

## NILUS OF ANCYRA AND THE PROMOTION OF A MONASTIC ELITE<sup>1</sup>

DANIEL CANER

Among the new elites that emerged in late antiquity, none so consciously defined and postured itself against traditional markers of elite status in the Roman world (e.g., family, wealth, education, civil or military service) than the monastic movement. By the late fourth century, its most outstanding members were identified with those few who had expressed their renunciation of the “world” and its trappings by withdrawing to the far desert or countryside. Such new “philosophers” of Christian culture were presented to ordinary Christians as proof that it was possible to disentangle oneself from the web of competitive relationships and hierarchical concerns found elsewhere in late Roman society.<sup>2</sup> Early hagiography gives the impression that the only care dogging these monks in their alternative, monastic world was eluding the visitations, solicitations, and flatteries constantly thrust on them by pursuing admirers.<sup>3</sup> This was, ideally, a reluctant elite, whose members best drew attention to themselves through the measures they took to evade that status.

In reality, of course, the early monastic world was notoriously competitive. From the torturous one-upmanship of Symeon Stylites at Teleda and Telanissos to the “theatrical one-downmanship” of monks in the Egyptian

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1 I want to thank the participants at the 1999 UCLA “Elites in Late Antiquity” conference and the *Arethusa* reviewers for comments on drafts of this paper. All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

2 See, e.g., John Chrysostom in *Matthaeum Homiliae* 7.6, 21.6, 72.3–4; *Catechesis ad Illuminandos* 8.5–6.

3 See, e.g., Jerome *Vita Hilarionis* 30–31, 42–43; Palladius *Historia Lausiaca* 17.10; Theodoret *Historia Religiosa* 3.9, 18, 4.8, 6.7, 13.2, 15.1, 18.2–3.

desert,<sup>4</sup> the extravagant physical measures with which some monks achieved spiritual goals and attained distinctive status among their peers quickly became legendary. Ordinary lay people also seem to have regarded enthusiastic behavior as a true marker of religious prowess, to be rewarded with alms.<sup>5</sup> Though always controversial, ascetic extremism produced its own elite of flamboyant over-achievers who ultimately found accommodation, even encouragement, as long as they remained within monastery confines and under church auspices.<sup>6</sup> But members of this ascetic class seem to have been special partly because they were relatively rare.

More important for the evolution of monasticism towards its historically more pervasive and staid ideal (characterized by social withdrawal and manual labor) was the competition for elite status fought out in the late fourth- and early fifth-century literary arena, often with the understanding that potential urban patrons might be reading. As Stefan Rebenich has shown so well, the master of that arena in the west was Jerome (c. 347–420). Knowledge of Greek theology and stylistic brilliance were Jerome's main strengths as he sought to become chief spiritual guide and exegete to members of the Christian nobility within their homes at Rome.<sup>7</sup> But two particular literary tactics also helped him win success in shaping monastic tradition while promoting himself. First, through deft use of satirical imagery in widely circulated letters and treatises, Jerome ridiculed his urban monastic competitors and rendered them a potential embarrassment to aristocratic patrons. Thus he instructed his own female patrons to avoid ascetic rivals like Antimus and Sophronius,

men whom you see loaded with chains and wearing their  
hair long like a woman's, against the precept of the apostle,

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4 Two monasteries expelled Symeon before he mounted his pillar: Theodoret *H. R.* 26.4–7, Greek *vita* 4–12, Syriac *vita* 9–12; cf. also Nilus *Ep.* 2.114–15 (scolding an unknown stylite named Nicander for lack of humility). For status competition and negotiation among the Egyptian desert fathers, see Gleason 1998 (quotation p. 512).

5 As implied by Basil *Ep.* 169 and Augustine *de Opere Monachorum* 31.39. Both criticize monks for adopting the look of Old Testament patriarchs or prophets and both associate such behavior with venality: cf. Jerome *Epp.* 22.28 and 125.11 (below).

6 See Harvey 1998 for the stylites Symeon the Elder and the Younger; for other Syrian "Nazirites," also called "mourners" (a special ascetic category), and their regulation in the fifth and sixth centuries, see Palmer 1990.85–88.

7 Rebenich 1992.159–69. Jerome started his career as an ascetic philosopher at Antioch and Constantinople before moving on to Rome: see Rebenich 1997.

with a shaggy goat's beard, black cloak, and bare feet braving the cold. All these things are plain signs of the devil . . . Such men as these make their way into noble houses and deceive "silly women laden with sin, ever learning yet never able to come to knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim 3:6).<sup>8</sup>

Second, Jerome crafted such portraits not just to divert attention away from monks whose boasts of supernatural struggles appealed to "the admiration of the ignorant mob, to extract money from their pockets." He also designed them to direct patronage toward monks who "take pleasure in poverty, whose garb, conversation, looks, and gait all teach virtue." In other words, toward a monastic elite whose *decorum* distanced it from the *vulgi homines*—an elite represented (and to some extent invented) by Jerome himself.<sup>9</sup>

Jerome's ascetic descriptions and recommendations were thus written in the context of competition for patronage. Espousing desert withdrawal, poverty, and manual labor (among other ascetic practices),<sup>10</sup> his writings must be viewed as highly successful efforts not only in self-fashioning, but also in the promotion of a monastic elite and the teaching of patrons to recognize it as such. His influence on western notions of monastic propriety is inestimable and has deservedly won him considerable attention. But Jerome's situation and literary efforts were not unparalleled and should not be viewed in isolation. In this paper, I wish to draw attention to the neglected writings of his slightly younger, eastern contemporary, Nilus of Ancyra (fl. c. 390–430).

Nilus was a monk perhaps best known for two ascetic treatises he wrote towards the end of the 420s: the *Ascetic Discourse* and *On Voluntary*

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8 Jerome *Ep.* 22.28 (written 384) (Wright 1991.118): *Qui postquam nobilium introierint domos et deceiverint mulierculas*. Translation adopted from Wright 1991.119. On this and similar portrait sketches by Jerome, see Rebenich 1992.177–79 and Curran 1997.218–20.

9 Jerome *Ep.* 125.9 (written 411) (Wright 1991.414): *volumus egredi milites . . . qui paupertate laetantur, quorum habitus, sermo, vultus, incessus doctrina virtutum est, qui nesciunt secundum quosdam ineptos homines daemonum obpugnantium contra se portenta confingere, ut apud inperitos et vulgi homines miraculum sui faciant et exinde sectentur lucra*. On this letter's context and aims, see Rebenich 1992.159, 291–92. Its phrase *daemonum . . . confingere* recalls a charge laid against "Messalian" monks (also accused of seeking alms) that they fashion arrows with their fingers and leap about, pretending to shoot demons: see Theodoret *Haereticarum Fabularum Compendium* 4.11.

10 E.g., *Epp.* 22.34–36 (excusing Eustochium herself from manual labor because of her delicacy: 31), 125.11, 16–17.

*Poverty*.<sup>11</sup> Both respond to “worldly” ambitions that Nilus felt jeopardized not only the salvation of his monastic peers but also the reputation of his vocation. Ambition for material things was the main problem. As explained in his *Ascetic Discourse*, this had rendered most fellow monks the object of public contempt, such that “we are now regarded as a useless rabble by those who should revere us . . . with nothing special to distinguish us from the rest” of mankind beyond the monastic garb.<sup>12</sup> Though partly blaming country monks who were spending too much time selling their produce in the markets, Nilus was mainly grieved by urban monks who were living “without scruple among promiscuous mobs.”<sup>13</sup> Cities were now overwhelmed by monks who, overpowered by their stomachs, had abandoned their monasteries; urban residents looked with disgust at them mobbing their doorsteps, “begging utterly without shame.” Many, he notes, even gained entry into houses, where they “feigned piety for a while” only to leave after defrauding their hosts. On their account, even “the attainments of those who truly live according to virtue” were considered a deceit.<sup>14</sup>

Placed prominently in the opening sections of his *Ascetic Discourse*, Nilus’ unflattering description of his urban counterparts portrays them either as failed monks who could not endure the discipline of their monasteries (*de Mon. Ex.* 8 [PG 79.728C]), or simply as false opportunists (*de Mon. Ex.* 9 [PG 79.730B]). In his view, they disgraced monasticism by behaving like ordinary beggars. But other details reveal that Nilus was actually addressing a more complex phenomenon and problem. Such monks, he explains (*de Mon. Ex.* 8 [PG 79.728CD]),

attend the gates of the rich no less than parasites  
(παράσιτων οὐκ ἔλαττον), and run beside them through

11 Λόγος ἀσκητικός (*de Monastica Exercitatione*), PG 79.720A–810D; Περὶ Ἀκτημοσύνης (*de Voluntaria Paupertate*), PG 79.968C–1060D. Though Nilus refers to his *Ascetic Discourse* in the latter (*de Vol. Paup.* 1 [968C]), it is not clear whether he originally conceived the treatises as a set pair. Neither has received critical attention. For a general introduction to Nilus, see Guérard 1982, Guérard 1994.15–22, and Heussi 1917.

12 Nilus *de Mon. Ex.* 7 (PG 79.728A): παρὰ τῶν σέβεσθαι ἡμᾶς ὀφειλόντων, ὡς εἰκαῖος ὄχλος ὀρώμεθα, καὶ . . . γελώμεθα, οὐδὲν παρὰ τοὺς λοιποὺς, ὡς ἐξῆν, ἐξαίρετον ἔχοντες, οὐκ ἐκ πολιτείας ἀλλ’ ἐκ σχήματος γνωρίζεσθαι βουλόμενοι.

13 Nilus *de Mon. Ex.* 6–7 (PG 79.725A–728A), 12 (732D), 46 (776C): ἀδεῶς τὸς πεφυρμένους ὄχλους συνδιαιτᾶσθαι.

14 Nilus *de Mon. Ex.* 9 (PG 79.728D–729A): Διὰ τοῦτο . . . ἡ τῶν ἀληθῶς κατ’ ἀρετὴν βιοτούντων κτήσις ἀπάτη νενόμισται. Cf. also *de Mon. Ex.* 6 (725A).

marketplaces like slaves, scaring off those nearby, driving away those in their path, zealous to give them easy passage. These things they do because of the neediness of their tables, because they have not learned to suppress their delight in delectable meals.

What Nilus describes here is familiar to classicists. His allusion to “parasites” hanging around the gates of the rich and escorting them lavishly through the marketplace recalls the basic motifs (the *salutatio ad limina* and *adsectatio*) that earlier satirists had repeatedly used to ridicule the *obsequium* or self-abasement that clients showed wealthy patrons in order to receive their meals and material support.<sup>15</sup> Late antiquity saw little change in such traditional features of patron-client relationships or in their criticism.<sup>16</sup> In his *Ascetic Discourse*, Nilus was adopting well-known imagery to criticize the obsequious scramble for patronal support he considered typical of his urban monastic peers (*de Mon. Ex.* 19 [PG 79.744C]). Nilus knew, however, that such monks were offering their benefactors more than flattery: “each with his visible monastic garb promises knowledge which hasn’t even passed by his lips.” It was this assertion of philosophic knowledge and ascetic *technê* that most upset Nilus, yet gained “many” access to houses of the rich.<sup>17</sup>

The urban monastic phenomenon to which Nilus alludes here should also seem familiar to classicists. The earlier satirist Lucian had devoted an entire essay called *Domestic Servants Hired for a Wage* to ridiculing the so-called “house” philosophers of second-century Rome. Lucian details the humiliations these willingly endured (including continual attendance on doorsteps or in marketplaces) for wealthy patrons who wished merely to appear learned by having a philosopher in their entourage; such philosophers, he surmises, were driven to the profession and such patron-client relationships by poverty.<sup>18</sup> There were also “many,” he notes, who cloaked their ignorance in philosophic garb and, once given entry to houses, offered nothing more than quack prophecies and love-charms. Lucian com-

15 E.g., Martial *Epig.* 3.7, 38; Juvenal *Sat.* 1.95–134; Lucian *de Parasito*. For the aims of such satire, see Damon 1997 (esp. 3–8) and Cloud 1989.209–14.

16 See Krause 1987.6–67 (esp. 20–31) and Patlagean 1977.156–231.

17 Nilus *de Mon. Ex.* 8 (PG 79.728BC): ἐπιστήμην ἐπαγγέλεται τῷ φαινομένῳ σχήματι ἥς οὐδὲ ἄκροισ ἐγέυσσας τοῖς χεῖλεσι. In 21 (748C), he describes their claim to be qualified teachers as αἰσχροὺν ἀληθῶς.

18 Lucian *de Mercede Conductis* 10 (*salutatio*), 25 (*adsectatio*), 5 (poverty).

plains that patrons who were deceived by such frauds thereafter held all philosophers equally suspect of slavishly seeking gain (Lucian *de Merc. Cond.* 40).

Such was the historical background to the urban monastic phenomenon Nilus describes. Just as Lucian provides rare evidence for the phenomenon of “house” philosophers supported by urban aristocrats in his own day,<sup>19</sup> so, too, does Nilus provide a glimpse of the Christianized version of that same arrangement in later Roman cities, where ascetic exemplars now taught virtue in the monastic *schêma* rather than a philosophic *tribôn*, providing “in-house” spiritual edification to urban Christian patrons in return for material support. Though characterized by Nilus as a recent corruption in his profession (*de Mon. Ex.* 4–6 [PG 721C–24D]), this was a traditional, widespread, and mutually desired arrangement for supporting ascetic teachers of Christian virtue, as Jerome’s early career and letters attest. From his own testimony, it is evident that Nilus was aware that such monks were being actively sought by wealthy Christians for their spiritual services.<sup>20</sup> It was patronal encouragement that created the problems and fostered the urban monastic leaders Nilus was contending against in his *Ascetic Discourse*.

In fact, Nilus devotes much of his treatise to criticizing the “dementia” for spiritual leadership displayed by this ascetic *hoi polloi*.<sup>21</sup> Not only were they inadequately prepared to meet such a challenge, he also points out that their “ambitious pursuit” of reputation and spiritual leadership was more characteristic “of market hawkers than of teachers,” and showed them unfit for the honor of that name.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, he represents them as rising to the monastic profession from low social origins, and indicates that this was one reason monasticism had now become contemptible: for who would not ridicule a man who yesterday fetched water for a tavern, but today is seen strutting around the marketplace with disciples in tow, as if a “teacher of

19 For such “house” philosophers see Hahn 1989.150–53 and Damon 1997.235–51.

20 Besides the implications of *de Mon. Ex.* 9, see Nilus *Ep.* 2.46 (PG 79.217BC).

21 Nilus *de Mon. Ex.* 5 (PG 79.724C): νῦν ἡ τῶν πλέον δοξάζεσθαι φιλονεικούντων μανία. 33 (761B): οἱ πολλοὶ . . . μανίαν δεινὴν ἐπιδεικνύμενοι μὴ κίνδυνον τοῦτο ἡγούμενοι.

22 Nilus *de Mon. Ex.* 24 (PG 79.752C): τὸ πᾶν τῆς δόξης τιθέμενοι ἐν τῷ προεστάναι πλειόνων . . . ἔστιν ἄμιλλα . . . καπῆλων μᾶλλον ἢ διδασκάλων κατάστασιν ἐπιδεικνύμενοι. For their inadequate training, *de Mon. Ex.* 21–22, 31 (PG 79.748A–749B, 760AC).

virtue”?<sup>23</sup> Such men clearly had “no source of support from home.” As Lucian had assumed about house philosophers in his own day, Nilus surmises that urban monks have been driven to the profession by economic necessity. “I think they might pursue it with greater dignity (σεμνότερον),” he adds, “if they did not press themselves on everyone’s gates.”<sup>24</sup>

Such remarks reveal the outlook of a monk who had steeped himself in aristocratic sensibilities. If we take Nilus literally, his descriptions of the low *mores* and economic background of these urban monks provide fascinating examples of how monasticism and its patronage opened new venues for upward social mobility in late antiquity,<sup>25</sup> as well as the “elitist” response they could provoke. We actually know little about Nilus or his own social background.<sup>26</sup> His writings offer meager clues: he seems to identify with country monks who might go to court over border-rights, suggesting ownership of land,<sup>27</sup> and, at one point, he notes a suspicion that monks were feigning piety only to escape burdensome liturgies (λειτουργείας), a reference perhaps to curial duties and financial obligations.<sup>28</sup> The daydreams he admits to enjoying while praying include attending banquets, building houses for relatives, and being elevated to the priesthood by force.<sup>29</sup> But the only sure clue we have that Nilus’ original social background was indeed fairly high is the elevated style and erudition of his prose, the mark of an expensive, privileged education.<sup>30</sup> His repeated

23 Nilus *de Mon. Ex.* 22 (PG 79.749A): διὰ τοῦτο εὐκαταφρόνητος ὁ βίος ἐγένετο.

24 Nilus *de Mon. Ex.* 26 (PG 79.753C): εὐχερῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ μηδεμίαν οἴκοθεν ἔχόντων ὠφέλειαν ἐστὶ δὲ τὴν ἑτέρων ἀναδέχεσθαι προστασίαν, δηλον μὲν καὶ ἐκ τῆς πείρας. 9 (729B): ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἴσως τινὸς συνωσθέντες ἀκρίτως ἐπὶ τὸν μονήρη βίον . . . τοῦτο ἂν οἶμαι σεμνότερον μετέλθοιεν, εἰ μὴ ταῖς πάντων θύραις προσίενται.

25 See MacMullen 1964a.49.

26 As Cameron 1976 has demonstrated, Nilus’ correspondence cannot be taken as evidence of high social connections, despite numerous addresses to men of rank. Nonetheless, I think his letters to monks may be accepted as genuine, and one of these, *Ep.* 2.60 (PG 79.226C), suggests Nilus and his circle were on close terms with a *vir illustris* named Hero (otherwise unknown).

27 Clearly he is addressing these country monks as opposed to urban monks in *de Mon. Ex.* 10 (PG 79.729CD): ἡμεῖς δ’, ὦ ἀγαπητοί, οἱ πόθῳ τῆς ἀρετῆς . . . ἀποταξάμενοι τῷ βίῳ. See 12 (PG 79.732CD–733AB) for contestations over water-rights, pasturage, and other such matters.

28 Nilus *de Mon. Ex.* 7 (PG 79.728A): τὰς μὲν ἐπιπόνους λειτουργείας φύγωμεν, ἄδειαν δὲ ἀπολαύσεως πορισάμενοι. Cf. *Codex Theodosianus* 12.1.63 (issued 370 or 373).

29 Nilus *de Vol. Paup.* 22 (PG 79.997D); cf. *de Mon. Ex.* 32, 59, 68 (PG 79.760D–761A, 792BC, 801BC). These may be commonplaces, but, in his writings, such allusions noticeably pile up.

criticism of the low behavior and background of his urban monastic counterparts may partially reflect an aristocrat's disdain for *parvenus* who were joining his profession.

But Nilus' emphasis on social decorum certainly did not just reflect snobbery. It instead reflects his own concern for securing patronage and for creating a monastic elite who would know how to solicit patronage properly and deserve it. For these purposes, his disdainful description of urban monks serves mainly as a foil: "Why," he asks his readers, "do we who yearn for virtue share in the folly of those who pursue it so indecently (οὐ δεόντως)?"<sup>31</sup> Nilus expects his readers to practice manual labor, but he treats this mainly as a contemplative exercise, and likens those who pursue it solely for material support to unclean animals that "move about on their paws."<sup>32</sup> Much more does he advise anxious readers simply to leave the cities and remain set in tranquil isolation, so that

those who now run from us might be drawn back to us . . .  
for who wouldn't provide the necessities and even more  
for those who live in pious, dignified, and virtuous fashion?<sup>33</sup>

As he once assured the monk Maurianus in a letter, "if we remain tranquil in our monasteries persevering in prayer and psalms, and if we don't press upon the people of the world, then God will rouse those very people . . . and compel them to furnish our bodily needs gladly."<sup>34</sup>

The writings of Nilus of Ancyra thus reflect a monastic world that

30 For Nilus' literary style and background (including such authors as Aristotle, Achilles Tatius, even Vitruvius!), see Guérard 1994.46–47, 373–80.

31 Nilus *de Mon. Ex.* 10 (PG 79.729D); cf. 14 (737A), 15 (737AB), 63 (796CD).

32 Nilus *de Mon. Ex.* 14 (PG 79.736CD): ὅς πορεύεται ἐπὶ χειρῶν, ἀκάθαρτος . . . ἐπὶ χειρῶν δὲ πορεύεται ὁ ταῖς χερσὶν ἐπεριδόμενος (cf. Lev 11:27). In *de Vol. Paup.* 24 (1000C–1001A), he advocates manual labor to prevent monks from burdening others, while addressing monks who refuse to work at all. Otherwise he does not mention its material benefits; cf. *de Vol. Paup.* 26–29, 42 (PG 79.1001C–1005B, 1020C–1021AB); *Epp.* 1.310, 2.135, 3.101 (PG 79.196AB, 256D–257A, 432D).

33 Nilus *de Mon. Ex.* 20 (PG 79.745D); cf. 16 (741A), 17 (741B); *Ep.* 2.60 (225D–228A): τίς γὰρ δὴ οὐ . . . χωρηγήσει . . . τοῖς εὐσεβῶς καὶ σεμνῶς καὶ ἐναρέτως βιοῦσιν;

34 Nilus *Ep.* 3.58 (PG 79.417C): Ἐὰν ἡσυχάζωμεν . . . καὶ μὴ παρενοχλῶμεν τοῖς κοσμικοῖς, ὁ Θεὸς ἐκείνους αὐτοὺς φέρει πρὸς ἡμᾶς . . . καὶ ἀναγκάζει αὐτοὺς μετὰ προθυμίας ποιεῖν . . . χρείας.



was highly conditioned by anxieties about material support and competition for patronage. In this competition, Nilus was as masterful a player as Jerome. Both used their considerable literary skills to educate, promote, and represent a monastic elite whom interested patrons might find distinctive and more attractive than the mob commonly found on their doorsteps. Like Jerome, Nilus demonstrates the spiritual ignorance and other alleged shortcomings of his “more simplistic” urban competitors to his readers, while reminding them that a truly knowledgeable spiritual teacher is “rare and not easily found.” At the same time, his *Ascetic Discourse* amply exhibits his own expertise as an ascetic teacher and decoder of scriptural symbols.<sup>35</sup> There is in fact good reason to suspect Nilus intended this treatise, in part, to advertise his own superior merit as a Christian philosopher to potential patrons: for while the *Ascetic Discourse* has no dedication itself, its companion treatise, *On Voluntary Poverty*, is dedicated “to the most dignified deaconess Magna.” We know this aristocratic deaconess to have not only been an ascetic herself, but *the* leading patron of early fifth-century Ancyra.<sup>36</sup>

The late fourth and early fifth centuries were crucial for sorting out what traits qualified and identified monasticism’s elite. Despite the firm posture Nilus took against any pursuit of elite “worldly” status, he uses some rather traditional markers of that status (viz. his references to family wealth and dignified or decorous behavior) to state his case. Whatever this might tell us about his own social background, what matters is that Nilus was using a language that elite Greco-Roman patrons could understand.

The importance of wealthy patrons and their expectations in shaping late antique notions of holiness and “orthodox” monastic practice has only begun to be appreciated,<sup>37</sup> and the importance of literary monks like Nilus in forming expectations and guiding their patronage must not be taken for granted. Every elite needs effective spokespersons as well as a receptive and enduring audience in order to survive. Other authors in this period proved less successful in promoting their own conception of a monastic

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35 Nilus *de Mon. Ex.* 10–11 (PG 79.729CD–32A): πολλοὺς τῶν ἀπλουστέρων. 28 (756C–57A): σπάνιος δὲ ὁ τοιοῦτος, καὶ οὐ ῥαδίως εὕρισκόμενος. Nilus alerts the reader whenever he is performing exegesis: see 14, 16, 25–26, 28, 35–40, 52–57 (PG 79.736A–737A, 737D–741A, 752C–753D, 756C–757A, 764A–769B, 784B–789D).

36 Nilus *de Vol. Paup.* (PG 79.968): πρὸς τὴν σεμνοπρεπεστάτην Μάγναν διάκονον Ἀγκόρας. The allusion to *de Mon. Ex.* at the beginning of this treaty (968C) assumes Magna’s familiarity with it. For her probable identification with the Magna of Palladius’ *H. L.* 67, see Foss 1977.50–52.

37 See esp. Brown 1995 and 1998.373.

elite—most notably the anonymous author of the Syriac *Book of Degrees*. Writing at roughly the same time as Jerome and Nilus but to Christians beyond the Greco-Roman cultural domain, this author vigorously defended an elite class of ascetic “perfect” (*gemîrê*) who were to circulate as spiritual teachers through cities and villages, performing no manual labors, while remaining wholly dependent on local sympathizers for their sustenance. His literary effort seems to have reached only a small, troubled audience.<sup>38</sup> While he and the monastic elite he promoted slid into historical obscurity, the elite that Jerome and Nilus promoted became recognized as the norm. By directing patronage toward monks who lived outside cities and devoted themselves to prayer with a light regimen of corporeal labor and asceticism, these authors helped guide monastic history in that direction too.

*University of Connecticut*

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38 For an introduction to the *Liber Graduum*, its possible audience, and the ascetic “perfect,” see Kitchen 1998 and 1987. In comparison to its limited manuscript tradition, see the lengthy tradition that Nilus’ writings enjoyed: Heussi 1917.50. His *Ascetic Discourse* was selected for inclusion in the eighteenth-century *Philocalia*.