



THE FORMATION OF THE MONASTIC INSTITUTE IN CHRISTIANITY AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SOCIAL ACTIVITIES OF MONKS

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Article history:	Abstract:
Received: January 10 th 2024 Accepted: March 7 th 2024	At the beginning of the 4th century, monasticism was formed in Christianity, and asceticism was given a stable and permanent form, which in turn led to the separation of ascetics (monks) from the outside world. In the Middle Ages, monastery regulations and monastic orders were introduced, the status of monasteries and monks in the state and society increased, and the spread of Christianity was observed.

Keywords: *monastery, monk, asceticism, Christianity, theology, abbot, prayer, liturgy, psalm*

In monasteries, a monk was required to devote his whole life to unceasing prayer. Prayer can be collective (liturgy, reading psalms) or individually. In monasteries following the Benedictine order or other traditions, special attention is paid to the physical labor of monks. Being engaged in work was considered a form of asceticism, not only to earn a living, but also to overcome laziness and despair, which were considered the main dangers for a monk.

The monks were required to eat and sleep at the times set by the abbot. They were awakened by the sound of the bell for the night prayer. Such calls brought them together for prayer 7 times a day. In the monastery, the year, week, and day were adopted based on a unique distribution. The Psalter, ¹ consisting of 150 psalms, formed the basis of the monks' prayer. The monk was required to read 150 psalms in one week. The routines of the monks differed according to the seasons (winter and summer).

In general, the prayer times of monks are divided as follows:

- morning (matutinae) - midnight prayer (started at 00:30);
- hymns (laudes) - when the first rays of the sun rise;
- first hour (prima) - after sunrise;
- third hour (tertia) - around 9 o'clock in the morning;
- the sixth hour (Sekta) - at noon;
- the ninth hour (nona) - around 15 o'clock in the afternoon;
- evening (vesperae) - before sunset;
- night (completorium) - between sunset and darkness.

It was required to determine the time to define exactly the life of the monks and the processes of prayer. The most difficult thing was to determine the time of night prayer. During the day it was determined by the sun, shadow, and in the evening by the stars. But these methods did not help in cloudy weather. In such conditions, various devices were used to determine the time - hourglasses, complex water mechanisms (clepsydras), candles, and later mechanical clocks, which were considered a real revolution. There were also different calls to prayer. The bells were rung differently according to the task at hand, for example, once for the first hour and night prayers, and three times for the third, sixth and ninth prayers. In addition, there is a wooden board (tabula) in monasteries, which is struck to announce that one of the monks is on his deathbed.

Monks who lived in separate cells gathered for collective prayer on Saturdays and Sundays of the week, and on other days they prayed in their cells. But it was obligatory for a monk to read 12 psalms only in the evening and at night. These were the covenants of ascetics who lived in the early days of Christianity. During the reading of the psalms,

¹Psalter (Greek psaltérion, derived from the name of the psaltery musical instrument; in Judaism - Tegilim, Hebrew t̥lym - "to praise") is a book in the Tanakh and the Old Testament. 150 or 151 paslma - songs or hymns. In the Bible, the Psalter is placed after the book of John. In Judaism, the third part of the Tanachnnig is located in the Ketuvim. In Islam, the Psalter is called the Zabur.

one "Hallelujah" was sung after every six psalms. On Saturdays and Sundays, the monks gathered in the church for "Mystery Rites". In Egyptian monasteries, collective prayers were held twice a day - in the evening and at night. The night prayer began before the rooster crowed and continued until sunrise. In the winter, the prayers continued long into the night until the fourth crowing of the rooster. A total of 12 psalms were sung during the prayers. If there are two singers, each one sings 6 psalms, if there are 3, then 4 psalms, and if there are 4, then 3 psalms are sung. There were no more than 4 singers. The listeners are sitting on low seats. At the end of each psalm, the singer recited a prayer, while all the audience rose from their seats to pray and bow².

After the 12 psalms were sung, the Old Testament and the New Testament were read. On Saturday and Sunday, only the New Testament (the Epistles and Acts of the Apostles or the Bible) was read. The prayer ended with a three-fold prayer and kneeling. On Saturday and Sunday, the third hour eucharistia (purification) ceremony was held. All the monks went to church barefoot, dressed in the robes they wore when they were first ordained as monks. When entering the church, their feet were washed by deacons in a special bowl. At the time of the Eucharist, the monks took off their belts and milots, each of them was given separate bread (the body of Jesus) and wine (the blood of Jesus) by the deacon. Those who came to their cells to purify the sick monks, and the monks who lived far from the church and went on a journey, took the eucharist (specially prepared bread eaten during the liturgy) with them.

Special evenings were sometimes organized after daytime prayers. In this, the monastery was fed with products such as donations from secular people, food donated by farmers for the monks during the harvest. During these nights, the table is decorated, the monks present some of their belongings to the new members of the community, and the belongings of the dead monks are distributed. As the table on these nights was different from the usual table of the monks, most of the monks did not want to participate, they went to their homes after the prayer³.

Monks' meetings were organized in monasteries on Sundays. These meetings were conducted by the oldest presbyter of the monastery and the issues related to all monks were discussed. In the 4th century, there were eight presbyters in the Nitrisky mountain monastery, but only one presbyter had the right to lead the assembly. The rest of the presbyters did not have the right to express their opinions and make decisions at the meeting. The following issues were mainly discussed at such meetings:

- appointment of a presbyter;
- issues related to faith and belief;
- sometimes the meetings are devoted to issues of fasting, which are held separately;
- sentencing the monks who were considered sinners.

Expulsion from the ranks of monks was considered the most severe punishment for monks. But this kind of punishment or passing judgment on the sins of the monks was not supported by most of the founders of monasticism. For example, Saint Antony said, "I have many sins left behind, and I will punish my brother's little sin by discussing it. "I pray to God to forgive my sins"⁴.

Chroniclers of the IV-V centuries distinguish between two types of monastic lifestyles in Egypt: anchorites and kinovites. The Anakhorets separated from the community of the monastery and lived in the desolate (deep) places of the desert without seeing the human race for decades. They ate wild plants, got water for drinking from dew that fell on stones and plants. Most of the Anakhorets did not live permanently in one place, but moved. In the early period, the "monastery fathers" visited the monks who separated from the community from time to time. Sometimes a case of temptation was observed among anchorites. In such a situation, the monk was brought to the church. "Church fathers" put water in a cup and washed their hands in it and poured that water over the monk. They saw it as a way to get rid of temptation.

Some of the monks who lived in the desert lived in caves, some in ruins, and tombs. But most of the monks built for themselves a small residence (kellia, skit) made of stones, bricks, mud or leaves. There are reports that the cells of famous monks such as Macarius of Alexandria, Illarion, and St. Antony were very small, even so narrow that it was impossible to pass a foot. But usually, monks' residences consisted of several rooms. It had an entrance hall, rooms for storing food and tools (for manual work).

Monks were engaged in physical labor along with prayer. For example, Egyptian monks were engaged in weaving baskets from ropes and tree branches in order to meet the need for food in addition to prayer, and not to be a burden to anyone. Also, through manual labor, monks helped travelers, the poor, and prisoners. Monks' training also protected them from various temptations. But the main activity for monks was prayer. They repeated prayers and dhikr even while they were working.

Monks living in communal monasteries had their own belongings and small farms. Some of them saved flour or other products, as well as labor tools, books, even a small amount of money as annual food. That's why the sources mention that the thieves spent the night⁵. But these needs did not serve to bind the monks to the world. Monks tried to limit their needs, so they chose the simplest of manual labor. For example, they wove baskets, sieves, fences from

²Kazansky P.S. General essays on the life of Egyptian monks in IV and V centuries. – M.: Type. V. Goetne, 1872. – P. 26

³Kazansky P. S. General outline of the life of Egyptian monks in the 4th and 5th centuries. – M.: Type. V. Gautier, 1872. – P. 26.

⁴Kazansky P. S. General outline of the life of Egyptian monks in the 4th and 5th centuries. – M.: Type. V. Gautier, 1872. – P. 29

⁵Kazansky P. S. General outline of the life of Egyptian monks in the 4th and 5th centuries. – M.: Type. V. Gautier, 1872. – P. 29

palm branches, some were engaged in pottery, others made candles, among them there were writers. There were also monks engaged in agriculture. Sometimes the monks themselves went to sell their products. They took products from each other when needed. They did not work on Sundays and the days of commemoration of martyrs.

The usual meals of the monks were mainly vegetables, greens, bread, fruits and small salted fish. Liquid foods are made from legumes, rarely with added oil or honey. Soft bread was considered a sign of luxury, large communities had bread-making rooms. But in most monasteries, paksama (dry, small bread made of barley flour) was eaten. Because the paksama was hard, it had to be soaked in water before eating. It was considered the norm for monks to eat two paksama in one day. Paksama can be stored for a long time. The monk could not eat until nine o'clock in the afternoon. After praying and singing psalms at nine o'clock, they ate. They did not eat any food on Wednesday and Friday. Most elders (starsi) did not eat boiled food. Monks usually had 3-4 hours of sleep.

Sick monks used the help of a doctor. The Nitriysky monastery had its own doctors. When the monk fell ill, he went to his daughter-in-law and received the necessary help. All the members of the community surrounded the monks who were on their deathbed to hear their last words. Memorial evenings were held for the deceased monks⁶. In conclusion, it can be said that in the early asceticism of Christianity, considering the human body as an obstacle to spiritual perfection, feelings of humiliation and hatred of it prevailed until the Middle Ages. In this period, harming the body was one of the main goals of monastic life.

The modern way of life has also influenced the ascetic practices in Christianity to a certain extent. Today, Christian asceticism focuses more on spiritual practice than on physical exertion of the human body. Today's monks place more importance on intellectual asceticism. Therefore, when the monks of our time talk about asceticism, they are referring more to spiritual and spiritual treatment.

Despite the above changes, the basic principles of asceticism have been preserved in monastic life and are still the essence of pious life for the pious.

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