That Christian monks were among the most active agents in the destruction of pagan temples is a fact that historians of late antiquity know very well, so well that we can assume monastic involvement in the demolition of a temple even when there is “no evidence” for it.¹ “It was really monks and their abbots,” we conclude, “who inspired the most drastic demolitions.”² Even looking only at Egypt, one can find well documented examples that support this fact—the activities of Shenoute in and around Panopolis before and after the start of the fifth century—and others that are more ambiguous—the attack on the Serapeum in Alexandria in the early 390s and the destruction of the Isis temple in Menouthis in 485. But Peter Brown has suggested that some of our sources, such as Libanius’s famous account of the “black-robed men who eat more than elephants,” may refer to monks in connection with anti-temple violence because they were convenient scapegoats: as laymen, they did not enjoy the privileges granted to the clergy and thus “were the one segment of the Christian church who could be convincingly accused by non-Christians of latrocinium, the use of force unsanctioned by the Roman state.”³ Moreover, just as we routinely take into account regional differences in our assessments of the roles of government officials and bishops in anti-pagan activities,⁴ so too we should not attribute a propensity to anti-pagan violence to monks qua

¹ Fowden 1978, 67, discussing the destruction of the temple to Zeus in Apamea led by Bishop Marcellus ca. 386. For their comments and suggestions I am grateful to the other participants in the colloquium, especially Stephen Emmel, David Frankfurter, and Johannes Hahn.
² Frankfurter 1998, 283.
³ Lib. or. 30.8; Brown 1998, 647.
⁴ This is a theme of Fowden 1978.
monks, but should assume a range of possible attitudes toward pagan rituals and sites among monastic groups and investigate how and why violent events took place. For example, even when historians recognize that Libanius offers us direct evidence only for late fourth-century Syria, his account often provides the basic theme against which incidents in very different contexts, such as the Alexandrian Serapeum, are set.\(^5\)

In fact, if we turn to the monastic sources themselves, we often find ambivalence about monastic violence against temples. To be sure, monastic authors may have wanted to conceal acts of monastic violence as much as non-monastic authors wished to highlight them. But even such concealment would indicate that enthusiasm for anti-pagan violence among monks was not unanimous. In this essay I will first explore the roles of pagan temples in the monastic literature that emanated from the fourth- and early fifth-century monastic communities of Scetis and Lower Egypt, especially the *Apophthegmata patrum*. My primary question is, how did temples function in the topography of this form of Egyptian monasticism, which was shaped as much by the opposition between “desert” and “world” as by that between “Christian” and “pagan”? I examine stories about monks visiting temples, staying overnight in them, and even living in them, stories in which the temple, as the headquarters for the demonic adversaries of the monk, plays a useful role in the monastic program of self-formation. I then turn to accounts of anti-pagan activities, especially the attack on the Serapeum, and find that, while an opposition to images may have motivated some monks to participate in violence against temples, for others such activities were problematic because they drew the monk away from the desert and into the world. As temple attacks served bishops as a means of uniting a fractious Christian community, monks naturally joined in them, and such attacks became a standard episode in monastic hagiography. Finally, the title of this book suggests that temple destruction and the renewal of the Mediterranean's cultic topography in late antiquity represented a movement from the temple to the church. At least some monks were engaged in a related but distinct project of movement from the temple to the cell.

Monastic literature is no less shaped by rhetorical strategies and political and/or spiritual agendas than other forms of ancient litera-

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\(^5\) E.g., Fowden 1978, 67–71. I do not mean to single this article out for special criticism; its excellence makes it a good example of this general trend.