruitfully described as it is so often described, as the rise of more primitive religious sentiments in a depleted and insecure society. One might suggest, tentatively, that the crisis of Late Antiquity was, rather, a crisis of freedom. We have found the holy man central to the way in which different *milieux* coped with increased freedom and its consequent dangers: for the farmers of Syria, he brought leadership; for the townsmen, the objectivity of a stranger; for innumerable individuals, an oasis of certainty in the conflicting aims and traditions of the world. Such a need for certainty and for leadership is not usually experienced by more stable societies, where the objectivity associated with the supernatural is more securely lodged in impersonal and enduring institutions—in great temple sites, whose prophets are often thought of as totally transparent to the divine, and whose grave priests (as in Egypt) emerged only in low relief against the façade of ancient wisdom. We know that the later Roman Empire was the very opposite of such a society.²³⁴ On every level of life, the institutions that had seemed capable of receiving the awesome charge of permanence and divinity in classical times either declined or exploded. Men were left with nothing to fall back on than other men. In the early fourth century, the old-fashioned might write as if knowledge and power still resided in the great temples of Egypt;²³⁵ but in Egypt itself, men prayed, 'Send me a man, that I may drink salvation from him.'²³⁶

So profound a revolution cannot have come unprepared. One might suggest at least two long-term developments within the classical world that merely culminated in the Later Empire. First, there was a long standing uncertainty about the rôle of the father in preserving the traditions of society. The society of the Empire was overtly patriarchal. Respectable provincial families liked to regard their members as so many *avatars* of the virtues of their forefathers.²³⁷ Yet in reality the father remained a distant and awesome figure compared with the true educators. It was the *τροφεύς*²³⁸ and the *ρήτωρ*, silently but effectively reinforced by the mother,²³⁹ who passed on the values of society to the children of every generation. Nowadays, it is easy to miss the warm emotional undertones of the idea of Christ as the *Παιδαγωγός*. For so many well educated young men, the good father was their teacher, not their father. The religious revolution of late antiquity contains a surprising number of decisive incidents, each involving the encounter of a lonely and ambitious young man with a man old enough to be his father: Gregory Thaumaturgus with Origen, Julian with the eunuch Mardonius and Augustine with Ambrose.²⁴⁰ Did the definitive rise of the *πνευματικός πατήρ*, coinciding as it did with a period when education alone, as opposed to family traditions, partly decided the recruitment of the governing class of the Roman world, represent the final sharpening of the old dilemma?

Secondly, and for a wider stratum of the population than the governing classes, the rise of the holy man has something to do with the silence of the oracles. Plutarch's complaint

²³³ *H.R.* 1380 D.

²³⁴ See esp. R. MacMullen, 'Social Mobility and the Theodosian Code,' *JRS* LIV, 1964, 49–53, on the variety of careers open to quite humble men. See also *Epistula Ammonis* c. 17 (*Sancti Pachomii vitae graecae*, ed. F. Halkin, 1932, p. 106)—a Coptic monk wrestling with the temptation to become a soldier. Peasant, monk, soldier—already an *embarras de richesse*!

²³⁵ Porphyry, *Vita Pythag.*, c. 34; cf. F. Cumont, *L'Égypte des astrologues*, 1937, 118–70.

²³⁶ T. Lefort, *S. Pachomii vitae sahidice scriptae*, 1933, 248–251, from the translation of P. Peeters, 'À propos de la vie sahidique de S. Pachôme,' *Analecta Bollandiana* LII, 1934, p. 303.

²³⁷ L. Robert, *Hellenica* XIII, 1965, 226–7.

²³⁹ *Ibid.* 22.

²³⁹ Women as *φιλολογοί*: Robert, *ibid.*, 52; cf. Artemidorus, *Oneirocritica* IV, 83—a woman dreams she has a beard on one side of her face: she manages her husband's estates while he is away. Very much the ancestors of St. Monica, and of the mothers of Theodoret and of Cyril!

²⁴⁰ See esp. Gregory Thaumaturgus, *In Origenem prophanetia ac panegyrica oratio* (PG X, 1049–1104), a neglected text, now available: Grégoire le Thaumaturge, *Remerciement à Origène*, ed. H. Crouzel (Sources Chrétienne, 148), 1969. See *H.R.* 1384 A—the 'netting' of a young man by a spiritual father, with the long classical background of the expression, in Festugière, *Antioche* o.c. (n. 86), 258, n. 5.

about the trivialization of the function of the Delphic oracle is relevant to this.²⁴¹ Oracles remained active into the late classical period;²⁴² but that they had already become too like their future rival.²⁴³ The holy man merely trumped the oracle, by being both objective and trenchant in an idiom that was more consonant with the habits and expectations of a new, more intensely personal style of society.

What is decisive, and puzzling, about the long term rise of the holy man is the manner in which, in so many ways, the holy man was thought of as having taken into his person, skills that had previously been preserved by society at large.²⁴⁴ The word of the holy man was supposed to replace the prophylactic spell to which anyone could have had access; his blessing made amulets unnecessary; he did in a village what had previously been done through the collective wisdom of the community. He was a ruthless professional; and, as is so often the case, his rise was a victory of men over women, who had been the previous guardians of the diffuse occult traditions of their neighbourhood.²⁴⁵ The blessing of the holy man, and not an amulet prepared by a wise woman, was what was now supposed to protect you from the effects of a green lizard that had fallen into your soup.²⁴⁶ If 'the natural death of paganism' is to become something more than a rhetorical phrase, its roots must be sought out in such nooks and crannies of late Roman village life.

The predominance of the holy man, therefore, marked out late antiquity as a distinct phase of religious history. The classical period conjures up the image of a great temple; the Middle Ages, of a Gothic cathedral. In between, it is the portraits that strike the imagination, the icons of the holy men, the austere features of the philosophers, the ranks of staring faces in frescoes and mosaics. For some centuries, the *locus* of the supernatural was thought of as resting on individual men. The rise of the holy man coincides, as we have seen, with the erosion of classical institutions; his decline—or rather the levelling-off of the trajectory of his ascent—coincides with the re-assertion of a new sense of the majesty of the community. This is foreshadowed, in the Eastern Empire, by a remarkable revival of the collective sense and morale of the towns, in the late fifth and sixth centuries;²⁴⁷ and, in the West, by the final organization of the monastic and ecclesiastical hierarchy of the Western towns around the tombs of their ancient dead. No holy man was active in Dark Age Rome, but the charged power of the body of a long buried martyr was thought enough to strike a workman dead in the catacomb chamber.²⁴⁸ The great basilica of the martyrs, the incubation church, the icon and, in the West, the solemn ritual of the great Benedictine monasteries, hemmed in, and over large areas and for long periods eclipsed, the holy man. These impersonal agents had become the bearers of the supernatural among men.²⁴⁹ Seen in this way, the victory of Christianity in Late Roman society was not the victory of the One God over the many: it was the victory of men over the institutions of their past. The medieval papacy, the Byzantine *lavra*, the Russian *starec*, the Muslim Caliphate: these are all, in their various ways, direct results of attempts of men to rule men under a distant high God. The last papyrus in the religious section of Mitteis and Wilcken's *Grundzüge und Chrestomathie der Papyruskunde* (Vol. 1, p. 135) sums up both the late antique revolution and its untold consequences: 'ἐν ὀνόματι τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἐλεήμονος καὶ φιλανθρώπου,' it runs, 'οὐκ ἔστιν

²⁴¹ Plutarch, *De Pythiae oraculis* c. 3, 408 B–409 A, is especially revealing. (But, as Professor E. R. Dodds has kindly pointed out to me, the trivialization of oracle-questions was no new thing: Plutarch had pitched his demands rather high).

²⁴² See esp. L. Robert, *Hellenica* XI–XII, p. 546 (on their continued stabilizing function in times of religious ferment); and 'Trois Oracles de la Théosophie et un prophète d'Apollon', *Comptes Rendus de l'Acad. des Inscr.*, December 1968, 568–99.

²⁴³ Already in the third and early fourth century, a 'prophet' had taken on some of the more 'personalized' attributes of a holy man: e.g. the priestess Ammias at Thyateira and Athanatos Epitynchanos at Akmonia, discussed with earlier references in L. Robert, *Études anatoliennes*, 1937, 131–2.

²⁴⁴ Clearly seen, as the background to the elaborate exorcistic prayers of a holy man, by Robert, *Hellenica* XIII, 1965, 267, n. 3.

²⁴⁵ See Neusner, o.c. (n. 141) 348–9 on the rabbi's mother as a source of occult remedies.

²⁴⁶ *V. Theod.* cc. 124 and 143.

²⁴⁷ See now D. Claude, *Die byzantinische Stadt im 6. Jahrhundert* (Byzantisches Archiv 13), 1969, and A. Grabar, 'La mosaïque de pavement de Qasr el-Lebya', *C.R. Acad. des Inscr.*, June 1969, 264–82.

²⁴⁸ See now Peter Llewellyn, *Rome in the Dark Ages*, 1971, 174.

²⁴⁹ Impressively described by Southern, o.c. (n. 192), 27–33.

θεὸς εἰ μὴ ὁ θεὸς μόνος.’ It is as we have been told: ‘ progrès et victoire du monothéisme, ainsi pourrait on la caractériser d’un mot.’²⁵⁰ But not quite. Not just the one God. One God *and* His man, for the papyrus continues: ‘ Μάμετ ἀπόστολος θεοῦ.’ It is this which the historian of Late Antiquity must attempt to understand.

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²⁵⁰ M. Simon and A. Benoit, *Le judaïsme et le christianisme antique* (nouvelle Clio), 1968, p. 2.