



MELANIA

THE YOUNGER



From Rome to Jerusalem

ELIZABETH A. CLARK

WOMEN IN ANTIQUITY

MELANIA THE YOUNGER

WOMEN IN ANTIQUITY

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Melania the Younger

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For

Annabel, Bart, Debbie, Randall, Sarah, Valeria

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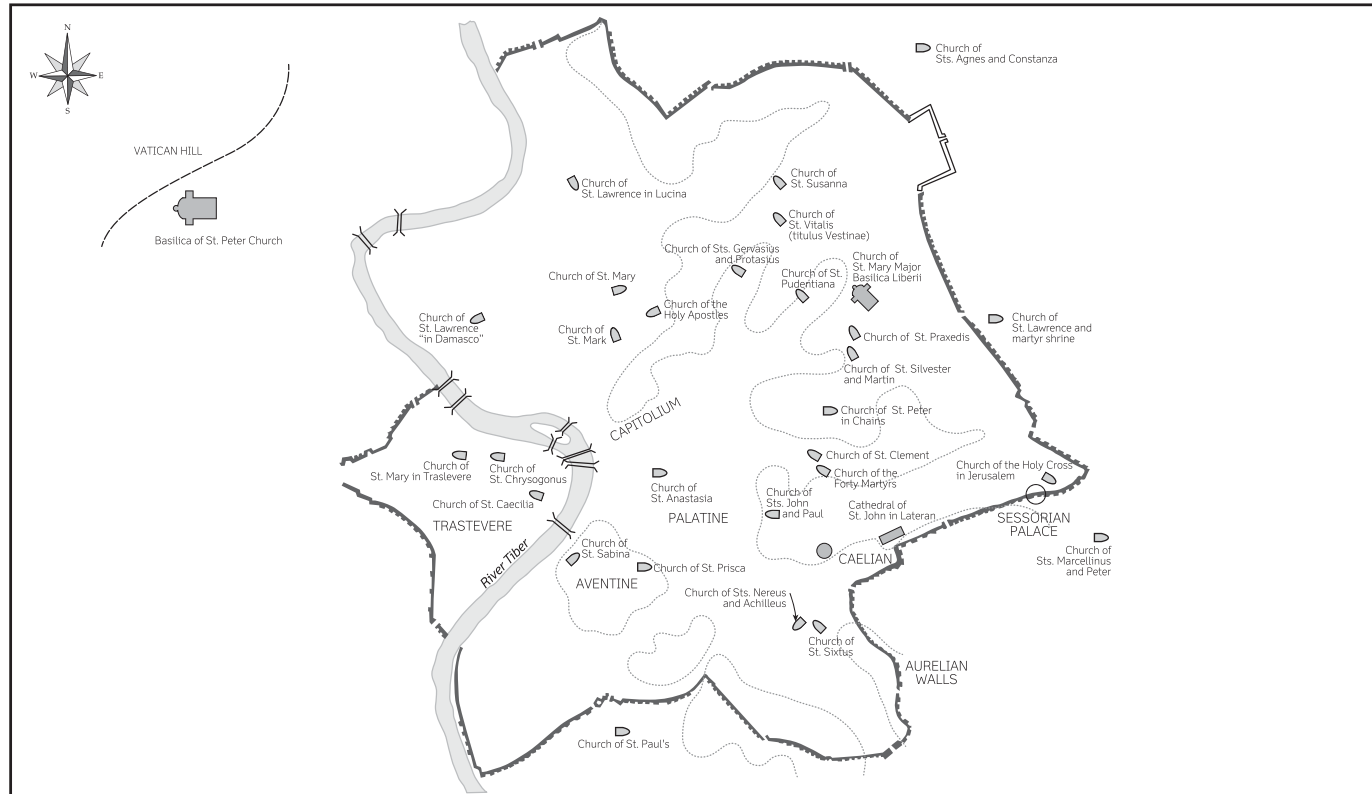
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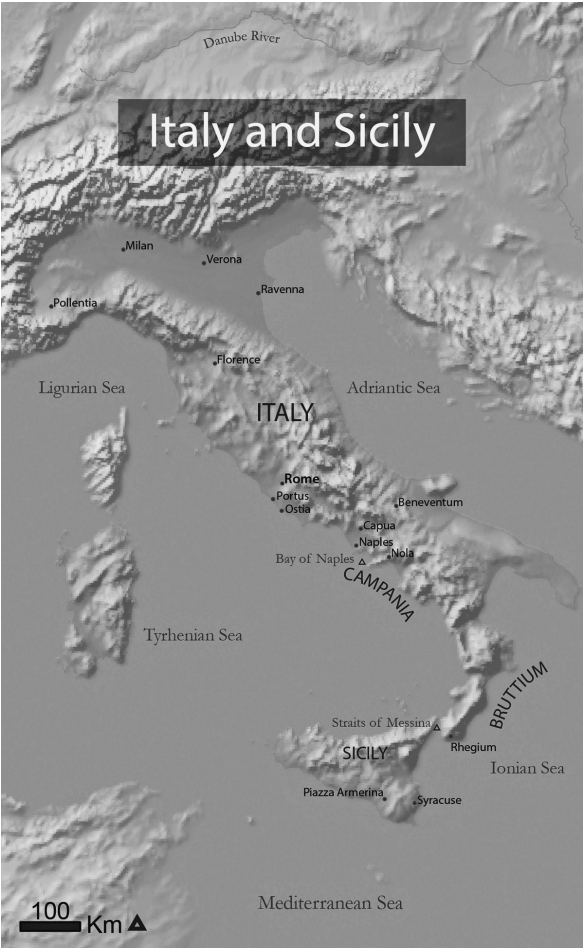
Maps



Some Churches in Rome in Melania's Era



Roman Empire in Fourth Century, with Dioceses and Some Provinces



Italy and Sicily

Milan

Verona

Ravenna

Pollentia

Florence

Ligurian Sea

Adriatic Sea

ITALY

Rome

Portus
Ostia

Beneventum

Capua

Naples

Bay of Naples

Nola

CAMPANIA

Tyrrhenian Sea

BRUTTIUM

Straits of Messina

SICILY

Rhegium

Ionian Sea

Piazza Armerina

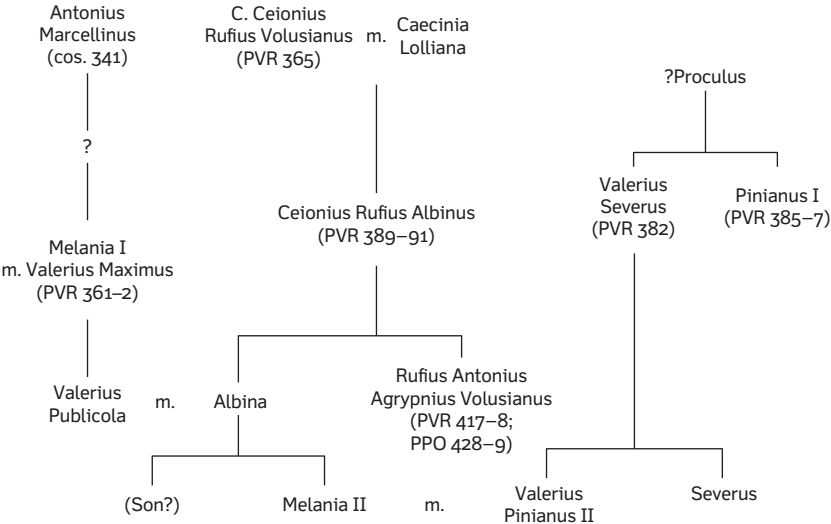
Syracuse

Mediterranean Sea

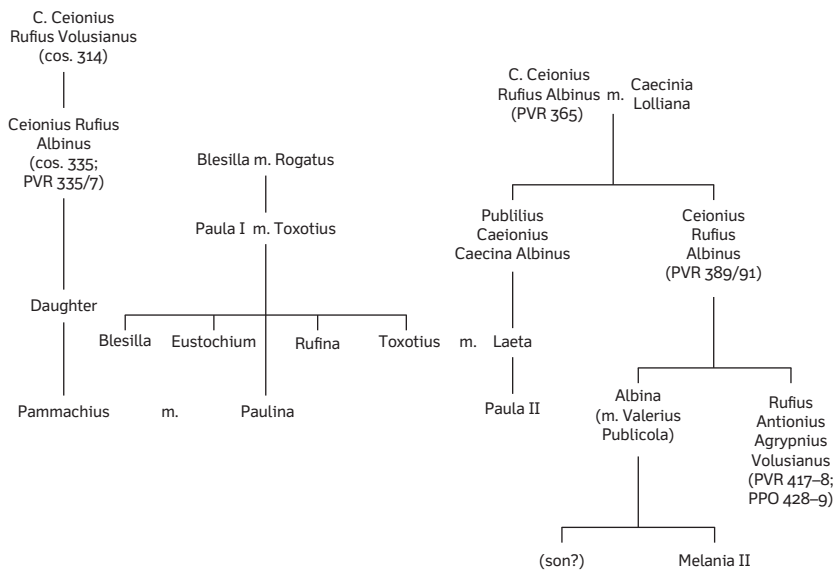
100 Km

Family Trees

Family of Melania the Elder and Melania the Younger
(cos. = consul; PVR = prefect of the city of Rome; PPO = praetorian prefect)



Family Tree of Paula the Elder and Paula the Younger
(cos. = consul; PVR = prefect of the city of Rome; PPO = praetorian prefect)



Abbreviations

AB	Analecta Bollandiana
ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
AJA	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
ANF	<i>The Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325</i>
ARCA	Classical and Medieval Texts, Papers and Monographs
CAH	<i>Cambridge Ancient History</i>
CCL	Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina
CH	<i>Church History</i>
CIL	Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum
CLA	Christianity in Late Antiquity
CP	<i>Classical Philology</i>
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
CSS	Cistercian Studies Series
CTh	Theodosian Code
DOP	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
FC	Fathers of the Church
GCS	Die Griechischen Christliche Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderts
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
JECS	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
JEH	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>
JLA	<i>Journal of Late Antiquity</i>
JRA	<i>Journal of Roman Archaeology</i>
JRS	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
NPNF	<i>A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i>
PBSR	<i>Papers of the British School at Rome</i>
PG	<i>Patrologia Graeca</i>
PL	<i>Patrologia Latina</i>

<i>PLRE</i>	<i>Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire</i>
<i>RQH</i>	<i>Revue des Questions Historiques</i>
SBF	Studium Biblicum Franciscanum
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SC	Sources Chrétiennes
SWR	Studies in Women and Religion
TCH	Transformation of the Classical Heritage
TRW	The Transformation of the Roman World
TTH	Translated Texts for Historians
TU	Texte und Untersuchungen
UMM, SS	University Museum Monographs, Symposium Series
WSA	<i>The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century</i>

Finding Melania

Melania the Younger: A Brief Overview

Across the decades, Americans have loved tales of “rags to riches”; Christians in late antiquity,¹ by contrast, cherished those of “riches to rags.” They found a spectacular example in the life of Melania the Younger.

Melania was one of the richest women in the Roman Empire of her era. Born in Rome amid fabulous wealth around 385 CE, she opted for a life of ascetic renunciation as soon as her family circumstances permitted. As a Christian ascetic and pilgrim, she traveled the Mediterranean world—from Rome to Sicily, North Africa, Egypt, Jerusalem, and Constantinople—dispensing wealth, property, and ornate clothing as she went. After her death in 439, she became the subject of a *Vita* (*Life*) by a monastic companion of her later years, Gerontius. One of the fullest extant accounts of an ancient woman, her *Life* remains in both Greek and Latin versions; a translation of the Greek version is found in this volume. Given her family’s prominence, Melania, her relatives, and

1. On the nomenclature of “late antiquity,” see James J. O’Donnell, “Late Antiquity: Before and After,” 203–13; Edward James, “The Rise and Function of the Concept ‘Late Antiquity,’” 20–30; Clifford Ando, “Decline, Fall, and Transformation,” 31–60; Frank M. Clover and R. Stephen Humphreys, “Toward a Definition of Late Antiquity” (Madison WI 1989), 3–26. In traditional British university curricula, the period from 300 CE to 600 CE was “a black hole, a no man’s land between ancient and medieval history, properly studied in neither” (Peter Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire* [Oxford 2006], xii). In the mid-twentieth century Arnaldo Momigliano, Henri Marrou, A. H. M. Jones, and others rescued the later Roman period from oblivion, neglect, or outright denigration. Although scholars debate where “late antiquity” begins and ends, the life of Melania the Younger (ca. 385–439) falls safely within any definition of the period.

her acquaintances are mentioned in numerous ancient sources. Despite many omissions and historiographical puzzles, we are able to date some events of her life with a high degree of probability.²

Melania the Younger was the granddaughter (and namesake) of a famous fourth-century aristocrat-turned-ascetic Melania the Elder. In the 370s, the elder Melania, after her husband and two of her sons died, adopted the ascetic life and decamped from Rome to Jerusalem. There, with her monastic companion Rufinus of Aquileia, she founded monasteries on the Mount of Olives. She left behind in Rome her one surviving child, Valerius Publicola, after having assured his well-being and the funds to launch his career as a member of the senatorial aristocracy. Melania the Younger was his daughter. Publicola had at first opposed his daughter's desire for ascetic renunciation. Perhaps, a recent commentator suggests, his mother's abandonment of him to pursue ascetic commitments may have soured his views on the subject.³ One of the historiographical puzzles of Melania's *Vita* is Gerontius' total silence concerning her famous grandmother.

According to the *Life*, Melania the Younger was coerced into marriage by her parents, despite her ardent desire for a life of religiously motivated celibacy: she had, Gerontius writes, been "wounded by divine love" (*Life* 1).⁴ The parents prevailed and Melania was married, probably in 398, to Valerius Pinianus (Pinian, in shortened form), her senatorial-class cousin. She was thirteen or fourteen, and he was seventeen. Although their youth may startle our contemporaries, the legal age for marriage in Roman law was twelve for girls and fourteen for boys.⁵ Aristocratic parents might deem it important for daughters to marry and reproduce at a young age to cement family fortunes and inheritance.⁶ While an often-large age difference between Roman spouses of the upper classes meant that many women would be widowed within

2. Patrick Laurence, *Gérontius, La Vie latine de sainte Mélanie* (Jerusalem 2002), chap. 1, "Chronological Research," proposing dates for Melania. Dates given in the following paragraphs are largely derived from Laurence's calculations.

3. Judith Evans-Grubbs, "Marriage and Family Relationships" (Chichester UK 2009), 208. Palladius (*Lausiac History* 54.2), by contrast, claims that Valerius Publicola provided funds for his mother's religious projects and charities.

4. See Kristi Upson-Saia, "Wounded by Divine Love" (Oakland 2017), 86–105.

5. M. K. [Keith] Hopkins, "The Age of Roman Girls at Marriage," 313, with legal sources.

6. Hopkins, "Age of Roman Girls," 321; he admits that this is a conjecture. Those lower in the status hierarchy presumably felt less pressure to cement alliances early: see Brent D. Shaw, "The Age of Roman Girls at Marriage: Some Reconsiderations," 43.

ten or fifteen years of marriage,⁷ Pinian and Melania remained married for at least thirty-three years. She lived on eight years after his death.

Once married, Melania tried to avoid sexual relations—but Pinian insisted that they produce two children to inherit their wealth and property. This plan was foiled, since both children soon died, a not extraordinary event for the era: about half of all children died before age ten, most in infancy.⁸ Melania, herself close to death, pressured Pinian to forego further sexual relations and adopt a life of ascetic renunciation with her. Her father, who had earlier forbidden her renunciations, upon his deathbed in (probably) 405 gave the couple his blessing to take up the life Melania desired. For her, bereavement was liberation.⁹ Throughout her seven years of married life in Rome, Gerontius reports, Melania had never ceased to yearn for a life of ascetic abstinence. On this, she and Pinian now embarked together, he, it seems, less enthusiastically.

Gerontius emphasizes Melania's wealth to heighten the contrast with the poverty that she chose. He also stresses the holiness and purity of her life, her humility, sacrifices, devotion to the church, and rigorous ascetic practices, some of which border on self-torture. Extreme asceticism represented a radical rupture not only with the traditional senatorial lifestyle but also with Christian monasticism as it would later be practiced in the West.¹⁰ Melania scarcely ate or slept, refused to bathe, and replaced her former silks with cheap clothes that irritated her skin. In addition, she engaged in extensive philanthropy, the recipients of which were mainly monastic establishments, churches, and clergy. (The poor and other unfortunates received some, as secondary recipients.) Such deprivations were considered holy practices, performed in repentance for one's sins, and in Melania's case for her earlier life of luxury—"an exorcism of feminine profligacy."¹¹ To bask in money and property was, in her view, a temptation of the Devil.

Attempting to abandon Rome and the lifestyle expected of them, Melania and Pinian soon found how difficult it was to rid themselves of their wealth and properties. Even the most highly placed members of the imperial court claimed that they could not afford to buy their Roman mansion when the couple wished to sell it. Disputes with

7. Richard P. Saller, *Patriarchy, Property and Death* (Cambridge 1994), 219.

8. Evans-Grubbs, "Marriage and Family Relationships," 203.

9. Kate Cooper, "The Household and the Desert" (Turnhout 2005), 12.

10. Claude Lepelletier, "Mélanie la Jeune" (Rome 1999), 15.

11. Linda L. Coon, *Sacred Fictions* (Philadelphia 1997), 115.

members of Pinian's family ensued over the property: at stake were the lives of thousands of slaves, staggering amounts of gold, and real estate spread across several provinces of the Roman Empire.

The flight of Melania and Pinian from Rome, accompanied by Melania's aristocratic widowed mother, Ceionia Albina, coincided with the downfall of her highly placed protectors at the imperial court, Serena and Stilicho. Stilicho was the head of the western armies and the father-in-law of the emperor Honorius. The couple's flight also coincided with the increasing Gothic pressure on the city, which resulted in the sack of Rome in August 410. By the time of that event, Melania and Pinian had decamped to their estates, first to one in the suburbs, next to one in Sicily, and finally to one in Roman North Africa. Although the text of the *Life* is somewhat garbled concerning these events, the trio probably left Sicily for North Africa in the fall of 410, before navigation stopped for the winter months.¹² In North Africa, they settled on their estate, allegedly larger than the territory of Thagaste itself (present day Souk Ahras, Algeria), and built monasteries for men and for women. They met bishops Alypius of Thagaste, Aurelius of Carthage, and Augustine of Hippo. In Augustine's city, Hippo Regius, Pinian narrowly escaped being ordained a priest—an encounter about which we learn from other sources that are uncomplimentary to all concerned.

After seven years in North Africa, Melania, Pinian, and Albina embarked for Jerusalem, detouring for a brief stop in Egypt; the couple would later return to visit desert holy men. After settling for a period near the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, Melania, from around 419, lived a life of seclusion in a small cell. Later, after the death of her mother and then of Pinian, in 431 or 432, she built first a monastery for women, and then one for men. The *Life* describes her building and guiding (from the sidelines) these Jerusalem monasteries, as well as her instruction of the nuns she gathered around her.

A last exciting adventure was Melania's trip overland in 436 from Jerusalem to Constantinople, a voyage of about 1,200 miles.¹³ The reason for the journey? She hoped to convert her (probably) still-pagan uncle, Rufius Antonius Agrypnius Volusianus, former prefect of Rome (417–18), to Christianity. Volusianus (Volusian, in shortened form) was on a senatorial mission in Constantinople, fêting the marriage of the eastern

12. Laurence, *Gérontius, Vie latine*, 52.

13. E. D. Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage* (Oxford 1982), 56.

Roman princess Licinia Eudoxia to the western emperor, Valentinian III. While in Constantinople, Melania stayed in the palace of Lausus, a former high imperial official. Lausus plays a role in the history of early Christian asceticism: he commissioned Palladius to write his *Lausiaca History*, an important compendium of stories about ascetics, largely those in Egypt.¹⁴ Both Melanias receive extravagant mention in this text. Lausus' palace, with its important collection of statuary, has intrigued art historians.

In Constantinople, Melania met aristocrats and members of the imperial family. According to Gerontius, she was successful in her effort to convert her uncle, aided by bishop Proclus of Constantinople. After her uncle's death, she spent forty days in mourning before starting the trip back to Jerusalem, trudging through winter snows. She arrived in time to celebrate Easter, which in 437 fell on April 11. The next year, she received the empress Aelia Eudocia, wife of Theodosius II, who was making a pilgrimage to the Holy Places.

In her last years, Melania undertook more building projects, including a chapel to house relics of the protomartyr Stephen, whose bones had allegedly been unearthed in Jerusalem earlier in the fifth century. In late December 439, she made the short trip to Bethlehem to worship at the site of Jesus' nativity. A few days later, after her return to Jerusalem, she died, at age fifty-four. Modern readers may be excused from wondering why she did not expire earlier, given the punishing deprivations to which she had subjected her body. Perhaps her fierce lifelong determination kept her alive. Her life had been filled with more adventure than most women of any time and place would ever experience.

The Text of the Life of Melania the Younger (Vita Melaniae Junioris) and Its Author

For many centuries, Melania remained relatively unheralded. Although she was remembered in Eastern Orthodox liturgies, saints' *Vitae*, and a few documents of the western church, only in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did she become better known through the

14. On Palladius, see Demetrios S. Katos, *Palladius of Helenopolis* (Oxford 2011).

discovery of the Greek and Latin texts of her *Life*.¹⁵ In 1884, the papal nuncio in Madrid, Mariano del Tindaro Rampolla, found a Latin manuscript of Melania's *Vita* in the Escorial Library. Rampolla, however, was a busy man in the next years, serving as a cardinal and as Pope Leo XIII's secretary of state. Only after losing a bid for the papacy in 1903 did he complete his book, *Santa Melania Giuniore, senatrice romana*. The book, published in 1905, contained the Greek and Latin texts of her *Life*.¹⁶

In 1903, the Bollandists (an association of ecclesiastical scholars who edited the saints' *vitae* preserved in the *Acta Sanctorum*) brought out a Greek text of the *Life* that they had discovered in the Barberini Library in Rome.¹⁷ "Melania fever" erupted, occasioning lively debates over the priority of the Latin or the Greek text. Today, many scholars think that there was a primitive Greek text, from which both the present Greek text of the Bollandists and the Latin version discovered by Rampolla were derived, and to which the redactor for each version added other items.¹⁸

Modern commentators agree on assigning authorship of the *Life* to a monk, Gerontius. In both versions of the *Life*, the writer makes clear that he had spent years with Melania. Other sources report that Gerontius, who had been ordained as a priest, directed Melania's monastery for several decades after her death in 439. He is described as an ardent Monophysite (now often called miaphysite), a religious party that rejected the language of the "two natures" of Christ, divine and human, formulated at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. Allegedly he called Juvenal, bishop of Jerusalem, a "Judas" for accepting the Chalcedonian formula.¹⁹ Perhaps Gerontius composed the *Life* soon after the council. One source claims that Gerontius became an archimandrite, an overseer of monasteries within the district of Jerusalem.²⁰

15. For discussion, and the discovery of Latin and Greek versions of Melania's *Life*, see Laurence, *Gérontius, Vie latine*, chap. 3; Elizabeth A. Clark, *The Life of Melania the Younger* (New York and Toronto 1984), 1–24; Denys Gorce, *Vie de Sainte Mélanie* (Paris 1962), 7–20, 45–62. English translation of the Latin version in Carolinne White, *Lives of Roman Christian Women* (London 2010), 179–230.

16. Mariano del Tindaro Rampolla, *Santa Melania Giuniore* (Rome 1905). For the intrigue, see Michael Penn, "Afterlives" (Oakland 2017), 246–47.

17. "S. Melaniae Iunioris, Acta Graeca."

18. For discussion of the arguments, see Laurence, *Gérontius, Vie latine*, 122–46, and E. A. Clark, *Life of Melania the Younger*, 4–13. Rampolla argued for the priority of the Latin text.

19. John Rufus, *Life of Peter the Iberian* 47. Also see Timothy D. Barnes, *Early Christian Hagiography* (Tübingen 2010), 252. For more on the controversy over the "natures" of Christ, see chap. 9, 188–191 *passim*.

20. Cyril of Scythopolis, *Life of Euthymius* 62.20–63.1.

An important question remains: *When* did Gerontius become part of Melania's entourage? Although some texts claim that as a boy he had stayed with her and Pinian in Rome, the vagueness of the *Life* on many points of Melania's early and young adult life stands against this view. Rather, he appears to have joined her family only later, probably in Jerusalem. (Gerontius himself states that Pinian was the source of some details of Melania's youth; that is, that he himself had not been an eyewitness.) As the reader can note, the *Life* is much fuller regarding the Jerusalem period onward. The author's relatively slim knowledge of the activities of Melania, Pinian, and Albina in Sicily and Roman North Africa remains disappointing.²¹

The publication of the Greek and Latin versions of Melania's *Life* in the opening years of the twentieth century did not excite only scholars; the general public was also caught up in the fervor.²² In the United States, the *Washington Post* in its edition of October 21, 1906, proclaimed, "Saint Melania Richest Woman That Ever Lived." The *Post* calculated Melania's annual income to have been \$175 million in 1906 dollars (equivalent, Michael Penn notes, to over four billion dollars in 2016 currency: more than Bill Gates' annual income at that time). The *Post's* report was repeated in papers across America, with a different comparison, namely, to John D. Rockefeller. In 1908, Georges Goyau published *Sainte Mélanie* (383–439) and recalculated Melania's income to something less eye-popping, albeit still very grand.²³ In recent times, translations of and commentaries on the *Life* and the splendid volume *Melania: Early Christianity Through the Life of One Family* have again made her a subject of interest.²⁴

Other Sources Concerning Melania

The *Life*, however, is not the only source pertaining to Melania and Gerontius. For example, Palladius, a fifth-century Christian bishop, provides information on both Melanias in his *Lausiatic History*, which was completed in 420 CE. Before his days as a bishop, Palladius had

21. For Gerontius' identity and allegiances, see Gorce, *Vie*, 54–62; Laurence, *Gérontius*, *Vie latine*, 118–21, and E. A. Clark, *Life of Melania the Younger*, 13–16, 20.

22. The following amusing examples were uncovered by Michael Penn, "Afterlives."

23. Penn, "Afterlives," 249–53.

24. See nn. 2, 15–17 above for texts and translations.

journeyed to and sojourned in Palestine around 385 and subsequent years. He then made a “grand tour” of Egypt, where he lived for approximately twelve years.²⁵ He left Egypt in spring 400, probably a victim of bishop Theophilus of Alexandria’s rout of monks devoted to the teachings of the third-century theologian Origen and his latter-day followers. Palladius then traveled east to become bishop of Helenopolis, a city in the Roman province of Bithynia.²⁶ After the fall from favor of bishop John Chrysostom of Constantinople and his exile, in 404, Palladius fled to the West, seeking the protection of Innocent, bishop of Rome, and pleading on behalf of Chrysostom. While in Rome, he was entertained by, and perhaps stayed with, Melania the Younger.²⁷

The Life of Peter the Iberian by John Rufus is a second source, important for information about Gerontius. Peter, a Georgian prince, as a child had been taken as a hostage to the court of Constantinople. His biographer claims that Peter met Melania in Constantinople in 437 and traveled to Jerusalem in either 437 or 438. There, Melania hosted him in her monastery.²⁸ Peter, an anti-Chalcedonian, was later chosen as bishop of Maiuma in Palestine but served for only a few months before his party was crushed. He also established a monastery in Jerusalem.²⁹ The author of Peter’s *Life* claims that Gerontius was born in Jerusalem around 395. After their arrival in 417, Melania and Pinian took him under their care and inducted him into monastic life. Eventually, John Rufus reports, Gerontius became a priest and later led Melania’s monasteries for forty-five years.³⁰ Other ancient sources, such as the monastic *vitae* by Cyril of Scythopolis, provide further information on Gerontius and monastic life in Palestine.³¹

The letters of Augustine are still another source, offering details of Melania, Pinian, and Albina’s visit to North Africa and (probably) of

25. E. D. Hunt, “Palladius of Helenopolis,” 458, 466; Eduard Schwartz, “Palladiana,” 161–62.

26. Hunt, “Palladius of Helenopolis,” 472. Melania the Elder, who had helped the Origenist-oriented monks, left her monastic retreat in Palestine for Italy, allegedly to assure that her granddaughter was not falling into the hands of “heretics”—presumably, anti-Origenists (Palladius, *Lausiaca History*, 46.2–4, 54.3).

27. Palladius, *Lausiaca History* 61.7. See Hunt, “Palladius of Helenopolis,” 476; and Claudia Rapp, “Palladius, Lausus, and the *Historia Lausiaca*” (Aldershot UK and Burlington VT 2001), 279–90.

28. John Rufus, *Life of Peter the Iberian* 29–44. See Cornelia B. Horn, *Asceticism and Christological Controversy* (Oxford 2006), 233, 278; Paul Devos, “Quand Pierre l’Ibère vint-il à Jérusalem?” 347–48.

29. Horn, *Asceticism and Christological Controversy*, 87–91, 198–203.

30. John Rufus, *Life of Peter the Iberian* 44–48; Horn, *Asceticism and Christological Controversy*, 141, 145, 248.

31. Cyril of Scythopolis, *Life of Euthymius* 42.14–15, 49.8, 62.20, 67.14–15, 115.2, 127.19.

Melania's uncle Volusian. From these letters, we learn of Pinian's escape from being dragooned into priestly service in Hippo and Augustine's somewhat disingenuous replies to the angry family about the incident. These events are completely passed over in Gerontius' *Life*. Moreover, some letters of Augustine and his friends concern a certain Volusian (most likely Melania's uncle), expressing his doubts about Christian teachings. These letters show that one of the intermediaries between Augustine and Volusian was count Marcellinus, to whom Augustine dedicated his monumental work *The City of God*, as well as several other treatises. Another treatise opposing the Pelagian movement (*On Nature and Grace*) is directed to friends of Pinian. Most important, Augustine's treatise *On the Grace of Christ, and On Original Sin* was written for Albina, Pinian, and Melania themselves.

Another important source regarding Melania's family was the poet Paulinus of Nola, possibly a distant relative. Paulinus, a wealthy aristocrat turned Christian ascetic, established a shrine to Saint Felix at Nola, in Campania, Italy.³² Paulinus details Melania the Elder's return to Italy in around 400 from her ascetic retreat in Palestine and the grand reception given her by her extended family. Shabby in old black rags, she was mobbed by her aristocratic relatives, clad in silk and riding in gilded carriages, who (Paulinus claims) rejoiced to gather dirt from her clothes and feet.³³ Melania the Younger and Pinian visited Paulinus in Nola at least once, and perhaps twice, according to her *Vita*.

Letters are an important source of information concerning women ascetics in this era, for example, those of the ascetic teacher and theorist Evagrius Ponticus to Melania the Elder;³⁴ those of Jerome, detailing women's ascetic life in Rome and Palestine, including his companion Paula's foundation of a monastery for women in Bethlehem;³⁵ and those of John Chrysostom to women ascetics in Constantinople.

Moreover, chroniclers and historians report on incidents closely related to Melania's family and events of the time. Various

32. See Dennis E. Trout, *Paulinus of Nola* (Berkeley 1999); John Matthews, *Western Aristocracies* (Oxford 1975), 73–74. Kim Bowes emphasizes how this establishment “sidelined” the local bishop (“‘Christianization’ and the Rural Home,” 168).

33. Paulinus of Nola, *Letter* 29.12, discussed in Trout, *Paulinus of Nola*, 131.

34. See discussion and references in Elizabeth A. Clark, *The Origenist Controversy* (Princeton 1992), 191–93.

35. Jerome, *Letter* 108 on Paula (chap. 20 on the regime of her monastery). Andrew Cain plausibly argues that Jerome's notice on her death in this letter was intended to promote a cult devoted to Paula, similar to a “martyr cult” (“Jerome's *Epitaphium Paulae*,” 105–39).

ancient historians—the pagan sympathizers Zosimus, Eunapius, and Olympiodorus and the Christians Orosius, Socrates, and Sozomen—provide information on Rome and Constantinople.³⁶ (Unfortunately, the history by Ammianus Marcellinus breaks off about the time of Melania the Younger’s birth.)³⁷ The anonymous author of the *Chronicon Pascale* details events, largely in the eastern part of the empire, from the late fourth century into the early seventh. Other authors compiled the *Notitia Dignitatum* for Constantinople and Rome, a work that lists the various monuments and buildings in these cities, providing interesting insights into urban life.

With assistance from these and other sources, we can construct a fairly full picture of Melania’s life and activities, even while recognizing that the sources are unabashedly biased and that some details are doubtless lost forever.

Hagiography: Its Purposes and Its Problems

The *Life of Melania the Younger* is a hagiography, that is, a pious devotional work that presents its subject as a saint. While ancient biographies usually centered on an important male (an emperor, general, or statesman), hagiography was an equal-opportunity genre. Gerontius in his introductory remarks engages in the self-denigration typical of hagiographers, making themselves “as nothing” in relation to their exalted subjects. (As historian Derek Krueger writes of hagiography, “With the Holy Spirit at work, what then is an author?”)³⁸ In truth, Gerontius’ narrative is rather flat-footed, with none of the rhetorical flare and witty turns of phrase with which Jerome describes his female friends and his opponents.³⁹

36. Zosimus used Eunapius (who was hostile to Stilicho) as a source up to 404; then he turned to Olympiodorus, whose more even-handed history covered 407–25, with flashbacks to the career of Stilicho. These historians were sympathetic to paganism; see Wolf Liebeschuetz, “Pagan Historiography” (Leiden and Boston 2003). For Christian historians: Orosius wrote his *History against the Pagans* in 417–18; Socrates and Sozomen wrote their *Church Histories* in the mid-fifth century.

37. John Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus* (Baltimore 1989): the eighteen extant books cover only from 353 to 378 (11, 27).

38. Derek Krueger, “Hagiography as an Ascetic Practice,” 228.

39. For a good example, Jerome’s *Letter* 22 on Paula’s daughter, Eustochium, who took up the ascetic life in Bethlehem with her mother and Jerome; see Neil Adkin, *Jerome on Virginity* (Cambridge 2003).

How to unearth details of social and cultural history from hagiographical accounts has been a perplexing problem for modern scholars. In the case of Melania's *Life*, Gerontius' concern is not to critique ancient economic and social structures, for example, income inequality, class privilege, or slavery. For scholars today, it is hard to overlook these disturbing issues. Gerontius puts Melania and her spiritual quest at center stage, even when her actions have a debilitating effect on others. Her philanthropy is measured: although she gives enormous sums to bishops and monks, she keeps at arm's-length from contact with the urban poor who may receive some trickle-down benefits.⁴⁰ (Gerontius explains, perhaps defensively, that the couple did not want others to see them doing good deeds [*Life* 35].) All this should not surprise, given ancient views toward class and slavery, among Christian as well as pagan writers of the era. We shall note one interesting exception when we examine the ancient Christian treatise *On Riches*.

This caveat registered, hagiographies can resonate with readers today. Although our contemporaries may dismiss sainthood as a "primitive throwback," Françoise Meltzer and Jaś Elsner argue that the categories that fascinate postmoderns—"excess, marginality, transgression, porous subjectivity"—also define the category of the saint. They continue, "To sanctify excess is a form of domestication; in the institutionalization of a saint there frequently lies the attempt to neutralize, to appropriate, or otherwise bring under rule. Politics is never far behind."⁴¹ As we shall see in Gerontius' representation of Melania, the "politics" sometimes involves aligning her with his theological preferences and divorcing her from theological approaches and persons that he considered insufficiently "orthodox."

At first sight, Melania's *Vita* provides a tantalizing analogy to the ancient genre of the Hellenistic novel, or "romance." These novels, which flourished in the precise period in which Christianity was developing, often featured an aristocratic heroine at odds with relatives who aimed to thwart her love relation. The adventures of these heroines resonate with Melania's, yet the novels end with marriage and "happily ever after." In this respect, Melania's *Vita* might be called an "anti-romance," since for years she struggled to keep Pinian at a distance. For Melania, the

40. An exception: at the beginning of their ascetic renunciations, Melania and Pinian are represented as visiting the sick, prisoners, and those sentenced to the mines (*Life* 9). This "hands-on" approach appears to fade as they advance in their renunciations.

41. Françoise Meltzer and Jaś Elsner, "Introduction," *Saints* (Chicago and London 2011), ix, xii.

wedding bells came very early in a life that was resolutely spent trying to silence them. Here, the “happily ever after” involves a life of dirt and near starvation.

Moreover, Melania’s *Vita* is pedagogical and didactic, not “entertainment”: she combats heresy, instructs in Christian virtue, and sets an example so stringent that few could emulate it. Her role is as teacher, to Pinian, to her nuns, to Constantinopolitan aristocrats. While literate ancients treated the novels as entertainments to be enjoyed after a good lunch,⁴² Melania’s *Vita* was read by bishops and monks, the latter of whom preserved copies of it in their monasteries—from which they were rescued in modern times.

Women’s Roles in Early Christianity

Before we begin our detailed exploration of Melania’s *Life*, we should briefly note the representation of women in early Christian texts. Despite the heavily androcentric nature of these texts, women found their place in them, not only as objects of censure who needed careful surveillance but also as leaders, martyrs, pilgrims, patrons, and ascetics.⁴³ In the New Testament, women are represented as traveling with and helping to support Jesus and the disciples; they stand last at Jesus’ cross as the male disciples flee and arrive first at his tomb; they serve as coworkers with Paul and other male leaders. In texts relating to some forms of second- and third-century Christianity—those grouped under the umbrella term “Gnosticism,” or in the Spirit-centered schismatic Montanist sect—women are represented as prophets, leaders of congregations, even (so proto-orthodox churchmen feared) as baptizers. Whether or not any women of what became “mainstream” Christianity were ordained as priests, they are well-attested as deaconesses, helping to prepare women

42. Persius, *Satire* 1.134: “post prandia Callirhoen do.”

43. For examples of what follows, with textual references, see Elizabeth A. Clark, “Devil’s Gateway” (Lewiston NY and Queenston ON 1986); Elizabeth A. Clark, “Early Christian Women” (Charlottesville 1990); Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (New York 1983); Patricia Cox Miller, *Women in Early Christianity* (Washington DC 2005); Susan Ashbrook Harvey, “Women in Early Byzantine Hagiography” (Charlottesville 1990), 36–59; *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient*, trans. Sebastian P. Brock and Susan Ashbrook Harvey (Berkeley 1987); *Gnosticism and Images of the Feminine*, ed. Karen King (Philadelphia 1988); *Lives of Roman Christian Women*, trans. Carolinne White (London 2010); Virginia Burrus, *Chastity as Autonomy* (Lewiston NY and Queenston ON 1987); L. Stephanie Cobb, *Dying to Be Men* (New York 2008); Coon, *Sacred Fictions*; Franca Ela Consolino, “Female Asceticism and Monasticism” (Cambridge MA and London 1999), 8–30.