

3. Texts, authority and identities

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Shaping authority and identity: Saint Antony and his followers in early monastic texts

“It happened that temptation fell upon a brother in the monastery of abbot Elias, and they sent him away: and he came to the mountain, to abbot Antony. After he had been with him for some time, Antony sent him back to the community whence he had come out. But when they saw him, again they sent him away: and again he made his way to the abbot Antony, saying, ‘they would not receive me, Father’. Then the old man sent to them, saying, ‘A ship was wrecked at sea, and lost all the cargo that it carried, and with hard toil was the empty ship brought at last to land. Is it your wish to sink on land the ship that had come safe from sea?’ And they recognised that it was the abbot Antony who had sent him back and straightaway they took him in.”¹

This little story is illustrative of the status Antony achieved in late Antiquity: his opinions or answers were binding. His sayings were remembered by his fellow hermits and used when instructing their own pupils (*hoc enim dicebat beatus Antonius*).² Together with Paul of Thebes, Hilarion, Benedict and Martin of Tours he is the most appealing saint of late antiquity.³ Throughout the middle ages Antony remained one of the most authoritative and exemplary desert fathers. His sayings were incorporated in a lot of monastic and theological works and his life was regarded as exemplary. To quote Athanasius of Alexandria in the preface to his famous *Vita Antonii*: “to know who Antony was offers us the perfect path to virtue”.⁴ But who *was* Antony? Why did he become so important and how describe contemporary authors his authority? To what extent was his name used to increase the credibility and underline the identity of his pupils and contemporaries? Are there also negative views on Antony and if so, how were they received?

The answers to these questions can be found in several late antique texts. Athanasius’ *Vita Antonii* may be the oldest and longest written account, it is not the only source about Antony. Other texts, all belonging to the so called *Vitas* (sic!) *Patrum*-collections, inform us even better about the way Antony was looked at. The exact contents of these collections differ from time to time and from region to region, but until the seventh century they almost exclusively contained the *vitae* and say-

¹ Pelagius and John, *Adhortationes sanctorum patrum ad profectum perfectionis monachorum* 9, 1, in: *Vitae patrum. De vita et verbis seniorum libri X historiam eremiticam complectens VII* (ed. Heribert Rosweyde, Anvers 1628), repr. in PL 73, 851–1024, at 909; (transl. Helen Waddell, *The Desert Fathers*, London 1977) 81–185, at 135.

² For example: Paschasius of Dumio, *Liber Geronticon de octo principalibus vitiis* (A versão latina por Pascásio de Dume dos Apophthegmata patrum) XXXII, 7 (ed. José Geraldes Freire, 2 vols., Coimbra 1971) 216.

³ For example: Grimlaicus, *Regula solitariorum*, PL 103, 573–664, at 633; *Die Briefe des Petrus Damiani* 38 (ed. Kurt Reindel, MGH EE, *Die Briefe der deutschen Kaiserzeit* 4, 1, München 1983) 369; Guitmund of Aversa, *Oratio ad Guillelmum Anglorum*, PL 149, 1509–1525, at 1512; Othloh of St. Emmeran, *Libellus de tentationibus/Dialogus de suis tentationibus*, PL 146, 23–61, at 45–46; *Das Register Gregors VII., Teil 2, V–IX*, 8, 21 (ed. Erich Caspar, MGH EE *selectae* 2, 2, Berlin 1923); Ambrosius Autpertus, *De conflictu vitiorum et virtutum* (ed. Robert Weber, *Ambrosii Autperti Opera* 3, CC CM 27B, Turnhout 1979) 909–931, at 930; See also: Jean Leclercq, *Saint Antoine dans la tradition monastique médiévale*, in: *Antonius Magnus Eremita 356–1956*, ed. Basilius Steidle (*Studia Anselmiana* 38, Roma 1956) 229–248.

⁴ This quote is taken from the latin translation by Evagrius of Antioch: Athanasius Alexandrinus, *Vita Antonii*, Evagrius interprete, Prologus (ed. Pascal H.E. Bertrand, Utrecht 2005) 160: *perfecta est siquidem ad uirtutem uia, Antonium scire quis fuerit*; (ed. and transl. Carolinne White, *Life of Antony by Athanasius*, *Early Christian Lives*, London etc. 1998) 1–71, at 8.

ings of the early Christian desert fathers.⁵ Most of the texts of the early *Vitas patrum*-tradition were originally written in Greek and afterwards translated into Latin. This article focusses on this Latin tradition. The historical credibility of the texts or the relationship between these texts and their Greek originals (if applicable) will not be discussed, as these two aspects do not play a role in their reception history of Antony's philosophy and the way in which he is portrayed. Before trying to answer the questions asked above, the sources used in this article will be briefly introduced.

SOURCES – A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

All texts concerning Antony were written down after his death in 356. A lot of them include oral traditions that already existed during Antony's life or came into circulation shortly after the desert father passed away. Therefore it is possible to compare the views on Antony in these texts with each other, although some of them were written down several decades after Antony's death. The *Vitae patrum*-texts can be divided into three groups:

- *Vitae*: The *Vita Antonii*, written in Greek by Athanasius of Alexandria shortly after Antony's death in 356, is the most famous and exhaustive source for Antony's life.⁶ In writing the *Vita Antonii* Athanasius did not have the intention to be completely objective. He used this hagiographical form and the saint to ventilate much of his own -especially anti-Arian- theology.⁷ Athanasius' text was translated into Latin twice. A first -anonymous- translation was made shortly after Athanasius finished his Greek original. Only one complete copy of this translation survived.⁸ The second translation was made by Evagrius of Antioch in 373. His translation became very popular in the medieval west: the text has been handed down in hundreds of manuscripts.⁹ Evagrius did not intend to make a literal translation.¹⁰ On many occasions Evagrius interfered with the contents of the Greek original. He included quotes from great classical authors and often altered Antony's ideas about the tricks of the devil and the way in which the devil can be defeated.¹¹

⁵ Eva Schulz-Flügel, *Zur Entstehung der Corpora Vitae patrum*, in: *Studia Patristica* 20 (Leuven 1989) 289–300. This article gives an overview of the history of *Vitas patrum* from the fifth until the ninth century. From the seventh century – and especially from the ninth century – onwards the contents of *Vitas patrum* have been extended several times. A preliminary overview of the history of *Vitas patrum* from the fourth until the sixteenth century is part of my dissertation.

⁶ See for more information: Athanase d'Alexandrie, *Vie d'Antoine* (ed. Gerard Bartelink, SC 400, Paris 1994). This edition gives an detailed introduction to the subject and includes an exhaustive list of literature.

⁷ See the introduction to the new edition of the Greek text: Athanasius Alexandrinus, *Vita Antonii*, ed. Bartelink 42 and 59–61.

⁸ The anonymous latin translation has been edited three times. The last edition appeared in 1971: Athanasius Alexandrinus, *Vita di Antonio* (ed. Gerard Bartelink, *Vite dei Santi* 1, Roma 1974). See this edition for the earlier editions and literature on this translation.

⁹ Hardly any work has been done yet on this translation. In 2005 I have finished a dissertation on the reception history and the manuscript tradition of this translation, including a new edition. The complete text is available at: <http://igitur-archive.library.uu.nl/dissertations/2006-0221-200251/index.htm>. A commercial edition is in preparation.

¹⁰ Athanasius, *Vita Antonii*, prologus Evagrii, ed. Bertrand 160: *Ex alia in aliam linguam ad uerbum expressa translatio, sensus operit et ueluti laeto gramine sata strangulat. Dum enim casibus et figuris seruit oratio, quod breui poterat indicare sermone, longo ambitu circumacta uix explicat. Hoc igitur ego uitans ita beatum Antonium te petente transposui, ut nihil desit ex sensu, cum aliquid desit ex uerbis. Alii syllabas aucupentur et litteras, tu quaere sententiam.* (The life of Antony, transl. White 7: "A literal translation made from one language to another conceals the meaning, like rampant grasses which suffocate the crops. As long as the text keeps to the cases and turns of phrase, it is forced to move in an indirect way by means of lengthy circumlocutions, and it finds it hard to give a clear account of something which could be succinctly expressed. I have tried to avoid this in translating, as you requested, the life of the blessed Antony, and I have translated in such a way that nothing should be lacking from the sense although something may be missing from the words. Some people try to capture the syllables and letters, but you must seek the meaning").

¹¹ Bernd Voss, *Bemerkungen zu Euagrius von Antiochien, Vergil und Sallust in der Vita Antonii*, in: *Vigiliae Christianae* 21 (1967) 93–102; Gerard Bartelink, *Einige Bemerkungen über Evagrius' von Antiochiens Übersetzung der Vita Antonii*, in: *Revue Bénédictine* 82 (1972) 98–105.

Next to the *Vita Antonii* the saint plays an important role in two *vitae* written by Jerome: the *Vita Pauli* (written in 373) and the *Vita Hilarionis* (written in 391).¹² These two *vitae* will be discussed at the end of this article.

– *Historiae*: The *historiae* present short descriptions of the lives and sayings of the desert fathers in the form of an eyewitness report. Very often these reports contain stories about other saints (including Antony) told by these fathers. For many hermits these *historiae* are the only sources about their lives. Only two texts belong to this group: the *Historia monachorum in Aegypto* and the *Historia Lausiaca*. The *Historia monachorum in Aegypto* was written in Greek in the second half of the fourth century by an anonymous author. In circa 395 Tyrannius Rufinus of Aquileia made a translation into Latin.¹³ The *Historia monachorum* describes a journey made by seven monks from Palestine through Egypt to visit the desert fathers living there. The text describes 28 fathers and three monastic settlements.

The *Historia Lausiaca* was written in circa 420 in Greek by Palladios of Helenopolis. Palladios (circa 363–431) was an Egyptian monk. He wrote his account of desert monasticism for Lausus, a chamberlain at the court of the eastern Roman emperor Theodosius II. In his work he describes about sixty ascetics. His information is based on his own experience, on conversations he had with other monks and on writings of others, including the *Vita Antonii*. Palladios' text has been handed down in a long and a shortened version. The shortened version is known as *Heraclidis Paradisus* and is wrongly attributed to Heraclides Alexandrinus. Both versions were translated into Latin by anonymous translators: the long version in the fifth century, the shortened some decades later.¹⁴ For the larger part the *historiae* contain information about Antony and his pupils that cannot be found in the *vita*.

– *Collections of Sayings*: Next to these *vitae* and *historiae* several collections of sayings exist. Most of the time these sayings are very short and contain only a sentence of a father or an answer to a question. Sometimes the sayings developed into little stories. An example of this last kind of Saying can be found at the beginning of this article. Almost all Sayings contain lessons in humility, persistence, obedience, nutrition, prayer, demons, forgiveness etc. The Greek originals mostly depend on oral traditions and were probably written down in the fifth century.¹⁵ In the second half of the sixth century several Greek collections were translated into Latin. These collections of sayings contain important information about the way Antony was looked at and the way in which others used his name. There are four important Latin collections of Sayings:

The *Adhortationes sanctorum patrum ad profectum perfectionis monachorum*, translated by pope Pelagius I and pope John III, between 540 and 555.¹⁶ This collection contains over 750 sayings.

¹² Hieronymus, *Vita Pauli* (ed. Domenico Vallarsi, *S. Hieronymi opera omnia*, Verona 21766–1772), (ed. Vincent Hunink, Leuven 2002); Hieronymus, *Vita sancti Hilarionis* (ed. Antonius Bastiaensen/Johannes Smit, *Vite dei santi del III al VI secolo* 4, Roma 1975) 70–143.

¹³ Greek text: *Historia monachorum in Aegypto* (ed. André Festugière, *Subsidia Hagiographica* 53, Bruxelles 1961); Latin text: Tyrannius Rufinus, *Historia monachorum sive de vita sanctorum patrum* (ed. Eva Schulz-Flügel, *Patristische Texte und Studien* 34, Berlin 1990).

¹⁴ Palladio, *La storia Lausiaca* (ed. Christine Mohrmann/Gerard Bartelink, *Vite dei Santi* 2, Roma 1974). See also Cuthbert Butler, *The Lausiaca History of Palladius. A critical discussion together with notes on early Egyptian monachism*, 2 vols. (Cambridge 1898, repr. Hildesheim 1967); The latin translations have not been edited since Rosweyde in 1615: *Vitae patrum. De vita et verbis seniorum libri X historiam eremiticam complectens* (ed. Heribert Rosweyde, Anvers 1615, Lyon 1617, Anvers 1628). Rosweyde's edition has been reprinted by Migne in PL 73 and 74. Rosweyde included three editions of the latin text as part of his edition of *Vitae patrum*. Only the edition included as appendix I (*Heraclidis Paradisus*) is somewhat reliable: Heraclides Alexandrinus, *Heraclidis Paradisus*, in: *Vitae patrum. De vita et verbis seniorum libri X historiam eremiticam complectens. Appendix I ad Vitas patrum* (ed. Heribert Rosweyde, Anvers 31628), repr. in PL 74, 243–342. For want of anything better this edition is used for this article.

¹⁵ See for more information about the Greek tradition: Jean-Claude Guy, *Recherches sur la tradition grecque des Apophthegmata patrum* (*Subsidia Hagiographica* 36, Bruxelles 1962).

¹⁶ Pelagius and John, *Adhortationes*, ed. Rosweyde (see note 1). Rosweyde's edition is corrupted and incomplete. Columba Battle, 'Vetera Nova'. Vorläufige kritische Ausgabe bei Rosweyde fehlender Vätersprüche, in: *Festschrift Bernhard Bischoff zu seinem 65. Geburtstag dargebracht von Freunden, Kollegen und Schülern*, ed. Johanne Autenrieth/Franz Brunhölzl (Stuttgart 1971) 32–42, has published some missing sayings; see also Battle's study about this collection of

- About 556 Paschasius of Dumio made a new translation of sayings at the request of Martinus of Braga. Paschasius' collection (the *Liber geronticon de octo principalibus vitiis*) contains 358 sayings.
- Around the same time as Paschasius, Martinus of Braga himself translated 109 sayings in his *Sententiae patrum Aegyptiorum*.¹⁷
- The anonymous *Commonitiones sanctorum patrum*, translated in the sixth century by an anonymous author, is the last large collection of sayings. The Greek original of this collection is lost.¹⁸

SHAPING AUTHORITY

Antony's extraordinary way of life and his persistence was one of the reasons for the high status he got in late antiquity and the Middle Ages. In his *Vita Antonii*, Athanasius tried very hard to show Antony's outstanding virtues and perseverance. At the beginning of the text Athanasius describes how Antony became a pupil of several ascetics: 'He obeyed all those whom he visited in his eagerness to learn and absorbed their various individual gifts – striving to imitate the self-restraint of one, the cheerfulness of another; emulating the gentleness of one, the nocturnal devotions of another, the assiduousness in reading of another; admiring one who fasted, another who slept on the bare ground and praising the endurance of one and the compassion of another. He kept in mind the love they all showed one another and he would return to his own place refreshed by every aspect of their virtues. There he would think all these things over and strive to imitate the good points of each of them. He was never provoked to anger, not even against those of the same age: the only fire that burned in the heart of that exceptional man was that of his determination to appear second to none in the deeds I have mentioned'. Athanasius presents Antony as the most important hermit of all: 'he surpassed all other in glory'.¹⁹

The *Vita Antonii* contains the main outlines of Antony's way of life and his teaching: live a life according to Scripture (especially the Gospels), trust your life completely to God's hands, do not care for earthly wealth or pleasures, be patient, forgiving, obedient and sympathetic, always try to improve yourself, be aware of the never-ending attacks and tricks of the devil and above all: be persistent. Although Athanasius did not write an objective vita and has often inserted his own ideas about asceticism, these ideas can also be found in the sayings attributed to Antony. As mentioned before, the sayings do not depend on Athanasius' text. However, these ideas are not new: they derive from

sayings: Columba Battle, *Die Adhortationes sanctorum patrum (Verba seniorum) im lateinischen Mittelalter (Beiträge zur Geschichte des alten Mönchtums und des Benediktinerordens 31, Münster 1972)*.

¹⁷ The collections of Paschasius and Martinus have been handed down in a longer and a shortened version. Editions: Paschasius of Dumio, *Geronticon*, ed. Freire [= long version]; Paschasius Diaconus, *Verba seniorum*, in: *Vitae patrum. De vita et verbis seniorum libri X historiam eremiticam complectens VII* (ed. Heribert Rosweyde, Anvers ³1628), repr. in PL 73, 1025–1066 [= shortened version]; Martinus of Braga, *Aegyptiorum patrum sententiae* (ed. Claude Barlow, Martini Episcopi Bracaraensis Opera Omnia, New Haven 1950) [= long version]; Martinus of Braga, *Aegyptiorum patrum sententiae*, in: *Vitae patrum. De vita et verbis seniorum libri X historiam eremiticam complectens. Appendix ad Vitas patrum* (ed. Heribert Rosweyde, Anvers ³1628), repr. in PL 74, 381–394 [= shortened version]. In this article only the complete versions are used.

¹⁸ *Commonitiones sanctorum patrum. Uma nova coleção de apotegmas* (ed. José Galdes Freire, Coimbra 1974). In the tenth century a new large collection of sayings came into circulation, attributed to Rufinus. This collection does not contain new material, but is completely based on the *Commonitiones sanctorum patrum*, the *Geronticon* of Paschasius of Dumio and a letter of Jerome. The collection of Pseudo-Rufinus has been edited by Heribert Rosweyde: *Vitae patrum. De vita et verbis seniorum libri X historiam eremiticam complectens III* (ed. Heribert Rosweyde, Anvers ³1628), repr. in PL 73, 739–814; see for a short description of this collection: José Galdes Freire, *Traductions latines des Apophthegmata patrum*, in: *Mélanges Christine Mohrmann. Nouveau Recueil offert par ses anciens élèves*, ed. Joseph Ysebaert et al. (Utrecht 1973) 164–171, at 166–167. In this article Freire also discusses some other smaller collections of sayings. In these collections Antony is not mentioned, apart from the so called 'Appendix', a small collection of sayings that Rosweyde wrongly inserted as part of his *Palladii Lausiaca = Vitae patrum. De vita et verbis seniorum libri X historiam eremiticam complectens. Appendix 2, 20*, in: *Vitae patrum. De vita et verbis seniorum libri X historiam eremiticam complectens. Appendix II ad Vitas patrum* (ed. Heribert Rosweyde, Anvers ³1628), repr. in PL 74, 377–382. The 'Appendix' contains one saying of Antony, PL 74, 380.

¹⁹ Athanasius, *Vita Antonii* 4, ed. Bertrand 161; *Life of Antony* 4, transl. White 10f.

asceticism, stoicism and the *via apostolica* and they had already existed long before Antony was even born.²⁰ These philosophies were not reserved to Antony, but they were practised by all the desert fathers; the *Vitas patrum* contain numerous stories and sayings from different desert monks in which these ways of life have been incorporated. Apparently Antony's philosophy and sayings were important not only because of their contents, but because of the fact that they were his. This authority is not only based on the fame Antony got by Athanasius' *vita*.

From the early tradition of the *Vitas patrum* it is clear that already in the fourth and fifth century Antony was regarded to be the most important desert father of all. A first indication of Antony's special status can be derived from the honorary titles he received. The *Historia Lausiaca* refers to him as *ille magnus Antonius*.²¹ Although the title 'magnus' is also used to denote other important desert fathers, Antony is the most important of them being the 'father of monasticism' (*Sanctus ac beatissimus Antonius, verus in Christo pater monachorum*).²² The reason for this title is described in the *Vita Antonii*: although Antony was not the first Christian ascetic, he was the first one to found Christian communities in the desert.²³ In the reception history of Antony this aspect plays an important role; Paul of Thebes is venerated as the first christian hermit that lived in the desert, Antony is regarded the first one to build monasteries and instruct pupils there.²⁴

Antony's way of life was a measuring rod for his fellow hermits and pupils. According to the *Vita* he surpassed his fellow hermits in the austere way in which lived his life: "He decided therefore to impose upon himself the constraints of a more rigorous rule of life and even though everyone was amazed at this young man's untiring dedication, he patiently endured the holy endeavour, because the long-term exertion of voluntary servitude to God would transform habit into nature."²⁵ Although it is possible that Athanasius exaggerated Antony's virtues for the benefit of his beloved subject, it is clear that Antony's way of living, his degree of perfection and his successful struggle with the demons were very important elements of his authority and veneration. Examples of this can also be found outside the *Vita Antonii*, for example in the *Geronticon* of Paschasius of Dumio and the anonymous *Commonitiones sanctorum patrum*.²⁶

²⁰ A large part of Antony's sayings contain elements of these philosophies. See for example Pelagius and John, *Adhortationes* I, 2; II, 2; IV, 1; V, 1; VI, 1; VII, 1; VIII, 2; IX, 1; X, 1, PL 73, 855, 858, 864, 873, 888, 893, 905, 909, 912; Paschasius, *Geronticon* XXIX, 5, XXV, 1, XXXII, 1, LXX, 2, LXXIII, 1, LXXVI, 4, LXXXVIII, 6, LXXXVIII, 8, ed. Freire 200, 201, 213–214, 290, 296, 302, 312, 313; Martinus, *Sententiae* 54 and 55, ed. Barlow 43; See also Athanasius Alexandrinus, *Vita Antonii*, ed. Bartelink 48–53; See also Étienne Bettencourt, *L'idéal religieux de saint Antoine et son actualité*, in: *Antonius Magnus Eremita 356–1956*, ed. Basilus Steidle (*Studia Anselmiana* 38, Roma 1956), 45–66, at 45–58; Karl Suso Frank, *Geschichte des christlichen Mönchtums* (Darmstadt 1993) 2–7; Gerard Bartelink, *De bloeiende woestijn. De wereld van het vroege monachisme* (Baarn 1993) 11–22; George Zarnecki, *The Monastic Achievement* (New York 1972) 11; Ernst Troeltsch, *Askese*, in: *Askese und Mönchtum in der alten Kirche*, ed. Karl Suso Frank (Darmstadt 1975) 69–91, at 70–76; André Bremond, *Der Mönch und der Stoiker*, in: *ibid.* 91–107; Georg Kretschmar, *Ein Beitrag zur Frage nach dem Ursprung frühchristlicher Askese*, in: *ibid.* 129–183.

²¹ Palladios, *Historia Lausiaca* II and IX, PL 74, 261 and 281–283.

²² The title 'magnus' can be found in connection to other hermits, see for example: Pelagius and John, *Adhortationes* I, 11 and III, 18, PL 73 856 and 1014; Palladios, *Historia Lausiaca* IX, PL 74, 265; Antony is regarded to be the most important desert father of all: *Commonitiones* V, 1, ed. Freire 379; Antony's honorary *pater monachorum* has been adopted by some medieval authors, for example: Cassiodorus Vivariensis, *De institutione divinarum litterarum* V (ed. Roger A.B. Mynors, Oxford 1961, repr. with corrections of the edition Oxford 1937) 22; Pseudo-Augustin, *Ad fratres in eremo commorantes* 17, PL 40, 1233–1358, at 1263; Ado of Vienne, *Martyrologium* 17 Jan., PL 123, 139–436, at 216.

²³ Cf. Conrad Leyser, *Authority and Asceticism from Augustine to Gregory the Great* (Oxford 2000) 8f.

²⁴ For example: Isidor of Sevilla, *Chronicon* (ed. Theodor Mommsen, MGH AA 9, Berlin 1894) 420–488, at 463; *Decius regnat anno I. Huius temporibus sanctus Antonius monachus in Aegypto docetur exortus, a quo primum monasteria condita sunt*; Hrabanus Maurus, *Martyrologium* (ed. John McCulloh, CC CM 44, Turnhout 1979) 1–161, at 8; *Natale Pauli primi anachoretiae, cuius vitam beatus Hieronymus scripsit, qui a XVI aetatis suae anno usque ad CXIII solus in heremo perman- sit, sed a Domino per coruum pastus, tonica palmarum foliis contexta usus est. Cuius inter apostolorum et prophetarum choros animam ad caelum ferri ab angelis Antonius vidit*.

²⁵ Athanasius, *Vita Antonii* 7, ed. Bertrand 162f.; The life of Antony 7, transl. White 13.

²⁶ For example: Paschasius, *Geronticon* 31, 4, ed. Freire 212; Pelagius and John, *Adhortationes* 7, 34, PL 73, 901; Paschasius, *Geronticon* 32, 2, ed. Freire 214; See also Pelagius and John, *Adhortationes* XVII, 3, PL 73, 973; *Commonitiones* V, 8, ed. Freire 389.

There are only two desert fathers that equal Antony: Paul the Simple and Hilarion. Both desert fathers were pupils of Antony. It seems that the presentation of Hilarion by Jerome is coloured by political motives. The *Vita Hilarionis* will be discussed at the end of this article. Paul the Simple is described as being mentally retarded, but completely humble, obedient, forgiving and patient. After he caught his wife in adultery, he left her and wanted to be a monk. So he went to Antony. After a while Paul even obtained the power to drive out demons, which was put to the test by Antony. The following story, taken from the *Historia Lausiaca*, illustrates Paul's extraordinary status in relation to Antony. One day a demoniac was brought to Antony: "So Antony, having examined him, said to those who brought him: 'this is not my work, for I have not yet been counted worthy of power over this order of high rank, but this is Paul's business'. So Antony went off and led them to Paul, and said to him: 'Father Paul, cast out this demon from the man that he may go away cured to his home'. Paul said to him: 'What are you doing?' Antony said to him: 'I have no leisure, I have something else to do.' And Antony left him and went again to his own cell. So the old man got up, and having prayed an effective prayer, addressed the demoniac: 'Father Antony has said: 'Go out from the man''. But the demon cried out, saying with blasphemies: 'I am not going out, bad old man'. So Paul took his sheepskin coat and struck the man on the back with it saying: 'Father Antony has said, 'Go out'. Again the demon cursed with some violence both Antony and him. Finally he said to him: 'You are going out; or else I'll go and tell Christ. By Jesus, if you don't go out I am going this very minute to tell Christ, and He will do you harm ...'. The demon still refused to go. Only after Paul had sworn to Jesus that he would not leave, drink or eat until He helped him, the demon fled, crying: "O Violence! I am being driven away. The simplicity of Paul drives me away, and where am I to go?"²⁷ In this case -and only this case- a pupil excelled his teacher: the demon was not driven away by Antony or by his name, but by Paul's simplicity.

SHAPING IDENTITY

The authors of the *Historia monachorum* and the *Historia Lausiaca* often declare that they have met pupils or contemporaries of Antony. These references can be interpreted as geographic indications or as indicating a time frame (the fathers lived in the same area and in approximately the same time as Antony did). Especially Palladius, the author of the *Historia Lausiaca*, was very keen to mention that some hermits he talked to were pupils of Antony, or at least known to him. Palladius tells a story about Jacob who was also known under the name Claudus. The author states that this fact is true, as Antony knew both names: *Fuit autem is quoque notus beato Antonio*.²⁸ According to Palladius, Isidore told a story that he once heard of Antony: "Blessed Isidore the xenodochus told me that he had met the blessed Antony and heard from him a story worthy of being put into writing".²⁹ The same goes for a story told by Cronius (*Hoc quoque narravit Cronius illa nocte magnum eis narasse Antonium*).³⁰

Mentioning Antony's name not only increases the status of his pupils and contemporaries and the credibility of the story told, there is a more important reason to mention his name: it links his pupils, contemporaries and successors together. Antony's name is an important addition as it emphasizes their identity: it indicates that originally they all belong (or want to belong) to the same spiritual community founded by Antony.³¹ This link to Antony's spirituality and his community is especially

²⁷ Antony's Disciples: Paul the Simple, in: *Medieval saints. A Reader* (transl. Mary-Ann Stouck, Readings in Medieval Civilizations and Cultures 4, Peterborough 1999) 83–87, at 86; Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* X, PL 74, 284–287; cf. Rufinus, *Historia monachorum* XXXI, ed. Schulz-Flügel 378–382.

²⁸ Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* XII, PL 74, 289.

²⁹ Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* I, PL 74, 253: *Sanctus iste Isidorus, qui benedictum quondam vidit Antonium, dignam rem memoria retulit mihi, quam ab ipso se dicebat audisse*. Transl. Benedict Baker: <http://www.vitae-patrum.org.uk>.

³⁰ Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* IX, PL 74, 283. There is a similar example in Pelagius and John, *Adhortationes* I, 11, PL 73, 856: *sed tamen audivi quia interrogavit unus Parum abbatem Nisteronem magnum, qui erat amicus abbatis Antonii*.

³¹ Rufinus, *Historia monachorum* VIII, 2; XXV, 5, 2; XXVI, 6, 1; XXVIII, 1, 1–1, 2; XXXI, ed. Schulz-Flügel 333, 362, 363, 365, 378–382; Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* II and X, PL 74, 259–260 and 284–287; *Commonitiones* V, 2, ed. Freire

important for his successors. In his *Historia Lausiaca*, Palladios explicitly connects two desert fathers to Antony. According to him Antony was first succeeded by Ammon, who – in his turn – was succeeded by Pityrion (*tertius qui illum locum excepit*). A similar example can be found in connection to the mountain on which Antony spent a large part of his life. It would always carry his name, as a geographical specification.³² For one father in particular this mountain had a special meaning: Sisoios. When Sisoios heard that Antony had passed away, he came to live on Antony's mountain. The mountain almost became his middle name: "Sisoios, living on Antony's mountain", "A certain father came to Sisoios when he was living on Antony's mountain" and so on.³³ Sisoios is presented as a heir of Antony's authority; he is identified with him. Just as visitors came to Antony 'on his mountain', they now came to Sisoios 'living on Antony's mountain'. According to the *Vita Antonii*, Antony saw the spirit of Amon when this great desert father had passed away.³⁴ In the *Vita Pauli* (see below), Antony saw how a choir of angels, prophets and apostles, accompanies the spirit of Paul of Thebes to heaven. When Sisoios was going to die he saw the spirit of Antony, the prophets and a choir of angels who were going to accompany him. Sisoios was almost presented as a second Antony. Almost: according to Sisoios himself he was not nearly as perfect as his predecessor: "A brother came to Abba Sisois in Abba Antony's mountain and in the course of conversation he asked: 'Do you think you have now arrived where Abba Antony got to, father?' And he replied: 'If even one of my thoughts were like those of Abba Antony I would by now have become like fire all through.'" ³⁵ Although his pupils and successors are closely connected to him, Antony stayed the most perfect and most important desert father of all.

RESTORING AUTHORITY AND IDENTITY: JEROME AND HIS *VITA HILARIONIS*

This inviolable status Antony achieved also played an important role in the reception history of the *Vita Pauli*. Jerome wrote this *vita* between 373 and 378. The text describes a visit Antony paid to Paul of Thebes who – according to Jerome – was the first Christian hermit. Jerome claims that he heard the story from Amathas and Macarius who assisted Antony in his old age. As Antony's life had already been written down in Greek and Latin, Jerome decided to write the *Life of Paul*.³⁶ The *Vita Pauli* gives a very negative view on Antony. According to this text Antony thought he was the only hermit in the desert. In the manuscript tradition of the *Vita Pauli* this part of the text has sometimes been changed: Antony does not think he is the only hermit, but he believes to be the best hermit there is. There has been scholarly debate about the original text by Jerome. The punishment by God, showing Antony there is another hermit who in fact is better than he is, allows both variants. Nevertheless, they both put Antony in the wrong. In writing this *vita* Jerome tried to surpass the success of Athanasius' work.³⁷

380; Pelagius and John, *Adhortationes* XVIII, 20, PL 73, 985; Paschasius, *Geronticon* LVII, 4, ed. Freire 276; cf. the introduction of Athanasius Alexandrinus, *Vita Antonii*, ed. Bartelink 61–62; especially Macarius of Egypt and Paul the Simple attained a very special status: Rufinus, *Historia monachorum* XXVIII, 1, 1–1, 2, ed. Schulz-Flügel 365; Pelagius and John, *Adhortationes* VII, 9, PL 73, 894.

³² Palladios, *Historia Lausiaca* IX, PL 74, 280; Pelagius and John, *Adhortationes* VII, 9; IX, 1; XI, 50; XVII, 4, PL 73, 894, 909, 940, 973.

³³ Paschasius, *Geronticon* XXXII, 1, ed. Freire 224; Pelagius and John, *Adhortationes* IV, 26; XVI, 44; III, 13; III, 6, PL 73, 869, 962, 1003, 1007; Paschasius, *Geronticon* LII, 4, ed. Freire 261.

³⁴ Athanasius, *Vita Antonii* 60, ed. Bertrand 180. The same story is included in Rufinus, *Historia monachorum* XXX, 1, 1 and 3, 8, ed. Schulz-Flügel 375 and 378, and Palladios, *Historia Lausiaca* II, PL 74, 258.

³⁵ Pelagius and John, *Adhortationes* XVI, 44, PL 73, 962: *Venit quidam frater ad abbatem Sisoii in montem abbatis Antonii; et loquentibus eis, dicebat abbati Sisoii: Modo adhuc non pervenisti ad mensuras abbatis Antonii, Pater? Et respondit ei senex: Ego si haberem unam cogitationem abbatis Antonii, efficerer totus velut ignis.* Transl. Baker: <http://www.vitae-patrum.org.uk>.

³⁶ Hieronymus, *Vita Pauli* I, ed. Hunink 4: *Igitur quia de Antonio tam Graeco quam Romano stilo diligenter memoriae traditum est, pauca de Pauli principio et fine scribere disposui, magis quia res omissa erat quam fretus ingenio.*

³⁷ Cf. Benjamin Kurtz, *From St. Antony to St. Guthlac. Studies in biography*, in: *University of California Publications in Modern Philology* 12, 2 (1926) 103–146, at 130–131; Georg Jenal, *Italia ascetica atque monastica. Das Asketen- und*

The Vita Pauli tells us that when Paul was one hundred and thirteen years old, the ninety year-old Antony was living in another part of the desert. It occurred to Antony that there was no other (or better) monk in the desert. But during the night God revealed to him that there was another monk in the desert who was better than himself: Paul of Thebes. God wanted Antony to pay Paul a visit. After a long and dangerous journey, Antony reached Paul's cell. Paul however was not prepared to let him in straightaway: "Then Antony fell down in front of this door and continued to beg to be allowed in until it was the sixth hour of the day or even later, saying, 'You know who I am, where I come from and why I have come. I know that I do not deserve to see you but I will not go away unless I do. Why do you, who welcome animals, drive a person away? I have sought you and I have found you: I knock that it may be opened to me. If I do not get what I want, I shall die here in front of your door – and I trust you will bury my body when I am dead'"³⁸ Finally Paul let him in and they had supper. When Paul felt that he was going to die he sent Antony back to his cell to catch a cloak Antony got from Athanasius in order to bury Paul's body in it. When his pupils asked him where he had been all that time, Antony answered: "Alas for me, sinner that I am. It is dishonest of me to call myself a monk. I have seen Elijah, I have seen John in the desert and now I have seen Paul in Paradise".³⁹ After Paul's death Antony "returned to the monastery and gave the disciples a detailed account of all that happened, and on the feast days of Easter and Pentecost he always wore Paul's tunic".⁴⁰

Some twenty years after he finished the Vita Pauli, Jerome wrote his Vita Hilarionis. In the prologue to this Vita Jerome says: "That is why, in taking up the work begun by Epiphanius I do him a service rather than any harm and I disregard what the critics say of it, for those who earlier found fault with my life of Paul will now perhaps also find fault with my life of Hilarion. If they criticize Paul for his solitude, they will criticize Hilarion for his sociability, believing that because Paul always remained out of sight he did not exist and because Hilarion was seen by many he should be regarded as of no importance".⁴¹ However, the lack of historical reliability in the Vita Pauli does not seem to be the real reason for the criticism Jerome encountered. Most medieval chronicles and martyrologies refer to Paul of Thebes, without question.⁴² Monastic texts mostly mention both Paul as well as Antony as being the great examples for Christian life.⁴³ The historical reliability of Paul has

Mönchtum in Italien von den Anfängen bis zur Zeit der Langobarden, ca. 150/250–604 (Monographien zur Geschichte des Mittelalters 39, Stuttgart 1995) 346–350; Julius Plesch, Die Originalität und literarische Form der Mönchsbiographien des hl. Hieronymus (München 1910) 40–55, esp. 51–55; Manfred Fuhrmann, Die Mönchsgeschichten des Hieronymus. Formexperimente in erzählender Literatur, in: Christianisme et formes littéraires de l'antiquité tardive en occident. Huit exposés suivi de discussions. Entretiens préparés et présidés par Manfred Fuhrmann (Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique 23, Genève 1976) 41–58; Antonius Bastiaensen, Jérôme hagiographe, in: Hagiographies 1. Histoire internationale de la littérature hagiographique latine et vernaculaire en Occident des origines à 1550 (Bruxelles 1994) 97–123.

³⁸ Hieronymus, Vita Pauli 9, ed. Hunink 15–17; (ed. and transl. Carolinne White, Jerome, Life of Paul of Thebes, Early Christian Lives, London 1998) 71–85, at 80.

³⁹ Hieronymus, Vita Pauli 13, ed. Hunink 21; transl. White 82.

⁴⁰ Hieronymus, Vita Pauli 16, ed. Hunink 25; transl. White 83.

⁴¹ Hieronymus, Vita Hilarionis, ed. Bastiaensen/Smit 72: *Unde et nos favore magis illius, quam iniuria coeptum ab eo opus aggredientes, maledictorum voces contemnimus: qui olim detrahentes Paulo meo, nunc forte detrahent et Hilarioni: illum solitudinis calumniati, huic obuiientes frequentiam: ut qui latuit, non fuisse; qui a multis visus est, vilis existimetur;* (ed. and transl. Carolinne White, Life of Hilarion by Jerome, Early Christian Lives, London 1998) 85–117, at 89.

⁴² For example: Hrabanus Maurus, Martyrologium (see note 24); Prosper Tiro, Epitoma Chronicon (ed. Theodor Mommsen, MGH AA 9, Berlin 1892) 341–486, at 455: *Antonius monachus centesimo aetatis anno in heremo moritur, solitus multis ad se venientibus de Paulo quodam Thebeo mirae beatitudinis viro referre complura;* Florus, Martyrologium (ed. Jacques Dubois/Genevieve Renaud, Paris 1976) 11: *Natale Pauli primi eremitae: qui a sexto decimo anno usque ad centesimum tertium decimum solus in eremo permansit: cujus animam inter apostolorum et prophetarum choros ad caelum ferri ab angelis Antonius vidit.*

⁴³ For example: Smaragd of St. Mihiel, Expositio in Regulam Benedicti 1 and 21 (ed. Alfred Spannagel/Pius Engelbert, Corpus consuetudinum monasticarum 8, Siegburg 1974) 55, 56, 103; Benedict of Aniane, De concordia regularum VI, PL 103, 702–1380, at 745; Hieronymus, Epistula XXII. Ad Eustochium, Paulae filiam (ed. Isidor Hilberg, CSEL 54, Eusebii Hieronymi Opera, Sect. 1, Wien 1910) 200; Ambrosius Autpertus, De conflictu vitiorum, ed. Weber 930; Isidor of Sevilla, De ecclesiasticis officiis I (ed. Christopher Lawson, CC SL 113, Turnhout 1989) 48. See also: Jean Leclercq,

never been an issue, although besides Jerome's *Vita Pauli* no references to Paul can be found in late antique texts.

In view of the structure and contents of the *Vita Hilarionis* it is quite obvious that Jerome used the *Vita Antonii* as an example. Just like Antony, Hilarion gave all his property to the poor after his parents died, he was attacked by demons, he performed miracles, he had to sustain numerous temptations by demons who appear to him in the shape of women, children and animals, he chased away serpents and other poisonous animals and so on. And when God revealed to Hilarion that the Arians will overturn the Church, it is almost an echo of the words used by Athanasius in his *Vita Antonii*.⁴⁴ It is very unlikely Jerome copied the structure of the *Vita Antonii* only because of pure admiration. As Jerome stated himself in the prologue to the *Vita Pauli*, he already knew the *Vita Antonii*: the *Vita Antonii* is the reason why he wrote his *Vita Pauli*. So if he had wanted to imitate the Life of Antony, he would have structured the vitae he wrote earlier – the *Vita Pauli* and the *Vita Malchi* – in the same way. There must be another reason for this change of style.

In comparing the contents of the *Vita Hilarionis* with the *Vita Pauli* it is striking to notice the positive way in which Antony has been portrayed: Antony was Hilarion's great example, and Hilarion was his disciple for a while: "When he came to hear of the famous name of Antony which was talked about by all people of Egypt, he was fired with a desire to see him and so he set off for the desert. As soon as he saw him, he changed the garment he had been wearing and remained with Antony for about two months, studying the routine of his life and the austerity of his behaviour. Hilarion was amazed by how frequently he prayed, how humble he was in welcoming the brothers, how severe he was in rebuke, how keen to encourage! No weakness ever caused him to break his rule of continence of give up his coarse diet".⁴⁵ Just like Antony he sells all his property after his parents have died and decides to commit his life to God. Dressed in the clothes he got from Antony he goes to live in the desert. In time Hilarion equals Antony, as the following example shows. One day a mother came to Hilarion. Together with her family she paid a visit to Antony, but on their way back her children had fallen ill. She asked Hilarion to save her children saying: "May those whom Antony kept safe in Egypt be saved by you in Syria". After Hilarion cured the children the text concludes "When this incident became known the news of it spread far and wide, people came flocking to him eagerly from Syria and Egypt, and as a result many came to believe in Christ and adopted the monastic way of life. For at that time there were as yet no monasteries in Palestine nor had anyone in Syria previously known a monk before St. Hilarion. He was the founder and teacher of this way of life and this discipline in that province. The Lord Jesus had the elderly Antony in Egypt and in Palestine he had the youthful Hilarion".⁴⁶ After Hilarion spent several years in the desert performing all kinds of miracles Jerome writes: "I would run out of time if I were to relate all the miracles Hilarion performed. For the Lord raised him to such great glory, that even blesses Antony, hearing of his way of life, wrote to him and received his letters gladly. And if ever exhausted visitors came to Antony from the regions of Syria, he would say to them, 'Why did you want to put yourselves to the trouble of such a long journey when you have my son Hilarion near you?'"⁴⁷ When Antony died, Hilarion was informed about this in a vision, and, in tears, informed a woman who wished to pay Antony a visit

Saint Antoine 229–248; in the early tradition of *Vitae patrum* no reference to Paul of Thebes can be found, beside the *Vita Pauli*.

⁴⁴ Athanasius, *Vita Antonii* 82, ed. Bertrand 187: *Abominabitur altarium meum. Nec mora, uisionem sequitur effectus. Nam post annos duos saeva Arianorum erupit insania. Tunc ecclesiarum rapinae, tunc diuinorum temeratio uasorum, tunc pollutis ethnicorum manibus sacra polluta sunt ministeria, tunc paganorum opificum praesidia aduersus Christum comparata cum assumptione palmarum – quod idololatriae apud Alexandriam insigne est – ad ecclesiam pergere compellebantur, ut Arianorum populi crederentur. Proh scelus! Horret animus replicare quae gesta sunt: uirginum matronarumque ereptus pudor, sanguis ouium Christi in Christi templo effusus ueneranda respersit altaria; baptisterium pro uoluntate gentilium pollutum est. Nihil defuit uisionis ueritati, monstrauit effectus, quod calcitrantium mulorum indisciplina Arianorum esset impietas; Hieronymus, *Vita Hilarionis*, ed. Bastiaensen/Smit 20: *Fallacem Dominum meum non faciam; non possum videre subuersas ecclesias, calcata Christi alteria, filiorum meorum sanguinem.**

⁴⁵ Hieronymus, *Vita Hilarionis*, ed. Bastiaensen/Smit 74; transl. White 90.

⁴⁶ Hieronymus, *Vita Hilarionis*, ed. Bastiaensen/Smit 90; transl. White 95f.

⁴⁷ Hieronymus, *Vita Hilarionis*, ed. Bastiaensen/Smit 106; transl. White 102.

of his death: “But today it is two days since the whole world was bereaved of such a father”.⁴⁸ After Antony’s death Hilarion is portrayed as Antony’s successor: “The skies had not opened for three years, causing those regions to become parched: people said that even the elements were mourning the death of Antony. The inhabitants of that place also got to hear of Hilarion’s reputation: men and women, pale-faced and with bodies emaciated with hunger, earnestly entreated this servant of Christ, as the blessed Antony’s successor, to bring rain. When he saw them he was terribly upset. Raising his eyes to heaven and lifting both hands on high, he instantly obtained what they desired”.⁴⁹

In view of the structure of the *Vita Hilarionis* and the extreme positive way in which Jerome describes Antony, it seems that lack of historical reliability in the *Vita Pauli* was not the real (or at least not the only) cause for criticism, but the negative way in which Jerome had portrayed Antony. Evidence for this assumption can be found in the reception history of the *Vita Pauli*. In the Latin text tradition Antony’s idea of being the best hermit has often been changed into the idea that he believes he is the only hermit in the desert.⁵⁰ In the tenth century an adaptation of the *Vita Pauli* was written: the *Legend of Patras*.⁵¹ This story can be divided into two parts: a new story about Antony followed by an adaptation of the *Vita Pauli*. The first part of the *Legend of Patras* gives the reason why Antony becomes convinced that he is the best hermit: he founded several monasteries and he was the leader of the largest amount of monks. The second part of the text, the adaptation of the *Vita Pauli*, follows the text written by Jerome, but here the humiliation Antony has to sustain before Paul’s door is shortened dramatically: the text only mentions that Paul at first was reluctant to open his door, because he was frightened by a noise he has heard. When Paul understood that the noise was made by Antony, he let him in immediately. However, Paul knew about Antony’s pride and he admonished him. Nevertheless the *Legend of Patras* tries to present Antony as Paul’s superior. Contrary to the *Vita Pauli*, Antony performed a miracle: by his prayers Agathon, a monk that was turned into a satyr because he sinned with a deer, was restored. Neither the *Vita Pauli* nor the *Legend of Patras* contain miracles performed by Paul. The text concludes with the remark that Antony stayed to live in Paul’s cell dressed in Paul’s tunic and that he was the first one to build a monastery in that land (*ipse vero fecit primum monasterium in terram illam*).⁵²

It seems that the *Vita Hilarionis* was not only written as a biography of Hilarion, but also as a rehabilitation of Antony and a public excuse for Jerome. Apparently the public of the *Vita Pauli* did not accept a negative story about Antony. In writing his *Vita Hilarionis*, Jerome not only restored Antony’s reputation, he also joined the general opinion on Antony’s authority and virtues. But this is not all. Jerome used these issues also to Hilarion’s advantage. As he portrayed Hilarion as Antony’s pupil, equal and heir, a negative portrayal of Antony would also harm Hilarion’s reputation. This is also a reason to give a very positive depiction of Antony. There was however no reason to link these two desert fathers in the way Jerome did or to follow the structure of the *Vita Antonii*. Jerome’s narrative technique in the *Vita Hilarionis*, his descriptions of the saints’ reputations and their relationship seem to be inspired by the negative reactions to his *Vita Pauli*.

⁴⁸ Hieronymus, *Vita Hilarionis*, ed. Bastiaensen/Smit 114–116; transl. White 105.

⁴⁹ Hieronymus, *Vita Hilarionis*, ed. Bastiaensen/Smit 122; transl. White 107.

⁵⁰ *Vita Pauli*, PL 22, 22, note i.

⁵¹ Edition and introduction to this text: Une histoire latine de S. Antoine, La ‘Légende de Patras’ (ed. François Halkin, *Analecta Bollandiana* 61 [1943]) 211–250. In the medieval Dutch tradition the *Legend of Patras* becomes far more popular than the *Vita Pauli*. The Dutch translator has interfered with the contents in order to give an even more positive picture of Antony; Pascal Bertrand, *Die heilighe vader sinte Anthonijs. Antonius de Grote en het Middel nederlandse Passionael*, in: *Madoc* 16, 2 (2002) 92–103.

⁵² *Legende de Patras* 20, ed. Halkin 242; cf. Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi* I, 17 (ed. Carolus Halm, *CSEL* 1, Wien 1866) 1163: *Duo beati Antonii monasteria adii, quae hodieque ab eius discipulis incoluntur, ad eum etiam locum, in quo beatissimus Paulus primus eremita est diversatus, accessi.*

CONCLUSION

From the late antique texts it is clear that Antony attained a very special status. His sayings were authoritative, not only because of their contents, but especially because they were his. He was the most important desert father of all, the *pater monachorum*. Antony's way of life became exemplary. It was a measuring rod for his fellow hermits and pupils. Negative stories about Antony were unacceptable: Antony's authority, piety and faultlessness are presented as being perfect and they were beyond all doubt and criticism. His pupils and contemporaries are often associated with him; it increased their own status and emphasized their identity as members of Antony's spiritual community. According to Athanasius of Alexandria knowing "who Antony was offers us the perfect path to virtue". Antony's life and virtues became the most important lesson his pupils and contemporaries could learn. Do you want to know how to be good? Live your life just like Antony did.

