

Saint Melania the Elder

Born Rome, Italy

Died c. 400, Jerusalem

Melania was one of the first Roman women to visit the Holy Land. Widowed at twenty-two, she joined a Christian study circle in the home of Marcella of Rome and later sailed to North Africa. One of Melania's first stops was a desert monastery where she presented the abbot Pambo with several chests. *"May God reward you,"* said Pambo, and without opening them, he directed his steward to distribute the contents among the neediest monasteries.

Melania could not contain herself. *"Father, I wish you to know that there are three hundred pounds of silver there,"* she said. Pambo replied: *"Daughter, He for whom you bring it has not need to be told of the quantity ... If you made this present to me it might be well to tell me the weight and the value, but if you offer it to God, who did not disdain a gift of two minutes, be silent."*

Lesson learned, Melania moved on, disguising herself as a slave in order to visit Christians in prison and building a monastery in Jerusalem where she presided over fifty nuns. After thirty-five years in the Holy Land, Melania returned to Rome to meet her granddaughter, Melania the Younger. Forty days after returning to Jerusalem, she died in her sleep.

The Genius of Melania the Elder:

Melania's kinsman, Paulinus of Noa, wrote: *"What a woman she is, if it is permissible to call such a manly Christian a woman! ... she loftily cast herself down to a humble way of life, so that as a strong member of the weak sex she might censure indolent men."*

Reflection:

"The LORD makes poor and makes rich, / he humbles and also exalts.."

1 Samuel 2.7, cited by Paulinus in his memoir about Melania

From Gallick, Sarah, [The Big Book of Women Saints](#), p. 172