Rural Monasticism as a Key Element in the Christianization of Byzantine Palestine*

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Introduction

In Palestine, Christian monasticism began early in the fourth century C.E.[1] The first monks known to us by name are Hilarion of Thavata, who lived in the region of Gaza; Epiphanius, who settled near Eleutheropolis, in the Shephelah; and Chariton, a native of Iconium in Asia Minor who became the founder of monasticism in the Judean Desert.[2] The monastic movement spread throughout Palestine during the Byzantine period (324–642 C.E.), and the remains of monasteries have been found in diverse areas. Many monasteries were established in or around large cities, or at holy places and sites of pilgrimage, while others were set in desert areas.

*I am grateful to Alice-Mary Talbot, Linda Safran, and Yizhar Hirschfeld for their advice and comments. Note the following abbreviations: *ACR*, *Ancient Churches Revealed* (ed. Yoram Tsafrir; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1993); *CAHL*, *Christian Archaeology in the Holy Land: New Discoveries* (ed. Giovanni C. Bottini, Lea Di Segni, and Vergilio C. Corbo; Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1990); and *NEAEHL*, *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* (ed. Ephraim Stern; 4 vols.; Israel Exploration Society & Carta; New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993).

[1]The research on which this paper is based covers the territory of the state of Israel, Judea, Samaria, and the Golan Heights. These territorial boundaries do not necessarily parallel those of the province of Palestine during antiquity. This geographic area was selected in order to take advantage of the fruits of the research undertaken in the region over the past few years. For this geographic delineation, see Yoram Tsafrir, Lea Di Segni, and Judith Green, *Tabula imperii Romani, Iudaea Palaestina* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1994) viii. In accordance with historical reality in Palestine, it is common to distinguish Late Roman (70–324 C.E.) and Byzantine (324–642 C.E.) periods, even though this periodization differs from the chronologies used elsewhere in the Roman and Byzantine worlds.

[2]For a short summary of Palestinian monasticism, see Lorenzo Perrone, "Monasticism in the Holy Land: From the Beginnings to the Crusaders," *Proche Orient Chrétien* 45 (1995) 31–63.

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Our knowledge of Palestine's monasteries has expanded in the past few decades with the publication of several monographs on the subject.[3] A brief survey of current archaeological research might lead one to believe that those monasteries that were not associated with urban centers, holy places, or pilgrimage sites were confined to the Judean desert, the Sinai peninsula, or Gaza's countryside,[4] and that those monks who chose to live outside the cities and away from pilgrimage sites were interested only in solitude and isolation, seeking to live as far as possible from the inhabitants of Palestine.[5] Recent archaeological excavations and surveys permit us to reduce the gap between the archaeological discussion, which centered almost exclusively on the study of the Judean desert monasteries,[6] and the literary documents, which attest a much more extensive distribution of monasteries in the Palestinian countryside.[7] While it is true that many monasteries were located in places of solitude, mainly in the Judean Desert and southern Sinai,[8] a surprisingly large number of monasteries were built in proximity to rural villages. Also, a small but significant number of literary sources speak of contacts between monks and the inhabitants of neighboring villages.[9] In the first two sections of this essay, I shall summarize both the archaeological and literary evidence for the network of less physically isolated, more socially integrated monastic centers that dotted rural Palestine.

[3]See Yizhar Hirschfeld, *The Judean Desert Monasteries in the Byzantine Period* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992); Joseph Patrich, *Sabas, Leader of Palestinian Monasticism: A Comparative Study in Eastern Monasticism, Fourth to Seventh Centuries* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1995); John Binns, *Ascetics and Ambassadors of Christ: The Monasteries of Palestine 314–621* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994); and Uzi Dahari, *Monastic Settlements in South Sinai in the Byzantine Period: The Archaeological Remains* (Israel Antiquity Authority Reports 9; Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2000). See also the relevant articles in *CAHL*.

[4]On Gaza monasticism, see Derwas J. Chitty, *The Desert a City: An Introduction to the Study of Egyptian and Palestinian Monasticism Under the Christian Empire* (London: Mowbrays, 1977) 71–76; and Bruria Bitton-Ashkeloni, "Gaza Monasticism During the Byzantine Period" (in Hebrew), *Cathedra* 96 (2000) 69–110.

[5]Andrew Jotischky, "Israel/Palestine," in *Encyclopedia of Monasticism* (ed. William M. Johnston; Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2000) 673–75; Robert L. Wilken, *The Land Called Holy: Palestine in Christian History and Thought* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992) 149–66; idem, "Loving the Jerusalem Below: The Monks of Palestine," in *Jerusalem: Its Sanctity and Centrality to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (ed. Israel L. Levine; New York: Continuum, 1999) 240–50; and Lorenzo Perrone, "Monasticism as a Factor of Religious Interaction in the Holy Land during the Byzantine Period," in *Sharing the Sacred: Religious Contacts and Conflicts in the Holy Land* (ed. Aryeh Kofsky and Gedaliahu G. Stroumsa; Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben Zvi, 1998) 91.

[6]Hirschfeld, *The Judean Desert Monasteries*; and Patrich, *Sabas*.

[7]As Perrone ("Monasticism in the Holy Land," 41 n. 22) observes, "Contemporary research on Byzantine monasticism in the Holy Land tends quite understandably to concentrate of the desert of Judaea because of the availability of sources." My article does not deal with the urban monasteries that were erected in many of Palestine's cities or with the monasteries erected at holy sites, again a major component in map of monasteries in Palestine.

[8]For Judean monasticism, see Hirschfeld, *The Judean Desert Monasteries*; and Patrich, *Sabas*.

[9]For a summary of monasteries mentioned in historical sources, see Siméon Vailhé, "Répertoire alphabétique des monastères de Palestine," *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 4 (1899) 512–42; 5 (1900) 19–48, 272–92.

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What was the role of these rural monasteries in the Christianization of rural Palestine? Were they a vehicle for introducing Christianity into the countryside, or were they founded in areas that had already been Christianized? Until only a few years ago, historical and archaeological research on the Christianization of Byzantine Palestine focused mainly on the urban sector and on the Christianization of the towns. Recent excavations and surveys in the countryside permit a re-evaluation of the customary views about settlement patterns during the Byzantine period and the progress of Christianization in rural areas. Thus, in the final section of this essay I shall consider whether the rural monasteries were a cause or an effect of the spread of Christianity to the villages.

Rural Monasticism: Archaeological Evidence

A rural Palestinian monastery is usually a squarish complex situated in the middle of an agricultural area in an inhabited part of the countryside.[10] Rural monasteries were generally well planned and built of stone ashlars. They contained a series of rooms that were used for sacred and secular functions. The monastery usually enclosed a church, often identifiable only by fragments of mosaic pavement, pieces of chancel screen, and inscriptions or stones decorated with Christian symbols. Many of the monasteries included such devices as oil and wine presses, indicating that agriculture was central to the monastery's daily routine.[11] Also, many of the monasteries in the countryside were encircled by a wall that separated the monastic community from its surroundings and served as protection.[12] The integration of towers into monastery architecture attests to the rather dangerous conditions that prevailed in the countryside and the insecurity that the monks must have felt.[13]

My updated map of monasteries in Palestine's countryside (p. 52) shows the location of more than 170 such establishments.[14] The Judean mountains and desert areas boast the most intense concentrations in Palestine.[15] Other rural regions, such

[10]The largest monastery yet to be found in Palestine is the monastic complex in Kursi, which measures 140 m by 120 m. See Vassilios Tzaferis, with Elizabeth Kessin and Dan Urman, *The Excavations of Kursi-Gergesa* (ʿAtiqot 16; Jerusalem: Department of Antiquities and Museums, 1983).

[11]Yizhar Hirschfeld, *The Desert of the Holy City: The Judean Desert Monasteries in the Byzantine Period* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben Zvi, 2002) 224–28. Sometimes the similarity between rural monasteries and farmhouses makes their identification very problematic.

[12]Ibid., 261–65; Joseph Patrich and Yoram Tsafrir, "A Byzantine Church Complex at Horvat Beit Loya," in *ACR*, 265; and Yitzhak Magen, *The Monastery of Martyrius at Maʿale Adummim* (trans. Edward Levin and Peter Schertz; Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 1993) 17–20.

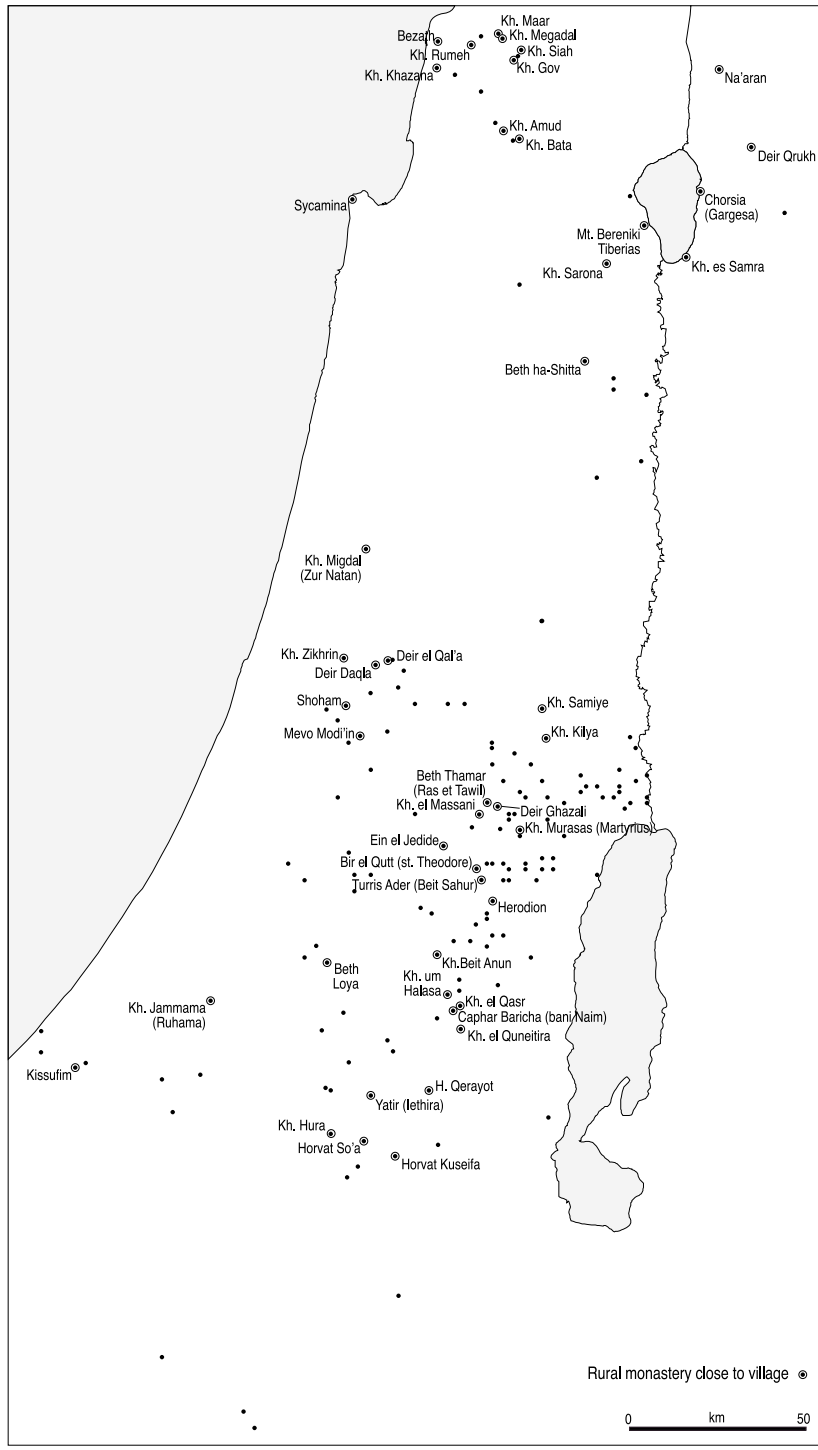
[13]Hirschfeld, *The Desert of the Holy City*, 241–53; Yizhar Hirschfeld, "Deir Qal'a and the Monasteries of Western Samaria," in *The Roman and Byzantine Near East* (ed. John H. Humphrey; 3 vols.; JRA Supplement 49; Portsmouth, R.I.: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 2002) 179.

[14]The database on which this map is based is continually expanding as more monasteries are discovered and published.

[15]Here, examples are extensive. See, e.g., Rina Avner, "Deir Ghazali, A Byzantine Monastery Northeast of Jerusalem," *ʿAtiqot* 40 (2000) 25*–52*; Simon Gibson, "Ras Et-Tawil: A Byzantine Monastery North of Jerusalem," *BAIAS* (1985–1986) 69–73; R. W. Hamilton, "Note on a Chapel and Winepress at ʿAin el Jedida," *QDAP* 4 (1935) 111–17; Virgilio C. Corbo, *Gli Scavi di Kh.*

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as western Galilee,[16] Lake Kinneret,[17] the fringes of the Carmel,[18] the slopes of the Samaria Mountains,[19] the southern parts of the coastal plains,[20] and the Negev, also have numerous monasteries.[21] Several monasteries were also surveyed and excavated in the Golan Heights,[22] the Bet-Shean valley,[23] and other regions that were characterized at the beginning of the Byzantine period by a decidedly pagan population.

The irregular spatial distribution of monasteries in Palestine is not simply the result of their association with holy sites, since monasteries are found in various parts of Palestine, including such areas as western Galilee and the Negev, that were

Siyar el-Ghanam (Campo dei Pastori) e i monasteri dei dintorni (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1955); Patrich and Tsafrir, "A Byzantine Church," 265–72; Hanan Eshel, Jodi Magness, and Eli Shenhav, with Joanne Besonen, "Interim Report on Khirbet Yattir in Judaea: A Mosque and a Monastic Church," *JRA* 12 (1999) 411–22; Rudolph Cohen, "Monasteries," *NEAEHL* 3:1067–70; Yizhar Hirschfeld, "Khirbet el-Quneitra—A Byzantine Monastery in the Wilderness of Ziph" (in Hebrew), *Eretz-Israel* 18 (1985) 243–55; Yitzhak Magen and Yuval Baruch, "Khirbet Abu Rish" (in Hebrew), *ʿAtiqot* 32 (1997) 135–46.

[16]Motti Aviam assembled all the relevant material on the monasteries of the region; see the various articles in his *Jews, Pagans and Christians in the Galilee: 25 Years of Archaeological Excavations and Surveys, Hellenistic to Byzantine Periods* (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 2004). See also Edna J. Stern, Hana Abu Uqsa, and Nimrod Getzov, "Horvat Qav," *Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 112 (2000) 11*–14*.

[17]Tzaferis et al., *The Excavations of Kursi*; and Vassilios Tzaferis, "An Early Christian Church at Khirbet Samra," in *Studies in the Archaeology and History of Ancient Israel* (ed. Michael Heltzer, Arthur Segal and Daniel Kaufman; Jerusalem: University of Haifa, 1993) 248–49.

[18]Joseph Elgavish, *Shiqmona on the Seacoast of Mount Carmel* (in Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Association for the Study of the Land of Israel and Its Antiquities, 1994) 110–11; and Raz Kletter, "Haifa, Tel Shiqmona," *Ḥadashot Arkheologiyot* 114 (2002) 24*–26*.

[19]Yitzhak Magen, "A Roman Fort and a Byzantine Monastery at Khirbet el-Kilia" (in Hebrew), *Qadmoniot* 85–86 = vol. 22 (1989) 45–50; Hirschfeld, "Deir Qal'a," 155–89; Moshe Fisher, "Excavations at Horvat Zikhrin" (in Hebrew), *Qadmoniot* 71–72 = vol. 18 (1985) 114; Emmanuel Eisenberg and Ruth Ovadia, "A Byzantine Monastery at Mevo Modi'im," *ʿAtiqot* 36 (1998) 1*–19*; and Uzi Dahari and Uzi ʿAd, "Shoham Bypass Road," *Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 20 (2000) 56*–59*.

[20]Rudolph Cohen, "A Byzantine Church and Mosaic Floor Near Kissufim" (in Hebrew), *Qadmoniot* 45 = vol. 12 (1979) 19–24; and Ran Gophna and Nurit Feig, "A Byzantine Monastery at Kh. Jemameh," *ʿAtiqot* 22 (1993) 97–108.

[21]Pau Figueras, "Monks and Monasteries in the Negev Desert," *Liber Annuus* 45 (1995) 401–50. For a monastery in the vicinity of the Roman-Byzantine settlement of Tel Malhata, see Bruce C. Cresson, "The Monastery," in *Tel ʿIra: A Stronghold in the Biblical Negev* (ed. Itzhaq Beit-Arieh; Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, Institute of Archaeology, 1999) 88–96.

[22]For a monastery in the village of Na'aran, see Claudine Dauphin and Jeremy J. Schonfield, "Settlements of the Roman and Byzantine Periods on the Golan Heights: Preliminary Report on Three Seasons of Survey (1979–1981)," *IEJ* 33 (1983) 197–200. But Zvi U. Ma'oz ("Comments on Jewish and Christian Communities in Byzantine Palestine," *PEQ* 117 [1985] 60–61) objects to the identification of the building as a monastery. For the possible identification of monasteries in the villages of Squfiyye and Ramsaniyye, see Robert C. Gregg and Dan Urman, *Jews, Pagans, and Christians in the Golan Heights: Greek and Other Inscriptions of the Roman and Byzantine Eras* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars, 1996) 46–47, 187–192; and Zvi U. Ma'oz, "Deir Qeruh," *NEAEHL* 1:348–49.

[23]See, for example, Yohanan Aharoni, "Excavations at Beth-Hashitta" (in Hebrew), *BIES* 18 (1954) 209–15.

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not associated with particular sanctity by Christians or Jews. The distribution of monasteries reflects, rather, the divisions among different religious groups during the Roman and Byzantine period. The lack of monasteries in eastern Galilee and the northern parts of Samaria is rooted in the resentment that the Jewish and Samaritan populations felt toward any Christian attempts to penetrate their regions.[24] The Jewish Upper Galilee was in fact left clear of churches and monasteries throughout the Byzantine period, while a few monasteries were erected in Samaria as part of a deliberate Byzantine policy of meeting Samaritan revolts with religious coercion.[25] On the other hand, many regions in Palestine were inhabited until the fourth and fifth centuries by pagans who later underwent a process of Christianization, and it is in these regions—in particular, western Galilee and the Negev—that we find most of the rural monasteries.

Western Galilee

Motti Aviam's research on the Christianization of western Galilee demonstrated that an imaginary borderline separated western and eastern Galilee during the Byzantine period.[26] East of this line only synagogues were found, while in the west only churches were discovered. This difference in the distribution of the community religious buildings in the two halves of Upper Galilee can be explained by the difference between the populations of these two areas. Throughout the Roman and Byzantine periods, the eastern Galilee was inhabited exclusively by Jews, who resisted any Christian attempts to penetrate it.[27] In western Galilee, however, the demographic process was entirely different. In addition to growing economic prosperity, which manifested itself in a marked increase in population density and in the

[24]The objection of the Jews to the establishment of churches in the Lower Galilee region is reflected in the story of Joseph of Tiberias, a convert elevated by Constantine to the rank of *comes*. See Stephen Goranson, "Joseph of Tiberias Revisited: Orthodoxies and Heresies in Fourth-Century Galilee," in *Galilee Through the Centuries: Confluence of Cultures* (ed. Eric M. Meyers; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1999) 335–43. On Jewish resistance to Christian penetration of the Galilee, see Zeev Rubin, "Joseph the *Comes* and the Attempts to Convert the Galilee to Christianity in the Fourth Century C.E." (in Hebrew) *Cathedra* 26 (1982) 105–16. On a parallel phenomenon, Samaritan opposition to Christian penetration of Samaria, see Antoninus Placentinus, *Itinerarium* 8, ed. P. Geyer, in *Itineraria et alia geographica* (2 vols.; CCSL 175–76; Turnholt: Brepols, 1965) 1:133.

[25]For the circumstances that led to the erection of the church of Mary Theotokos on Mount Gerizim, the holiest place for Samaritans, see Yitzhak Magen, "The Church of Mary Theotokos on Mount Gerizim," in *CAHL*, 333–34. As for the dozen rural monasteries on the western slopes of the hills of Samaria, see Hirschfeld, "Deir Qal'a," 155–89. Hirschfeld speculates that the erection of these monasteries in the midst of a Samaritan settlement was a punishment decreed by the Byzantine ruler. A Samaritan synagogue, erected during the fourth or fifth century and ruined during the Samaritan revolt, was discovered in Horvat Migdal, in western Samaria. See Etan Ayalon, "Horvat Migdal (Tzur Natan)—An Ancient Samaritan Village," in *The Samaritans* (in Hebrew) (ed. Ephraim Stern and Hanan Eshel; Jerusalem, 2002) 272–88. Following the destruction of the synagogue, a monastery was founded nearby. The location of the monastery, south of the village, may indicate an intention to promote Christianity in the region.

[26]Aviam, "Christian Galilee," 281–300.

[27]See n. 24, above.

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number of villages and farmhouses,[28] the population of western Galilee gradually deserted their pagan beliefs and embraced Christianity.[29] Yet it was only during the second part of the Byzantine period, mainly from the sixth century onwards (as the remains of the community churches attest), that Christianity gained a firm foothold in this region.[30]

The hagiographic literature contains no indication that monks were present in western Galilee. Yet of the approximately fifty churches surveyed in western Galilee, approximately fifteen have been identified as belonging to monasteries.[31] This surprising find demonstrates how monks were active even in a remote area of Palestine, characterized by harsh geographical conditions.[32] One of the most prominent features shared by this region's monasteries is the fact that they were erected near villages, usually on their outskirts. Solitary caves found in gorges in the area testify to the existence of hermits,[33] but other monastic installations, inhabited by monks who were active among the local population, were more common. Thus, for example, remains of a monastery have been identified near the modern city of Shalomi. This monastery was built near the prosperous village of Horvat Bezeth.[34] The monastery at Khirbet el-Quṣeir was built near the village of Biar.[35] The church at Horvat Kenes in the Beit Kerem valley was built on a hill north of the village of Horvat Bata, while at the southwestern part of the same village another monastery was found, hinting at the close relationships between monks and villagers.[36] This phenomenon, the erection of monasteries at the edges of villages in the western Galilee, can also be identified in Horvat Gov, Bir el-Khazna,[37] and in other regions of Palestine as well.

[28]This was a wide-ranging phenomenon characterizing Palestine in general and western Galilee in particular. See Doron Bar, "Geographical Implications of Population and Settlement Growth in Late Antique Palestine," *Journal of Historical Geography* 30 (2004) 1–10.

[29]On changes in burial practices during late antiquity, see Nimrod Getzov and Edna Stern, "Studies in Phoenician Burial Customs in the Western Galilee During the 2nd–3rd Centuries C.E." (in Hebrew), in *Settlement, Civilization, and Culture: Proceedings of the Conference in Memory of David Alon* (ed. Aharon M. Maeir and Eyal Baruch; Ramat-Gan: University of Bar-Ilan Press, 2001) 193–98; and Refael Frankel et al., *Settlement Dynamics and Regional Diversity in Ancient Upper Galilee: Archaeological Survey of Upper Galilee* (Israel Antiquity Authority Reports 14; Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2001) 110–16.

[30]Aviam, "Christian Galilee," 281–300; and Lea Di Segni, "Horvath Hesheq: The Inscriptions," in *CAHL*, 379–90.

[31]Aviam, "Christian Galilee," 281–300.

[32]Frankel et al., *Settlement Dynamics*; and Aviam, "Christian Galilee," 281–300.

[33]Motti Aviam, "Remains of Churches and Monasteries in Western Galilee" (in Hebrew), *Qadmoniot* 109 = vol. 28 (1995) 59.

[34]Claudine Dauphin ("A Byzantine Ecclesiastical Farm at Shlomi," in *ACR*, 43–48) suggested identifying this archaeological complex as a farm belonging to a monastery. Nevertheless, Aviam, who surveyed the region, identified the site as a monastery ("Remains of Churches and Monasteries," 57).

[35]Refael Frankel, "Some Oil Presses from Western Galilee," *BASOR* 286 (1992) 49–59.

[36]Aviam, "Christian Galilee," 293; and Dina Avshalom-Gorni and Motti Aviam, "Horvat Kenes," *Excavations and Surveys in Israel* 15 (1996) 25–26.

[37]Aviam, *The Christian Community in Western Galilee*, 137–38.

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The Negev

In southern Palestine we find numerous examples of monks and settlers living in proximity. Although in the history of Palestine this desert area had usually been a nomadic region, during the Byzantine period the Negev witnessed a process of settlement, sedentarization, and Christianization, and the presence of monks is therefore to be expected. In Iethira (Yattir), a large village located on a rugged hill in the remote fringes of the desert bordering the Hebron hills, a monastery was erected to the settlement's west, separated from the village homes by a large reservoir.[38] In the northern Negev, a monastery that was built next to the large township of Orda has been excavated,[39] as has another monastery built near the village of Kh. Jammame.[40] Horvat Hor, in the northeastern part of the Beersheba valley, is home to the remains of two monasteries, the larger one on the northeastern outskirts of the village, the smaller in a flat area approximately 200 meters to the southwest.[41] In H. So'a, the remains of a monastery were found on the southern fringes of the settlement,[42] as in Tel ʿIra and Tel Masos.[43]

Several monasteries were identified in the "cities" of the Negev, semi-urbanized villages to the south of the region. A monastery was built in Oboda around the atrium of the southern settlement's church.[44] In Rehovot-in-the-Negev, a monastery may have been located in the buildings adjacent to its northern church. Together with its atrium, this formed one of the largest church complexes known in the Negev.[45] The papyri from Nessana attest to the high degree of involvement the local monks had in the communal life of that settlement at the end of the Byzantine period. The location of the monastery, next to the main church and on its acropolis, underscores the proximity and importance of the monks to the villagers.[46] The location of the monastery in the village of Sobata is especially interesting since it may provide a better understanding of the way monasteries were agglomerated in the social and urban fabric of settlements.

[38]Eshel, Magness, and Shenhav with Besonen, "Interim Report," 411–22; Hanan Eshel, Jodi Magness, and Eli Shenhav, "Khirbet Yattir, 1995–1999: Preliminary Report," *IEJ* 50:3–4 (2000) 153–68.

[39]Cohen, "A Byzantine Church," 277–82.

[40]Gophna and Feig, "A Byzantine Monastery," 97–108

[41]Yehuda Govrin, *Map of Nahal Yattir (139)* (Archaeological Survey of Israel; Department of Antiquities, Jerusalem, 1991) 43*–45*.

[42]Ibid., 67*.

[43]Beit-Arieh, *Tel ʿIra*, 88–96; and Volkmar Fritz and Aharon Kempinski, *Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen auf der Ḫirbet el-Mšāš (Tēl-Māśōś) 1972–1975* (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 1983) 138–85.

[44]Avraham Negev, *The Architecture of Oboda: Final Report* (Qedem 36; Jerusalem: Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1997) 122–52.

[45]Yoram Tsafrir, *Excavations at Rehovot-in-the-Negev, I: The Northern Church* (Qedem 25; Jerusalem, 1988); and idem, "The Early Byzantine Town of Rehovot-in-the-Negev," in *ACR* 294–302.

[46]For Nessana, see Avraham Negev, "Nessana," *NEAEHL* 3:1148–49; H. Dunscombe Colt, *Excavations in Nessana* (London: British School of Archaeology, 1962) 18–20; and Casper J. Kraemer, *Excavations at Nessana, III: Non-Literary Papyri* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1958) 6–11.

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The northern church from the fifth century[47] was deliberately built at a distance from the settlement, and only later was it attached to the rest of the village buildings by the erection of a wall. At this stage a monastery was erected adjacent to the former church, turning the northern part of the settlement into its religious center.

Rural Monasticism: Literary Evidence

From the very beginning of Christian monasticism in the Roman world, monks related to society in a variety of ways. Some monks favored solitude and seclusion, living alone or in isolated communities as far as possible from the human environment, devoting themselves exclusively to the work of God.[48] Other monks maintained intimate ties with their human environment and resided among the local population. Basil of Caesarea, whose rules were foundational for monastic organization in the East in general and in Palestine in particular, presented asceticism as a life of service to God through obedience, manual work and charity. He gave priority to the coenobitic way of life and to social welfare activities and encouraged the establishment of monasteries in proximity to existing settlements rather than in distant, isolated areas.[49]

Sometimes these two monastic lifestyles were integrated: Chariton, for example, founded monasteries in places of solitude as well as in relative proximity to settled places that were inhabited, at least partly, by pagans. From his vita we learn how his cell in Pharan attracted "an innumerable crowd of pagans and Jews [who] were induced to receive the saving bath, as a consequence of the miracles made by God through the holy man."[50] Later on, after leaving his second place of solitude in Duca, situated in the remote cliffs above Jericho, Chariton decided to build his third monastery in proximity to the village of Thecoa, one of the largest pagan villages in the desert fringes, neighboring Bethlehem to the southeast.[51]

[47]Renate Rosenthal-Heginbottom, *Die Kirchen von Sobota und die Dreiapsidenkirchen des Nahen Ostens* (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 1982); Avraham Negev, "Sobata," *NEAEHL* 4:1405–6; and Yehuda Guvrin, "Appendix A," in Arthur Segal, Shivta: Portrait of a Byzantine City in the Negev Desert (Haifa: University of Haifa Press, 1986) 87–96.

[48]Susan Ashbrook-Harvey, "Asceticism," 317–18, and Conrad Leyster, "Monasticism," 583–84, in *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World* (ed. Glen W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999); Marilyn Dunn, *The Emergence of Monasticism: From the Desert Fathers to the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000) 6–19; and Clifford H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages* (London: Longman, 1984) 123–27.

[49]Philip Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) 190–232; and Dunn, *The Emergence of Monasticism,* 34–41.

[50]*The Life of Chariton*, 14, translated by Leah Di Segni in *Ascetic Behavior in Greco-Roman Antiquity* (ed. Vincent L. Wimbush; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 405.

[51]Ibid., 23, trans. Di Segni, 410; and Yizhar Hirschfeld, "Life of Chariton in Light of Archaeological Research," in *Ascetic Behavior in Greco-Roman Antiquity* (ed. Vincent L. Wimbush; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 425–47. In Tekoa itself, another monastery was founded by two monks, Marcianus and Romanus, according to Cyril of Scythopolis (*V. Euth.* 30, 49; all references to Cyril follow E. Schwartz, ed., *Kyrillos von Skythopolis* [TUGAL 49/2; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1939]).

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This was done, inter alia, out of Chariton's desire to spread Christianity among the inhabitants of this area.

Contact between monks and villagers occurred both on the desert fringes of Palestine and in the more inhabited rural regions. The hagiographic literature hints at the involvement of the monks, as "holy people," in the day-to-day lives of the residents of the countryside.[52] Cyril of Scythopolis describes both Euthymius's encounters with herdsmen from the village of Bethania (Lazarium), east of Jerusalem, and Saba's decision to build a monastery near the city of Nicopolis (Emmaus), in the midst of one of the most populated areas of Palestine.[53] A good example of a site where, according to the literary sources, monks and villagers interacted is the monastery of Caperbaricha, which was founded by Euthymius during the fifth century in the Desert of Ziph, southeast of Hebron. After about ten years of solitude in the monastery of Theoctistus in the inner desert, Euthymius decided to move south and settle near several villages on the desert fringes. Euthymius soon became well known among the local residents of the villages of Ziph, Aristoboulias, and Caphar Baricha, and after he miraculously healed one of the locals, "people came to Euthymius from Aristobulias and the nearby villages and they built him a monastery." It is hard to tell whether Euthymius chose this area because of its proximity to several settlements and whether the inhabitants of those settlements were already Christianized at this stage.[54] Cyril of Scythopolis, however, mentions how "some of the people of Ziph who had formally adopted the heresy called after 'mania' renounced the impure heresy as a result of his [Euthymius's] inspired teaching: declaring anathema on Manes, its begetter, they were instructed in the catholic and apostolic faith and baptized."[55]

[52]Most of the hagiographic sources, it must be admitted, refer to the fringes of Palestine, mainly to the Judean Desert. Much less information is available on the monks' activity in the more fertile regions of Palestine.

[53]Cyril of Scythopolis, *V. Euth.* 8, 15–16; idem, *V. Sab.* 120, 25.

[54]The fact that the churches of Ziph, Aristoboulias, and Caperbaricha were built rather late in the Byzantine period, mainly during the sixth century, may hint at the relatively slow process of Christianization in this region; if this was the case, then some of the locals were probably still pagans during the fifth century, when Euthymius was active there. On the churches of this region, see Yuval Baruch, "Tell Zif and the Establishment of Christianity in the Wilderness of Ziph" (in Hebrew), in *Judea and Samaria Research Studies: Proceedings of the Eighth Annual Meeting* (ed. Yaakov Eshel; Qedumim-Ariel: Judea and Samaria Research Institute, 1999) 171–84.

[55]Cyril of Scythopolis, *V. Euth.* 12, 22. If Hirschfeld is correct in his identification of the site, then the monastery was situated on the edge of a crag in the vicinity of the Roman-Byzantine villages of Aristoboulias and Caperbaricha: Yishar Hirschfeld, "List of the Byzantine Monasteries in the Judean Desert," in *CAHL*, 13–15. The fact that this monastery bears the name of the nearby village of Caperbaricha may be seen as another proof of the close connections between the monks and the villagers who donated money for the erection of the monastery. On the heresy of Manes, presumably a popular blend of superstition and ancient religious practice, see Epiphanius, *Pan.* 66 (trans. Philip R. Amidon, *The Panarion of St. Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1990] 221–43); and Samuel N. C. Lieu, *Manichaeism in Mesopotamia and the Roman East* (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

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Relationships between the monks and the villagers were varied and complex. Unlike the monastic movements in Egypt and Syria, Palestinian monasticism was not an indigenous movement but mainly a Greek-speaking one. Activity in the villages required the use of Aramaic, a language unfamiliar to the monks, as most of them were strangers to the local rural areas.[56] It also called for treatment of many local issues that were all novel and challenging experiences for the monks. The monks had to learn how to cure people, as can be learned from the typical story of Cyriacus's healing of the son of a resident of the village of Thecoa.[57] Cyril of Scythopolis's story of how Euthymius, beseeched by an immense crowd from Jerusalem and the surrounding villages, miraculously ended a long drought can give us an idea of the extent to which the aid of the Judean Desert monks was solicited during times of drought and famine in the bordering villages to the west.[58] Cyril also relates how a possessed woman from the village of Beth Abudison, also located west of the monastery of Euthymius, was cured by drinking oil from the saint's tomb lamp, and the anecdote testifies to the belief that the monks' power was still strong even after their death.[59]

Frequently we hear of monks casting out demons and cleansing places made dangerous by previous pagan practices. A good example of this phenomenon is found in Sozomen's story of the pagan families of his grandfather and of Alphion, who were the first to convert in Bethelea, a small semi-urbanized settlement to the north of Gaza, as a consequence of Hilarion's activity. The monk succeeded in curing Alphion, who was tormented by a daemon, after pagans and Jews had failed. In return, Alphion converted and decided to found churches and monasteries in the same region, the southern coastal plain of Palestine.[60]

There was a complicated give-and-take between the monks and villagers. The local villagers enjoyed the protection, religious patronage, and various religious services that the monks offered them, elements that previously were lacking in these remote areas.[61] The many baptismal basins found in the monasteries provide an example of one kind of religious service that was offered by the monks in the countryside.[62] In many cases, villagers decided to be buried inside the boundaries

[56]For the international character of the monks in Palestine, see Edward D. Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982) 244.

[57]Cyril of Scythopolis, *V. Cyr.* 8–10, 228. See also the story of Romanus, from the village of Bêtakabea, near Gaza; he was seized with paralysis and cured by the spirit of Euthymius (Cyril of Scythopolis, *V. Euth.* 57, 78–79).

[58]Ibid., 25, 38–39.

[59]Ibid., 54, 76.

[60]Sozomen, *Hist. eccl.* 5, 15, 14–15.

[61]During the Byzantine period, the monk replaced the village patron as a source of protection, security, and patronage. For a summary of the place of the pagan holy man during late antiquity, see Garth Fowden, "The Pagan Holy Man in Late Antique Society," *JHS* 102 (1982) 33–59. For the founding of the monastery of Caperbaricha by Euthymius, see n. 55, above. Cyril of Scythopolis mentions the miracle performed by Euthymius, as well as the protection and patronage he supplied to villagers residing in the vicinity of the new monastery.

[62]See, for example, the baptistery in the monastery church of Horvat Kenes, discussed in Motti Aviam, "Christian Galilee in the Byzantine Period," in *Galilee Through the Centuries*, 293. See also

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of the monasteries—another example of the importance of the monasteries in the life of the peasants.[63] The monks themselves sought the presence of the villagers since they provided justification for living in remote areas of Palestine that had not been sanctified by contact with Jesus or the apostles. In those rural areas, the monks became well-known figures and fulfilled a major sociological role. The monks helped the farmers to confront problems typical in those regions, and in return the farmers made handsome donations to the monks and their monasteries.[64] For example, two brothers from the village of Bouriron in the coastal plain were stricken with serious illness during the grape harvest. Cyril of Scythopolis recalls how they prayed to the spirit of Sabas, who cured them after he appeared to each of them in a dream.[65] Sabas's coenobium near Nicopolis was built out of donations made by a local bailiff,[66] and the villagers of Bethania, east of Jerusalem, ministered to Euthymius during his stay in the desert fringes. Similar relationships existed between Cyriacus and the villagers of Thecoa, who supplied him with food,[67] and between Hilarion and the villagers in the countryside around Gaza.[68] In some cases we hear that the villagers desired to "possess" the local holy man so that they might benefit from his apotropaic power and his abilities as a healer, and so they encouraged him to dwell in their midst by erecting a cell or a monastery. A good example of the advantages the villagers gained from living near a monastery are the story of a woman from the village of Bethania, troubled by an impure spirit, who was cured when she was anointed with oil from the tomb of Euthymius,[69] and John Moschos's description of the healing of another woman from one of the villages near Ptolemais, by a monk named John who resided in the same village.[70]

It is important, however, not to draw too idealized a picture of Christian success in penetrating the countryside in general and Western Galilee in particular on the basis of the literary evidence for close relations between monks and farmers. The spread of monasteries in the countryside was prolonged, not rapid, lasting throughout the

Malka Ben-Pechat, "Baptism and Monasticism in the Holy Land: Archaeological and Literary Evidence," in *CAHL*, 501–22.

[63]For a summary of this subject, see Haim Goldfus, "Tombs and Burials in Churches and Monasteries of Byzantine Palestine (324–628 A.D.)" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1997).

[64]Richard M. Price, trans., *A History of the Monks of Syria by Theodoret of Cyrrhus* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1985) xxvii–xxix; ibid., trans., *Lives of the Monks of Palestine by Cyril of Scythopolis* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1991) x–xi. See, for example, the monastery of Horvat Beit Loya, where the inscription "Azizos and Kyrikos, giving thanks, dedicated this shrine" attests a donation made by the villagers of this remote settlement (Patrich and Tsafrir, "A Byzantine Church Complex at Horvat Beit Loya," 269).

[65]Cyril of Scythopolis, *V. Sab.* 79, 185.

[66]Ibid., 35, 120–21.

[67]Idem, *V. Euth.* 8, 16; *V. Cyr.* 8–10, 227.

[68]Hieronymus, *Vita Sancti Hilarionis eremitae* 25, trans. R. J. Deterrari in *Early Christian Biographies* (FOC 15; Washington D.C., 1952) 263.

[69]Cyril of Scythopolis, *V. Euth.* 52, 76.

[70]Joannes Moschos, *Pratum Spirituale (Leimonarion)* 56, in *The Spiritual Meadows* (trans. John Wortley; Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1992) 44–45.

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Byzantine period, and fear of the villagers' hostility may have caused monks to hesitate to operate in the more remote regions.[71] The presence of walls and towers at many rural monasteries indicates the monks' concern for safety.

Christianizing the Rural Areas of Palestine

In a recent article on Palestinian monasticism during the Byzantine period,[72] Lorenzo Perrone expressed wonder at the relatively scant information we have about relations between monks and the local population. The updated archaeological finds discussed in this paper supplement the meager documentary and literary record with evidence of a more widespread monastic presence in the countryside, thereby providing evidence for close relationships, both geographical and religious, between monks and local society.

To put these relationships in a larger context, I would like to pose the question of the role that monasteries played in the Christianization of rural Palestine. Were the rural monasteries founded in a countryside already inhabited by Christians, or did the monks venture into the countryside with the intention of converting the pagan population to Christianity? The question may be approached chronologically: How long did the Christianization of rural Palestine take, and when were the rural monasteries founded?

The prevailing assumption among scholars dealing with the history of Palestine during the Byzantine period is that the process of converting the local pagan population to Christianity had been completed as early as the fifth century.[73] Palestine's special status as the Holy Land,[74] the investment by emperors of vast sums of money in building churches,[75] and the density of holy sites and the thousands of pilgrims who journeyed to those sites,[76] according to the common theory, are all factors that hastened the conversion process in Palestine, relative to the conversion of other provinces in the Roman Empire.[77] According to many scholars, Christianization was particularly rapid and vigorous in the parts of the land where Jesus had been active, namely Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and the area around the Sea of Galilee,[78] where Christians had already become a majority during the early Byzantine centuries.[79]

[71]For the Syrian countryside, see Peter Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982) 114–15.

[72]Perrone, "Monasticism as a Factor," 90–91.

[73]See the summary in Yoram Tsafrir, "Introduction," in Tsafrir, Di Segni, and Green, *Tabula*, 19.

[74]Wilken, *The Land Called Holy.*

[75]Gregory T. Armstrong, "Imperial Church Building in the Holy Land in the Fourth Century", *BA* 30 (1969) 90–102.

[76]Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage*, 83–106.

[77]Yoram Tsafrir, "Foreword," in *ACR*, xi; Joseph Patrich, "Church, State and the Transformation of Palestine—The Byzantine Period (324–640 CE)," in *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land* (ed. Thomas E. Levy; London: Leicester University Press, 1995) 470.

[78]Yoram Tsafrir, "The Spread of Christianity in the Holy Land," in *Cradle of Christianity* (ed. Yael Israeli and David Mevorah; Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 2000) 33.

[79]Robert L. Wilken, "Byzantine Palestine—Christian Holy Land," *BA* 51 (1988) 217, 233–37;

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In contrast to this prevailing opinion, I have suggested elsewhere that conversion to Christianity among the rural population of Palestine occurred relatively late, slowly and spontaneously, and that the process of adopting the new Christian faith in the countryside was neither chronologically nor spatially uniform.[80] Although the map of holy sites in Palestine had largely taken shape by the end of the fourth century,[81] the conversion of the population proceeded at a much slower pace, achieving real momentum only during the second half of the Byzantine period. Penetration into the countryside stemmed from internal social developments that took place within the villages of Palestine; it was not institutional in nature. While the provincial towns were regarded as veritable battlegrounds with paganism, which explains why so much effort was invested there not only in secular buildings but also in municipal churches,[82] the villages of Palestine were of less interest to the Christian establishment. The ecclesiastical establishment did not direct any significant resources or manpower there, and consequently did not leave a major mark in those regions.

Assuming that the process of rural Christianization lasted long beyond the fifth century, were the rural monasteries founded in the early or later centuries of this process? Until recently, scholars believed that a majority of the monasteries in Palestine were built during the fourth and fifth centuries in bursts of activity conducted under the auspices of different emperors.[83] But a growing number of excavated monasteries and dated inscriptions may now give us a more accurate picture.[84] While monasteries had been built at holy sites during the initial phases of the Byzantine period (to 450 C.E.),[85] some of them financed by imperial sources,[86] the number of rural monasteries was quite restricted at this early stage. During the first half of the

Patrich, "Church, State," 472; and Yoram Tsafrir, "The Fate of Pagan Cult Places in Palestine: The Archaeological Evidence with Emphasis on Beth Shean," in *Religious and Ethnic Communities in Later Roman Palestine* (ed. Hayim Lapin; Bethesda, Md.: University of Maryland Press, 1998) 177–79.

[80]Doron Bar, "The Christianisation of Rural Palestine during Late Antiquity," *JEH* 54 (2003) 401–21.

[81]This can be judged from fourth-century pilgrims' accounts and detailed descriptions that reveal how well established the monks were in the holy places. See, for example, the itinerary of Egeria or Egeria, in John Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels* (London: S.P.C.K., 1971) 89–147; and Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage*, 83–106.

[82]Lea Di Segni, "Epigraphic Documentation on Buildings in the Provinces of Palestina and Arabia, 4th-7th c.," in *The Roman and Byzantine Near East* (ed. John H. Humphrey; 3 vols.; JRA Supplement 31; Portsmouth, N.H.: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1999) 149–78.

[83]See, for example, Michael Avi-Yonah, "The Economics of Byzantine Palestine," *IEJ* 8 (1958) 39–51; and S. Thomas Parker, "The Byzantine Period: An Empire's New Holy Land," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 62 (1999) 152. Indeed, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher had been dedicated in 335 C.E.

[84]Asher Ovadiah, *Corpus of the Byzantine Churches in the Holy Land* (Bonn: Hanstein, 1970) 188, 193; Lea Di Segni, "Dated Greek Inscriptions From Palestine From the Roman and Byzantine Periods" (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, 1997); and eadem, "Epigraphic Documentation," 149–78.

[85]See, for example, Yoram Tsafrir, "Monks and Monasteries in Southern Sinai," in *ACR*, 315–33; It was only in the sixth and the beginning of the seventh centuries that Judean desert monasticism reached its peak. See Yizhar Hirschfeld, "Monasteries and Churches in the Judean Desert in the Byzantine period," in *ACR*, 149–52; and the introduction by Price, *Lives of the Monks*, x–xi.

[86]Armstrong, "Imperial Church Building," 90–102.

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Byzantine period, monastic construction was centered primarily in the towns and holy sites of Palestine, whereas in the rural areas Christian religious construction activity was relatively rare. During the second half of the Byzantine period, as dedicatory inscriptions attest,[87] this trend was reversed, and most of the monasteries built between ca. 450 and ca. 640 were located in Palestine's countryside.

Thus, I would like to suggest that while the lengthy process of the Christianization of rural Palestine was essentially non-institutional in nature, a semi-institutional component that facilitated the introduction of Christianity into the countryside was the deliberate foundation of monasteries near rural settlements. The spread of rural monasteries should be seen as a contributing factor in the gradual Christianization of the countryside, and not as a result of the early acceptance of Christianity by rural populations.

Research on the phenomenon of rural monasteries in the Roman world in general, and in its eastern part in particular, is only in its initial phases.[88] Usually, monasteries have been considered oases of sanctity and prayer, or more recently as financial corporations that held land and exploited local resources. The evidence presented above leads me to suggest that a different model is required to explain the distribution of rural monasteries in Palestine. Examples of monasteries from western Galilee, southern Palestine, and other parts of the land show how thoroughly monasticism spread in the countryside. Many of the monasteries were built not in isolated areas but close to a village, sometimes integrated into its fringes, and most frequently connected to the village by a short path. This phenomenon can be observed not only in Palestine but also in some other regions of the Byzantine world,[89] and suggests that in such cases, both the monks and the villagers were interested in being neighbors.

[87]Ovadiah, *Corpus of the Byzantine Churches*, 188, 193; Vassilios Tzaferis, "Recent Discoveries of Churches in Eretz-Israel" (in Hebrew), *Qadmoniot* 33 = vol. 9, no. 1 (1976) 23–25; and Di Segni, "Epigraphic Documentation," 149–78. Di Segni's work focuses on the churches, including monastic churches, from the province of Palestine that can be dated through inscriptions (57 of the 450 archaeologically known churches). Her research indicates that only 10 of the 57 churches had been established up through the early sixth century, while 34 churches were established in the remainder of the sixth century, and another 11 were added during the seventh century.

[88]Major work has been done on rural monasteries in Britain. See, for example, Roberta Gilchrist and Harold Mytum, *The Archaeology of Rural Monasteries* (BAR British Series 203; Oxford: B.A.R., 1989). For Byzantine monasteries, see Konstantinos Smyrlis, "Une puissance économique: les grands monastères à Byzance: de la fin du X^{e} au milieu du XIV^{e} siècle" (Ph.D. diss., University of Paris, 2002); and B. Brenk, "Monasteries as Rural Settlements: Patron-dependence or Self-sufficiency?," *Recent Research on the Late Antique Countryside* (ed. W. Bowden, L. Lavan, and C. Machado; Leiden: Brill, 2004) 447–76.

[89]A parallel is supplied by the Pachomian monasteries of Upper Egypt. There, several monasteries were located within or in close proximity to the towns and villages whose names they bore. See James E. Goehring, "Withdrawing From the Desert: Pachomius and the Development of Village Monasticism in Upper Egypt," *HTR* 89 (1996) 267–85; and idem, *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert: Studies in Early Egyptian Monasticism* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1999) 89–109. On monasteries in Syria, see Andrew N. Palmer, *Monk and Mason on the Tigris Frontier: The Early History of Tur ʿAbdin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 107–12. On monasteries in Jordan, see Michele Piccirillo, "Rural Settlement in Byzantine Jordan," in *Studies in the History*

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Christianization in the countryside was not achieved through institutional coercion and the eradication of pagan rituals; rather, it occurred as part of a prolonged sociocultural development. In this process, so I propose, the monks had a central and important role in introducing and promoting the Christian faith. By the end of the sixth century, the heyday of the Byzantine period in Palestine, Christianity was thoroughly integrated into the lives of the inhabitants, rural as well as urban.[90] Except for a few pockets where pagan belief survived the Christianization process—such as the Hermon Mountains—not many followers of traditional religions were left in Palestine at the end of the Byzantine period. Those monks who deliberately chose to reside in the countryside had a critical role in this process. This phenomenon was most prominent in Judea, and can be explained by the demographic changes that this region underwent after the second Jewish revolt of 132–135 C.E. The expulsion of Jews from the area of Jerusalem following the suppression of the revolt,[91] in combination with the penetration of pagan populations into the same region,[92] created the conditions for the diffusion of Christians into that area during the fifth and sixth centuries. The remains of community churches in the region, mainly from the sixth century, testify to Christianity's success in eliminating pagan beliefs—if not pagan practices—during this period.[93] This regional population, originally pagan and during the Byzantine period gradually adopting Christianity, was one of the main reasons that the monks chose to settle there. They erected their monasteries near local villages that during this period reached their climax in size and wealth, thus providing fertile ground for the planting of new ideas.

Other factors may have affected the decision to found a monastery near a particular village; the perceived sanctity of a given location, or prior ownership of the land by the founder or donor, would no doubt influence a monastery's location. Other founders of rural monasteries may have been motivated by more practical considerations such as security, food, water, and the need for laborers, especially during the busy agricultural seasons. Accessibility and communication with other monastic communities were also essential.[94] But all of these factors, I believe, should

and Archaeology of Jordan II (ed. Adnan Hadidi; London, 1985) 258–59.

[90]Lea Di Segni ("Monk and Society: The Case of Palestine," in *The Sabaite Heritage in the Orthodox Church from the Fifth Century to the Present* [ed. Joseph Patrich; Leuven, Peeters, 2001] 31–36) claims that Palestinian monasticism was essentially an urban phenomenon with only minor influence on the countryside.

[91]Peter Schäfer, *The History of the Jews in Antiquity: The Jews of Palestine From Alexander the Great to the Arab Conquest* (Luxembourg: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1995) 158–60; and Zeev Safrai, "The Bar-Kokhba Revolt and its Effect of Settlement" (in Hebrew), in *The Bar-Kokhba Revolt: A New Approach* (ed. Aharon Oppenheimer and Uriel Rappaport; Jerusalem, 1984) 182–214.

[92]For examples, see Yitzhak Magen, Yoav Zionit, and Erna Sirkis, "Kiryat Sefer—A Jewish Village and Synagogue of the Second Temple Period" (in Hebrew) *Qadmoniot* 117 = vol. 32 (1999) 25–32; and Boaz Zisu and Amir Ganor, "Horvat 'Etri—The Ruins of a Second Temple Period Jewish Village on the Coastal Plain" (in Hebrew), *Qadmoniot* 123 = vol. 35 (2000) 18–27. These two villages were destroyed after the second Jewish revolt and were later inhabited by pagans.

[93]Bar, "The Christianisation of Rural Palestine."

[94]Alice-Mary Talbot, "Founders' Choices: Monastery Site Selection in Byzantium," in *Founders and Refounders of Byzantine Monasteries* (ed. M. Mullett; Belfast: forthcoming).

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be regarded as secondary in regard to the main reason why monasteries were located near Palestine's villages: the Christianization of the countryside. The archaeological data, and also to some extent the hagiographical sources, demonstrate how the spread of monasteries in Galilee, Judea, and other parts of Palestine was fueled by the monks' desire to influence the local population to accept Christianity.

By deciding to erect their monasteries in the more populated areas of Palestine, near villages and farms, the monks expressed, so it seems, their ambition to exert a strong influence on the local population and to energize the Christianization process. D. J. Chitty's statement that during the sixth century, Palestinian monasticism was well integrated into the organization, both ecclesiastical and civil, of the Christian oikoumene refers, we now see, not only to the monks' central position in local political life but also to their geographical spread throughout Palestine.[95] Unfortunately, there is no direct indication in our documentary sources that conversion of the local populations was the intention behind monastic settlement in the countryside;[96] the monks in the western Galilee, the coastal plain, and the Negev did not leave behind written testimony, and we know of no exemplary figures among those monks such as Chariton, Euthymius, or Sabas, who were active in the Judean desert. The archaeological finds, nevertheless, testify to the central role of rural monasteries in the Christianization of Palestine during Byzantine period, and suggest that conversion in these areas was not a by-product of the monks' activity but the result of a deliberate program.

[95]Chitty, *The Desert a City*, 179.

[96]In most of the above-mentioned examples of contacts between monks and society, the religious identity of the villagers was deliberately, so it seems, left obscure, and we cannot tell whether they were already Christianized at this stage. This, in part, can be explained by the biased perception of the sources available to us, all internal to the Christian camp and almost exclusively theological or hagiographical in nature.

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