

The complete text of the Letters of Barsanuphius and John appears here in English for the first time. John Chryssavgis faithful and deft translation brings vividness and freshness to the wisdom of a distant world, ensuring its accessibility to contemporary readers. Addressed to local monastics, lay Christians, and ecclesiastical leaders, these remarkable questions and responses (850 of them) offer a unique glimpse into the sixth-century religious, political, and secular world of Gaza and Palestine during a period torn by doctrinal controversy and in a context shaped by the tradition of the early desert fathers. The great old man, Barsanuphius, and the other old man, John, flourished near Gaza around the early sixth century. Choosing to dwell in complete isolation, they saw no one with the exception of their secretaries, Seridos and the well-known Dorotheus of Gaza. Barsanuphius and John communicated in silence through letters with numerous visitors who approached them for counsel. Curiously, this inaccessibility became the very reason for the popularity of the elders. They formed an extraordinarily open system of spiritual direction, which allowed space for conversation and even conflict in relationships, while also accounting for the wisdom and the wit of the correspondence. Barsanuphius's inspirational advice responds to problems of a more spiritual nature; John's institutional advice responds to more practical problems. The two elders in fact complement one another, together maintaining a harmonious authority-in-charity. Their letters are characterized by spontaneity and sensitivity, as well as by discretion and compassion. They stress ascetic vigilance and evangelical violence, gratitude and joy, humility and labor, prayer and tears.

ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR: John Chryssavgis studied theology in Athens, Greece, and Oxford. He taught patristics and church history in Sydney, Australia, and Boston. His publications have focused on the early ascetic literature of Egypt, Palestine, and Sinai, as well as on Orthodox theology and spirituality.

PRAISE FOR THE BOOK: In the last thirty years or so, virtually all of the literature of early Christian monasticism (the desert fathers and mothers) has been translated or retranslated into English; one of the last holdouts, surprisingly, was the letters of Barsanuphius and John... . John Chryssavgis began to fill in this regrettable lacuna in 2003 with his selection of letters, *Letters from the Desert: Barsanuphius and John*... . Now, with the publication of the first volume of a projected two-volume set of the Letters in the venerable Fathers of the Church series, he is on his way to completing this worthy and worthwhile project... . I know nothing remotely like this extraordinary trove of correspondence and counsel in early monasticism. The monastic and social world of Barsanuphius and John can be very distant, however, so we need a reliable guide such as Chryssavgis to help us navigate the often uncertain terrain... . Chryssavgis knows what he is talking about. - Tim Vivian, *Review of Biblical Literature*

This volume contains a collection of 348 letters in a smoothly readable (and often first) English translation, based both on original manuscripts and contemporary source editions. ? *Vigiliae Christianae* This first volume, in lucid translation and with an excellent bibliography and an introductory essay, all by John Chryssavgis, contain numerous letters from two just such old men of the early sixth century desert of Gaza... . [W]e have here in the first volume and in the one to come a very rich collection of teachings quite similar to the Sayings/Apophthegmata of the desert fathers and mothers as well as their lives. ... These letters are a great treasure. And a second volume is to come. ? *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*

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