

Meeting: Oct 11, 2011 — 7:30 pm @ Joan's

### **What is this thing?**

I can't think of anything else I've read that is comparable but this may be because I don't read travel writing much.

It's the story of a modern day journey following in the footsteps of a Byzantine monk, John Moschos, who is also a writer and traveler and his companion later to become the patriarch of Jerusalem: Sophronius. Mo & So bore witness to the end of the Byzantine world and WD "now bears witness to the almost defunct Christian monasteries and sects of the Middle East, while also managing to recreate the world Moschos knew." (Mail on Sunday)

It's a travel book...

a history book

a story book

it's hagiography

a theology book

a political book "presenting the case of the of Middle East's downtrodden Christians". One reviewer describes it as being "driven by indignation. "While leavened with this characteristic jauntiness and humour, it is also profoundly shocking. Time and time again in the details of D's discoveries I found myself asking: why do we not know this? (Spectator) I particularly enjoyed Part IV about the war in Lebanon which I struggled to understand while it was ongoing.

a prophetic book

### OVERVIEW

#### **Part I (Greece)**

The Monastery of Iviron, Mount Athos, Greece 29 June 1994. The Feast of SS, Peter and Paul

#### **Part II (Turkey)**

Pera Palas Hotel, Istanbul, Turkey, 10 July 1994

Istanbul, 17 July

Istanbul, 20 July

"When it was first built in the 530s, Procopius, in one of his finest passages, described the overwhelming effect it has on the visitor. 'So bright is the glow of the interior that you might say that it is not illuminated by the sun from the outside but that the radiance is generated within, ...Rising above is an enormous spherical dome which seems not to be founded on solid masonry, but to be suspended from heaven by a Golden Chain. Whenever one goes into this church to pray, one understands immediately that this work has been fashioned not by human power and skill, but by the influence of God. And so the visitor's mind is lifted up to God and floats aloft, thinking that He cannot be far away, but must love to dwell in this place which He himself has chosen.'

The power of the building has not been diminished by fourteen hundred years of earthquakes and rebuildings, the destruction of much of its mosaic, the stripping of its altars, nor even a city fire which caused molten lead from the dome to run down the gutters in a flood of boiling metal.

...The sacred breaks in on the mundane; and one immediately understands what a Byzantine monk must have felt when he touched a relic or gazed at a sacred icon: for a moment the gates of perception open and one catches a momentary glimpse of the Divine."

Istanbul, 28 July

Istanbul, 1 August

Istanbul, 3 August

...night ferry across the black Bosphorus to Haydarpasha...the conductor asked my nationality, and when I told him, I thought I saw a brief flicker of terror cross his face; certainly, I was immediately upgraded to first class. ...the reason for this uncharacteristically flexible behaviour...a soccer match between Manchester United and Galatasaray, and the tv news was full of the English visitors' traditional pre-match activities: trashing restaurants, picking fights, beating up innocent Turks...For the first time I felt grateful for English football's international reputation

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for hooliganism: it seemed that my compatriots from Manchester had unknowingly guaranteed me a first-class berth for the night.

Night bus between Ankara and Antioch, 6/7 August

Buyuk Antakya Oteli, Antioch, 11 August

...I lingered in the ruins, pacing through the complex in the dusk and wondering at the oddness of the world John Moschos inhabited: sophisticated enough to build this astonishing classical basilica, yet innocent enough to believe that these strange, ragged men shrieking from their pillars were able to pull aside the heavy curtain of the flesh and gaze directly on God. Standing on their pillars, they were believed to be bright beacons of transcendence, visible from afar; ...Byzantine holy men and stylites became the focus for the most profound yearnings of half of Christendom. ...It is easy to dismiss the eccentricities of Byzantine hermits as little more than bizarre circus acts, but to do so is to miss the point that man's deepest hopes and convictions are often quite inexplicable in narrow terms of logic or reason. At the base of a stylite's pillar one is confronted with the awkward truth that what has most moved past generations can today sometimes be only tentatively glimpsed with the eye of faith, while remaining quite inexplicable and absurd when seen under the harsh distorting microscope of skeptical Western rationality.

Hotel Turban, Urfa, 12 August

Urfa Bus Station, Lunchtime, 15 August

...at the fishponds of Abraham,,It is a quite extraordinary example of continuity despite surface change: as remarkable as finding Egyptians still building pyramids, or a sect of modern Greeks still worshipping at the shrine of Zeus.

Hotel Karavansaray, Diyarbakir, 16 August

Those who flout the unspoken rules on Armenian history still find themselves facing almost ludicrously severe penalties. In early December 1986 Hilda Potuoglu was arrested by the Turkish security police and charged with 'making propaganda with intent to destroy or weaken national feelings'. The prosecutor of the Istanbul State Security deemed that her offence merited severe punishment, and asked for between a 7 1/2 and 15 year jail sentence. Her crime was to edit the Turkish edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica, in which was included a footnote reading: 'During the Crusades the mountainous regions of Cilicia were under the hegemony of the Armenian Cilician Kingdom.' It would be impossible to find a respectable academic anywhere in the world who could possibly take issue with the historical accuracy of this statement, but in the view of the prosecutor, Potuoglu was guilty of distorting the facts on a politically sensitive issue: the Britannica quickly joined the index of forbidden books, along with ...the Times Atlas of World History and The National Geographic Atlas of the world.

The Monastery of Mar Gabriel, Tur Abdin, 18 August

The Monastery of Mar Gabriel, 23 August

...for the first time I am sleeping in a monastery which John Moschos could have stayed in, hearing the same fifth century chant sung under the same mosaics. Facing me is the south wall of what is probably the oldest functioning church in Anatolia. It was built by the Emperor Anastasius in 512: before Haghia Sophia, before Ravenna, before Mount Sinai; it was already eighty years old by the time St Augustine landed at Thanet to bring Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England. Yet some parts of the monastery date back even earlier, to the abbey's original foundation in 397 AD.

Matins at Mar Gabriel... The entire congregation began a long series of prostrations: from their standing position, the worshippers fell to their knees, and lowered their heads to the ground so that all that could be seen from the rear of the church was a line of upturned bottoms. All that distinguished the worship from that which might have taken place in a mosque was that the worshippers crossed and recrossed themselves as they performed their prostrations. This was the way the early Christians prayed, and is exactly the form of worship described by Moschos in The Spiritual Meadow. In the 6<sup>th</sup> century, the Muslims appear to have derived their techniques of worship from existing Christian practice. Islam and the Eastern Christians have retained the

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original early Christian convention; it is the Western Christians who have broken with sacred tradition

However alien and eccentric Eastern asceticism sometimes seems, it had an extraordinary influence on the medieval West; indeed the European monks of the early Middle Ages were merely provincial imitators of the Eastern desert fathers. The monastic ideal came out of Egypt, that of the stylite from Syria. Both forms travelled westwards, stylitism, amazingly enough, getting as far as Trier before being abandoned as impossible in a northern climate, with the aspiring German stylite eventually yielding to pressure from his bishop to come down before he froze to his pillar....

...illustrations in the Diatessaron iconographically identical to those in the first of the great illuminated Celtic gospel books, the Book of Durrow. The Diatessaron pictures also had a close relationship with a slightly later Celtic manuscript, the Gospels of St. Willibrord.

The Monastery of Mar Gabriel, 24 August

Hotel Cliff, Hassake, Syria, 26 August

**Part III (Syria)**

The Baron Hotel, Aleppo, Syria, 28 August 1994

...then the penny dropped. The inexplicably horrible food, the decaying neo-Gothic architecture, the deep baths and the uncomfortable beds: no wonder Lawrence and his contemporaries felt so much at home here —the Baron is the perfect replica of some particularly Spartan English public school strangely displaced to the deserts of the Middle east. ...And yet despite its best efforts, I feel this place growing on me. I have always loved that fact that in Syria you can still walk on Roman roads that have not been resurfaced since the time of Diocletian, or stand on castle walls that have not been restored since Saladin stormed them. In the same way, perhaps I should be pleased that in the Baron you can sleep in sheets that have not been washed since TE Lawrence slept there....

...WD's remembered story about President Asad: 'There is good news, Mr. President,... You are more popular with the people of Syria than ever before. 99% of the people voted for you. Only 1% abstained. What more could you ask?' 'Just one thing,' Asad is said to have replied. 'Their names and addresses.'

Aleppo, 2 September

Aleppo, 4 September

Re: The History of the Monks of Syria by Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrrhus... a near contemporary of John Moschos... If Theodoret is to be believed, the greatest celebrities of his day were not singers or dancers or even charioteers, but saints and ascetics. St Symeon Stylites the Elder, whose pillar lay a few miles west of Aleppo was a case in point. .... There was also Baradatus who devised 'new tests of endurance.' On a ridge above his hermitage he constructed out of wood 'a small chest that did not even match his body and in this he dwelt, obliged to stoop the whole time. It was not even fitted together with planks, but had openings like a lattice... then he devised an even more unusual way to follow his calling... standing up all the time plus "He covered his entire body 'with a tunic of skins — only around the nose and mouth did he leave a small opening for breath', so that in addition to having to stand all day he would also be baked alive in the sweltering Syrian midsummer heat: a sort of Byzantine boil-in-the-bag monk."

Aleppo, 5 September

...By their ability to endure physical suffering Byzantine holy men like Thalalaeus were believed to be able to wear away the curtain that separated the visible world from the divine; and by reaching through they gained direct access to God, something that was thought to be impossible for the ordinary believer. For by mortifying the flesh, it was believed that the holy men became transformed: 'If you will, you can become all flame,' said Abba Joseph in one of the stories of the desert fathers, holding up his hand to show fingers which had 'become like ten lamps of fire', radiant with the 'uncreated light of divinity', the same form of illumination that is shown surrounding the great saints in icons. In this heightened state the holy men were believed to be able to act as intercessors for their followers at the distant court of Heaven, and like the old gods had the power to give children to barren women, to cure the sick, and to divine the future.... But perhaps the holy men's most important task was to fight demons. The world was believed to be besieged by invisible agents of darkness, and to sin was not merely to err: it was to be overcome by these sinister forces. Demonic activity was a daily irritation, and was believed to intrude on the most ordinary, domestic activities. .... Monks and holy men were thought of as 'prize-fighters' against the Devil's minions, and only with their help—and their amulets, relics, and remedies—could demons be fought or defeated. Across the east Mediterranean that tradition still continues: to this day Christian monks are believed to be powerful exorcists, a talent they share with their Islamic counterparts, the Muslim Sufi mystics.

Aleppo, 9 September

The Convent of Seidnaya, 11 September

Meditations after visiting the ruined Byzantine town of Serjilla... If recent scholarship is correct, it seems increasingly likely that the two worlds—those of the gentrified landed estates and the

isolated wild-eyed illuminator monks—coexisted side by side in these hills, and that the transition both from the pagan-classical to the Byzantine-Christian, and then, three centuries later, from the Byzantine-Christian to the medieval-Islamic was a far more gradual process than the traditional accounts of violent change and invasion would allow. ... [In the Middle East, the reality of continuity has always been masked by a surface impression of cataclysm.](#)

#### Part IV (Lebanon)

Hotel Cavalier, Beirut, Lebanon, 23 september 1994

Most commentators have tended to attribute the balance of responsibility for the outbreak of the civil war to the Maronites' intransigence, their unapologetic Christian supremacism. Their contempt for their Muslim neighbours, and their point-blank refusal to share Lebanon with the landless Palestinian refugees ejected from their homes at the creation of Israel in 1948... When the civil war finally broke out... the Maronite militias were responsible for more than their fair share of the war's worst atrocities: the notorious massacres at Sabra and Chatila, where at least six hundred (and perhaps as many as two thousand) Palestinian civilians were butchered, was the work of the Maronites' Phalange militia, [albeit under Israeli supervision.](#)

... taxi to Beirut... Perhaps strangest of all were the unlikely lines of hoardings that rose above the forbidding ruins lining the highway: a smiling Claudia Schiffer stretched out leopard-like in Salvatore Ferragamo next to a yellow sandstone French colonial villa so riddled with great round shrapnel-holes it resembled an outsized slice of Emmental; the Marlboro cowboy with his ten-gallon hat and herd of steers beaming out over an apocalyptic wasteland of shattered tower blocks; a metal tube of Bodymist — *un beau corps sans effort* — set against a carbon-black skeleton of twisted metal that had once been a filling station. ... The Thunderbird's outsized bonnet swung over the hogsback of the ridge, and we were off: down we twisted, through a series of S-bends, under the ruins, past the posters: *Salvatore Ferragamo Pour Hiver 94*; an Ottoman villa pock-marked with small-arms fire; *Valentino: En Exclusivite*, a Bible-black hearse parked outside a church; *Martini: Right Here, Right Now*; two decapitated palm trees; *Calvin by Calvin Klein*; a dead tank; *Cool Budweiser — On Tap*; a bombed-out hospital; *Lucky Strike*; a cluster of skyscrapers so pockmarked with shrapnel they looked like a mouthful of severely rotten teeth; *Versatile by Versace*... [It was like a morality tale, spiraling downwards through one of the world's greatest monuments to human frailty, a huge vortex of greed and envy, resentment and intolerance, hatred and materialism,](#) a five-mile-long slalom of shellholes and designer labels, heavy artillery and glossy boutiques. Like a modern updating of a Byzantine Apocalypse, it was the confusion that was most hell-like: Ayatollah Khomeini, hands raised in blessing, shared a billboard with a bottle of American after-shave; below huge American cars — Thunderbirds, Chevrolets, Corvettes—roared past building sites where monstrous machines, thickly carapaced like metal-clad cockroaches, moved earth, demolished ruins, dug holes.

Beirut, 28 September

Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Christian arabs have played a vital role in defining a secular Arab cultural identity. It is no coincidence that most of the founders of secular Arab nationalism were Christians... If the Christian arabs continue to emigrate, the Arabs will be in a much more difficult position to defend the Arab world against Islamism. ... 'But isn't that battle already being lost?' ... 'Everyone is very frightened by the spread of fundamentalism,' said the Professor 'And of course it is unsettling to read about what is happening in Algeria and upper Egypt. But this is not the end of history.' ... He smiled. 'The battle,' he said, 'is not over yet.'

Beirut, 30 September

Hotel Ch'baat, Bsharre, Northern Lebanon, 4 October

Bsharre, 5 October

Bsharre, 9 October

Hotel Cavalier, Beirut, 17 October

**Part V (Israel)**

The Monastery of Mar Saba, Israeli-occupied West Bank, 24 October 1994

...the last of the ancient monasteries of the Holy Land to survive as a functioning community

- on the way to Mar SaBa WD visits the Greek Orthodox church on the edge of the ravine of the Valley of Kedron: **the Lavra of St Theodosius** where St John Moschos (550 – 619 AD) who died in Constantinople was brought according to his last wishes to be buried alongside his companion, St Sophronius (560 in Damascus – March 11, 638 in Jerusalem). Sophronius was the Patriarch of Jerusalem from 634 until his death, and is venerated as a saint in the Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox Churches. Before rising to the primacy of the see of Jerusalem, he was a monk and theologian who was the chief protagonist for orthodox teaching in the doctrinal controversy on the essential nature of Jesus and his volitional acts.

In Orthodox Christianity and certain other Eastern Christian communities Lavra or Laura (Greek: Λαύρα; Cyrillic: ѿ ѿ) originally meant a cluster of cells or caves for hermits, with a church and sometimes a refectory at the center. The term originates from the Greek for "a passage" or "an alley". The Lavrite style of living has its origins in the early fourth century with the founding of a settlement of cells in the Nitrean desert. A community of 600 hermits lived scattered over the area, reliant on Nitria for bread, but with their own priest and church. Saint Euthymius the Great (377 - 473) founded one of the early Lavras in fifth-century Palestine.<sup>[1]</sup> The Lavra of Saint Sabbas the Sanctified (†532), known as Mar Saba, is one of the most ancient continuously functioning monasteries in the Christian world

...Mar saba has been occupied continuously since its foundation in the late 5<sup>th</sup> century: since the 2 week hiatus following the massacre of the monks by the Persians in 614 AD—the same raid that devastated St Theodosius—divine office has been sung in the rock chapel of St Sabas every morning for the last 1,380 years.

Fr.Theophanes story of being protected at night by St. Sabas from a rabble of demons coming to turn Fr. T into a freemason... 'The Devil will capture everyone if he gets the chance,' said T gravely. 'But the saints protect us. In this monastery I feel secure, although it is in the middle of the desert, with Bedouin all around us. We are protected.' p292-293

Mar Saba, 28 October

Exposition on the chapel built around the tomb and hermitage of St John Damascene — John was in an excellent position to write the first ever informed treatise on Islam by a Christian, and when he retired to Mar Saba he dedicated his declining years to writing doctrinal homilies and working on his great masterpiece, a refutation of heresies entitled *The Fount of Knowledge*. The book contains an extremely precise and detailed critique of Islam, which intriguingly, John regards as a form of Christian heresy related to Arianism (after all like Islam, Arianism denied the divinity of Christ). It never seems to have occurred to John that Islam might be a separate religion, and although he looked on it with considerable suspicion, he nevertheless applauds the way Islam converted the Aarabs from idolatry, and writes with admiration of its single-minded emphasis on the unity of God. ...If a theologian of the stature of John Damascene was able to regard Islam as a new—if heretical—form of Christianity, it helps to explain how Islam was able to convert so much of the Middle eastern population in so short a time, even if Christianity remained the majority religion until the time of the Crusades.

John did what no Byzantine was permitted to attempt: to write and distribute a systematic defence of images in which he provided the fundamental theological counterblast to iconoclams. John argued that although no man has seen God at any time, nevertheless, since Christ deigned to take upon himself the human form, it was necessary to worship the human face of God in the sacred icon. ..."Paintings are the books of the illiterate."

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...description of John's cave...It seemed strange that a book of such breathtaking sophistication as The Fount of Knowledge could be produced in so astonishingly crude and primitive a cave.

...certainly an unlikely setting for the writing of one of the most important tracts ever to be penned in defence of artistic freedom. What Damascene wrote in this cave was largely responsible for saving Byzantium from the ban against sacred art that has always been a part of Islam and Judaism. Without Damascene's work, Byzantine *ars sacra* would never again have been permitted, Greek painters might never have been able to pass on their secrets to Giotto and the Siennese, and the course of the Renaissance, if it had happened at all, would have been very different.

Mar Saba, 1 November

Fr. Theophanes raves against the Freemasons as "the legions of the Anti-christ...the storm-troopers of the whore of Babylon."

Ararat Street, The Armenian Quarter, Old City of Jerusalem, 4 November

...a city within a city entered through its own gate and bounded by its own high, butter-coloured wall...the last substantial community of permanent Christian exiles resident in Jerusalem. The surprise isn't that the others have disappeared. It is that the Armenians have managed to remain. For despite the reference in the psalms to 'the peace of Jerusalem', the Holy City has probably seen more rapine and pillage, more regularly, than any comparable patch of ground on the planet...In J every street corner has its own martyr of monument, saint or shrine. Its soil is drenched in blood spilt in the name of religion; its mental hospitals are full of whole hagiarchies of lunatics claiming to be David, Isaiah, Jesus, St Paul or Mohammed. ...by the time of John Moschos there were over seventy Armenian churches in the city.

Jerusalem, 10 November

Exposition on the effect of the accession of the emperor Constantine and the adoption of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman empire ...Palestine becomes the Holy Land in the early 300s...the rise of religious tourism: by the 6<sup>th</sup> century there are set tour circuits and guide books ([some furnished with maps](#))

The seeds of the destruction of Byzantine Palestine may well have lain in the scale of this sudden expansion. Excavation at Scythopolis (modern Beit Shean) have shown that while the town's brothels were flourishing, bathing was falling out of fashion: the town's five bath houses, all flourishing during the Roman period fell into disuse under the Byzantines. This may have been partly due to the influence of the monks, who regarded the baths with horror and heaped praise on those who refrained from washing for the longest possible period: one story of the desert fathers admiringly tells how a wandering monk chanced upon a saintly hermit in a cave in the furthest reaches of the desert, 'and believe me, my brothers, I, Pambo, this least one, smelt the good odour of that brother from a mile away. Basic norms of hygiene were not just ignored by the monks and their admirers: they were deliberately piously flouted. ....and infrastructure was breaking down ...The result of all this was a wave of epidemics throughout the 6<sup>th</sup> century. ....Plague, leprosy, smallpox and tuberculosis were rife, while lice proliferated to an extent unknown in almost any other period of Middle Eastern history. ...Many historians now believe that it is in the devastating infections and plagues of the late 6<sup>th</sup> century that the root cause of the rapid collapse of the Byzantine Levant should be sought.

Jerusalem, 14 November

Discussion of J E Hanauer's 1907 book, Folklore of the Holy Land: Muslim, Christian and Jewish — the shrine in the village of Beit Jala beside Bethlehem regarded by Christians as the birthplace of St George, by Jews as the burial place of the Prophet Elias, by Muslims as the home of the legendary saint of fertility known simply as Khidr, Arabic for green. ...No one can travel for very long around the Middle East, Particularly among the Christian Arabs, without quickly realizing that the English are not the only people to claim St George as their own. The English may fondly believe that they have got their patron saint safely stashed away in St George's Chapel in Windsor but this will come as news to the nine monasteries on Mount Athos, the 35 other churches in Greece, the 24 churches and monasteries on Crete and the Greek islands, the 6 churches on

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Cyprus, the 15 churches in Egypt, the 5 churches in Israel and the West bank, the citadel in Aleppo and the 2 monasteries in northern Iraq which also claim the honour of possessing part of all of the ubiquitous and clearly many-boned St George. ... In fact the veneration of St George originated in the Byzantine Levant and did not become popular in England until returning Crusaders brought the saint's cult back with them.

...St George lives...'Ask anyone,' said Fr. Methodius ... Stop anyone in the street outside and ask if they have seen St George. They will all have stories Don't take my word for it: go out and see for yourself. ... The first person we came across was an elderly Muslim gentleman named Mansour Ali. I asked him whether he had ever seen St George...'Of course,' he said. 'I live just around the corner, so I see him frequently—he is always coming and going on his horse.' ... You see this in dreams?... No, when I am awake, in daylight. Khidr is not dead. Whenever we have problems he comes and helps us. ... In what way?... Well, last year I asked him to find work for my children. Within two weeks both my sons had good jobs.

The Anglican Hostel, Nazareth, 20 November

Nazareth, 22 November

### **Part VI (Egypt)**

Hotel Metropole Alexandria, Egypt, 1 December 1994

Alexandria, 5 December

Alexandria, 6 December

The Coptic Orthodox Monastery of St Antony the Great, 10 December

St Antony's, 11 December

It is true said Fr. Dioscuros... You can pray anywhere. After all, God is everywhere so you can find him everywhere. ... But in the desert, in the pure clean atmosphere, in the silence—there you can find yourself. And unless you begin to know yourself how can you even begin to search for God?

St Antony's, 13 December

"The government does nothing for us," said one monk who begged me not to mention his name.

"In Egypt the authorities are very bad to the Copts."

Hotel Windsor, Cairo, 15 December

Cairo, 16 December

Hotel Casablanca. Asyut, 18 December

Hotel Oasis, Kharga, 20 December



**Some bones to pick:**

1. More maps and photographs linked more closely to the text would be a great help. It needs to be re-issued as an illustrated work.
2. I take issue with the statement about the ongoing humiliation of the Muslim world by the west.
 

III Aleppo, 5 September (p168)

Today the West often views Islam as a civilization very different from and indeed innately hostile to Christianity. Only when you travel in Christianity's Eastern homelands do you realize how closely the two religions are really linked. For the former grew directly out of the latter and still, to this day, embodies many aspects and practices of the early Christian world now lost in Christianity's modern Western incarnation. When the early Byzantines were first confronted by the Prophet's armies, they assumed that Islam was merely a heretical form of Christianity, and in many ways they were not so far wrong: Islam accepts much of the Old and New Testaments, and venerates both Jesus and the ancient Jewish prophets. ... Certainly if John Moschos were to come back today it is likely he would find much more that was familiar in the practices of a modern Muslim Sufi than he would with those of, say, a contemporary American Evangelical [[Yes because American Evangelicalism is an offshoot of Protestantism](#)] Yet this simple truth has been lost by our tendency to think of Christianity as a Western religion rather than the Oriental faith it actually is. Moreover [the modern demonisation of Islam in the West, \[this is written pre9/11!\]](#) and [the recent growth of Muslim fundamentalism \(itself in many ways a reaction to the West's repeated humiliation of the Muslim world\)](#), have led to an atmosphere where few are aware of, or indeed wish to be aware of the profound kinship of Christianity and Islam.
3. I take issue with the omission of discussion about the precariousness of the Israeli situation. The portrayal of Israel is generally negative.
 

Example: p312 discussion with Bishop Hagop Sarkissian about the decision by Israeli TV to cancel a documentary film on the Armenian genocide scheduled for prime-time viewing..."The Israelis are always insisting on the uniqueness of their Holocaust," said Hagop. "Now it seems they want our genocide to be forgotten. It is as if they want a monopoly on suffering...In a million little ways, the Israelis make life difficult for us. Many of my people believe they want to squeeze us out."
4. a slow start to the read, a slow uptake - there's so much that doesn't stick even on re-reading and it's hard to keep all the various visits to all the various monasteries, shrines, caves and cells straight. Likewise the old luxury hotels he stays in usually at the start of his travels in each new country he encounters. I'm not sure if this is my feeble brain struggling or whether there is something in the manner of the telling that could make a better, stickier, impression.

**My takeaway**

- current stories resonate – death of 26 Coptic protesters this past weekend in Cairo from the military's reaction/extreme over-reaction to their protests against the military rulers and the too slow transition to democratic rule.
- My knowledge of monasticism then and now has increased tremendously but I am left wanting more partly helped by the many Wikipedia articles on monasticism and the long article on Christian Monasticism.
  - o Wikipedia : Christian Monasticism
- Christian Monasticism is a practice which began to develop early in the history of the Christian Church, modeled upon scriptural examples and ideals, including those in the Old Testament, but not mandated as an institution in the scriptures. It has come to be regulated by religious rules (e.g. the Rule of St Basil, the Rule of St Benedict) and, in modern times, the Canon law of the respective Christian denominations that have forms of monastic living. Those living the monastic life are known by the generic terms monks

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(men) and nuns (women). In modern English, they are also known by the gender-neutral term "monastics." The word monk originated from the Greek word monos, which means alone.<sup>[1]</sup> Monks did not live in monasteries at first, rather, they began by living alone, as the word monos might suggest. As more people took on the lives of monks, living alone in the wilderness, they started to come together and model themselves after the original monks nearby. Quickly the monks formed communities to further their ability to observe an ascetic life.<sup>[2]</sup> Monastics generally dwell in a monastery, whether they live there in community (cenobites), or in seclusion (recluses).

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