

# Renowned Ascetics: Their Lives & Practices

Cor-Episcopo K. Mani Rajan, M.Sc., M.Ed., Ph.D.



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# **Renowned Ascetics: Their Lives & Practices**

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## Author's Preface

This book *Renowned Ascetics: Their Lives and Practices* is a collection of biographies of thirty ascetics. Asceticism is a form of spiritual exercise. The word originates from the the Greek word *askesis* which means practice or exercise (Ferguson, Wright, & Packer, 1988). It describes a system of spiritual discipline (practices) designed to encourage interior vigilance so as to combat vices and develop virtues by means of self-discipline and self-knowledge.

The purpose of asceticism is to gain freedom from the disordered passions through renunciation of the world and the flesh as part of the great struggle against the devil. The words monk, monastery, and monasticism do not appear in the Bible. The word monasticism originates from the Greek word *monachos* which means solitary or alone. It also describes the religious practice of renouncing worldly pursuits in order to fully devote one's life to spiritual work. Thus, asceticism and monasticism are almost synonymous terms.

Asceticism was practiced in biblical times, and events like the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness (Mathew 4: 1-11) and the lifestyle of John the Baptist in the desert (Mathew 3:4) were

later regarded as helpful models when monasticism became the leading representation of asceticism. In general, ascetics seek a life that to most may seem unusual. To them the life in this world is less important because they believe that ultimately a greater reward is in the life to come. Christians who pursued monastic lives were doing it in an effort to become closer with God. Often times, this meant living with the absolute bare minimum to survive and devote the rest of the life to God.

Many early Christians moved to the desert to draw closer to God, following the example of Christ. Later many Christians joined them to escape the persecutions of the Roman Empire. The end of persecution also meant that martyrdom by blood was no longer an option to prove one's piety and instead the long-term 'martyrdom' of the ascetic became an order to be lived out. The practice of seeking seclusion from the world in order to practice ascetic ideals in a better way was not unknown in the third century. But it became general by the time of the conversion of Constantine, the Great. Thus a new expression of the ascetic life was introduced to the Church in two forms: (1) Eremitism and (2) Monasticism.

### **Eremitism and Monasticism**

The older style of monasticism, to live as a hermit, is called eremitic. The Greek word for hermit *eremos* which means 'desert,' was coined in the earliest centuries of Christian era. The monk is literally one who lives alone and apart from any social living. Eremitic monasticism refers to

monks who dwell alone (eremites or hermits). This was the original Christian monasticism (eremitism), and was exemplified in the life of St. Anthony of Egypt (Cross & Livingstone, 1997). Christian monks of early centuries were usually hermits. This form of solitary living, however, did not suit everyone. Some monks found the eremitic life style to be too lonely and difficult; and if one was not spiritually prepared, it could lead to mental breakdowns (Lawrence, 2015). For this reason, organized monastic communities started to be created, so that monks could have more support in their spiritual struggle.

This use of *eremos* (eremitae, desert-dwellers) eventually assigned to the hermit contrasts with *monachos*, meaning ‘monk’ (Ferguson, Wright, & Packer, 1988). While eremitic monks did have an element of socializing, since they would meet once a week to pray together, cenobitic monks came together for common prayer on a more regular basis. The cenobitic monks also practiced more socializing because the monasteries where they lived were often located in or near inhabited villages. This means that cenobitic monks did find themselves in contact with other people, including lay people, whereas the eremitic monks tried their best to keep to themselves, only meeting occasionally, for prayer. Cenobitic monks were also different from their eremitic predecessors and counterparts in their actual living arrangements.

The literature on asceticism describes five categories of hermits based on their different ways

of lives and practices. They are: (1) Essenes, (2) Anchorites, (3) Cenobites, (4) Sarabites, and (5) Stylites.

Essenes is the earliest known order of monks in the Middle East. It is likely that they first came out of Jewish society in the second century BC in protest against a secular leader, Simon Maccabaeus, becoming the high priest in the Temple (Josephus, 1992; Cross & Livingstone, 1997). The Essenes live a closely regulated monastic life. The brothers meet at dawn for prayers, and then work at practical tasks throughout the day except for two meals, at midday and in the evening, which are eaten together in silence. On the Sabbath manual work is replaced by prayer, meditation and study of the Torah. They were a group of hermits who awaited the arrival of Messiah. John the Baptist is their contemporary.

Anchorites (تسببا *Yeehidoyo*, meaning solitary or حَمِيْمًا *hbeeshoyo*, meaning recluse) are persons who live in seclusion usually for religious reasons. The reclusive 'anchorite' is derived from the Latin *anachoreta*, which, in turn, can be traced to the Greek *anachōrein*, meaning 'to withdraw'. The term anchorite is more precisely applied to those who live as hermits after a period of probation in a monastery (Douglas, 1978). They live in very confined quarters (cells). In the early Church, this way of life was at the will of the anchorite, who was free to take up retirement if he desires, but later it was recognized and ordered according to the rules

of the Church (Cross & Livingstone, 1997). Life of an anchorite is one of severe austerity, incessant prayer, supernatural healings and perceptions.

Cenobites is a community of monks ( **كِنُوبِيَّة** *dayroyo*) who live in 'communities' under an abbot as a group subjecting themselves to a set of rules. The English words 'cenobite' and 'cenobitic' are derived, from the Greek words *koinos* and *bios*, meaning 'common' and 'life'. This life-style is different from the solitary life of a hermit. Each dwelling would house about twenty monks and within the house there were separate rooms or "cells" that would be inhabited by two or three monks (Dunn, 2000). This is generally called monasticism. All monks must renounce private ownership, though the monastery may own property. Work in a monastery may take any form. Traditionally, it includes agriculture, teaching, art, and all kinds of scholarly research. In the Middle Ages, copying of manuscripts was a work often associated with monks (Cross & Livingstone, 1997). Monks took part in the theological and ecclesiastical controversies.

Sarabites is a name given in the early Church to a class of ascetics who dwelt either in their own houses or in small groups near cities and acknowledged neither a monastic superior nor definite rules, keeping the returns of their manual labour (Cross & Livingstone, 1997; Douglas, 1978). The occupants of the Skete, as a transition to 'complete eremitism' can be classified into this

category. Sarabites can also be conceived as a form of asceticism which is a blend of eremitic and monastic traditions. This was organised by Mor Saba (A.D.439 - 532) near Bethlehem in A.D. 483.

Stylites (سُيُوتِيَّةٌ *Esthoono*, meaning pillar ascetic) are monks who live on the top of natural or artificial pillars. The word stylite originates from the Greek word *stylos* meaning pillar. In the monastic tradition of eastern Christianity, hermits put up with the discomfort of living on pillars. Their pillars would vary in height, and the platforms were sometimes made more habitable by a small hut and were generally provided with a parapet against which the stylite would lean for his scanty sleep (Cross & Livingstone, 1997). Apart from the solemn duties of prayers and fasting, stylites were often gifted preachers and theologians, addressing the crowds which gathered at the foot of their pillars and pronouncing on the current theological controversies. Simon, the Stylite and Daniel, his disciple are examples of stylites. As a way of life it was generally considered superior to monasticism (Douglas, 1978).

The traditional account of Christian monasticism begins with St. Paul of Thebes (A.D. 234-347) who retreated to a cave in the Egyptian desert in A.D. 250 to avoid the persecution initiated by Decius. Paul of Thebes is traditionally considered to be the first hermit (eremitic). The bishop of Carthage, St. Cyprian (A.D. 200-258), went into hiding in the same year for the same

reason. He is said to have "lived with the hermits" during this period, and wrote of the eremitic lifestyle.

St. Antony of Egypt (A.D. 251-356) was the pioneer monk about whom something is written. St. Antony of Egypt is referred to as 'the first Christian monk' and often known as 'father of monasticism'. After years of solitary existence in Lower Egypt, he formed a colony of hermits and undertook to organize the monks who had sought him out for spiritual guidance and had become his disciples. For most of the week, they maintain their solitary life. But on Sundays they come together for worship and a communal meal. One of the world's oldest monasteries, named after St. Antony and established soon after his death, still survives in the desert near the Red Sea, below the mountain cave in which the saint spent his last years. The two great founders of this form of monastic life are Pachomius of Egypt (A.D. 292-346) and Basil, the Great of Caesarea (329-379).

Pachomius (c. A.D. 292-346), a contemporary of St. Antony, formed the first organized monastic community (cenobitic) in c. A.D. 320. Pachomius' communities were found around Tabbennisi in Thebaid, near the Nile (Dandara) and in areas of Egypt less remote than that of Antony. There existed monastic communities which were not formally organized but were made up of individual hermit-type (eremitic) monks. Each man lives in his own hut, but they eat their meals in common -

usually in the open air. Pachomius established ten more communities of the same kind, two of them for women. Pachomius also built a convent (the first organized women's community) in which a number of religious women lived with his sister, Mary. Chastity and poverty were requisites, and to these Pachomius added obedience as a necessary condition for life in community. Poverty is the abandonment of the world's goods, chastity is the refusal of the pleasure of the flesh, and obedience is the spiritual submission to the superior or to the rule of life (Ferguson, Wright, & Packer, 1988).

Pachomius framed a 'rule' by which each community must live and worship, thus forming the basis for cenobitic monasticism. The monasteries appear as self-sufficient profitable agricultural colonies or manufacturing complexes, whose hierarchical organization perhaps bears a military stamp (Douglas, 1978). The routine of the monastery includes instruction in and memorising of scripture, two daily offices and a weekly Eucharist. The rule of St. Pachomius is now lost, but it was known to St. Benedict when he established the pattern of western monasticism. The account of how Pachomius was given the idea to start a cenobitic monastery is found in Palladius' *The Lausiac History* (Palladius, 1898). There are sources that indicate that there were other monastic communities around at the same time as Pachomius, and possibly even before him (Attridge & Hata, 1999; Harmless, 2004).

St. Basil the Great (329-379), influenced by Pachomius, founded monasteries in Cappadocia (eastern Asia Minor; now modern-day Turkey). In Asia Minor, Basil also strongly encouraged the cenobitic form of monasticism as being more suitable for most people than the eremitic style. Mor Awgin founded a monastery on Mt. Izla above Nisibis in Mesopotamia in c. A.D. 350 and from this monastery the cenobitic tradition spread to Mesopotamia, Persia, Armenia, Georgia, and even India and China. Also luminaries such as Bishop Ambrose in Milan (d.397) set up monasteries. Evagrius Ponticus (d.399) who taught ascetic life in Nitria and Palladius and Rufinus were his pupils. Pambo (d. A.D. 385?) who lived in the Nitrian desert in Egypt excelled most other ancient monks in the austerity of his continual fasts (Rajan, 2017). Jerome of Rome (d.419) who championed the ascetic life translated the rule of Pachomius into Latin. Mor Saba (A.D. 439-532) in A.D. 457 went to Jerusalem and lived as a hermit. He organized the monks of the Judean Desert in a monastery close to Bethlehem in c. A.D. 483. This is the order of Sabaites, which is considered to be the mother of all monasteries of the Eastern Orthodox Churches (Douglas, 1978).

The Syrian Orthodox Church gave much importance to monasticism. Many men (ܕܝܝܘܝܘܐ *dayroyo*) and women (ܕܝܝܘܝܘܬܐ *dayroytho*) exercised voluntary poverty, abstinence, silence, fasting and prayer. In the fifth century there were three hundred monasteries in the mountains of Urhoy (Edessa)

with ninety thousand monks. In St. Mathew monastery, Mosul, there were twelve thousand monks. In Mor Basos monastery near Homs, Syria there were six thousand three hundred monks. The Gabriel monastery (the monastery of Qartmin) is the principal monastery of Turabdeen founded in A. D. 359. The monastery of Zafran (St. Hananyo monastery), South-east of Mardeen, Turkey is the most famous monastery in Mesopotamia which became the seat of the Holy See of Antioch from twelfth century until the third decade of twentieth century ([http://catholicose.org/PauloseII/Church\\_History\\_Universal.htm](http://catholicose.org/PauloseII/Church_History_Universal.htm)).

A record of the virtuous asceticism and marvellous manner of life of those blessed and holy fathers, the monks and anchorites written by Palladius (1898) contains memoirs of those who have successfully encountered the struggles of virtuous asceticism. These accounts serve as a model and object of desire for those who long to attain the crown of continence and chastity. It is hoped that the biographies of the renowned ascetics detailed in this book will instil an ardent desire in the faithful to please our Lord by virtuous practices.

**Cor-Episcope (Dr.) K. Mani Rajan**

## **Acknowledgement**

This book on *Renowned Ascetics: Their Lives and Practices* includes biographies of thirty ascetics. These biographies are taken from the book *Martyrs, Saints & Prelates of the Syrian Orthodox Church* (One Volume). Although biographies of ascetics are available in Syriac and Arabic languages, only a few have been translated either into Malayalam or English. Therefore, a book on ascetics, their practices, and teachings will help the faithful to understand the variety of ways in which they lived in an effort to attain holiness.

I am much obliged to JSC Publications, Puthencruz, for taking up the publication of the book. I sincerely thank Mr. Julius C. Abraham, M/s Megapixel Graphics, Kottayam, for the layout and cover design of the book. The printing was done by M/s Mor Julius Press, Puthencruz.

I earnestly wish and hope that the English speaking Diaspora of the Syrian Orthodox Church will find this book useful to understand the life and teachings of renowned ascetics.

**Kunnamkulam**  
**23 July 2017**

**Cor-Episcopo (Dr.) K. Mani Rajan**



## Abbreviations Used

c.	-	Circa, meaning approximately
cf.	-	compare with
d.	-	death
ed.	-	edition
Ed.	-	Editor
Eds.	-	Editors
Fr.	-	Father
H.B.	-	His Beatitude
H.E.	-	His Eminence
H.G.	-	His Grace
H.H.	-	His Holiness
M. E.	-	Malayalam Era
MSS	-	Manuscript
Mt.	-	Mount
n.a.	-	no author
n.d	-	no date
p.	-	Page
pp.	-	Pages
rev. ed.	-	revised edition
St.	-	Saint
Sts.	-	Saints
Trans.	-	Translator(s)
Vol(s).	-	Volume(s)



## **St. Cyprian, the Martyr**

(A. D. 200 - 258)

Cyprian was born in Carthage, Africa in A. D. 200. His father was one of the principal senators (Hoever, 1989; White, 1991). His parents were pagans and very wealthy. He was a student of law and later became an advocate. He was a Professor of rhetoric and a public orator. In the middle age he came under the influence of the Priest, Caecilian. As a result of this association, he made a vow of chastity and was baptized (Cross & Livingstone, 1997; Ferguson, Wright & Packer, 1988).

Cyprian was soon ordained Bishop in A. D. 238. Emperor Decius began his persecution in A. D. 250. Cyprian went into hiding and lived as an ascetic. Several Christians abandoned the faith. In A. D. 251, Cyprian returned from his hiding place. Several people came back to the faith. Subsequently a crisis arose in the Church regarding accepting those returning to the Church. A Priest, Novatus who had opposed the election of Cyprian, fuelled this. Cyprian was in favour of accepting those returning to the Church who was previously baptized in the Church, but opposed accepting those baptized by the heretics and schismatics. Cyprian refused to recognize their validity. Cyprian although

was lenient to laity in the above issue, was very tough with the clergy. Those Priests who joined heretics and later returned to the Church were not acceptable to him. In A. D. 252, Emperor Gallus persecuted the Church. In addition, Novatus the Priest, quarrelled with Cyprian. Cyprian opposed Pope Stephen I in the matter of baptism conferred by heretics. However, after the martyrdom of Stephen I (A. D. 257) the successors had good relations with Carthage. In August 257, Emperor Valerian passed an edict forbidding all assemblies of Christians and requiring all Bishops, Priests and Deacons to take part in the official worship or be exiled. On August 30, Cyprian was brought before the proconsul, Paternus, who exiled him to Curubus, Gulf of Hammamet. He was recalled and tried again in A. D. 258. On 14 September Cyprian was beheaded.

Cyprian was a theologian, Bishop, and a steadfast leader in the Church of Africa. Tertullian, the theologian of North Africa, influenced him. Cyprian has written about the use of the sign of the cross on different occasions. He insisted that here is no salvation outside the Church. The Syriac Orthodox Church celebrates the feast of St. Cyprian on 16 September.

## **St. Malke**

(A.D. 222 – 315)

Malke was born to a wealthy family in Qulezmo in A.D. 222. His parents were Yuhanon and Rafkha, sister of St. Augen. Yuhanon and Rafkha were childless for long years. Shufny their first child was dumb. After three years, they were blessed with a son. When the speechless Shufny was asked to name her brother, she uttered the name Malke for the first time.

When he was five years old, he was tutored by Samuel on the precepts of Christian belief. He was an excellent student. When he was sixteen, he wanted to become an ascetic. However, his parents wanted him to take a wife; but he left home with his friend Elisha in A.D. 245 to Mount Izlo and entered monastic life.

There he stayed in the monastery of his uncle Mor Augen. He and his friend stayed there for four years and then went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The following three years were spent in Egypt. They proceeded to Nisbis where Mor Yacoub (d. A.D. 338) ordained them priests (Roberts & Donalson, 1956).

As he preferred a life of solitude, he went to Arkah, a village in Turkey. Once he saw a group

of boys playing. A young boy had climbed up a fig tree and was scared by an evil spirit at the foot of the tree (Astrasis). Malke's prayer drove away the spirit. He constructed a monastery on the location where God exiled the devil. The people of the village came in hordes to assist in the construction. Another miracle attributed to him is the curing of Emperor Constantine with his intercessory prayers.

Malke was aware that his death was near. He blessed the people thus, "My beloved people, always be merciful and dedicate yourselves to prayer and fasting. Let truth, love and peace adorn all your lives. Fight evil with good." He passed away on a Thursday, 14 April A.D. 315. The Syrian Orthodox Church commemorates him on 21 April ([www.soc-wus.org](http://www.soc-wus.org)).

## **St. Paul of Thebaid**

(A.D. 234 – 347)

Christian monasticism first evolved in Egypt. Paul, born in Thebes in A.D. 234 has a primary place among the early monks. He is known as Paul of Thebes or Thebaid. Thebes was the first capital of Egypt.

He was born in a rich and aristocratic Christian family. He could acquire a good education and proficiency in Greek and Latin languages. His parents died when he was fifteen (Aphrem Paulose, 1963).

Caesar Decian and Valerius let loose a slew of persecutions against Christians during the period A.D. 249 – 51. When Paul's brother-in-law tried to murder him to appropriate his wealth he ran away to the desert (Cross & Livingstone, 1974). After travelling a long distance he found a cave wherein he stayed.

He lived by eating dates, drinking water from a nearby spring and wearing clothes made of palm leaves. In his fifty third year a raven started bringing him half a loaf of bread. This miraculous event continued for the next sixty years.

In A.D. 347 God in a dream revealed to St. Antony of Egypt (A.D. 251 – 356) that there is an old monk in the desert and asked him to meet this monk. He woke up from sleep and walked across the desert between the River Nile and the Red Sea, supporting himself on his walking stick. At the end of the long journey he found the cave and its grey-haired occupant (Aphrem Paulose, 1963).

St. Paul asked St. Antony about the activities of human beings. He wondered if there were still kings and authorities who drove men towards evil worship (Irmanos, 2008). This meeting took place when St. Paul was hundred and thirteen years old. The raven brought a full loaf for them as they were talking. St. Paul remarked “Brother, see how much God is concerned about us.”

They prayed hard after having their food. He then said “I will die soon. You are sent here to conduct my burial service. My body must be covered in the shroud entrusted to you by Athanasius” (Cross & Livingstone, 1974).

St. Antony departed to a monastery which involved three days’ travel to obtain this shroud given by Athanasius. When he returned he found St. Paul on his knees praying. St. Antony also joined him in this silent prayer. After some time he realised St. Paul had passed away while at his prayers (Irmanos, 2008).

As he wondered how to arrange the burial two lionesses came and started digging the grave (Aphrem Paulose, 1963). St. Antony glorified

God and said “Even the dumb animals behave appropriately to satisfy the needs of those chosen by God.” Thus St. Antony entombed the first solitary saint according to proper rites. St. Paul passed away on 10 January. In the ancient times, the eight days (Octave of Epiphany) following Epiphany (the baptism of Jesus) on 6 January were considered as feast days. To avoid intermingling the two festivals St. Paul’s feast is celebrated on 15 January ([www.stpaulinthedesert.com](http://www.stpaulinthedesert.com)). The Syrian Orthodox Church celebrates his feast on 15 January.

## **St. Antony of Egypt**

(A. D. 251 - 356)

The biography of St. Antony came to us through Mor Athanasius, the Great (A. D. 295-373) who had served St. Antony. Antony was born in the city of Kaman (Coma), Upper Egypt in A. D. 251. His parents were Christians and very rich. His parents died when he was about eighteen years old. His only younger sister was brought up under his care. Later his sister joined a nunnery. In about A.D. 269, Antony sold all his ancestral properties and donated it to the poor and needy (Cross & Livingstone, 1997).

Antony practised very tough ascetism. “If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat” (2 Thessalonians. 3:10). He worked hard with his own hands and shared everything with the poor. He ate food only once, after the sun set. He ate bread and drank water. He slept on the floor. He did not use oil on his body. The cloth he wore was of leather with fur inside. He lived in caves and forts in the mountains. He lived up to the age of one hundred and five in good health, even with this life style.

Antony withstood the trials and tribulations of life reciting the Psalms and the Epistle of St.

Paul to Romans: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?” (Romans 8:35). “Though an army may encamp against me, my heart shall not fear, Though war may rise against me, in this I will be confident” (Psalm 27:3). He spent about twenty years in solitude. “Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distress, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:10). Through the intercession of St. Antony, many were healed. At the age of fiftyfour (A. D. 305) he established a monastery at Fayum. This is considered as the beginning of Monasticism. Another monastery was later established at Pispir (White, 1991).

During the course of his solitary life, he came to the group of faithful only twice. The first happened in A. D. 311 or 313 at the persecutions of Maximos of Alexandria and the second to help Mor Athanasius of Alexandria against the heresy of Arius in c. A.D. 338 (Douglas, 1978). St. Antony was very particular that he should not be second to his contemporaries in practising the virtues of Christian life. He was very humble. In the presence of a Deacon, he asked him to begin the prayer. To those who approached him for healing, he said: “Healing is from God. Healing is not of men.” He also said that it is the will of God to heal according to his time and plan. Thus, the sick people learned the lessons of real Christian virtues.

St. Antony knew the time of his death. In A. D. 356 at the age of one hundred and five he admonished his fellow ascetics: “Love Jesus, trust in Him, keep away from worldly pleasures, examine ones own life and repent, never boast if you can live without sin, never take pride if God answers your prayers or murmur if your prayers are not answered. Keep away from Arius and his followers. Don’t be afraid if you see the authorities protecting them. Their victory will not last, it is to perish.”

St. Antony passed away in the thick forest. He insisted that his body should not be taken to Egypt. He feared that his body may be preserved in homes as they were doing in those days. He was of the opinion that his body should be entombed as Christ was entombed. He was against the practice of preserving dead bodies, prevalent in those days. He wanted two ascetics to conduct the burial service and the place of burial was not to be revealed to anybody. He wanted his headdress, bed-sheet, and dress made of sheepskin to be handed over to Mor Athanasius of Alexandria. The staff (T-shaped) was to be given to Macarius whom he called to monastic life. After these instructions, he stretched his legs and joined the Holy fathers. The feast of St. Antony of Egypt is observed on 18 January in the Syriac Orthodox Church.

## **St. Aphrahat, the Ascetic**

(A.D. 280? – 364?)

Aphrahat was born in A.D. 280 on the Syrian border of Persia. He is referred to as Aphrahat in Syrian letters and Aphraates in Latin books. Historical books refer to him as ‘the Hermit of Antioch’. Though he was born into a pagan family he accepted Christianity and later became a monk (Aphrem I, 2000).

There are dissenting opinions among historians about his Episcopal name and positions. Some historians say he was consecrated metropolitan under the name Yacoub and he was sometimes identified as the bishop of the monastery of Mor Mathai monastery, Mosul (Cayre, 1936; Bihlmeyer & Tuchle, 1958). There is also the opinion that he was known as Yacoub either at the time of his baptism or on consecration as a metropolitan (Wace & Piercy, 1999). Patriarch St. Aphrem I states there is no evidence to suggest he had been a metropolitan and that Mor Mathai monastery had not been established during his time (Aphrem I, 2000).

Aphrahat who was otherwise known as ‘the Sage of Persia’ later shifted to Edessa, famous for

its strong Christian heritage. In A.D. 360 he retired to Antioch. He never asked for bread, cooked food, or clothes from anyone. He ate nothing but some vegetables and a small piece of bread after sunset (Theodoret, 1990). He spoke publicly against the heresies of Arius. He replied in similes to those who engaged him in arguments.

Once a servant of Emperor Valence insulted and threatened Aphrahat and even made attempts on his life. This servant had an untimely death which made the Emperor believe in and praise Aphrahat's God. On another occasion he gave blessed water to a race horse that had fallen sick. The horse was cured. Many blessings have been received due to the intercession of monk Aphrahat. His life and miracles are dealt with in the book titled 'Pearls of Syria' (Theodoret, 1990).

During the reign of Sappor II (A.D. 340? – 380?) persecution against Christians was dire. When the Roman Emperor Susthantinos recognised Christians they received the protection of the Roman Empire. The Roman Emperor dispatched a letter to Sappor II about the upkeep and safety of Christians. The Christians who spoke the Persian language used Syriac as their language of worship which caused suspicion among the Persian kings (O' Leary, 2002).

All historians comment on the twenty-three Expositions and speeches of Aphrahat. They deal with faith, prayers of repentance, fasting, the divinity of Christ and the resurrection. He gives

a lot of importance to monastic life and celibacy (Cross & Livingstone, 1974). The above mentioned letters refer to all the sacraments (Cayre, 1936).

In all his teachings he stressed the fact that Jesus was the son of God and Peter was the chief priest designated to lead the sheep of the Church established by Jesus. The first ten letters were written in A.D. 337, the next twelve in A.D. 344 and the final letters in A.D. 345 (Cross & Livingstone, 1974).

A letter written during the final phase speaks against the Jewish Sabbath and the ceremony of circumcision. The last letter highlights the few just people who survived the persecution of Sappor II and how they saved the folk from total destruction. The articles of Aphrahat come under study in the book '*Aphraatus and Jews*' by Frank Gavin and published by Gorgias Press. The memory of this saint is celebrated on 7 April by the Syrian Orthodox Church.

## **St. Ammon (Amus) of Nitria**

(c. A.D. 288 ? - c. 350)

St. Ammon (Amoun or Ammonas) was the first Egyptian father to establish a monastery in Nitria. Nitria, now called Wady Natrun, is about seventy miles south-east from Alexandria. It has been described as “a poisonous marsh overgrown with weeds, full of reptiles and blood-sucking flies. . . . The hermits chose it because it was even worse than desert” (Thurston & Attwater, 1990, Vol. IV).

Palladius visited Nitria fifty years after the time of St. Ammon and noted the following: “On the mountain live some five thousand men with different modes of life, each living in accordance with his own powers and wishes, so that it is allowed to live alone or with another or with a number of others. There are some six hundred anchorites. There are seven bakeries in the mountain, which serve the needs of these men. In the mountain of Nitria there is a great church by which stand three palm trees, each with a whip suspended from it. One is intended for the solitaries who transgress, one for robbers, if any pass that way, and one for chance comers. All who transgress and are judged worthy of blows are tied to the palm tree, and

receive on back the appointed number of strokes and are then released. At the ninth hour of the day it is possible to stand and hear psalmody from each habitation.”

Relatives (uncle?) of Ammon forced him to matrimony when he was twenty-two years old. Ammon read to his wife what St. Paul wrote in commendation of the state of virginity, by which she was persuaded to consent to their living together in perpetual continence. They thus lived eighteen years under the same roof as brother and sister (Smith & Wace, 1877). He was severe in his mortifications to inure and prepare his body to bear the austerity of the desert. He spent the day in hard labour in tilling the land and agriculture. He ate food such as vegetables and fruits and retired to prayer in which he spent a great part of the night. Later on Ammon spent his time alone in Nitria and his wife assembled in her house a number of religious women, who were visited and directed by Ammon once every six months.

Saint Ammon lived in great austerity. He took only one meal a day; this he extended to two to four days. A miracle happened when Ammon was crossing a river with his disciple, Theodore. The river was overflowing as they came to cross it. Ammon was too shy to undress to swim across the river. While he stood trying to make up his mind, he suddenly found himself on the other side of the river. Theodore seeing Ammon on the other side asked how he got there. Ammon confessed the

miracle and made Theodore promise that he would not tell anybody about it.

Saint Ammon departed for heavenly abode at the age of sixty-two years. The feast of Saint Ammon is celebrated on 29 April by the Syrian Orthodox Church.

## **St. Pachomius, the hermit**

(A.D. c. 290? - 346?)

Pachomius was one of the pioneers in the organisation of hermits into groups and to write down rules for them. He was born in Thebaid, Egypt in A.D. 290 (292?). He was inducted into the Emperor's army (White, 1991; Cross & Livingstone, 1997) at the age of 20 and while serving as a soldier he was attracted by the behaviour and noble actions of the local Christians (Aphrem, 1963). It made a lasting impression on his mind. When the army was disbanded he returned to Khenoboskion and joined a church to learn the primary lessons of Christianity.

After his baptism in c. A.D. 313, he followed the venerable old ascetic, Palaemon. The ascetics of that order spent their day time making baskets and other utensils out of bamboo and reeds. During the nights they read Psalms and immersed themselves in prayers by keeping vigil. Their products were sold once in a week and the money was used to buy bread and the rest of the money was distributed among the poor.

One day as Pachomius was walking along the banks of river Nile he heard a voice that told

him to build a dwelling for the hermits and he and Palaemon on the instruction of an angel constructed a monastery in c. A.D. 318 and started living there (Douglas, 1978; Hoever, 1989). Palaemon later left him to lead a solitary life.

According to the directives given by the angel on a bronze plate Pachomius codified rules for monastic life (Chediath, 1993). He set apart special timings for prayer and handicraft work. The ascetics were expected to wear a headgear and maintain silence and quietude (Aphrem, 1963).

The first person to join his monastic group was his own brother, John (Aphrem, 1963; White, 1991). Hundreds followed him and he constructed six more monasteries in Thebaid. From A.D. 336 he had been living mainly in Pabau (White, 1991).

He also constructed a church for the benefit of poor shepherds. The ascetics in his group were not ordained priests. St. Athanasios visited him in A.D. 333 because of his zealous defence of orthodoxy against Arianism (White, 1991).

When his dear disciple Thevodoros fell ill the inmates of the monastery informed him about it and requested his prayers. He replied, "I am praying for him but it is worthier to bear the pain and other difficulties with patience and fortitude" (Aphrem, 1963).

Pachomius who had a special gift for prophecy was blessed with healing powers too. A nunnery

for his sister Maria (Mary) was constructed on the opposite bank of river Nile (White, 1991; Chediath, 1993). St. Baselios had implemented the rules codified by Pachomius (Hoever, 1989).

Egypt was in the grip of an epidemic in A.D. 348 and many members of the monastery died. Pachomius was also a victim of this pandemic and died in A.D. 346 (Aphrem, 1963; Hoever, 1989). Before his death he assembled all the inmates of the monastery and reminded them about the rules of ascetic life especially the oath of obedience in order to strengthen their faith. His feast is celebrated on 9 May.

## **St. Hilarion, the Abbot**

(A.D. 291 ? – 371)

St. Hilarion was born in the village called Tabatha, to the south of Gaza. His parents sent him to study at Alexandria where he came to know about Christian faith and was baptized when he was about fifteen (Thurston & Attwater, 1990; Walsh, 1985).

Hilarion visited St. Antony of Egypt (A.D. 251-356) and stayed with him for two months. Later he retired into the desert seven miles from Majuma, towards Egypt in c. A.D. 306/7 (Attwater & John, 1996; Farmer, 1997). His clothing consisted of a sack-cloth shirt, and a leather tunic which St. Antony gave him, and an ordinary short cloak. His food was fifteen figs a day, which he never took till sunset (Smith & Wace, 1882). His occupation was tilling the earth and in imitation of the Egyptian monk, making baskets, whereby providing for the necessities of life. Hilarion spent twenty years in the wilderness.

During his first years he had no shelter other than woven reeds and rushes. Afterwards he built a cell which was four feet broad and five feet in height. It resembled a tomb rather than a house. St.

Hilarion had a revelation in A.D. 356 of the death of St. Antony when he was sixty-five years old. (Thus we can reckon his birth to be around A.D. 291). He set out to St. Antony's mountain and found two cells to which St. Antony often retired to avoid visitors. He and two of the disciples of St. Antony wanted to see the place where St. Antony was entombed. The disciples said that St. Antony had given strict injunction that his grave should be concealed. Hilarion returned to Aphroditopolis (Atfiah) where he spent his time in abstinence and silence (Thurston & Attwater, 1990). It had not rained there for three years, ever since the death of St. Antony and people considering Hilarion as the successor of St. Antony requested him to pray for rain. The saint lifted up his hands and eyes to heaven, and immediately there was a downpour.

He had performed many miracles; a barren woman of Eleutheropolis brought forth a son by the intercession of St. Hilarion. He was very popular in that place as many labourers and herdsmen who were stung by serpents and insects were cured by their wounds being anointed with oil which he had blessed. He moved out to Sicily and later to Epidaurus (on the Dalmatian coast) with his disciple Hesychius. To be in seclusion, finally he fled to Cyprus and settled at a place two miles from Paphos.

St. Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis (c. A.D. 315 – 402), visited Hilarion in his last days of illness. Hilarion passed away at the age of eighty

and was entombed near Paphos. Later his relics were transferred to Majuma. The Syrian Orthodox Church celebrates the feast of St. Hilarion on 21 October.

## **Abraham Kidunay**

(c. A.D. 296 - c. 366)

Abraham Kidunaia was born to a wealthy family near Edessa in Mesopotamia in about A.D. 296. Abraham, contrary to the wishes of his parents to get him married, ran away to be a monk. When his parents died, he inherited their riches, but he commissioned a friend to distribute all his goods to the poor. He retained a cloak, a goat-skin garment, a bowl for food and drink, and a rush mat on which he slept (Thurston & Attwater, 1990; Farmer, 1997). He lived in a cell with only a small opening for food. Abraham regarded each day as his last.

Not far from Abraham's cell there was a town called Beth-Kiduna whose citizens were idolators. They resisted with violence all efforts to evangelize them. This was a source of constant grief to the bishop of Edessa. The bishop of Edessa asked Abraham to leave the hermitage (against his will) and ordained him priest and sent him to preach the gospel to the people in Beth-Kiduna. He built a church in the town and preached the gospel to which the citizens were not willing to listen. Hence, he returned during the night and went again on the next day. They stoned him and

left him half-dead. Upon recovering consciousness he again returned, and though constantly insulted, ill-treated, and sometimes attacked with sticks and stones, he continued for three years to preach without any apparent result.

Suddenly there was a break-through, the patience of Abraham convinced them of his holiness, and they listened to the message and were baptized. He continued to instruct them on the principles of faith, of Christian justice and of charity for a year and then retired to his hermitage. It is from his success in Kiduna that he became known as Kidunaia (Kidunay or Kiduniya).

Abraham led a life of penance for fifty years and lived to the age of seventy. At the news of his last illness, the whole countryside flocked to receive his benediction and after his death each one sought to procure a fragment of his clothing. The feast of St. Abraham Kduniya (Kidunay) is celebrated on 24 October in the Syrian Orthodox Church.

## **St. Dimet of Persia**

(A.D.? – 362?)

The biography of Dimet (Dometius) is confusing as there are two saints by the name Dimet (Dometius). The two have many details in common including the date of commemoration, 24 September. Therefore, further research is necessary to delineate the two from one another. However, the date of death is different; one in A.D. 362 and the other in A.D. 408 ([http://syrorthodoxchurch.com/english-Dateien/st\\_dimet.html](http://syrorthodoxchurch.com/english-Dateien/st_dimet.html)).

Dimet (Dometius) was a Persian convert who became a monk at Nisbis in Mesopotamia. He was ordained deacon and went to live in a cave and he converted many heathens of the neighborhood (Thurston & Attwater, 1990, Vol. III). People flocked to his retreat to request his blessings and to be healed. Emperor Julian, the Apostate, accused Dimet of courting popularity because Dimet had reproached Julian for his impiety. Dimet said: “If these poor harmless folk come to see me, I cannot send them away.” Julian was so enraged that he had him stoned to death (Thurston & Attwater, 1990, Vol. III, p. 275). The feast of St. Dimet is celebrated in the the Syrian Orthodox Church on 24 September.

*Note:* As per another account, St. Dimet, a man in the Middle East was serving Emperor Valens (364-378). Dimet who was a follower of Arianism was granted that grace by which he realized that he had displeased the Lord. Subsequently, he asked the Emperor to allow him to go to Cyrus, near the village Qelith (Turkey). Later Schabai baptized Dimet. Dimet lived there from A.D. 378 to A.D. 408. He departed for heavenly abode on 24 September A.D. 408. In 478, a certain woman who was healed from her illness by Saint Dimet, took off the relics of the saint and had them transferred to bishop Theodore of Amid (Diyarbakir). Later, St. Joseph, a disciple of Bishop Theodore, built over the relics of St. Dimet a well-known and large monastery ([http://syroorthodoxchurch.com/english-Dateien/st\\_dimet.html](http://syroorthodoxchurch.com/english-Dateien/st_dimet.html)). St. Dimet of Persia - The feast of Dimet is celebrated on 24 September in the Syrian Orthodox Church.

## **St. Macarius of Egypt**

(c. A.D. 310? – 390)

Macarius was born in the village Kemet of North Egypt around A.D. 300. He was known by different titles like ‘Macarius, the Great’, ‘Macarius, the Egyptian’, and ‘Macarius, the Elder’ (*Britannica*, 1988, Vol. 7; Cross & Livingstone, 1997; Chediath, 2006). Information about him is found in Rufinus’ Translation of the *Historica Monachorum* and *Lusaic History* by Palledius (Cross & Livingstone, 1974).

Once a wicked woman who became pregnant accused Macarius of having defiled her and people dragged him along the streets (Moothedan, 2001). He did not defend his innocence. At the time of her delivery, she had prolonged labor. She had a dream in which God told her she could not deliver unless she confessed the name of the man who really violated her. She was thus compelled to disclose the identity and Macarius was freed from the accusation. People praised and glorified him.

He dwelt in a desert in Scete/Skete, Wadi-el-Natrum. When he was thirty, in A.D. 340 he was ordained a priest (Cayre, 1935; *Britannica*, 1988). He was blessed with the power of prophecy

and healing. He was known as the patriarch of monasticism. He was well known like the Antony of Egypt. He had visited Antony many times (Cayre, 1935; *Britannica*, 1988). He was very popular among the hermits of South Egypt. He lived the life of a hermit for sixty years (Douglas, 1978).

Bishop Lucius of Alexandria banished Macarius to an island in the River Nile as he fought against the heretical teachings of Arius. Later he returned to Egypt and lived there until his death in A.D. 390.

Historians have made many references to his letter to his brothers '*To the Friends of God*'. Another renowned work is *Fifty spiritual Homilies* of St. Macarius, the Egyptian by A. J. Mason, 1921. The Syrian Orthodox Church celebrates his feast on 19 January.

## **St. John of Egypt, the Abbot**

(A.D. 304? - 394)

John (Yuhanon) was born in the Lower Thebaid at Lycopolis (now, the city of Asyut). He was a carpenter until the age of twenty-five. At the age of twenty-five, he abandoned the world and became a disciple of an aged anchorite. He submitted himself to the anchorite for about twelve years in obedience and self-surrender. After the death of the anchorite, John went on visiting several monasteries for four to five years and finally settled on the top of a steep hill near Lycopolis.

On the top of the hill, he made three little cells - - a bedroom, a work-room cum living room, and an oratory. He constructed walls with only a little window through which he received the necessities of life and spoke to those who visited him. He spent five days in prayer and meditation and on Saturdays and Sundays accepted only male visitors for instructions and spiritual advice.

John never ate until sunset and he ate only dried fruits and vegetables. At first and even until he became inured to it, he suffered severely because he would not eat anything that had been cooked by fire, but he continued this diet from fortieth year

until he was ninety (Thurston & Attwater, 1990, Vol. I).

St. John founded no community, but was regarded as the father by all the ascetics of the neighbourhood. St. John was famous for his prophesies, his miracles and his power of reading the thoughts and of discovering the secret sins of those who visited him (Thurston & Attwater, 1990, Vol. I; Attwater & John, 1996). The oil blessed by him cured the sick and the blind. He was twice consulted by the Emperor Theodosius I, once in A.D. 388 (in the war against Maximus) and in A.D. 392 (in the war with Eugenius). Palladius, the monastic historian, who visited St. John before his death has recorded a detailed account of his journey and reception.

St. John foreseeing his end commanded that nobody should come near him for three days. At the end of the period he died peacefully at the age of about ninety when he was on his knees at prayer. The cell which he had occupied was discovered in Asyut in 1901. The feast of St. John of Egypt is celebrated on 14 January along with all the monks and ascetics of the deserts and mountains of Egypt.

## St. Aphrem, the Syrian

(c. A.D. 306 – 373)

The great poet and saint, Mor Aphrem (Ephrem) was born in c. A.D. 306 in Nisbis. His father belonged to a Christian family in Nisbis and his mother was from Amid (Mar Aphrem, 1990).

The description of some historians that Aphrem later converted to Christianity is baseless because in his authentic writings he says “I was born in the way of truth.” In another *memre* it is recorded “My Lord, from infancy till old age I have borne your yoke. I have pleasantly discharged my duties without laziness or indolence” (Aphrem, 1963).

Mor Aphrem was tutored by the holy and virtuous bishop of Nisbis, Mor Yacoub (Smith & Wace, 1880). He was only twenty-two years (nineteen?) old when he accompanied the bishop to the Synod in Nicaea where the heresies of Arius were refuted.

There are two varying opinions about the ordination of Aphrem as a deacon in A.D. 338. Some claim that he received his deaconship from Mor Basil of Caesarea; meanwhile many others affirm it was from his own tutor Mor Yacoub (*Britannica*, 2001). Many historians state that he

met Mor Basil only once as a visitor.

In A.D. 337 after the death of Emperor Constantine I, the Persian King Shapur II conquered Nisbis. With the blessing of his teacher Aphrem climbed up a fort in the city. His fervent prayers from there brought in a swarm of insects which penetrated the enemy battallion. The Persian army scattered and fled (Mor Aphrem, 2001).

He had been a teacher in the Nisbis monastery for thirty-eight years. After the death of his mentor, Mor Yacoub and the Persian occupation of Nisbis he withdrew to Amid and later on to Urahoy (Edessa). He contributed a lot for the development and to the building up of the reputation of the school at Urahoy.

Mor Aphrem wrote several polemical works refuting the heresies of Bardaissan and Marcion (*Britannica*, 2001). Bardaissan presented his arguments in verse form to the students. Aphrem also composed verses contradicting the heretical views. Though in the ecclesiastical hierarchy he was only a deacon, he was respected as a Doctor (*Malphono*) of the Universal Syrian Orthodox Church.

Mor Aphrem who was otherwise known as 'the harp of the Holy Ghost' (Douglas, 1978) was an expert in expressing a vista of meanings through brief and selected words. His unique skill took the reader to heights of repentance, dedication and worship. He was rightfully called 'the prophet of

the Syrians' and the 'the custodian of knowledge'.

Mor Aphrem wrote a wide variety of hymns, sermons in verse and prose biblical exegeses. He has composed nearly thirty lakh lines in various *memre* and *madraso* (*Britannica*, 2001). His biblical commentaries on Genesis and Exodus are widely acclaimed. The indivisible divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ, the Church, the Apostles, Martyrs, lent, virginity, the sacraments, the baptism of Jesus Christ (*Dehno*), the resurrection, the special features of the Universal Church are some of the other subjects he dealt with (Aphrem, 1963; Aphrem I, 2000).

He led a simple and frugal life, sleeping on the floor and feeding on leafy vegetables and barley. He drank only water. Assuming that he would not live to see the next day he kept night vigil praying throughout.

Mor Aphrem departed for the heavenly abode on 9 June, A.D. 373 (376?). His body was interred as per his own instructions. "I am unholy who don't deserve to be entombed in a holy place. So do not bury me inside the church as I do not deserve that glory" (Aphrem I, 2001). He is commemorated on the first Saturday of the Great lent (Fifty days' lent).

## **St. Augen of Clysma**

(? – A.D. 363)

Christian monasticism originated in Egypt. St. Antony (A.D. 251 – 356) and St. Athanasius (A.D. 295 – 373) who had spent two years with him are prominent among them.

Monks started leading a community life by the end of the third century. The important centres of their monasteries were Pispir on the east of Egypt, Nitrean Valley on the western island of River Nile and Thebaid. Regulations were codified for the community life of the monks during the period of St. Pachomius (A.D. 290 – 346).

Men from various foreign nations joined the Egyptian monastery. Among them were those from Greece, Rome, Cappadocia, and Syria. Augen of Clysma was engaged in helping the poor for nearly twenty-five years. He gathered oysters from the bottom of the sea and distributed them among the poor. He then approached the noble monk Pachomius and started the life of a monk (Chediath, 2006).

He established many monasteries in Syria after becoming a monk. He is known as the father of Syrian Monasticism. It is believed that he started

the tradition of monasteries in Persia as well. The Syrian Orthodox Church celebrates his feast on 23 January and 21 April.

## **St. Epiphanius of Egypt**

(A.D. 315 ? – 402/3)

Epiphanius was born in Besanduk village near Elethropolis, Palestine. Besanduk is in the neighbourhood of Gaza. It is inferred that his birth was somewhere around A.D. 315 (Cayre, 1936; Wace & Piercy, 1999).

While very young, Epiphanius followed a monastic life in Egypt. He was attracted to the ascetic life that followed the model and advice of St. Hilarion (A.D. 291-371). He founded a monastery near Besanduk when he was in his twenties and stayed there for thirty years (Cayre, 1936). Luthicos, the Metropolitan of Elethropolis ordained him a priest (Wace & Piercy, 1999). He gained the ability to speak five languages; Greek, Hebrew, Syriac, Coptic and Latin. St. Jerome called him 'a pentaglot' on account of this (Cayre, 1936).

He was a close associate of Patriarch St. Paulinos of Antioch (A.D. 323 - 324?) who took a stern stand against the heresies of Arius and protected the Nicene Creed. He was consecrated Metropolitan of Constantia (the ancient Salamis in Cyprus) as he was renowned for his saintly life and

erudition. He served as the Metropolitan of Salamis for thirty six years from A.D. 367 to A.D. 402/3. During this period many monasteries came up in the island of Constantia. Monks from Palestine and Eleuthropolis frequented these monasteries. In his letter (against all heresies) to the believers in Arabia he clearly asserted his belief in ‘The virgin mother of God’.

Priests and many others in Pamphilia sought his help to resist and defeat the heresies of Arius. Even though he did not attend the Synod convened at Constantinople in A.D. 381, the declaration of the decisions taken in that Synod was a verbatim declaration of the Creed that existed in the Church of Salamis (Wace & Piercy, 1999).

Towards the end of A.D. 382 he worked in close association with St. Jerome and Paulinos of Antioch. The spiritual inspiration of St. Jerome motivated a rich lady, Paula, to distribute her wealth among the poor and the sick. Epiphanius encouraged her to take up the monastic life. She went on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in A.D. 383 and stayed in an abbey of Epiphanius for ten days.

St. Jerome visited Epiphanius on his way to Bethlehem. He was accompanied by many priests to whom Epiphanius was introduced as ‘the father of all episcopos and the remnant of ancient moral principles’.

Epiphanius described Origen as ‘the forefather of Arius’ heresies’. In A.D. 394 he hastened to Palestine on hearing that Origenism had reared its head there (the reasoning that the second and third persons in the Trinity were less than God, the Father). He could singularly refute and counter the heresies.

Epiphanius spoke vehemently against Origen in the church of Resurrection in Jerusalem. Metropolitan John who was a sympathizer of Origen expressed his disagreement with Epiphanius through an Arch-Deacon. Following that Epiphanius discontinued his association with this Metropolitan. Jerome of Bethlehem and Rufinus of Mt. Olive, two eminent persons who were friends parted ways in the light of this argument. Jerome supported Epiphanius and Rufinus took sides with Metropolitan John (Bihlmeyer & Tuchle, 1958). Jerome’s brother Paulinos was ordained priest by Epiphanius in order to cater to the spiritual needs of the monks of Bethlehem (Cayre, 1936; Wace & Piercy, 1999). The appointment of a priest in an area under the authority of a Metropolitan was a transgression of Canonical laws, argued John. He approached many Metropolitans for the settlement of this issue. The arguments that ensued found no fruitful compromise.

In A.D. 402 Epiphanius travelled to Constantinople and argued against the heresies of Origen and he could successfully outwit him. He was considered a saint during his lifetime. Many

people used to gather and wait patiently for hours to listen to his speeches (Wace & Piercy, 1999).

Among his literary compositions *Ancorates* written in A.D. 374 and *Panarion* in A.D. 377 are very important. *Ancorates* was composed when the believers in Pamphila asked for the teachings of the Church on the Trinity and the Holy Ghost. The book served as an anchor to stabilize those who wavered under the influence of Arius and other heretics (Cayre, 1936). Its hundred and twenty-one sections deal with belief in the Trinity, the Humanity of Christ and Resurrection (Wace & Piercy, 1999).

*Panarion*, considered as a ‘Medicine Chest’ was presented as an antidote for those bitten by the serpent of heresy (Cayre, 1936). It lists eighty heretical teachings (from the time of Adam) and quotes many basic records (Wace & Piercy, 1999). Origen is listed as a heretic in *Panarion*.

Epiphanius stressed the importance of the Church in his teachings. “The Church alone, he says, has received the content of tradition, and it is in her teaching and decision that the faithful finds the truth.” He teaches thus, ‘the Church is built upon the foundation of the unshaken faith of the rock, St. Peter’. His feast is celebrated on two dates by the Syrian Orthodox Church, 13 March and 12 May.

## **St. Pambo of Nitria**

(A.D. 315 - 385?)

Saint Pambo (Pampo) lived an ascetic life in the Nitrian desert in Egypt (Smith & Wace, 1887, Vol. IV). Abbot Poemen spoke of Pambo's three practices that are remarkable, viz., his fasting every day till evening, his silence, and his great diligence in manual labour. St. Antony inculcated in all his disciples the obligation of diligence in constant manual labour in a solitary life, both as a part of penance, and as a necessary means to expel sloth, and entertain the vigour of the mind in spiritual exercises (Palladius, 1898; Butler, 1866; <https://oca.org/saints/lives/2010/07/18/102051-venerable-pambo-the-hermit-of-egypt>).

St. Pambo, after he left St. Antony, settled in the desert of Nitria on a mountain, where he had a monastery; but he lived sometime in the wilderness of the Cells, where Rufinus says he went to receive his blessing in A.D. 374. St. Melania the Elder, in her visit found the holy abbot Pambo engaged in his work of making mats. She gave him three hundred pounds weight of silver, desiring him to accept that part of her store for the necessities of the poor among the brethren. St. Pambo without interrupting his work, or looking at her or her present, said to her that God would reward her

charity. Then turning to his disciple (Origen?), he asked him to take the silver and distribute it among all the brethren in Lybia and the isles who were most needy, but charged him to give nothing to those in Egypt, that country being rich and plentiful.

Melania continued standing for sometime expecting to be glorified and honored by him and said: "Father, do you know that here there is three hundred pounds weight of silver?" The abbot, without casting his eye upon the chest of silver, replied: "Daughter, He to whom you made this offering, very well knows how much it weighs without being told, for He weighs the mountains. If you give it to God who did not despise the widow's two mites, and even preferred them to the great presents of the rich, say no more about it and be silent" (Butler, 1866; Palladius, 1898).

St. Pambo excelled most other ancient monks in the austerity of his continual fasts. The restraint of his tongue was admirable. Once a certain religious brother to whom he had asked for advice began to recite to him Psalm 39:1 - - "I said, I will watch my ways and keep my tongue from sin." When Pambo heard these words he returned to his cell saying that it was enough for one lesson and that he would go and study to put it in practice. This he did by keeping perpetual silence. Whenever it was necessary to speak he did that after weighing well before he gave answer.

The disciples of St. Pambo such as Dioscorus (later Bishop of Hermopolis), Ammonius, Eusebius

and Euthymius, mentioned in the life of St. John Chrysostom, became great ascetics. It was said that sometimes St. Pambo's face shone like lightning, as did the face of Moses. When Abbot Theodore begged St. Pambo some words of instruction, he said: "Go, and exercise mercy and charity towards all men. Mercy finds confidence before God."

St. Athanasius once desired St. Pambo to come out of the desert to Alexandria, to confound the Arians by giving testimony to the divinity of Jesus Christ. The saint seeing in that city an actress dressed up for the stage, wept bitterly. He was asked the reason of his tears. He said he wept for the sinful condition of that unhappy woman, and also for his own sloth in the divine service; because he did not take so much pains to please God as she did to ensnare men.

Pambo while on his death-bed, at the very moment of his passing, is reported to have said this to the bystanders, Origen and Ammonius and the rest of the brethren: "From the day that I came to this place in the desert and built my cell and inhabited it, I cannot remember having eaten bread that I have not earned by my hands. I have not had to repent of any word that I have spoken up to the present hour. And so I go to God, as one who has not even begun to be pious."

He passed away at the age of seventy in A.D. 385 without any sickness, pain, or agony, as he was making a basket. St. Pambo said to the brethren who stood near his deathbed: "I go to the Lord as

one who has not yet begun to serve Him.” Melania took care of his burial (Butler, 1866; Palladius, 1898). St. Pambo is commemorated on 17 June in the Syrian Orthodox Church.

## **St. Moses, the (Black) Ethiopian**

(A.D. 320? – 395?)

Moses was an Ethiopian by race and lived in Egypt during the fourth century. He was a servant or slave to an Egyptian official (Thurston & Attwater, 1990, Vol. III). He was a man of huge stature. His master drove him out because he committed a murder. He joined a band of robbers. Because of his great physical strength, they chose him as their leader. Moses and his band of robbers were feared because of their many evil acts. People trembled at the mere mention of his name (<https://oca.org/saints/lives/2015/08/28/102414-venerable-moses-the-ethiopian-of-scete>).

Once Moses sought revenge on a man whose barking dog kept him from an intended robbery of sheep. He swam the Nile and killed four of the man's sheep, swam back across the Nile with them. He butchered them, cooked and ate the best parts. He sold the skin for wine. Then he walked 50 miles to rejoin his gang.

Moses spent several years leading a sinful life, but through the great mercy of God he repented, left his band of robbers and went to one of the desert monasteries in the Valley Wadi al-Natrum (Skete). There he was completely obedient to the brethren, and he poured forth many tears of sorrow for his

sinful life. After a while St. Moses withdrew to a solitary cell, where he spent his time in prayer and the strictest fasting.

St. Moses was not quickly freed from the passions. He went often to the monk, Abba Isidore, seeking advice on how to be delivered from the passions of profligacy. Being experienced in the spiritual struggle, the Elder taught him never to eat too much food, to remain partly hungry while observing the strictest restraint. But the passions continued to trouble St. Moses in his dreams.

Moses was tempted by demons to get back to his old habits. Moses went to Isidore who lived in Skete and explained his conflict. He said: "What am I to do, seeing that the dreams of my soul darken my reason, by reason of my sinful habits?" He said to him: "Because you have not withdrawn your mind from imagining these things that is why you endure this. Give yourself to watching and praying with fasting and you will quickly be delivered from them." Listening to this advice he retreated to his cell and gave his word that he would not sleep all night nor bend his knees. So he remained in his cell for six years and every night he stood in the middle of the cell praying and not closing his eyes. And he could not master the thing. So he suggested to himself yet another plan, and going out by night he would visit the cells of the older and more ascetic (monks), and taking their water-pots secretly would fill them with water. For they fetched their water from a distance, some from two

miles off, some five miles, others half a mile.

Several accounts note how for years he struggled with temptation to return to his robber life after he had chosen the monastic way. Once, while alone in his cell, four robbers attacked him. He tied them up, slung them over his shoulders and took them to the church where he dumped them, declaring that it was un-Christian to harm them and inquiring what was to be done with them. When the attackers found out who he was, they repented and joined the community (Palladius, 1898; Thurston & Attwater, 1990, Vol. III).

After many years of monastic life, St Moses was ordained deacon. The bishop clothed him in white vestments and said, "Now Abba Moses is entirely white!" The saint replied, "Only outwardly, for God knows that I am still dark within." Once, the bishop decided to test him and he directed the clergy to drive him out of the altar, insulting him as an unworthy Ethiopian. In all humility, the monk accepted the abuse. Having put him to the test, the bishop of Alexandria, Mor Theophilus, then ordained St. Moses to the priesthood. St. Moses labored for fifteen years in this rank, and gathered many disciples around him.

When the saint reached the age of 75, he warned his monks that soon robbers would descend upon Skete and murder all those who remained there. The saint asked his monks to leave, in order to avoid violent death. His disciples begged the saint to leave with them, but he replied: "For

many years now, I have awaited the time when the words of my Master, the Lord Jesus Christ, should be fulfilled: “All who take up the sword, shall perish by the sword” (Matt. 26: 52). After this, seven of the brethren remained with St. Moses, and one of them hid nearby during the attack of the robbers. The robbers killed St. Moses and the six monks who remained with him. Moses was entombed at the monastery called Dair al-Baramus (Thurston & Attwater, 1990, Vol. III). Their death occurred about the year 400 ( <http://incommunion.org/2011/12/07/st-moses-the-black-a-patron-saint-of-non-violence-by-pieter-dykhorst/>).

The feast of St. Moses, the Black is celebrated in the Syrian Orthodox Church on 18 June and 28 August.

## **Mor Shalito, Hermit**

(A.D. 320? – 415?)

Mor Shalito was a hermit in the monastery of Mor Pachomius. He was interested in reading biographies of saints and studied in detail the scriptures, both the Old and the New Testaments. He was in charge of the monastery for five years. His rendition of songs was excellent and his humility was a model worthy to be emulated.

His first miracle occurred regarding a man possessed of a demon. Shalito drove out the demon in the name of Christ. Other hermits were jealous of his activities and so he left the monastery of Mor Pachomius and lived in another monastery for ten years. He led a life of solitude inhabiting mountains and caves.

He could overcome many temptations by the strength provided by the Holy Spirit due to his prayers and vigil. Shalito strongly resisted the heresy of Arius. He recognized the error of Arius through a vision. The vision enlightened him thus, “the heresy of Arius is darkness; it will be wiped off by the light which is the Orthodoxy of the Church. Lord Jesus will enable the victory over heresy. It will be destroyed like paper thrown into fire. The

True Faith will conquer and destroy all heretical teachings and deceptions.”

He also had a vision about Mor Augen. Mor Shalito left to live with his brothers after receiving this vision. ‘We will receive a great signal. A man, who is blessed like the apostles who were sanctified by God and filled with the Holy Spirit, will lead us. You will be like the apostles of Jesus. You will travel eastward to spread the Gospel. You will sow the seeds of the word of God in the fields of human minds. You shall uproot the teachings of Arius and rectify his errors’.

His vision proved right when Mor Augen joined Mor Shalito and his brothers. Together they worked in the vineyards of Christ propagating the True Faith. They visited Nisbis in Mesopotamia under the leadership of Mor Augen.

Three years later the epidemic, plague, hit Shar’oto village. Many people died and Mor Augen asked Mor Shalito to pray for the city and to drive away the angel of Death. The village was soon free of plague, which had taken the lives of one thousand two hundred and three people. They returned to Mt. Izla soon after relief was effected.

Once a snake bit him while he was sleeping. He killed the snake on the spot and spoke thus, “O, Serpent! Don’t you know that God has given us power and authority to crush snakes and scorpions and to exorcise evil spirits? None of your evil tactics will work with us.” Though it was a venomous

snake, the poison did not affect him.

Mor Jacob of Nisbis (d. A.D. 338) before his consecration as a Bishop accompanied Mor Augen and Mor Shalito to Botan region in Quardu Mountains. They constructed a church in Zariklo where there was a temple (Zorababel) of heathens.

On another occasion when these three saints were resting in a mountainous valley they chanced upon a dragon (a huge serpent with wings) attacking a child and killing it. Mor Shalito raised the child to life making the villagers very happy. There was great rejoicing over the risen child and celebrations went on for three days.

He returned once again to Mt. Izla. From the monastery there, he started on a long missionary journey to Mt. Sobo near Beth Zabady. He walked across the River Tigris as St. Peter, the disciple did. On the mountain, he had to endure a harsh winter with heavy snow fall. The area was engulfed in darkness making it impossible to see the sun or the moon for many months. He left for Maranashaf village and could evict evil spirits dwelling there. He also converted many a Kurdu to Christian faith. He could also raise a man from death in the village Farzoon (Arslan, 2005).

Mor Shalito baptized many as well. When he arrived in the village Moelo, he came to know about the death of Mor Augen. He himself departed for the heavenly abode in his ninety fifth year. A

monastery was constructed where his remains were interred. It is called monastery of Mor Shalito. The Syrian Orthodox Church celebrates his feast on 15 November.

**Note:** Rev. Dn. John Anderson, who was a student of St. Ephrem's Seminary, Ma'arat Saidnaya, Syria translated the content on my request from *Saints Syriaques* in January 2010.

## **St. Ambrose of Milan**

(A.D. 340 – 397)

Ambrose was born in Trier (now in Germany) to Christian parents in A.D. 340. His father, the Roman Governor of France, died early in his childhood (Hoever, 1989). He embarked on a career in Law and when he was practising as a lawyer in Rome (in A.D. 370) he was appointed as the Governor to Liguria, Amelia in Northern Italy (Hoever, 1989; *Encarta*, 2005).

In A.D. 374 Auxentius Episcopo of Arian faction died (Aphrem, 1963, Douglas, 1978). The church committee was convened to elect a new Episcopo. A noisy quarrel and vehement argument ensued between Arius supporters and those against them. Governor Ambrose was called upon to mediate and settle the dispute amicably. In the midst of his speech a child called out that Ambrose should be the next Episcopo which was unanimously endorsed by the gathering. Though reluctant he had to go by the majority opinion and was compelled to accept the position. He received baptism on 7 December A.D. 374 in his thirty fourth year (Moothedan, 2001) and in eight days step by step he was duly consecrated the next bishop (Aphrem, 1963). As a religious head he adopted an

ascetic life and apportioned his entire wealth to the Church and to the poor.

The politician turned Church man immediately turned his attention to his great responsibilities. Ambrose studied holy books, letters of prelates, theology and asceticism and wrote profusely on these subjects. The most important among his theological works are a book on Christian moral law *De Officiis Ministrorum* and another book he wrote for his sister St. Marcelena, *De Virginibus* (White, 1991). Being a strong spokesman against Arianism he was known as the ‘Hammer of Arianism’.

Ambrose battled boldly to preserve the independence of the Church from the state. He was an affable Governor and the common people were impressed by his compassionate attitude and intelligence. Once in an argument with Emperor Auxensius, Ambrose told him: “The Emperor is a member of the Church; he is never above it” (Moothedan, 2001). He also restrained the kings from occupying positions in Church along with the Church prelates. “The royal robes belong to a king but they are not those of a priest. So it is not right for the kings in their royal attire to occupy the same place with the priests.” In those days the kings were allowed to enter the sacrificial altar along with the priests (Chediath, 1998, p. 251). The Church enjoyed the patronage and support of the kings in the fourth century and in return they were allowed these privileges.

In A.D. 390 Emperor Theodosius ordered the massacre of seven thousand people in Thessalonica. Ambrose had forbidden this Emperor from entering the church. He asked the Emperor, “Who are you? Only God has supreme power over the world. Who do you make yourself by issuing orders without discretion for a massacre? Do you have power like God’s who only has authority over lives?” (Aphrem, 1963). The chastisement led the Emperor to repentance and he decided to frame laws according to the direction given by Ambrose. Accordingly if a man commits a sin equivalent to murder he should be given one month’s reprieve before the facts are proved against him.

St. Ambrose’s speeches helped a lot to lead St. Augustine to repentance. It was he who baptised St. Augustine in A.D. 387. St. Ambrose, the bishop of Milan, departed for heavenly abode on 4 April A.D. 397 after serving the church for twenty-three years (Aphrem, 1963). His feast is celebrated on 6 December (the day of his baptism).

## **Evagris, Ascetic and writer**

(A.D. 344? - 398)

Evagris (Ponticus), ascetic and writer, was born at Ibora, in Pontus Galaticus in A.D. 344. He was ordained 'reader' by St. Basil, the bishop of Caesarea. After the death of St. Basil, Gregory Nazianzen ordained him deacon (Palladius, 1898; Smith & Wace, 1880, Vol. II; Douglas, 1978; Malaty, 2005). Deacon Evagris accompanied Gregory to the great synod of Constantinople in A.D. 381 and left him with bishop Nectarius, since Evagris was skilled in argument against all heresies (Wace, 1911).

Evagris was troubled by temptations of flesh by the wife of an ex-prefect (Wace, 1911). This resulted in a prolonged illness (fever) lasting for about six months. Physicians were at a loss and could find no way to cure him. He moved to Jerusalem where Melania, the Elder, nursed him and said: "Son, your long illness does not please me. Tell me therefore what your thoughts are. . ." Then he confessed to her the whole matter. But she said to him: "Give me your word before the Lord that you will keep the monastic life; and, sinner though I am, I will pray that you may be granted reprieve." Fearing God and respecting his

own conscience he consented. So within a few days he got well, and travelled to the mount of Nitria, Egypt in c. A.D. 382 where he became a friend and disciple of Macarius of Egypt (Cross & Livingstone, 1997; Malaty, 2005).

He lived there two years and in the third year he entered the desert. So he lived fourteen years in the place they call Cellia. In the course of fifteen years, having purified his mind, he composed three holy books for monks, called *Antirrhetica* in which he taught the arts to be used against demons. He also wrote on asceticism and stillness in the solitary life. Theophilus of Alexandria wanted to ordain Evagris a Bishop which he refused (Wace, 1911). He once said: “Always keep your death in mind and do not forget the eternal judgment, then there will be no fault in your soul” (Malaty, 2005, p. 239).

Evagris in his chapters on prayer wrote: “Prayer is the flower of gentleness and of freedom from anger. Prayer is the fruit of joy and thankfulness. Prayer is the remedy for gloom and depression. Go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and take up your cross so that you can pray without distraction. . . . Prayer is an ascent of the spirit to God. If you long for prayer, renounce all to gain all” (Malaty, 2005, p. 239).

To one of his disciples he told the things that would happen to him after eighteen years. And he said: “From the time that I moved to the desert, I have not touched lettuce or any other green

vegetable, or any fruit, or grapes, or meat, and nor have I taken bath.” And later, in the sixteenth year of his life without cooked food, his flesh felt a need, owing to the weakness of the stomach, to partake of something cooked. However, he did not take bread even then having fed on herbs or gruel or pulse for two years. He attended the church on the Epiphany and passed away after a few days. Shortly before his death in A.D. 398 at the age of fifty-four (Smith & Wace, 1880, Vol. II) he told the disciples: “For three years I have not been troubled by fleshly desire after so long a life and toil and labour and ceaseless prayer.” The feast of St. Evagris (surnamed Ponticus) is celebrated in the Syrian Orthodox Church on 16 January.

## **St. Arsenius, the Great**

(A.D. 354 – 450)

St. Arsenius (Arsenius) the Great was born in c. A.D. 354 in Rome in a pious Christian family. Arsenius is also known as “the Roman” or “the Deacon.” He is one of the most famous monks of Egypt. He studied Rhetoric and Philosophy, and mastered Latin and Greek languages. St. Arsenius gave up philosophy and the vanity of the worldly life, seeking instead the true wisdom. He entered the ranks of the clergy as a Deacon in one of the Roman churches, dedicating himself to the service of God (Smith & Wace, 1877, Vol. I; <http://home.iprimus.com.au/xenos/arseniusgreat.html>).

Emperor Theodosius I (A.D. 379-395) ruled the eastern half of the Roman Empire. In about A.D. 383 he entrusted Arsenius with the education of his sons Arcadius and Honorios (Wace, 1911). Against his will, but in obedience to the will of Pope Damasos (Damasus) Arsenius agreed to teach the imperial children, hoping to teach them Christian piety as well (<http://catholicfire.blogspot.co.uk/2008/07/saint-of-day-st-arsenius-great.html>).

When Arsenius arrived at Constantinople, he was received with great honour by the Emperor Theodosius. Theodosius said: "Forget that they are the emperor's sons, for I want them to submit to you in all things, as to their father and teacher." The Saint devoted himself to the education of the youths, but the high esteem in which he was held troubled his spirit. St. Arsenius prayed to the Lord and he heard a voice telling him, "Arsenius, flee from men, and you shall be saved." Then in c. A.D. 394, removing his rich clothing and replacing it with old and tattered garments, he secretly left the palace, boarded a ship for Alexandria, and he made his way to Sketis, a monastery in the midst of the desert.

The brethren led him to Abba John Colobus (the Dwarfish), famed for his holiness of life (Wace, 1911). He, wishing to test the newcomer's humility, did not seat Arsenius with the monks for the meal (Thurston & Attwater, 1990, Vol. III). He threw him a piece of dry bread saying, "Eat if you wish." St. Arsenius got down on his hands and knees, and picked up the bread with his mouth. Then he crawled off into a corner and ate it. Seeing this, Elder John said, "He will be a great ascetic!" Then accepting Arsenius with love, he tonsured him into monasticism.

Having taken on the struggle of silence he seldom left his seclusion. He came to church only on Sundays and Feast Days, observing complete silence and conversing with no one. Although

absorbed in constant prayer, the Saint did not refuse monks visiting him for his counsel and guidance. St. Arsenius was interested in handicraft work and wove baskets (mats) using fronds of date palms (leaves) soaked in water. He never changed the water in which he moistened the leaves, but only poured fresh water in it. When someone asked, he answered: "I ought to be punished by this smell for the self-indulgence with which I formerly used perfumes" (Thurston & Attwater, 1990, Vol. III, p. 146).

St. Arsenius felt that many were fasting and observing vigil, but it was rare for someone to guard his soul from pride, greed, jealousy, and hatred of one's brother. In this they resemble graves which are decorated outwardly, but are filled with foul smell. He was heard to cry aloud in his cell: "Forsake me not, O God! I have done no good in Thy sight, but, in Thy goodness, grant me Your mercy to make a beginning" (Wace, 1911, p. 96).

A certain monk once asked St. Arsenius what he should do when he reads the Holy Scriptures and did not comprehend their meaning. The Elder answered, "My child, you must study and learn the Holy Scriptures constantly, even if you do not understand their power . . . For when we have the words of the Holy Scriptures on our lips, the demons hear them and are terrified."

The Saint often said, "I have often regretted the words I have spoken, but I have never regretted my silence." He spent fifty-five years at monastic

labours and struggles. He spent forty years (c. A.D. 394-434) at Sketis, and ten years (c. A.D. 434- 444) on the mountain of Troe near Memphis. Then he spent three years at Canopus, and two more years at Troe, where he fell asleep in the Lord (Thurston & Attwater, 1990, Vol. III).

St. Arsenius departed for heavenly abode at Troe in the year A.D. 449 or 450. When Arsenius was very near his end, he was weeping. The monks asked Arsenius: “Are you afraid Father?” Arsenius replied: “Truly, the fear that is with me in this hour has been with me ever since I became a monk” (Smith & Wace, 1877, Vol. I, p. 174). The feast of St. Arsenius is celebrated in the Syrian Orthodox Church on 8 May (and on 11 July?).

## **Mor Palladius, the Solitary**

(c. A.D. 367? – 425?)

Palladius was born in about A.D. 367 (363?) in Galatia (Cayre, 1935, Vol. I). Palladius embraced an ascetic life when he was about twenty years. He was a pupil of Evagris Pontus (Malay, 2005). Palladius travelled widely to acquaint himself with the life of those leading solitary lives (Wace, 1911).

Palladius visited Bethlehem in about A.D. 387. At Jerusalem he met Melania, the elder, and Rufinus. In A.D. 388 Palladius visited Alexandria and the nearby monasteries (Malaty, 2005). He also met Didymus (d. A.D. 395) while on the journey. Thereafter Palladius retired to the Nitrian desert in about A.D. 390.

After spending a year in the Nitrian desert, Palladius went deeper into the desert known as Cells. There he spent nine years (Cayre, 1935, Vol. I). He enjoyed the company of Macarius the younger (d. A.D. 390) and Evagris Pontus (d. A.D. 398). During this period Palladius travelled the whole of upper Egypt and visited all leading solitaires.

Palladius returned to Palestine due to ill-health and then moved to Bithynia where he was

called to the Episcopate in about A.D. 400 (Cayre, 1935, Vol. I; Malaty, 2005). Mor John Chrysostom (A.D. 347-407) ordained Palladius, bishop of Helenopolis. Mor Palladius was one of the first victims of the persecution that was aimed at the followers of Mor John Chrysostom. Mor Palladius fled to Rome with many others since a decree was promulgated to arrest all those who had given assylum to bishops, priests or laymen who had communicated with Mor Chrysostom.

Mor Palladius and others were received hospitably in Rome about the middle of A.D. 405. Mor Palladius gratefully acknowledged the help and Mor Chrysostom wrote letters from Cucusus thanking the noble ladies of Rome and one Pinianus and his wife (Wace, 1911).

The whole group returned to Constantinople later but was confined in separate chambers in the fortress of Athyre and were compelled to renounce communion with Mor Chrysostom and to recognize Atticus. Threats and violence could not change the mind of Mor Palladius and he was banished to Syene, on the extreme border of Egypt (Wace, 1911) where he spent six years from A.D. 406 to A.D. 412 (Cayre, 1935, Vol. I). About the year A.D. 408, Palladius composed his famous work '*Dialogue on the life of St. John Chrysostom*' (Malaty, 2005).

In about A.D. 412 Mor Palladius was permitted to leave but was not allowed to return to his Episcopate in Helenopolis. Mor Palladius resided

near Antinopolis in the Thebaid for four years and travelled to Mesopotamia, Syria and other parts of the eastern world. Peace was established in the Church in A.D. 417 and Mor Palladius returned to his episcopate in Helenopolis. But Mor Palladius later took charge of the episcopate in Aspuna in Galatia.

Mor Eusebius attended the Synod of Ephesus in A.D. 431 as the bishop of Aspuna. Therefore, it is assumed that Mor Palladius was not alive then or that he ceased to be the bishop of Aspuna before A.D. 431. Cayre (1935, Vol. I) has recorded that Mor Palladius became the bishop of Aspuna in his own province in Galatia and died in this episcopate (in A.D. 425?).

The feast of Mor Palladius, the solitary is celebrated in the Syrian Orthodox Church on 29 November.

## **St. Mary of Egypt**

(A.D. ? – 422?)

Mary was an Egyptian, who left home at the age of twelve and went to live in Alexandria, where she lived the life of a prostitute and remained so for seventeen years (Attwater & John, 1996; Farmer, 1997).

In the reign of Theodosius, the Younger, there lived in Palestine a holy monk and priest named Zosimus. He had been serving God for fifty-three years and was directed to leave his monastery for one near Jordan, where he might learn how to advance further on the path of holiness. He found that members of this community on the first Sunday in Lent after Mass dispersed to the desert to spend their time in solitude and penance until Palm Sunday. It was in that season (c. A.D. 430?) one day, Zosimus, after travelling a twenty day's distance from the monastery, sat down at noon to say Psalms and to rest. Suddenly he noticed a person who seemed to be a hermit running away. Zosimus ran after him to receive his blessing but the person exclaimed: "Father Zosimus, I am a woman; throw your mantle to cover me that you may come near me."

Mary narrated her story and that she was a native of Egypt and left home for Alexandria

without the consent of her parents (Thurston & Attwater, 1990, Vol. II). She confessed that she lived the life of a prostitute for seventeen years, not for money, but to gratify her lust. At the age of about twenty-eight, she joined (out of curiosity) a group of pilgrims going to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of the Holy Cross. While travelling with the pilgrims, she continued with her evil ways. Upon their arrival in Jerusalem she tried to enter the church but an invisible force held her back. After two or three ineffectual attempts, she withdrew to a corner of the outer court. Suddenly the full realization of her sinfulness swept over her. She raised her eyes to the icon of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, with tears. Thereafter, she was able to enter the church to venerate the cross. Then, she returned to the icon of St. Mary to give thanks. There she heard a voice which said: "Go over to Jordan and you shall find rest."

Mary bought a few loaves of bread from a baker and enquired the way to Jordan and reached there at the church of St. John, the Baptist, on the bank of the river. She crossed over river Jordan into the wilderness and remained there for forty-seven years. She had seen no human being and had lived on edible plants and on dates. She was not able to read and God himself had taught her the mysteries of faith. Mary requested Zosimus not to divulge what she had said. Zosimus promised to meet her again in Jordan on the Maundy Thursday of the following year to give her holy communion. The next year, on the Maundy Thursday Mary received

communion from Zosimus at the appointed meeting place and ate three lentils which Zosimus offered. She went back walking over the river. But when Zosimus went back into the desert to keep his second appointment Mary was found dead. Zosimus entombed the body of Mary. A lion helped to dig her grave.

St. Mary of Egypt is depicted in portraits with three loaves of bread which she took with her into the desert. The feast of Saint Mary of Egypt is celebrated in the Syrian Orthodox Church on 1 April.

## **Mor Barsoumo, the chief of the Mourners**

(A. D.? – 458)

Barsoumo was born at the village of Otton near the city of Smeshath. His parents were Hanock and Zachia. The life story of Barsoumo, chief of the mourners, written by his disciple Samuel, the Priest, is kept in the library at St. Mark, Jerusalem (Zafaran, MSS 117).

Barsoumo is known as the head of the mourners. His name is known differently in the historical books - - Barsuma and Barsoma. One day Barsoumo went for a festival in the city of Smeshath. He happened to be alone on the bank of Euphrates. He was crying. A monk by name Abraham met him and asked: "Why are you crying?" Barsoumo replied: "I want to be the slave of Jesus Christ, our Lord." Abraham took him to the monastery and taught him ascetic practices. His teacher Abraham, the ascetic, departed for heavenly abode in c. A. D. 409.

After the death of his teacher, Barsoumo visited the holy land. On return, he stayed on a high mountain. The faithful built a monastery for him at that place and he stayed there. The Dayro

of Mor Barsoumo is near Melitine. On a summer night Barsoumo went out of his room and looked at the shining stars. He thought of his humble self and the mighty creations of God. He decided on that day that he would not sit in the presence of his master. That day onwards he remained standing before the Lord and supported himself on a rock whenever he was tired.

In A. D. 449 Barsoumo attended the second Synod of Ephesus as the representative of all monasteries of the East. He was given the authority over other monasteries by Caesar Theodosius (to settle disputes and issues). After the death of Theodosius II, the army chief Markkian took charge.

Barsoumo felt bad about the decision of Chalcedon synod. The Chalcedonians read an order of excommunication of Barsoumo in a church. Then a prominent person testified that his son was seriously ill and Barsoumo's prayer healed him. The faithful was unanimous in their conviction of the saintly life of Barsoumo and Chalcedonians could not do anything.

Barsoumo was a close friend of Mor Dioscoros, the Patriarch of Alexandria (Smith & Wace, 1877). Mor Barsoumo entered his heavenly abode on 3 February A. D. 457/58. The feast of Mor Barsoumo is celebrated on 3 February and 31 May in the Syrian Orthodox Church.

## **Mor Simon, the Stylite**

(A. D. 390 - 459)

Mor Simon is the first among the pillar ascetics. The term stylite originated from the Greek word '*stylos*' which means pillar. Simon was born in the village of Sesan, a place on the border of Cicilia and Syria (Smith & Wace, 1887; Cross & Livingstone, 1974; Douglas, 1978).

Simon was a shepered at a young age. While in the field with sheep, he saw a vision. Later, he disposed of his properties and the assets of his aunt, which had been entrusted to him. He distributed part of the proceeds among the poor and the needy. The remaining assets he took to the monastery of Eusebona at Tell 'Ada, situated between Antioch and Aleppo. He joined the monastery with his brother Shemse when he was in the teens.

Later, he dug a pit of about 4 ft in the garden and stood in the pit for about two months. After the midnight prayer he used to stand with a big stone hung around his neck. He also stood on a roller to resist sleep in the night. His fellow hermits were jealous about these practices of Simon and raised some false accusations against him. Thus, he left the monastery of Eusebona. The head of the

monastery gave him four coins which he refused to accept and said: "May your prayers be the viaticum for me."

Mor Simon reached the village Telanissur, Dair Sem'an. He sat beneath a tree and prayed, "O God, My Lord, by Thy will you protected me from all adversities. Help and guide me until I reach the heavenly abode." He then travelled and reached the monastery of Maris. Maris is the son of Barathoon and was the head of the village. He healed several sick people while staying in this monastery.

Mor Simon was in the habit of observing the forty-day lent in all its seriousness. During the forty-day lent he did not eat anything. In A. D. 423, he prepared a platform of about 4 ft. high and stood on it for about five years. Mor Simon was going around the nearby villages to preach Gospel. Angels, prophets Elijah and Moses appeared to him. Several miracles happened through the intercession of Mor Simon.

Mor Simon spent about forty years on a pillar. He prayed, "O Lord, my God, let not the hands of mortal men be necessary for my help. Let not me step down from this pillar to see men on earth. Help me O Lord to end my life on this pillar on which I ascended by your grace. According to Thy will accompany the soul of Thy servant from this place."

Mor Simon had ulcers on his foot because of standing for long on the pillar. He suffered a lot for about nine months. Emperor Theodosius sent three

Bishops to request Mor Simon to step down from the pillar. However, he spent time in prayer and fasting. In A. D. 459 (July) several people gathered around the pillar to listen to his words. Mor Simon departed for the heavenly abode probably on Wednesday July 27. His body was kept on the pillar for nineteen days in order to agree upon the place of burial. The body was carried in a funeral procession from the Fort of Simon (where he spent his time as a pillar ascetic) to Antioch. The body was entombed in a church at Antioch constructed by King Constantine. An evil spirited man touched the coffin during the funeral procession and was healed.

Now there are four churches near the pillar of Mor Simon. Those who followed his ascetic practices are called stylites. Daniel is one of the prominent disciples of Mor Simon. The Syriac Orthodox Church celebrates the feast of Mor Simon, the stylite, on 27 July.

## **St. Zeno, the Ascetic**

(Fourth/Fifth Century ?)

The venerable Zeno was born in the city of Pontus into a rich family (Theodoret, 1990; Smith & Wace, 1887). He was the neighbour of Mor Basalius, the Great of Caesarea.

Zeno served at the court of Emperor Valence (A.D. 328 – 378, co-emperor from A.D. 364). So it is inferred he must have lived in the last part of the fourth century or the first half of the fifth century. Theodoretus, the bishop of Cyrus, is recorded to have visited him. Tillemont claims that Theodoretus' period was from A.D. 393 to A.D. 453. Meanwhile some others say Zeno died during the reign of Emperor Leo (A.D. 457 – A.D. 458).

After the death of Emperor Valence he left the army and settled for a monastic life and many people assert Mor Baselius had a hand in this transformation. He lived in a cave near Antioch observing a rigid ascetic life. In his cell he had neither bed nor fireplace. He lived without the comfort of basic amenities like a lamp, an oven, vessels or bottles. The ascetic wore old rags, strapless slippers and consumed only bread and water. The visit of Theodoretus is described as a happy event. He went to church every Sunday and

received the Holy Mysteries. He ate only once in two days. The bread was supplied to him by an acquaintance. He had to make a tedious journey to bring water from a far away well.

Zeno led this solitary ascetic life for forty years. He was immersed in reading holy books. He had not completely given up his family property as his siblings were underaged. Later he entrusted his share of wealth to Patriarch Alexander of Antioch (A.D. 412 – 417) whom he considered as his divine caretaker.

Zeno escaped the persecution and murder let loose by Isaurian. What happened to his later life is not clearly known. The feast of the ascetic Zeno is celebrated on 22 November by the Syrian Orthodox Church.

## **Mor John, the Arab**

(A.D. 391 – 486)

Mor John, the Arab (Mor Yuhanon, the Arabian) was born in the village Hirtha in the Kashkar region. His father, Abraham, who belonged to the Buquila family was well known in that area.

His education started at the age of seven. He was interested in monasticism from the age of fifteen. Once at the church in Hirtha he had a vision about trisagion. He also saw punishment meted out to sinners on the Day of the Judgment and the list of names of the Just. An angel asked him, “Where do you want your name to be?” he answered, “With the virtuous.” The angel advised him, “You must become a monk.” On his enquiry how that could be made possible the angel told him, “A group of saints will pass your way after two days. You must join them.” Yuhanon shared this divine experience with Mor Coorilos of Hirtha. The Bishop advised him to wait for two days to ascertain the veracity of the vision. After saying this the Bishop retired to the church to carry on with his prayers.

As Mor Coorilos was engaged in praying, he saw a light emanating from the cross. He

saw a vision. He saw a lamp and heard a voice announcing that Mor Augen had sent seventy-two disciples to wipe off the darkness of the world. The next morning he summoned Yuhanon and asked him to wait for one more night. Yuhanon had another vision that night of three elderly people. One person appeared more luminary. He heard a voice asking him to go to Mt. Sinai. Yuhanon after discussing his vision with the Bishop shared his feelings with his parents whom he had invited. They were anxious over his decision to become a monk but gradually accepted it.

Yuhanon started out on his journey from the village and like prophet Habakuk arrived at Singar. The village headman questioned him about the purpose of his visit. As Yuhanon made no answer, he was imprisoned. That night an angel appeared before him and asked him to go to the house of Augen. He arrived at Augen's Ashram weary after two days.

Pallus, the abbot of the monastery asked, "Why have you come here?" He was too tired to respond. Pallus reported the matter to Andrews, another monk who had foreseen this matter by divine grace. Yuhanon was given monastic habit. Yuhanon who was filled with divine blessing was a model for other monks.

Once John was sent to the village Marre to buy wine for the Holy *Qurbano*. On arriving there, he gave away the money meant for the purchase of wine to a poor man. As he had no money, he filled

the barrels with water and returned. He reported the matter to the abbot. On inspection, they found to their surprise that the water had miraculously turned into wine.

On another occasion, he with the brother monks went to buy grain from the village near the Mor Augen monastery. Three thieves attacked them on the way and bound John with ropes. They released him when he cried for mercy. He prayed for their return to the right path shedding their vicious lives. They had a change of heart and became monks.

Another miracle attributed to him is about walking on water. When he arrived at the village Tamonon, a monk invited him to join his monastery. When they reached the banks of the river Tigris, they found a Persian ship anchored there. They refused the monks permission to board the ship and harassed them as well. Then John and the brother monk walked over the River Tigris to reach the other side.

When John returned to the monastery he obtained permission from the Abbot to lead a solitary life on the eastern side of the monastery. The Gospel of John was his only possession. He came to the monastery only to attend Sunday mass and to partake in the feast of saints. He succeeded as the next Abbot after the death of the then Abbot.

Many miracles happened due to his intercession. He could oust an evil spirit with his prayers from a man possessed who was brought

before him from Nisbis. Many childless couples were blessed with children, plants bloomed, even the war between the Persians and the Romans ended and the plague that ravaged many in Marre village could be wiped off through his intercession.

Mor John revealed to the monk Shem'un "My death is near. My body should be entombed in Mor Augen Dayro." He who had been a monk for forty-two years and an abbot for thirty-three years. Mor John passed away in his ninety-fifth year. The feast of John, the Arabian, is celebrated on 29 August in the Syrian Orthodox Church.

## **St. Daniel, the Stylite**

(c. A.D. 409 ? – c. 493 ?)

Daniel, the stylite (pillar ascetic) is the most famous of the disciples of Simon, the Stylite (Rajan, 2007). He was born of devout parents at Maratha, near Samosata in Mesopotomia (Thurston & Attwater, 1990; Attwater & John, 1996; Farmer, 1997). He was a child of promise, dedicated to God before his birth. Daniel left home at the age of twelve and joined a nearby monastery. The Abbot of the monastery going on a journey to Antioch took Daniel with him and passing by Telanissur they visited Simon, the stylite. Farmer (1997) has recorded that Daniel inherited both his cloak and way of life after the death of Simon, the stylite in A.D. 459 (Smith & Wace, 1877; Cross & Livingstone, 1974; Farmer, 1997).

Inspired by the visit, he took up his position on a pillar four miles north of Constantinople. Daniel offered the following prayer before he began life on the pillar: “I yield Thee glory, Jesus Christ my God, for all the blessings which Thou hast heaped upon me, and for the grace which Thou hast given me that I should embrace this manner of life. But Thou knowest that ascending this pillar, I lean on Thee alone, and that to Thee alone I look for

the happy issue of my undertaking. Accept, then, my object; strengthen me that I finish this painful course; give me grace to end it in holiness” (Smith & Wace, 1877, p. 786).

Daniel with friends’ help set himself up on a pillar overlooking Bosphorus, a few miles from the city. He almost froze to death one night, after which the Emperor built him a better shelter on the pillar; which consisted of two pillars fastened together with iron bars, whereon masonry was placed, on the top of which was fixed a covered shelter and railing (Thurston & Attwater, 1990). The country was subject to high winds, and very severe frosts, but this did not deter him from leaving his pillar.

Daniel, against his wishes, was ordained priest by Patriarch Gennadius, who read the prayers beneath the pillar and then climbed the ladder to lay hands on him and give communion. He preached regularly in the afternoon, his theme frequently being the love of God and of one’s neighbor, especially shown in almsgiving, as well as ‘the everlasting condemnation which is the lot of the sinners’ (Farmer, 1997, p. 128).

He lived on this pillar for thirty-three years and entered to eternal rest at the age of eighty-four. He left his pillar only once in c. A.D. 476 to rebuke Emperor Basiliscus who protected heretics, especially the Euthychians. He was often consulted by the emperors Leo I and Zeno and by the Patriarchs of Constantinople, and people flocked to him, bringing their sick to be anointed

and prayed over (Attwater & John, 1996). By continually standing his feet were covered with sores and ulcers. Euphemius, the Patriarch of Constantinople, gave him the viaticum and soon afterwards he passed away in A.D. 493. The body was entombed at the chapel at the foot of his column (Farmer, 1997).

Daniel wrote the following in his will: “Hold fast to humility, practice obedience, exercise hospitality, keep the fasts, observe the vigils, love poverty, and above all maintain charity, which is the commandment; keep closely bound all that regards piety, avoid the tares of heretics. Never separate from the Church, your mother; if you do these things your righteousness shall be perfect” (Smith & Wace, 1877, p. 786; Farmer, 1997, p. 128). The Syrian Orthodox Church celebrates the feast of Daniel, the stylite, on 11 December.

## **St. Aho, the Ascetic**

(c. A.D. 419 – 524)

St. Aho was born around A.D. 419 in the city of Rish'aino (Rasul-'ayn), which is to the southeast of Nisbis in present day Syria near Hassekeh. His father's name was 'Ubadyo and Aho was one of his three children. At the age of twelve Aho, an intelligent boy, became the disciple of a local monk (<http://www.soc-wus.org/ourchurch/St.%20Aho.htm>).

In c. A.D. 439, Rish-'aino came under the Persian siege. The great army of Persians came to Nusaybin and the Romans retreated before them. They were chased to Harran. During this time, Ubadyo, father of Aho, came to him and said "My son, behold, our residents wait outside the City gate. Behold, your mother, and your brothers are with them. Rise, we shall go." He agreed and went with him and when they crossed over the bridge of Euphrates about 200 people died in a stampede. When the Blessed Aho saw this, he returned to the city. His father, mother, and brothers went on their way and their father died on the way.

Mor Aho returned to Rish'aino and travelled to Nusaybin along with a young man about his age. When they were travelling, a unit of a troop

of Persians leading many captives caught and bound them. They arrived at Nusaybin where they gathered all the captives. They were about seven thousand in number.

Mor Aho was given to Michael, a Christian soldier, to serve as a slave. Michael discovered that Aho was a Christian and they made a deal to serve together in the military. So Michael took Aho to the King (who most likely was Yazdagrid II). Michael told the King that Aho was his nephew on his mother's side, and he persuaded the King to make Aho a soldier. The King saw in the Blessed One a countenance like that of an angel. He favored him and registered him like one of the soldiers.

Mor Michael and Mor Aho served in the Persian army for 18 years. In around A.D. 458, they decided to follow the Lord's steps. They saw a dream. A man wearing glorious clothing appeared and said to them, "My brothers, rise, ascend at once together to the region to the west, for there the Lord prepares for us a place that we might dwell in it." They rejoiced greatly for they realized that the Lord prepared before them His way. Very early in the morning they took their belongings and started their journey. They travelled to Nisbis, the place of Mor Aho's capture. They entered the village of Dara. A man by name Theodoros received them well. Theodoros had a son, called Heworo who was deaf and dumb. The child Heworo regained speech by their prayer. Heworo said to them that, "There was a man with you in the evening and he took

me by the hand and gave me a cup of cold water. When I drank he said to me, "Rise, go and when I came near you my tongue was straightened."

The fame of Aho and Michael spread throughout the region when this miracle was known. Theodoros built a monastery for them in the village, Kasar. In Kasar about 20 monks joined the two saints in the monastery. Later, Mor Aho and Mor Michael were offered a nearby vineyard in the village of Zamorto (Kfar Zamoro is the name of the ruin today). In Zamorto, St. Aho drove out a demon from a man called Hobel.

Mor Michael left the community after five years, returned to the region of Nineveh and built for him a monastery there. He built a pillar in it and sat upon it until his departure around A. D. 463. It is also about the same time that Aho took a trip to Jerusalem for a year and a half. On his return he decided to follow the Mediterranean coast. At 'Akka he boarded a ship which turned out to be owned by his brothers. He disembarked from the vessel in Antioch. His brothers could not persuade him to return to 'Akka with them and meet his mother. When Mor Aho's mother learned of this event she travelled to Antioch, joined a caravan to Nisbis and met Mor Aho near his monastery. Mor Aho out of guilt and devotion stayed by her side for nine years until her death in A.D. 474.

Meanwhile, Theodoros built another monastery (the White Monastery in the name of his son Heworo) for Mor Aho in Tur'abdin. After

the death of his mother and Theodoros, Mor Aho left his community again and travelled to a village called Hadas and performed miracles in the house of Dorsela and Maximus.

Mor Aho continued his journey and arrived in Athens where he stayed for five years which must have been about the year A.D. 480. He continued his journey to Constantinople and then to Hadas. Dorsela and Maximus sent their eldest son, Rumanos, to Mor Aho as a disciple. Mor Aho remained in the village for two years.

Mor Aho then ventured into Armenia and near the village of Ause he encountered pagans who were celebrating under a giant tree in which they believed resided a god. Mor Aho feared for his life and prayed to God. A tornado ripped up the tree and cast it in the river about a mile away. The people were furious at Mor Aho and they wanted to kill him because he told them that Jesus Christ was his god. They demanded that the tree be brought back and their gods with it. Another storm caused two hours of darkness in the land. The pagans then accepted the faith of Mor Aho.

In about the year A.D. 508, Mor Aho built a church and invited the Bishop of Miletene, Mor Kuriakos, who came and baptized many people and ordained many priests and deacons. A monastery was built and Mor Aho resided there for 22 years.

When the villagers heard that St. Aho was about to die, they all gathered around him weeping. He said: "My brothers, this is the end of every man."

They wept and said: “O father of peace and mercies, where shall we go to find you and who shall be a leader for us like you? Stretch out your right hand and confirm your sons and daughters while we are standing. Give us peace and go in peace, merciful peace. Then go to the region of pleasures. We remain here tormenting ourselves. O good shepherd where will we go? Your flock is left without a shepherd. You saved us from the mad wolves that would have torn us apart.”

St. Aho stretched out his hand and blessed them with the sign of the Cross. He turned and knelt in prayer and prayed: “O Lord God, mighty and holy, give to your servant in this hour the petition that I ask from you. ... Give them times of peace and seasons of blessings. ... Make them fervent in all goodness and in every place where they perform vigil or intercession. In your name and in the name of your servant may there not be hail, nor blight, nor locust, nor plague.”

He turned to them and said, “My moment arrives.” He entrusted his soul to the Creator for eternal sleep. His face was illuminated like the sun. The people of the entire region gathered there and they made a great procession and conducted service for three days. St. Aho departed for his heavenly abode in the year A.D. 524 at the age of 105. The feast of St. Aho is celebrated on 19 April and 1 October.

## **Mor Gregorios Dodho**

(A.D. 530- 609)

Dodho was born in Sidos, a village in Iraq. His parents Simon and Helen were wealthy and well known for their strong faith. They were childless for a long time. Their faith led them to a monastery in Mt. Tabriz, Iraq. They stayed with the abbot Mor David spending their days and nights in prayers. Dodho was born to them in A.D. 530 because of their fervent prayers ([http://wikivisually.com/wiki/Mor\\_Dodo](http://wikivisually.com/wiki/Mor_Dodo)).

Mor David baptized him and they returned to their native place, Sidos. The villagers named the little boy Dodho according to the Christian tradition. He attended school in the village and grew up as a clever and good student.

Dodho's parents wanted to arrange a marriage for him but he was against the idea, as he wanted to dedicate himself fully to Jesus. He carried the Bible always with him, read and meditated upon it. After the death of his parents, he distributed all their earnings and wealth among the poor. He followed literally, what Jesus had taught. "If you will be perfect, go and sell all that you have and

give it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me” (Matthew 19:21).

Dodho went to Mor David’s monastery. He observed rigorous penance. He desired to serve God leading a virtuous life. On mount Tabriz, he lived a solitary life for twelve years. The Abbot saw in a dream that Dodho’s life was in danger and set out in search of him. He was brought back to the monastery severely ill.

After regaining his health, he visited the Holy land. On his return journey, he visited a village seven kilometers from Azakh in the northeast direction, a place infested with thieves. Dodho called upon his uncle and forty hermits and stayed with them. With everyone’s cooperation, he could construct a church there. The village soon became a beautiful place to live.

When the metropolitan of Tigris passed away in A.D. 589, the Patriarch Peter III (A.D. 581 – 591) nominated Dodho as his successor. Even though he tried to evade it he had to accept the position and was consecrated under the name Mor Gregorius. As a Metropolitan, he ordained one thousand three hundred priests and one thousand seven hundred deacons. Mor Gregorius Dodho passed away in A.D. 609. His burial service conducted at Tigris Cathedral was attended by an enormous crowd of believers and one thousand eight hundred priests.

Mor Issahac, a relative of Mor Dodho transferred his relics from Tigris to Thur'abdin in A.D. 629 and it was interred at Basibrin, Turkey. A church was constructed over his tomb. His memory is celebrated by the Syrian Orthodox Church on 20 May.



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## **About the Author**

Cor-Episcopo Dr. K. Mani Rajan is the Vicar of St. Mary's Syrian Simhasana Church, Arthat, Kunnamkulam, Kerala, India, since 1984. He has served St. Peter's Syrian Simhasana Church, Thrissur during 2010-16. He has served the M. M. D. M. Patriarchal Center (now, St. Mary's Church, Ithithanam, Changanacherry) from 1994 to 2003. While he was a doctoral student at University of California, Riverside, USA, he has served St. Mary's Syrian Orthodox Simhasana Church, Los Angeles, California, from 1989 to 1993. He was a faculty member and principal at St. Joseph's Training College, Mannanam, Kottayam from 1983 to 1988 & from 1994 to 2014. He was a CERC Fellow at University of California, Riverside, U.S.A. during 1990-93.

Dr. Mani Rajan holds a Ph.D. from the University of California, U.S.A. He received his B.Sc. degree (1978) from the University of Kerala, his M.Sc. degree (1980) from Jabalpur University, his B.Ed. Degree (1981 - First Rank) and M.Ed. degree (1983) from Calicut University. At present, he is a research guide in Education at the School of Pedagogical Sciences, M.G. University, Kottayam.

Dr. Mani Rajan was ordained priest in 1984 by His Holiness Moran Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas at Damascus, Syria. His Holiness decorated him with a pectoral cross in 2000 in recognition of his services to the Simhasana church and his literary contributions to the Church. He was elevated to the rank of Cor-Episcopo in May 2009.

In addition to Martyrs, Saints and Prelates of Syrian Orthodox Church (Vols. I-V), he is the author of Queen of the Sacraments (1991), The prayer book of the Syriac Orthodox Church (1993), Perspectives in physical science teaching (1999), A treatise on form and style of thesis and dissertation (1999) and Science of Science Education (2004). He has authored a chapter in Secondary Education: The Challenges Ahead (2002) published by NIEPA, New Delhi. He is the co-author of the book - Teaching of physical science: Theory, perspectives & practice (2010).

He has published about twenty articles in journals and has presented half-a-dozen papers at national and international conferences. He has successfully guided two Ph.D.s in Education. He secured the best paper award in 1998. He has associated with UGC, SCERT, IASE, and SME as a resource person for workshops and seminars. He has authored, compiled and edited a few other books in Malayalam and English. He has attended American Educational Research Association (AERA) meetings at Chicago (1991) and San Fransisco (1992). He is a member of the

executive committee of the All India Association for Educational Research (AIAER).

Dr. Mani Rajan is a member of the Manjinikkara Dayra Committee. He is a visiting team member of National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE). He has served Kerala Public Service Commission as a subject expert.

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