



“Now having held converse with many of the saints, and having gone round about among the monasteries which were nigh unto Alexandria for three years and having met about two thousand of the great and strenuous men who lived there, and who were adorned with the excellence of spiritual lives, I departed from there and came to Mount Nitria.”

Excerpts from:

The Paradise Of The Holy Fathers

The Monks of Nitria

Now between this mountain and Alexandria there lieth a certain lake, which, is called “Mareotis,” which embraceth a space of seventy miles. And having seated myself in a boat I crossed this lake in a day and a half, and I came unto the mountain to the south, where unto is joined the desert which reacheth unto Cush (Ethiopia). In this mountain of the Mazaki and of the Mauritanians there live excellent men who are adorned with divers kinds of ascetic virtues; and every monk leadeth the ascetic life as he wisheth and as he is able, either by himself or in a community. Now in this mountain there are seven bakers who make bread and who minister unto them, and unto the chosen men of the inner desert, of whom there are six hundred, and also unto the people of that mountain. And when I had dwelt in this mountain for a year, and had profited by the fathers, pious and blessed men, I mean Rabba Barsis (Arsisius) and Busiris and Peta-Bast and Agios and Khronis and Serapion, the elder and had learned from them also concerning the ancient and first spiritual fathers (who had lived there) I entered into the inner desert wherein is Mount Nitria.

In this mountain is a great church and in the courtyard thereof are three palm trees, in each of which hangeth a whip. One of these is for the correcting of the monks who transgress through folly; the second is for the punishing of the thieves if they were found falling on the place; and the third is for the chastising of the strangers who flock there and who transgress in any matter whatsoever. And it is the same with anyone who shall commit any offense, they bring him to the palm tree and punish him, and he receiveth upon his back the number of stripes, which they have appointed unto him. Adjoining the church is a house which the strangers who arrive there may lodge, and if any man wisheth to work there one year, or two, or until he departeth of his own accord (he may do so) and every week of days they permit him to rest, so that he may do nothing, but they give him work during the remaining days of the week, either

among the bakers, or in the refectory. And if there was among these anyone who was sufficiently educated they used to give him a book to read, but they did not allow him to hold converse with any man until the sixth hour. There were also in this mountain physician for the use of the sick and those who sold cakes; and they also used wine that was sold there. All these people worked at the weaving of flax with their hands, and there was no needy man there. Now when the evening cometh thou must rise up to hear the praises, and the Psalms, and the prayers which are sent up to Christ by the people from the monasteries which are there and a man might imagine, his mind being exalted, that he was in the Paradise of Eden.

Now the monks only came to the church on the Sabbath and on the First Day of the week. Belonging to this church there were eight priests and governors, but as long as the first one lived none of the others ministered in the church; he neither judged nor spake with any man, and they lived with him a life of silent contemplation. Now this great man Arsisius and many of the ancient holy men whom we saw were followers of the rule of the blessed man Anthony, and Arsisius himself told me that the holy man Ammon, who was from Nitria and whom he knew, and whose soul was taken up and carried by the angels into Heaven, even saw Anthony. And Arsisius also spake to me concerning the blessed man Pachomius, who came from Tabenna of Hekham, and who possessed the gift of prophecy and who became the governor and head of three thousand men; of this man I will relate the virtues at a later time.”



St Pachomius

In the next issue of the Mighty Arrows we will learn of the history of the married Abba Ammon, the Father of Egyptian Monasticism. He could not resist the counsel of his uncle and married at the age of twenty-two when he was left an orphan by his parents.....