

ANTONY (ca. 251-ca. 356)

A Saint, monk, ascetic. He is known as “[the father](#) of the monks.” He was born in an Egyptian village called Koma of the Heracleopolite nome in Middle Egypt. As a youth of about 18 years old, Antony heard in the church the Lord’s command: “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come to follow Me” (Matt. 19:21).

Accordingly, Antony sold his possessions, gave the money to the poor, and devoted himself to a life of asceticism. He began his ascetic life as a village ascetic, and around 285 he set out for the mountains and withdrew himself to Pispir, about 60 kilometers south of Cairo, where today stands the Monastery of al-Maimoun. By about 313 he had completely retired in the “inner desert” at the Red Sea, where he is said to have struggled with demonic powers. His commitment to God, seclusion, self-denial, and his readiness to be a spiritual guide for the monks made him a complete model for an anchoritic way of life.

Antony went to **Alexandria** to strengthen the Christians who were imprisoned at the time of persecution. He supported Patriarch **Athanasius** in his [struggle](#) against the Arians. Toward the end of Antony’s life, the number of his disciples grew. They settled in the very region where today stands his famous monastery in Wadi Araba of the Red Sea. Athanasius, who knew Antony personally, wrote the [Life of Antony](#) shortly after Antony’s death. Its authenticity, which has sometimes been questioned, is now generally accepted by scholars.

Athanasius introduced the West to this ideal monk through his [biography](#) of the great hermit. It had a considerable impact on Christianity: It is sufficient to mention its influence on St. Augustine. *See also* MONASTERY OF ST. ANTONY; MONASTICISM, EGYPTIAN.

[GAWDAT GABRA](#)



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