

# The Impact of Athanasius' *Life of Antony*: The First One Hundred Years

Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, June 12–14, 2025

Co-organizers:

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The *Life of Antony*, written in Greek by Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria around 360 CE, is widely regarded as one of the most important and influential of all early Christian writings. It exerted an enormous, centuries-long impact on the development of both Christian monasticism and monastic hagiography, an explosively popular literary genre throughout Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, and a literary tradition that Athanasius in fact inaugurated with the *Life*. The *Life* is thus one of the few early Christian texts that earned the designation of being a literary "classic." The extent of the *Life's* impact is well known, but the complex dynamics of how and why it became so influential, so quickly, have yet to be comprehensively explored. The time therefore is ripe for a thorough multi-disciplinary investigation that fills this *lacuna* in scholarship. This conference accordingly brings together the leading researchers in the field to do a group-think of the *Life's* pluriform reception in the century following its composition.

A first section will be devoted to *The Life of Antony – Translation, Reception and Rewriting*. Here, the achievements and peculiarities of the first two Latin translations of the Greek *Life* and of the Coptic translations will be compared, the latter being foundational for Egyptian Christianity in Late Antiquity. The biographical tradition about Pachomius as well as Jerome's monastic *Lives* of Paul of Thebes and Hilarion will be scrutinized as texts that draw on the plot of Athanasius' *Life*, but do so competitively, while Callinicus' *Life of Hypatius* is a fine example of intertextual appropriation of Antony's biography. Finally, Antony's paramount importance in the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* will be brought to the fore.

The second section will be devoted to the figure of Antony which is omnipresent in the monastic textual world of Late Antiquity. This includes the works of the contemporary church historians and several large-scale serial collections of ascetic sayings, stories, and micro-lives like the *History of the Monks in Egypt* and Palladius' *Lausiac History* that offer a multi-generational (and also transregional) view of emerging monasticism. This is also true for another major monastic anthology, Theodoret's *Religious History*, set in Syria. The *Life of Martin of Tours* became the most serious rival of Antony in the West, but the later hagiographical tradition in Gaul still drew on Antonian motives, as well as the *Conferences with the Desert Fathers* by John Cassian. Also the impact of Antony's life and legacy on Augustine will be under scrutiny in order to reflect upon the way how images of Antony were continuously debated in Latin Late Antiquity.

The speakers have been tasked with considering one or more of the following questions:

- What was the *Life of Antony* in the eyes of its early readers (given that we cannot reckon with an existing tradition of ascetic biographies before the mid-4<sup>th</sup> century)?
- How did the *Life* come to exert such a profound and broad influence beyond its immediate context?

- How did the *Life* enrich and/or shape subsequent hagiographic life-writing in both form and content? And how did it provoke rival hagiographic creations?
- What role did the figure of Antony play in early monastic anthologies and church histories?
- What do we learn about the dynamics of hagiography in its phase of emergence between c. 360 and 450 CE?

## Conference Schedule

Venue: Conference Center "Alte Mensa", Wilhelmsplatz 3, 37073 Göttingen

### Thursday, June 12

14.00–14.15 Welcome and Introductions

14.15–15.30 Peter Gemeinhardt, "Athanasius' *Life of Antony*: The State of the Question"

### *Section A: The Life of Antony – Translation, Reception and Rewriting*

16.00–16.45 Joseph Verheyden, "Translation and Reception: A Comparative Analysis of the Two Latin Versions of the *Vita Antonii*"

16.45–17.30 Mary Farag, "Antony, the *Life of Pachomius*, and the Politics of Asceticism"

### Friday, June 13

09.00–09.45 Christa Gray, "How Evagrian is Jerome's Antony?"

09.45–10.30 Jan Bremmer, "The *Life of Antony* and the Death of Hilarion"

11.00–11.45 Jaclyn Maxwell, "From Desert to Bosphorus: The Legacy of Antony in Callinicus' *Life of Hypatius*"

11.45–12.30 Sina von Aesch, "'And because they had no discernment, they were far from God' – Antonios in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*"

### *Section B: Antony in Monastic Hagiography beyond Individual Lives*

15.15–16.00 Johan Leemans, "Antony in the Ancient Church Historians"

16.30–17.15 Andrew Cain, "Antony and the *Life of Antony* in the Anonymous Greek *Historia monachorum in Aegypto* and Rufinus' *Historia monachorum*"

17.15–18.00 Sabrina Inowlocki, "'Are the Brothers from Egypt or Jerusalem?' Palladius' Antony in the *Historia Lausiaca*"

### Saturday, June 14

09.00–09.45 Andreas Westergren, "Antony and the Extreme Monks of Syria: Athanasius' *Life of Antony* in Theodoret's *History of the Monks of Syria*"

09.45–10.30 Nienke Vos & Teun Van Dijk, "Antony and Monasticism in Gaul"

11.00–11.45 Dorothee Schenk, "Antony in John Cassian's *Collationes Patrum*"

11.45–12.30 Mark Vessey, "Augustine, Jerome, and Antony"

12.30–13.00 Closing discussion