From his original Dubruja, in today’s Romania, John Cassian started a journey that will take his entire life. Moving at the beginning south to Bethlehem, where he entered a monastery, sojourning afterwards for ten years in Egypt, where he met famous ascetics and experienced Egyptian monasticism, he left around 400 AD to go to Constantinople, Rome and, eventually, to Marseille, where he died in 432 AD.

This study discusses Cassian’s presentation of the different kinds of monasticism he encountered in Egypt. The main sources are his *Conferences* 18 (On the three kinds of monks; which was received by both *Regula Magistri* and *Regula Benedicti* with almost no modifications) and 19 (On the end of the cenobite and of the hermit). This analysis provides us with an overview of the broader diversity of monastic life and its different goals. It is especially through Cassian’s mediation, which is not neutral but follows a precise agenda of reforming Gallic monasticism, that Western Christianity will perceive Egyptian monastic experience and will carry it on in a different context. Due to the historical relevance of the development of monasticism in Occident, Cassian’s role can hardly be exaggerated even today.

1. Introduction

1.1. Life

It has been often stated how elusive the person of John Cassian is, hiding behind his works, even self-effacing. We do not know with certainty about important facts of his life such as his exact name, his place of birth, and even of some periods of his life there is no information.

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It seems (and not more than that) that he was born in the Dobruja, Scythia Minor, today’s Romania, in the 360s. While some scholars proposed Gaul, the majority tends today to Dobrudja, on the basis, among other factors, of Cassian’s bilingualism. This is much more cultural than only linguistic and prepared him from early on to serve as a bridge between the East and the West, becoming an ambassador of Eastern Christianity and especially monasticism first in Rome and then, eventually, in Gaul.

After receiving a solid classical education, he started a journey that would take his entire life. We find him in ca. 380 AD at what had become the centre or the Christian world, the Holy Land,4 the place where salvation started. Indeed, in Bethlehem, he entered a cenobitic Latin-speaking monastery not far from the Nativity’s basilica. However, his remembrance of that time is outshined by his later encounter with Egyptian monasticism. Indeed, after a few years, having received permission, he undertook a monastic tour to Egypt, together with Germanus, who would become his inseparable companion. They spent there, however, much more years than what that visit of monasteries had been planned, and had to return in-between in order to be freed from the oath they had taken to return to their monastery and so be able to go back again to Egypt. It is highly difficult to reconstruct their itinerary in Egypt in detail. Arriving in Thennessus, they moved to Panephysis and later to Diolcos. In their journey, they met famous ascetics and experienced representatives of Egyptian monasticism. Diolcos is relevant for us because there they met Piamun and John, the two elders of Conferences 18 and 19, which constitute the centre of the present study. From Diolcos they continued to Skete, the renowned monastic centre, and made it their monastic base. Indeed, besides Moses and Paphnutius, Cassian would attribute conferences to other five abbas of Skete. From Skete they also went to Kellia. However, Cassian avoids any mention of the monks there. Especially striking is the absolute silence upon the leading spiritual authority there, Evagrius; arguably his most influential source. In failing to do so, he might have attempted to distance himself from Evagrian Origenism. The reasons for this appear to be a big crisis within this monastic line, which eventually led to a large exodus of Origenist monks after 399 AD, from which Cassian appears to share views in many respects.5

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4 However, he never mentions Jerusalem or the other holy places besides Bethlehem. Neither has he mentioned Jerome’s monastery in that city.

Among these exiled ascetics, Cassian with Germanus, received refuge under the bishop of Constantinople, John Chrysostom, who ordained the latter as a priest and Cassian as a deacon. That this was no durable solution was clear when John entered in conflict with the bishop of Alexandria, because of receiving the exiled Egyptian monks. After Chrysostomus was finally deposed in 404 AD, Cassian and Germanus were sent within a delegation from Constantinople to inform the Church of Rome about Chrysostom’s unlawful deposition. It is not clear if both monks returned to Constantinople with the answer of the bishop of Rome. It seems, however, more probable that they remained in Rome, where Germanus eventually died. Especially obscure appears this period of 405-415 AD, for which different possibilities have been proposed, after which we eventually find Cassian in Massilia, southern Gaul.

There he found a particular situation. While Christian asceticism had already started with St. Martin, it was not yet real monastic asceticism. In Lérins, emerged later a monastic way with the work of St. Honoratus. Against this setting, we can understand Cassian’s contribution in this process of monastic development in Gaul. There, he founded two monasteries: Saint Victor, for monks, and Saint Saviour, for nuns. However, his lasting contribution is to be found in his literary activity: he penned his most important works: the Institutes and the Conferences. These are to be seen within a well-defined agenda. First, it is evident that he developed a significant monastic network, as is apparent from the different prefaces to the three parts of the Conferences. Within this global framework, he undertook the reform of previous monasticism in the region. He considered it too disorganized and lacking discipline, and relying too much on miracles. On the contrary, he presents Egyptian monasticism as the canonical and original one, based on “institutes” and discipline. In Cassian's pages, Egyptian elders are now, twenty years later, addressing Gallic monks, through Cassian (and Germanus). Eastern monastic experience is now delivered to Western audience through the “authority” of Cassian, the eyewitness of supreme monastic perfection. In addition, having

“bei Cassian begegnet uns also ein origenistisches Mönchtum...Er versuchte vielmehr die monastische Tradition, wie er sie in Palästina, Ägypten und Konstantinopel erlernt hatte, im Westen weiter zu geben. In dieser Funktion ist er insbesondere auch für das benediktinische Mönchtum wichtig geworden.”

become a highly influential character in the monastic topography of Gaul, he died between 432 and 435.

1.2. Cassian’s Sources

Besides the Bible, Cassian has abundantly read classical and Christian texts. From the Fathers, he knows among others Origen, especially present in Cassian’s allegory and typology, and within monastic literature: Palladius’ Historia Lausiaca, Sulpitius’ Dialogues, the Life of Antony, Jerome, Augustine, and some strata of the Apophthegmata. From earlier Church Fathers, it is clear that he had acquaintance with Hermas, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyprian, Eusebius of Caesarea, Basil and his beloved John Chrysostom. His main source remains, nevertheless, Evagrius. To some extent, Cassianus “translates” and adapts Evagrius to Western Christianity. His spiritual theology is deeply indebted to the elder of Kellia. However, Cassian is much more than a divulgator of Evagrius.

It is apparent that in the thought of Cassian, a great number of sources is to be found, especially if we consider his infrequent bilingualism. In this sense, it is clear that they inspired him. In this vein, the teaching of the Institutes and the Conferences “propagent en Occident une doctrine déjà bien exposée en Orient”, and unlike what he often manifests, he is not providing anything substantially new, with the exception of bringing that solid doctrine to a new audience: Western monasticism.

Neither can be maintained that Cassian offers the earliest teaching on monastic life in Latin, since there was already monastic literature in this language before the Institutes and the Conferences.

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10 Guy, “Jean Cassien”, p. 364: “A cette date, la littérature monastique en langue latine, qu’il s’agisse de textes originaux ou de traductions, est déjà abondante”
1.3. Reception

Cassian’s diffusion and influence on Western monasticism has been immense. In effect, starting with the monks of Lérins, following with Cassiodorus, Caesarius, it was mainly in the monastic rules, especially the Rule of the Master and, through him, the Rule of Benedict, where his impact was strongest. In that way, he became in the West “the” authority on Eastern ascetical and monastic life. Nevertheless, we cannot overlook a problematic aspect of his reception in the West: his *Conf.* and its connection to what has been called “semipelagianism”.

This did not affect at all, however, his reception, reputation and sainthood in the East. As a bilingual author and due to the depth of his spiritual theology, he was also highly esteemed in the Christian East, as it is attested by the unusual fact for a Latin author of being taken into the alphabetical collection of the *Apophthegmata*, and even later in the *Philokalia*.

11 Cf., Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, p. 25: “The Master’s debt to Cassian, especially in ascetical doctrine, is tremendous. To the master goes the credit for the creative elaboration of Cassian’s ten marks on humility (Inst. 4.39) into twelve degrees of humility. Benedict inherited Cassian’s teaching from the Master, and also added his own deep knowledge of both *Institutes* and *Conferences*.”

12 Dattro, *Giovanni Cassiano*, p. 23: “Il nome di Cassiano, apparso come persona ricca di straordinarie esperienze in materia, divenne ben presto famoso come fonte privilegiata di informazione intorno alla vita ascetica e monacale condotta nei centri dell’Oriente: se ne parlava come di ambienti d’assoluta perfezione. Cassiano rispose a quegli appelli con opere scritte che ebbero in seguito una diffusione notevole.” See also S. Hausammann, *Alte Kirche. Gottes Dreieheit-des Menschen Freiheit*, p. 452: Er versuchte vielmehr die monastische Tradition, wie er sie in Palästina, Ägypten und Konstantinopel erlernt hatte, im Westen weiter zu geben. In dieser Funktion ist er insbesondere auch für das benediktinische Mönchtum wichtigt geworden.” W. Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism*, Oxford 2004, p. 403: “Cassian was not neutral. He transformed the legacy, he received an in the process instituted – in a new language – monasticism made for the harsher climate of the West. He exerted a profound influence first on fifth-century Gallic monasticism, then on Benedict and his *Rule*, and finally, through Benedict, on the whole Medieval West... Cassian earned equal respect in the Greek East. He is the only Latin-speaking author whose sayings appear in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, a singular honor. Whereas the West would begrudge him the title of ‘saint’ and a place in its liturgical calendar, the Greek East felt no such inhibition.”

1.4. Works

Beside the treatise *On the Incarnation of the Lord*, commanded by whom later would become Pope Leo, in order to combat Nestorian ideas, his significant works are the *Institutes* and the *Conferences*. Being written in the ten years that passed between 419 and 429, they respond to a same plan, carried out in three phases. In the original project, we find the twelve books of the *Institutes* and the first instalment of ten *Conferences* with *abbas* of Skete. An expansion of the plan came later with two further series of seven conferences.

The *Institutes* are clearly divided into two parts: basic introduction into cenobitic monasticism [1-4] and the presentation and analysis of the eight main vices [5-12].

The 24 *Conferences* cover a broad variety of monastic questions and they have the same structure. Within the classical form of the *erotapokriseis*, they deal with conversations, where a young disciple (Germanus) poses spiritual questions to an elder (in all *Conferences*, a total of 15 elders appear, since some have more than one conference). As mentioned above, Cassian remains always in the background, silent, as the narrator of the conference.

Although different works, *Institutes* and *Conferences* are deeply interconnected, forming part of a same project, as already stated, with frequent mutual references, in such a way that they appear to be two sides of one coin.\(^{14}\)

I have already stated that the dedications of the different parts of the *Conferences* and of the *Institutes* are highly relevant in order to understand Cassian’s monastic project. The *Institutes* were dedicated to the bishop (Pope) Castor, while the first part of the *Conferences* were intended for bishops Leontius and Helladios:

\[\text{The obligation that was incurred with respect to the blessed Pope}\]
\[\text{Castor in the preface of those volumes that summarized in twelve}\]
\[\text{books the institutes of the cenobia and the remedies for the eight principal vices has, with the Lord’s help, been more or less fulfilled; our}\]
\[\text{feeble nature was just capable of it… Now, however, since the afore-}\]
\[\text{said bishop has left us and gone to Christ, I thought that there should}\]
\[\text{be dedicated to you above all, O most blessed Pope Leontius and holy}\]
\[\text{brother Helladius, the ten conferences of the greatest fathers – ancho-}\]
\[\text{rites who dwelled in the desert of Skete – which he, inflamed with}\]
\[\text{an incomparable zeal for holiness, had ordered to be written in like}\]

\(^{14}\) Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, p. 31.
words, not thinking in the breadth of his charity what a heavy weight he was laying on weak shoulders.\textsuperscript{15}

The second series is dedicated to bishop Honoratus and Eucherius, and finally the third one, to Jovinianus, Minervus, Leontius and Theodore. In other words, Cassian addresses his works to those who are shaping the emerging Gallic monasticism.\textsuperscript{16} In these prefaces, we receive a glimpse of Cassian’s ascetical politics. He intends, as already referred, to reform what is inconvenient in that form of monasticism\textsuperscript{17}, by presenting the true monastic life, the one professed in Egypt. In this way, “Cassian offers his \textit{Conferences} as a way for the new monks of Gaul to overhear the great monks of Egypt speaking as they did back home.”\textsuperscript{18} Indeed, although the \textit{Conferences} speak of Egypt, the intended audience lived in southern Gaul.

2. \textit{The Conferences}

In order to provide a glimpse of the topics dealt in the extensive 24 \textit{Conferences}, I present here the main themes of each one of them.

\textit{First Part (1-10)}
\begin{enumerate}
  \item On the goal and end of the monk
  \item On discretion
  \item On the three renunciations
  \item On the desire of the flesh and of the spirit
  \item On the eight principal vices
  \item On the slaughter of some holy persona
  \item On the changeableness of the soul and on evil spirits
  \item On the principalities
  \item On prayer I
  \item On prayer II
\end{enumerate}

\textit{Second Part (XI-XVII)}
\begin{enumerate}
  \item On Perfection
  \item On Chastity
\end{enumerate}

\textsuperscript{15} Cassian’s Preface to the First Part, 1-2
\textsuperscript{16} Cf. Harmless, \textit{Desert Christians}, p. 388: “He clearly wanted to disseminate his message to those who had the authority to bring it to fruition”.
\textsuperscript{17} Fontaine, “L’ascétisme chrétien dans la littérature gallo-romaine”, p. 109.
\textsuperscript{18} Stewart, \textit{Cassian the Monk}, p. 3.
13. On God’s Protection
14. On Spiritual Knowledge
15. On Divine Gifts
16. On Friendship
17. On Making Promises

Third Part (XVIII-XXIV)
18. On the Three Kinds of Monks
19. The End of the Cenobite and of the Hermit
20. On the End of Repentance and on the Mark of Reparation
21. On the Relaxation at Pentecost
22. On Nocturnal Illusions
23. On Sinlessness
24. On Mortification

3. Diversity of Monastic Experience

After this presentation of the general structure of the Conferences, in their three parts, I will focus now upon Conferences 18 and 19. Although attributed to two different abbas (Piamun\textsuperscript{19} and John) they are deeply connected and the latter bases upon and expands what has been dealt with in the former. In both cases, as it is often the case in Cassian, we have a very systematic, almost scholastic, presentation and argumentation about the principles of monastic life. Main terminology refers to professions/perfections (for designing the two main forms of monastic life) and their ends\textsuperscript{20} (which is central in 19). Indeed, these two main forms of monastic life constitute the thread through Cassian’s works.\textsuperscript{21} In both cases, our author or the abbas that are teaching refer to discipline, precepts, rules and institutes to attain that end. In doing this, they clearly state the necessity of knowing these distinctions.

\textsuperscript{19} Already mentioned in 17.24 and he appears also in Historia monachorum in Aegypto 25 and Sozomen, Historia ecclesiastica 6.29.

\textsuperscript{20} In Conf. 1 (2.1-4.1) from the very outset abba Moses clearly distinguishes between the goal (skopos) and the end (telos) of monastic life.

\textsuperscript{21} Cf. Harmless, Desert Christians, p. 401: “The theme of two monastic lifestyles is a thread that runs through Cassian’s whole project. He dedicates the Institutes to issues of cenobitic life, while the first then Conferences use anchorites as spokesmen and seem geared to anchoritic spirituality.”
3.1. *Conference 18*

It is set close to Diolcos [located at one of the seven mouths of the Nile] and, as already pointed out, the main character is here an elderly monastic and priest, abba Piamun (1), who, after practicing hospitality with Germanus and Cassian and having inquired about their origin, teaches them how they have to adapt to Egyptian discipline (2-3). After this prologue, Piamun will expand upon the central topic of the conference, namely the different kinds of monks (4). In doing so, he undertakes a very precise presentation, systematically organised, dedicating a paragraph to each monastic kind: the cenobites (5), the anchorites (6), the sarabaïtes (7), the unnamed fourth kind (8) and finally, in answering Germanus’ question, he distinguishes between a monastery and a cenobium (9-10). The following paragraphs (11-16) deal with other issues such as humility, patience and envy, which, however, do not interest us in the context of this study.

In the analysis of the conference, I will focus on three key aspects: a) the alleged superiority of Egyptian monasticism over other forms, b) the claimed origin of monastic life in the eyes of Piamun-Cassian c) the different kinds of monks.

As referred before, after the setting of the conference and introducing the abba and priest Piamun (1), this one, finding out that Germanus and Cassian come from a “cenobium in Syria,”

\[22 \text{ In XIX, 1.3: Cassian speaks also from “our monastery in Syria”.} \]

\[23 \text{ Conf. 18. 2.2.} \]

... takes occasion to bring up a problem caused by several monks from the same region that, having come to Egypt, did not adapt to the “Institutes” of this country but continued living according to their own uses.

“For we have known some people who have come to this place from your region in order to go around to the monasteries of the brothers merely for the sake of getting acquainted with them, but not in order to receive the rules and institutes for which they came here.... Holding on to the behaviour and concerns to which they were accustomed, they were thought to have changed provinces not for the sake of their own progress but out of a need to escape poverty, and many people reproach them for this.”

The text reports that some monks come to learn (“for the sake of their own progress”) from Egyptian monasticism, here explicitly presented as consist-
ing in “receiving the rules and institutes.” The notion of *instituta* is key. They are the foundational principles, with which “Cassian, like a good architect, wanted to institute this new monastic edifice by surveying the terrain and laying out a firm foundation.”

What these monks do, or at least what they are expected to do, is the following. They undertake a monastic tour (“go around the monasteries of the brothers”) and they should, after receiving the (Egyptian) rules and institutes from the different *abbes*, go to their cells and put them into practice.

We know that the boom of monasticism in Egypt in the second half of the fourth century attracted many people from the entire Christian world of that time, who wanted to personally experience this new form of life. In the case of the reference of Piamun, the problem here appears to be some “Syrian” monks. About the situation in the monasteries in Syria, we have Germanus’ and Cassian’s reports and reflection. In the third conference, they honestly acknowledge:

> “[W]e just realized that we had not yet even begun to dream of the summit of monasticism when, after having learned very little in the cenobia about the second renunciation, we discovered that we had not heard anything about the third, in which all perfection is contained and which is vastly superior to the other two.”

Although coming to learn, i.e. to receive (new) rules, those monks persist upon the old own ones. The new way of life (the Egyptian one) is considered to be, at least in the expectations of Piamun and many other, as a progress for those monks. Nevertheless, the practice is far from this ideal and Piamun ascribes other earthly reasons to this pilgrimage. In reality, they are – as we would call them today – economic migrants since, in the eyes of the *abba*, they are looking for a better life, not in the spiritual sense (“for the sake of their own progress”), but concretely their aim is “to escape poverty.” In other words, these groups of Syrian (Palestinian, we would say) monks remain a strange body within the broad Egyptian monastic geography. However, the reproach that Piamun and other monks (“many people”) address to them is not material but spiritual. They simply do not acknowledge the superiority of Egyptian monastic practices. On the contrary, they persist upon their own

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25 *Conf.* 3.22.4. On the instruction that Germanus and Cassian received in their own cenobium in Bethlehem see 5.12.3; 17.3ff, 18.2.2ff., 19.1.3ff., 21.11
practices. These are explicitly named by the *abba*. These monks continue wearing the same kind of clothes they wore in Syria; they pray and fast also according to Syrian traditions and, the worse, they do not put in practice the “Egyptian” rules, but just visit the monasteries, only to get acquainted with the monks. In other words, no sins are attributed to them, but simply that they do not adapt to the “Egyptian way of life,” but “hold(ing) on to the behaviour and concerns to which they were accustomed.” Piamun regards all this as stubbornness, and, as a consequence, those monks did not acquire any instructions and had to leave Egypt. It is clear, however, that by reporting this speech of Piamun, Cassian is mainly addressing his Gallic audience. Also for them it is the Egyptian version of monasticism, provided by Cassian himself, the canonical one. Moreover, like Germanus and Cassian, they are required to forget everything what they thought they knew about monasticism.

Going back to Piamun, after offering this desolate state of affairs, he turns to Germanus and Cassian, urging them to take a different stance than his fellow monks.

Therefore, if, as we believe, concern for God has drawn you to seek after our knowledge, you must completely renounce (abdicate) all the institutes that accompanied your first beginnings in the former place and follow with great humility whatever you see our elders do or teach.

Unlike the other Syrian monks, they ought first of all to acknowledge the superiority of the Egyptian experience and forget the Syrian one, with its institutes. The way is the one of imitation of the Egyptian *abbas*, in “whatever” they teach them. This obedience to them and their institutes accepts no discussion, but requires great “humility.”

26 A. De Vogüé, “Monachisme et église dans la penseée de Cassien”, in Théologie de la vie monastique. Études sur la tradition patristique, Paris 1961, p. 217: “C’est un écrivain latin, soucieux de grandir aux yeux des moines d’Occident la tradition égyptienne ont il est le porte-parole, qui a lancée cette thèse »

27 *Conf.* 18. 3.1.

28 *Conf.* 18. 3.1: “Nor should you be moved or diverted or held back from imitating (ab imitatione) them, even if the reason or the cause for a particular thing or deed is not clear to you at the time...”

29 *Conf.* 18.3.2: “But whoever begins to learn by discussion will never enter into the reason for the truth because the enemy will see him trusting in his own judgment rather than in that of the fathers and will easily drive him to the point
Having made clear the basis for taking profit of his teaching, Piamun turns to the real theme of the conference, namely the different kind of monks. Also here he provides an unusual, almost scholastic, clarification.

Therefore, the first thing that you must know is how and where the order and origin of our profession (ordo atque principium professionis nostrae) came about. For a person will be able to pursue the discipline (disciplinam) of the desired art (artis) more effectively and be drawn to exercise it more ardently when he recognizes the dignity of its authors and founders (auctorum ac fundatorum).30

Without distinguishing yet the different kinds of monks, Piamun speaks at this point of a single “professio”, which they share. In order to attain the goal, it is necessary to know how this was originated and which the founders were as well. In proposing this, the abba presents monastic life as another “ars,” which requires, as every art, a certain “disciplina”. In other words, we will listen now which is (are) the monastic way(s), who started it/them and how are we to attain its/their goal(s).

Against this background, Piamun is able to produce his central statement: “Tria sunt in Aegypto genera monachorum…”31 and introduce us in the following three chapters each of these three “genera” in detail. Here, however, each of them is presented very briefly in regard to their main characteristics.

There are in Egypt three kinds of monks. Two of them are very good (optima), while the third is lukewarm (tepidum) and utterly to be avoided. The first is that of the cenobites (coenobiotarum), who live together in a community and are governed by the judgement of one elder (qui scilicet in congregatione pariter consistentes unius senioris iudicio gubernantur). The greatest numbers of monks dwelling throughout Egypt are of this kind. The second is that of the anchorites (anachoretarum), who are first instructed in the cenobia and then, perfected in their practical way of live, choose the recesses of the dessert. We too have chosen to be part of this profession. The third and blameworthy (reprehensibile) one is that of the sarabaites. We shall discuss each of these in order and at great length (per ordinem plenius).32

From the three groups (later he will mention in passing a fourth one) a clear line is traced between the first two, characterized as “optima,” and the

30 Conf. 18. 4.1.
31 Conf. 18. 4.1
32 Conf. 18. 4.2.
third one, “tepidum” and later even “reprehensibile.” Piamun does not explain so far the meaning of the names of the three categories. The definition of the first one is done through the reference to their common life, as the names points it out, but also in their obedience to one abba. Benedict will also refer later to the elder, adding however another element: the (monastic) rule33. The second class clearly bases upon and presupposes the first one. The third one is only introduced by its name and further qualified as “blameworthy.” After this summary introduction and after stating the importance of knowing “the founders of these three professions,” Piamun will abound in each of these groups. Herein, new and relevant for our study will be Piamum’s/Cassian’s interesting explanation about the origin of the different kinds, especially the first two.

We turn now to the question on the origins of monasticism and the different kinds of monks.

The discipline of the cenobites took its rise at the time of the apostolic preaching (a tempore praedicationis apostolicae). For such was the whole multitude of believers in Jerusalem, which is described thus in the Acts of the Apostles.34

In this way, Cassian places in the mouth of Piamun this particular connection between cenobitic life and first Christians. It must be first stated that the reference is not to the apostles but to their preaching and, especially, the effect of this upon the early community of Jerusalem. The text continues with three quotations from the Acts of the Apostles35 that became classic in supporting the spirituality of later monastic and religious life; passages that point out the suppression of private property and the common sharing of everything. This will be the point of connection between the early Christian community and the cenobites: their having everything in common. In the meantime, this will be a special bone of content with the blameworthy forms of monasticism.

In any case, that high ideal did not uphold for a long time and contrasts in the view of Piamun with the situation of the Church and even the cenobia at

34 Conf. 18. 5.1
35 Chapters 2 and 4.
his time. This break, however did not take place recently but very early, with the disappearance of the apostles. Then, “at the death of the apostles, the multitude of believers began to grow lukewarm, especially those who came over to the faith of Christ from different foreign nations.” Indeed, Piamun charges especially former pagans of gradually “spoil[ing] the perfection of the Church which was in Jerusalem.” This claim is argued upon the concessions given to them in the early practice of Christianity, especially at the so-called council of Jerusalem. This is perceived as a relaxation, in which eventually even the leaders of the Church will fall; a relaxation in the earlier practice of having everything in common and not possessing anything. At that time, some people did no longer consider irreconcilable to be a Christian and, in the meantime, to possess properties.

“Those in whom the apostolic fervor still existed (adhuc apostolicus inerat feruor), however, were mindful of that earlier perfection (memores illius pristinae perfectionis). Abandoning (discedentes) their towns and the company of those who believed that the negligence of a more careless life was lawful for both themselves and the Church of God, they began to live in rural and more secluded places and to practice privately and individually (priuatim ac peculiariter) what they remembered (meminerant) the rules (institutes) [taught by the apostles] in a general way throughout the body of the Church. So it was that the-

36 Cf. Conf. 18. 5.2: “Such, I say, was the whole Church then, whereas now it is difficult to find even a few like this in the cenobia”
37 On this decline from the original perfection, see Conf. 7.23; 19.5.2; 21.30 and Inst. 2.5 and also in some other examples of monastic literature such as Jerome’s Vita Malchi 1; Apothegmata patrum. Elia 8; Peomen 166; Verba seniorum 10.105, 10.114, 17.19: Regula Benedicti 18.25; 40.6. John Moschus, Pratum sprituale 54, 130,162,168.
38 Conf. 18. 5.2
39 Conf. 18. 5.2: “But at the death of the apostles, the multitude of believers began to grow lukewarm, especially those who came over to the faith of Christ from different foreign nations … But this liberty, which was conceded to the pagans because of the weakness of their new faith, gradually began to spoil the perfection of the Church which was in Jerusalem, and, as the number of natives and of foreigners daily increased, the warmth of that new faith grew cold and not only those who had come over to the faith of Christ but even those who were the leaders of Church relaxed their strictness”.
40 Conf. 18. 5.3.
Within this state of decay, there is a “holy rest.” In this context, the text refers twice to the remembrance. A group has not forgotten the primitive state, here designed as the “earlier perfection” taught by the apostles. More than a group, there are private persons that individually save the memory from oblivion. In such way, continuity between apostolic times and the consolidation of monasticism is clearly stated. There is, however, a break, at least physically, since that rest abandoned their milieu, mainly the cities, and went to more solitary places, in order to put into practice the earlier perfection and its rules. It does not seem clear so far, what does this mean. In any case, it appears that no community is referred (another break with the origins), since the practice of these people is “private and individual.” They broke not only topographically but also spiritually (from contamination). This separation does not end there but will continue to increase.

“As time went on they gradually separated themselves from the crowd of believers (segregati a credentium) by reason of the fact that they abstained from marriage, cut themselves off (secernerent) from the company of their parents and from the life of this world, and were called monks or μονάζοντες (monachi siue μονάζοντες) because of the strictness of their individual and solitary lives. Consequently they are called cenobites (coenobiotae) from their common fellowship (ut ex communione consortii), and their cells and dwelling places are called cenobia. This alone, then, was the most ancient kind of monks (antiquissimum monachorum genus), which is first not only in time but also in grace (non solum tempore, sed etiam gratia primum), and which remained inviolable throughout the years, up until the era of Abba Paul and Abba Antony. We see that remnants (uestigia) of it endure even now in strict cenobia.”

Those “memores” are now explicitly identified as cenobites. The identification is not evident, though. The emphasis is placed first on the rupture with former life (marriage, family, world) that leads them to very strict “individual

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41 Conf. 18. 5.3.
42 Conf. 18. 5.4.
and solitary lives.” The jump from the solitary life to the common one is not made clear; or they are solitaries that stand in some kind of communion. This tension emerges in both names given to them. Because they are “separated” (segregati; secernerent) they are called monazontes or in a latinized way, monachi.\textsuperscript{44} To some extent contradictory as stated, they live a solitary life but in a common fellowship, reality which is expressed by the other Greek name: “coenobiotae,” i.e. those who lead a common life. We are informed that they live in special dwellings called cenobia.

Cassian’s explanation of the emergence and development of monastic life out of the apostolic community presents a theological stance, although with no historical basis. In this context, De Vogüé has claimed: “[s]on récit n’est pas autre chose qu’un mythe.”\textsuperscript{45} He also points out, how Cassian, by introducing this strange connection to the origins of Christianity, is in the meantime explicitly avoiding any mention of whom is considered to be the actual founder of cenobitic monasticism, Pachomius, and replacing him with other origins.\textsuperscript{46}

In this context, the text qualifies them highly, as being the first in time and in grace. This, as similar expressions, is in tension with Cassian’s clear preference of anchoritic life. For instance, in the same Conf. 18, Piamun tells Germanus and Cassian at the end of our section:

“Therefore, since I see that you have learned the principles of this profession from the best kind of monks – that is, from the praiseworthy school of the cenobia – and that you are heading toward the highest reaches of anchorite discipline, toward the virtue of humility and patience…”\textsuperscript{47}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[De Vogüé, “Monachisme et église”, p. 218.
\item[De Vogüé, “Monachisme et église”, pp. 217-218: “D’après les textes pacômiens, Pacôme est le seul fondateur des cenobia d’Egypte. Avant lui, la vie cénobitique n’existait pas. Cassien ne pouvait ignorer Pacôme et le rôle de fondateur qui lui était reconnu en Egypte. Mais cette origine lui paraissait trop récente et trop obscure pour la tradition monastique qu’il voulait recommander aux moines gaulois. Aussi n’a-t-il pas hésité à transférer aux Pères apostoliques un trait de la légende pacômienne. Pas une seule fois, d’ailleurs, les Institutions et les Conférences ne mentionnent Pacôme. L’escamotage est total”.
\item[Conf. 18.11.1.]
\end{footnotes}
Very often, Cassian makes this superiority very clear.48

“As the solitary life is great and more sublime than that of the cenobia, and the contemplation of God – upon which those inestimable men were ever intent – than the active life that is led in communities…”49

In Cassian’s presentation of the cenobites a term is introduced: the time of Paul and Antony. Later we will see why. In any case, this way of life persists in some cenobia (only in the strict ones). Implicit appears here a criticism to contemporary cenobitic life, by stating that that original cenobitic life are at his time only uestigia.

After this long preparation, Piamun has finally introduced the first kind of monks, the cenobites, and is ready for the second one.

“From this number of the perfect, from what I would call this most fruitful root of holy persons, the flowers and fruit of the anchorites (fecundissima radice sanctorum etiam anachoretarum) sprouted forth afterwards. We know from the existence of the leaders of this profession (professionis principes), whom we mentioned shortly before – namely, the holy Paul and Antony.”50

In this introduction, origin and leaders of this monastic way are presented. The historical emergence of the anchorites out of the cenobitic life, present in this paragraph, has been called into question, especially by de Vogüé. As in 5, 4, both initiators of this way of life are mentioned, this time qualified as “holy.” In any case, even graphically, anchoritic life is portrayed as the fruit and the flower of monastic life. Already here we find the tension with Cassian’s affirmation on the primacy in grace of cenobitic life.

48 De Vogüé, “Monachisme et église”, p. 238: “La préférence de Cassien pour l’éremitisme est un fait bien connu, encore que les exégètes modernes aient communément tendance à le sous-estimer.”
50 Conf. 18. 6.1.
In his general presentations of the different monastic “professions,” Piamun, who belonged to it, had characterized it in its developing process in the life of the anchorites. They led first a cenobitic life and only afterwards, well trained, they could go into the desert. Back to the chapter 6, the abba expands what he had stated before, in explaining how the passage from one life to the other takes place:

“They sought out the recesses (sectati sunt) of the desert not, indeed, because of faintheartedness or an unhealthy impatience but from a desire for higher progress and divine contemplation (sublimiori profectus contemplationisque), although the former of them is said to have penetrated the desert out of need, in order to escape the snares of his relatives during a time of persecution.”

The process of separation, which already took place at the beginning of cenobitic life and continued to deepen, increases in this second kind of life even more. The anchorites do not go to rural zones (as it was affirmed from the cenobites) but to the desert. The reasons for such a flight are positively presented. The motive for leaving the cenobium and going into the deep desert is progress and/in contemplation. In other words, progress sought in the solitude seems to be a more profound contemplation of God. However, in the following paragraph another reason for changing professions is provided or added. It is not only contemplation (not mentioned here), which leads the monk into the desert, into separating from the rest of the community, but the desire of a singular combat with the demons

“In this way, then, another kind of perfection came out of the discipline that we have spoken of. Its followers (sectatores) are deservedly

51 Cassian had already spoken of these different professions in Inst. 5.4.3: “Although our religion has one end, there are nonetheless different professions by which to go to God, as will be more fully discussed in the conferences of the elders”.
52 Conf. 18. 8.2.
53 Cf. Conf. 18. 4.2: “The greatest number of monks dwelling throughout Egypt are of this kind. The second is that of the anchorites (anachoretarum), who are first instructed in the cenobia and then, perfected in their practical way of live, choose the recesses of the desert”.
54 Conf. 18. 6.1.
called anchorites (anachoretae),\textsuperscript{55} that is, those who go apart (id est secessores merito nuncupantur) – because they are not at all content with the victory of treading underfoot the hidden snares of the devil in the midst of men (inter homines). They desire to engage the demons in an open struggle and in out-and-out combat (aperto certamine ac manifesto conflictu), and they are not afraid to penetrate the vast recesses of the desert (uastos heremi recessus) in imitation of John the Baptist, who spent his whole life in the desert, and of Elijah and Elisha…”\textsuperscript{56}

While the name of cenobites pointed out the communal character of their life, the anchorites characterize themselves exactly by the opposite. They have left that community and penetrated the desert, in order to continue the combat, already undertaken by the cenobites, now deprived from human assistance in their fight, but only with God’s assistance. In doing so, Piamun goes on, they continue a biblical tradition. In this context, biblical characters are brought forward. They would become the predecessors, inspirers and prototypes of anchoritic life. First of all, the Baptist, but also Elijah and his disciple Elisha. In addition to this, passages referring to the desert or to solitary life are collected from the book of Job, the prophet Jeremiah, and the Psalms. As the \textit{abba} has done before in referring to the famous passages of the Acts of the Apostles for cenobitic life, he underpins now the anchoritic life with some other biblical examples. In doing so, he closes his presentation of the second profession and moves on in the next paragraph to the third kind, qualified as \textit{deterrimum et infidele}. Also here he provides a biblical basis, also extracted from the early community in Jerusalem and the book of the Acts of the Apostles: the couple of Ananias and Sapphira.

“And as the Christian religion was rejoicing in these two professions of the monks, although the latter class had also begun to deteriorate gradually, they appeared thereafter the worst (deterrimum et infidele) kind of monks, who are faithless. Or rather that harmful plant took new life, which, when it was sprouting at the beginning of the Church under Ananias and Sapphira, was cut down by the severity of the apostle Peter. Among the monks, this has been considered detestable and detestable and detestable and detestable…"

\textsuperscript{55} On the pagan and early Christian usage of \textit{ἀναχωρεῖν}, see A.-J. Festugièrè, 

\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Conf.} 18. 6.2.
abominable (detestabilis execrandaque), and it has not been practiced by anyone ever since…”57

Unlike the cenobites, who were –to some extent– in direct connexion with the apostolic times and the anchorites, who start with Paul and Antony, the origin of the still unnamed third profession can be conducted only indirectly to some leaders, since it was discontinued (succisa est) also in that early time. The same is expressed below, but adding now how this error came again to life:

“When this example, which was punished with apostolic vigor in Ananias and Sapphira, had gradually faded from the thought of some, due to long neglect and to the forgetfulness that comes with time, there emerged the kind known as sarabaites. They are rightly called sarabaites in the Egyptian language because they withdrew themselves from the communities of the cenobia and as individuals cared for their own needs. They came from the number of those whom we have already spoken about…”58

Again here, Piamun brings the dynamics of forgetting-remember to the fore. While in 5.2 the monks were those who were mindful of the earlier perfection, oblivion (temporis oblitteratione subtracto) occurs regarding the crime of the couple and the following apostolic punishment. In this context the third group emerges, which is now designed no longer with Greek terminology but with an Egyptian name59. This is explained as meaning the withdrawal from the community (a coenobiorum congregationibus sequestrarent). This is, however, exactly what the anchorites, the second group, were. Another element is added though: “and as individuals cared for their own needs” (ac singillalim suas curarent necessitates), which in itself is not negative, since the same anchorites would have needed to take care of their necessities. The detailed negative portray comes, however, in the following paragraph:

“These, then, while faint-heartedly affecting the highest virtue, have been compelled to come to this profession out of necessity, being eager to be accounted merely as bearing the name of monks without making any effort to imitate them. In no way do they long for the discipline of the cenobia (coenobiorum nulla tenus expetunt disciplinam). They

57 Conf. 18. 7.1. 58 Conf. 18. 7.2. 59 Cassian ist the earliest source in Christian literature for the use of this term.
do not submit to the judgment of the elders (nec seniorum subduntur arbitrio), nor are the formed in their traditions and they do not learn to conquer their own wills; neither do they accept, as a result of some prescribed training, any rule of sound discretion (aut eorum traditionibus instituti suas discunt uincere uoluntates nec ullam sanae discretionis regulam legitima eruditione suscipiunt). Instead they only make a public renunciation – that is, in the sight of men – and either remain in their dwellings, bound to the same occupations, thanks to the privilege of this name, or build themselves cells and call them monasteries (monasteria), living in them at liberty under their own law (suo iure) and never obeying the gospel precepts.  

The emphasis is placed on spurious motives and the liberty of these “monks”. First the text alludes to “necessity” being at the origin of this option. Piamun had stated the same before for the Syrian monks coming to Egypt but also to abba Paul. In any case, the text undermines the freedom of such a decision. Another reason is the prestige that monks had. This third category desires this prestige, however with no submission or discipline to elder, rule or even the evangelical precepts. On the contrary, they are totally free, in Piamun’s view, to do whatever they want and continue their formal life. Finally, the text had pointed out to two ways of realizing this third kind of monasticism. After making a public renunciation (we do not know, how this would be, where, in front of whom, etc.), either they continue the same life or they construct their own monasteries and call them so.

“Those who, however, as we have said, leave the strictness of the cenobium and live in cells by twos and threes, not content to be governed by the care and judgment of an abba (non contenti abbatis cura atque imperio gubernari), but rather being especially concerned to be loosed from the yoke of the elders (a seniorum iugo) and to be free to exercise their own wills (exercendi uoluntates suas in eis ac libertate), to go wherever they please and to wander (euagandi) about and act as it suits them...”  

Obedience to the abba and to the elders is opposed to the exercise of the free will and, in this context, wandering about. This reference to wandering (euagandi) is relevant since Benedict will design not the third but his

60 Conf. 18. 7.3.
61 Conf. 18. 7.3.
fourth kind of monks as *girovagum*. Finally, Piamun reveals the expansion of these monks, by stating that in some provinces “the third kind, the Sarabaites, abounds and exists almost by itself”\(^{62}\), outnumbering the first two classes. However, as we saw before, Piamun is speaking in this *conference* to Gallic monks.

Cassian’s principal complaint about the Sarabaites is their failure to follow the traditions of the fathers. He makes the same complaint about Gallic monks. Early in the *Institutes* Cassian bemoans abbots who, either from ignorance or pride, have introduced traditions contrary to those of the fathers. Just as it was necessary for Germanus to forget what he had learned in Syria and adopt the institutes of the Egyptians, so also the reader needs to abandon the corrupt practices he had learned in Gaul. Cassian’s condemnation of the Sarabites reinforces his oft-repeated call for cenobite discipline founded on humility and on obedience to the tradition of the Egyptian *abbas*.\(^{63}\)

Although the abba had spoken in his brief presentation of only three kinds, after introducing all three, he surprisingly comes up with a fourth one.

There is fact a fourth kind as well, which we see has appeared recently among those who fancy themselves in the style and likeness of anchorites and who seem, when they are starting out, too long for the perfection of cenobium with a sort of short-lived fervor. But all at once they grow lukewarm, contempting the curtailment of their earlier behaviour and vices, not content with bearing the yoke of humility and patience any longer and disdaining to place themselves under the rule of the elders (*subdique seniorum imperio*). They long for separate cells and want to live by themselves (*ac solitarie sedere*), so that they may be irritated by no one and may be considered patient, mild, and humble by men… For in this way their voices are not only not cut off but even grow worse, since they are challenged by no one… Virtues, however, are begotten not by hiding one’s vices (*occultatione uitiorum*) but by fighting (*expugnatione*) them.\(^{64}\)

The monks of the fourth kind, like those in the third one, pretend to be holy, and refuse to submit to any authority. Unlike that class, they have ac-

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\(^{62}\) *Conf.* 18. 7.8: “These two kinds of monks, nearly equal in numbers, rival one another in the province. But in other provinces, which the requirements of the Catholic faith have obliged me to travel though, we know that the third kind, the sarabaites, abounds and exists almost by itself”.


\(^{64}\) *Conf.* 18. 8.1-2.
tually lived in a cenobium, but for a short time. Faced to the challenges and
difficulties of communal life, they fall into the illusion that a separate mi-
lieu will make them progress in monastic life. Leaving the cenobia too soon,
without a proper training of communal life, they run after praise, without
being challenged, however, by anybody. Basil would use this argument to
argue his preference for communal life and the challenges it poses to progress
in monastic life. In other words, it is the difficult living amidst a community,
which makes the monk progress in his way, especially in humility, regarded
by the monastic tradition as the key virtue of the monk. Our section closes
when Piamun answers Germanus’ question regarding the distinction between
monastery and cenobium.

3.2. Conference 19

This conference brings another elder, John, who seems to be an exceptional
case since he went in both ways: not only the traditional flight from the cen-
obium to the desert, but after many years the return to communal life. Indeed,
he “left the desert and with the most virtuous humility submitted himself to
this cenobium.” This strange path intrigues Germanus and Cassian, who ask
him:

Why he had left the freedom of the desert (*heremi libertate*) and that sub-
lime profession (*et illa professione sublimi*), wherein a very celebrated reputa-
tion had given him precedence over other leading the same life, and chose to
place himself under the yoke of the cenobium (*sub coenobii iugum*). The mere question reveals the pre-eminence of anchoritic life over the cen-
obite one. The first is connected to freedom, while the second one with a yoke.
In addition, John was not only an anchorite, but also a very famous one. The
answer of John confirms the character of the question and states that indeed
anchoritic life brings to the “heights of perfection”, while the cenobium is
rather a “school for juniors” (*iuniorum scolas*). In his own account, John re-
veals Germanus and Cassian his *curriculum vitae*, having passed thirty years
in the cenobitic life and afterwards twenty in the desert, where he was fre-
quently seized by ecstasies and he could say,

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65 Basil, Reg. fus. tract. 7.
66 Conf. 18. 10.
67 Conf. 19. 1.1.
68 Conf. 19. 2.3.
69 Conf. 19. 3.1.
My mind was so filled with divine meditation and spiritual theoria
(diuinis meditadionibus ac spiritualibus theoriis animus replebatur).\textsuperscript{70}

In this context, John proposes for first time the distinction between the end of the desert and the one of the cenobium (de solitundinis atque coeenobii fine), and this in order to explain why he left the former for the latter.\textsuperscript{71}

In his explanation, he argues that the prior freedom of the desert, that attracts the monks, had now disappeared. The reason of this is the increase of monastic population in the desert. In other words, the desert is no longer a desert and with this new situation the contemplation, which in the previous catechesis\textsuperscript{72} was the reason that led the monks into solitary life, has become difficult. Practical reasons explain this change, as he later explains; issues such as nourishment or hospitality overwhelmed the solitaries in such a way that contemplation of God suffered.

“But when, as I have said, a greater number of brothers began to long to dwell in that desert and, having cramped the freedom of the vast desert, not only caused the fire of divine contemplation to chill (ignem illum diuinae contemplationis frigere fecisset) but even tied down my mind in many ways with the fetters of carnal matters.”\textsuperscript{73}

In this state of affairs, John opted for an unusual turn, deciding to be saved by the anchor of obedience. Since contemplation and the heights of \textit{theoria} have become very difficult in the new situation, he decided to lose them to some extent, in making it up by an obedient submission (hac oboedientiae subiectione pensetur)\textsuperscript{74}.

Due to his extraordinary experience, John is particularly qualified to provide views on both forms of monastic life, their advantages and risks, as well as their proper goals. Among the advantages of cenobitic life John lists the lack of concern for bodily matters such as preparing food\textsuperscript{75}. In addition to this, as already suggested, the “spiritual theoria” was hampered by the prob-

\textsuperscript{70} Conf. 19. 4.1.
\textsuperscript{71} Conf. 19. 4.3.
\textsuperscript{72} Conf. 19. 4.3.
\textsuperscript{73} Conf. 19. 4.3.
\textsuperscript{74} Conf. 19. 4.1.
\textsuperscript{75} On monastic diet, see Conf. 8.1.
lem of frequent visits of brothers and the required hospitality. In this way, “the freedom of the anchorite (is) tied down.”

“Finally, even if I should suffer some loss of purity of heart while I am in the cenobium, I shall happily be compensated by the gospel precept alone, which certainly cannot be subordinated to any of the other fruits of the desert, so that I need have no thought for the next day. And, subject to an abba until death (usque ad finem subjectus abbati), I shall seem to a certain degree to imitate (aemulari) him of whom is said: ‘He humbled himself, having become obedient until death.’

It is obedience, which configures the monk with Christ, the Obedient par excellence.

John’s decision is completely at odds with the expectations of Cassian’s audience, for it overturns the popular equation of solitude with freedom from worldly care. Instead, Cassian’s reader is confronted with a venerable abba who argues that such freedom can be found only within the confines of the coenobium. Paradoxically, it is among the brethren that one finds the conditions necessary for solitude. Robert Markus has recently noted this juxtaposition and argued that ‘in the course of thee two Conferences (XVIII and XIX) Cassian has come to abandon, subtly but decisively, the equation of the communal with the practical and the solitary with the contemplative life’ This is a valid assessment of Cassian’s argument, for in these Conferences Cassian emphasizes how the world impinges upon the hermitage and how the coenobium provides freedom from distraction. This emphasis, however, is not new to Cassian’s last set of Conferences. It is instead a theme that recurs throughout his monastic literature.

When John, has ended his argument for the unusual decision he took, Germanus will go back to something the abba had mentioned before by asking him: “what the end of the cenobite is and what the end of the hermit is.” John’s answer begins by claiming that “one and the same person could not be perfect in both professions,” in later nuancing this by saying that this perfec-

76 Conf. 19. 6.5.
77 Conf. 19. 6.6.
78 Driver, 2002: 100.
79 Conf. 19. 7.1.
80 Conf. 19. 8.1.
tion is “attained to very rarely and by very few people”, and eventually excluding from this general affirmation, Abba Moses, Abba Paphnutius and the two Macarri. After having stated this, John proceeds to answer Germanus’ question in explaining which the two ends are.

The end of the cenobite is to put to death and to crucify all his desires (omnes suas mortificare et crucigere volantates) and, in accordance with the saving command of gospel perfection, to have no thought for the next day. It is very certain that this perfection cannot be arrived by anyone but a cenobite.

Again here, the abba refers to two aspects of this perfection, as he already did in 6.6, obedience – implicit in the abandonment of the own will – and the lack of concern for the future (also here designed as Gospel [the Our Father] precept). In both regards, John makes clear that the anchorite is not in a situation to fulfill them. After supporting this claim with a quotation from Isaiah 58, he comes to the perfection of the hermit, which, in its turn, is backed by passages of Jeremiah and Psalm 102:

“[T]he perfection of the hermit is to have a mind bare of all earthly things (exutam mentem a cunctis habere terrenis) and, as much as human frailty permits, to unite it thus with Christ (unire cum Christo).”

Actually, of the two elements presented here, the first (an oblivion of everything in this life) seems to be the necessary means for attaining the second, the union with Christ.

Having identified both ends, he concludes again the relevance of having a precise knowledge of them. To some extent, it closes the circle begun by Piamun, regarding also the necessity to know the discipline of the art someone undertakes. John follows,

“Unless each of them arrives at the end, therefore, which we have said belongs to his own profession; in vain does the one pursue the discipli-

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81 Conf. 19. 8.2.
82 Conf. 19. 9.1.
83 Conf. 19. 8.3.
84 Conf. 19. 8.4.
85 Conf. 18. 3.1: “Therefore, if, as we believe, concern for God has drawn you to seek after our knowledge, you must completely renounce (abdicate) all the institutes that accompanied your first beginnings in the former place and follow with great humility whatever you see our elders do or teach.”
ne of the cenobium and the other that of the anchorite life, for neither has practiced the virtue of his own profession."⁸⁶

Each way of life has an own end and an own virtue. This is why, it is difficult to find someone who is completely accomplished in both professions because the anchorite cannot wholly attain to ἀκτημοσύνη - that is, to the contempt and privation of material things – nor can the cenobite wholly attain to the purity of theoria (theoreticam ad integrum adsequi puritatem).⁸⁷

Discernment, despite of not being explicitly mentioned here, is key. For anchorites, previous well-grounded and hard training is fully necessary. Otherwise, the entire monastic way would come to a disaster.

This is usually the case in particular with those who have not been instructed perfectly in the cenobia and have not purified themselves of their former vices, but have betaken themselves to the solitary life out of an immature desire.⁸⁸

### 3.3. Reception in Western Monastic Rules

As already stated much of Cassian’s afterlife is due to his reception in later monastic rules, especially the *Regula Magistri* and the *Regula Benedicti*. At the end of the latter, among the sources for monastic perfection, Benedict explicitly mentions: “Necnon et Collationes Patrum et Instituta,”⁸⁹ revealing in the meantime what a deep influence did Cassian exert in the formation of Benedictine monasticism and, through it, in the entire Western spirituality.

In our particular case, Cassian’s presentation of the different kinds of monastic experience, the reception is striking, as the table at the end of this paper shows, where both Rules are placed in parallel, and the text of the *Regula Magistri* taken over by the *Regula Benedicti* is written in italics.

### 4. Conclusions

We cannot understand the evolution of (not only Western) monasticism without reference to the work of John Cassian. By mediating the mature Eastern monastic experience to the West, he had assisted in shaping the development of monasticism first in Gaul, then in Italy, and then throughout Europe and the

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⁸⁶ *Conf.* 19. 8.4.
⁸⁷ *Conf.* 19. 9.1.
⁸⁸ *Conf.* 19. 10.1.
⁸⁹ *Regula Benedicti*, 73.5.
world. In proposing the Egyptian model as the standard one, in times in which it had already disappeared, Cassian is not neutral at all. He is addressing those speeches that, at least in their basics, took place twenty years before, and the doctrine in them to a new audience. This is required, first of all, to accept the testimony of an eyewitness of that supreme monastic perfection, and afterwards follow the rules and “institutes” that the Egyptian abbas propose. Cassian’s project was extremely successful and generations saw in his works an objective testimony of Egyptian monasticism and its spiritual heights.

A more attentive reading and checking with other sources pose numerous questions about the validity of Cassian’s historical presentation\(^90\) and its value. Without doubt, his doctrine and theology reveal unparalleled depth. However, are these actually facts as he presented them?

Le résultat en est une doctrine, aussi irréductible à chacune des sources dont elle s’inspire que ne l’est le miel à chacune des fleurs dont il est fait. … En réaction contre l’effervescence d’un monachisme latin assez peu organisé, sans traditions solides et trop sensible au ‘merveilleux’ (ces mirabilia Die dont il se refuse de parler), Cassien a reçu pour mission d’insuffler un esprit authentiquement monastique aux nouveaux groupements qui viennent de se constituer en Provence… La meilleure façon de donner du poids à son enseignement n’était-elle pas de le mettre dans la bouche des plus célèbres parmi les moines d’Égypte ?\(^91\)

In our case, it is difficult to accept his portray of the emergence of monasticism connected with the early community in Jerusalem. His silences are also blatant regarding key figures of Egyptian monasticism such as Pachomius and, especially, Evagrius. It is there, as in many other passages, where we begin discovering an intention, an agenda that flows beneath all those wonderful expositions. In many regards, Cassian is constructing a history of Egyptian monasticism,\(^92\) using it as validating authority, and proposing it as “the” mod-

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92 J. Leroy, “Les Préfaces des écrivains monastiques de J. Cassien”, Revue d’ascétisme et de mystique 42 (1966), pp. 159-160: “More than as an historian, Cassian acted as an architect who choses and adapts his materials, that means even if his encounters are not rigorously historical, he has used without doubt authentic reflections.”
el for Gaul (and the West). All this, however, does not minimize the stellar role of John Cassian in the development of monasticism, included his systematization of the different kinds of monks.
REGULA MAGISTRI
I. DE GENERIBUS VEL POTVS VEL ACTVS ET VITA MONACHORUM IN COENOBIIS

Monachorum quatuor esse genera manifestum est: Primum coenobitarum, hoc est, monasteriale, militans sub regula vel abbate.

Deinde secundum genus est anachoritarum, id est, heremitarum; horum qui non conversionis fervore nouicio, sed monasterii probatione diuturna, qui didicerunt contra diabolum multorum solacio iam docti pugnare, et bene instructi fraterna ex acie ad singularem pugnam heremi, securi iam sine consolatione alterius, sola manu, uel brachio contra uitia carnis uel cogitationum cum Deo et spiritu repugnare sufficiunt.

Tertium vero monachorum deterrimum genus est sarabaitarum, quod melius adhuc laicum dixissem; si me propositi sancti non impediret tunsura. Qui nulla regula approbati et experientia magistro sicut aurum fornacis, sed in plumbi natura molliti, adhuc factis servantes saeculo fidem, mentiri Deo per tunsuram noscuntur. Qui bini aut terni aut certe singuli, sine pastore non dominicis, sed suis inclusi ouilibus, pro lege eis est desideriorum voluntas, cum quidquid putauerint vel elegerint, hoc dicunt sanctum, et quod noluerint, hoc putant non licere: et dum in proprio arbitrio quaerunt habere cellas, arcellas et recellas, ignorant quia perdunt suas animellas.

Simul et ii, qui nuper conuersi immoderato fervore heremum putant esse quietem, et non putantes insidiari et nocere diabolum, singularem cum eo pugnam indocti et securi inuadunt, sine dubio inducti lupi faucibus occursuri.

Quartum vero genus est monachorum nec nominandum, quod melius tacerem quam de talibus aliquid dicerem, quod genus nominatur gyrouagum: qui tota uita sua per diversas provincias ternis aut quaternis diebus per diversorum cellas et monasteria hospitantes; cum pro hospitis adventu a diversis volunt cottidie noviter susci, et pro gaudio superuenientes exquisita sibi pulmentaria adparari, et animantia pullorum sibi creant quotidie a diversis hospitibus pro adventu noviter sustinens, et dum in proprio arbitrio quaerunt habere cellas, arcellas et recellas, ignorant quia perdunt suas animellas.

REGULA BENEDICTI
I. DE GENERIBUS MONACHORUM
Monachorum quattuor esse genera, manifestum est. Primum coenobitarum, hoc est
monasteriale, militans sub regula vel abbate\textsuperscript{94}.
Deinde secundum genus est anachoritarum, id est heremitarum, horum qui non con-
versationis fervore novicio, sed monasterii probatione diuturna, qui didicerunt contra
diabulum multorum solacio iam docti pugnare, et bene extracti fraterna ex acie ad
singularem pugnam heremi, securi iam sine consolatione alterius, sola manu vel bra-
chio contra vitia carnis vel cogitationum, Deo auxiliante, pugnare sufficiunt\textsuperscript{95}.
Tertium vero monachorum taeterrimum genus est sarabaitarum, qui nulla regula
adprobati, experimenta magistra, sicut avrum fornacis, sed in plumbi natura molliti,
adhuc operibus servantes sæculo fidem, mentiri Deo per tonsuram noscuntur. Qui
bini aut terni aut certe singuli sine pastore, non dominicis sed suis inclusi ovilibus,
pro lege eis est desideriorum voluntas, cum quidquid putaverint vel elegerint, hoc
dicunt sanctum, et quod noluerint, hoc putant non licere\textsuperscript{96}.
Quartum vero genus est monachorum quod nominatur girovagum, qui tota vita sua
per diversas provincias ternis aut quaternis diebus per diversorum cellas hospitan-
tur, semper uagi et numquam stabiles, et propriis uoluntatibus et guilæ inlecebris
seruientes, et per omnia deteriores sarabaitis\textsuperscript{97}.
De quorum omnium horum miserrima conversatio melius est silere quam loqui.
His ergo omissis, ad coenobitarum fortissimum genus disponendum, adiuuante
 Domino, ueniamus\textsuperscript{98}.  

\textsuperscript{94} \textit{Regula Benedicti}, I. 1-2.
\textsuperscript{95} \textit{Regula Benedicti}, I. 3-5.
\textsuperscript{96} \textit{Regula Benedicti}, I. 6-9.
\textsuperscript{97} \textit{Regula Benedicti}, I. 10-11.
\textsuperscript{98} \textit{Regula Benedicti}, I. 12-13.