

Monks and Property: Rhetoric, Law, and Patronage in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* and the Papyri

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THE REFLECTIONS that follow originate in one of those accidents of discovery that are among the principal charms of teaching. They are for this reason, I hope, particularly appropriate as an offering to John Oates, who was my first ancient history teacher at Yale and whose influence on my own teaching no doubt goes far beyond my awareness of it. As I was preparing for a session of an undergraduate class on Egyptian monasticism, I reread one of the stories in the Sayings of the Desert Fathers, about Abba Gelasios and a piece of property. Two thoughts occurred to me: first, that in places the story as told in the translation I was using (and my students were reading) made no sense; second, that even so the story reminded me strongly of something I had seen in a papyrus. Consultation of the Greek showed that the translation was significantly inaccurate (and the story quite coherent), and a little rummaging turned up the papyrus the story had reminded me of.¹

Poverty, it hardly needs to be said, was one of the cardinal monastic virtues. Theodore of Pherme (5) listed it with *askesis* and avoiding other people as the three chief points to which a

¹Sections of the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, alphabetic collection, are cited throughout this paper (usually in parentheses after the name of the *gerôn* in question) by paragraph number as those are given in the edition of the Greek text in *PG* 65. English renderings from this text are mine unless otherwise noted.

monk needed to give his attention. An entire chapter (ch. 6) in the Systematic Collection of the *Apophthegmata* is devoted to it.² Desiring wealth, Isaiah said (9), was tantamount to disbelieving in God's care and his promises. Both Syncretica (5) and Hyperechios (6) emphasize that it is voluntary poverty that could strengthen the monk's soul. The great exemplar was of course Antony's renunciation, in two stages, of his entire patrimony, even the part he originally destined for his sister's support. The experience did not make Antony more tolerant of others' hesitations about doing likewise, as we see in the anecdote (Antonios 20) in which he causes a man who had kept a little money to be lacerated by dogs. John Cassian (7) quotes Basil to much the same effect: "You have lost the senator without making a monk," he said to a senator who kept back some funds, "not wishing to accept the humility of perfect renunciation and sincere subjection to the cenobitic rule." Arsenios turned down an inheritance (29; cf. John Cassian 8) and gloried in finding himself accepting charity (20), but strangers bearing gifts of money were routinely turned away (Zenon 2; Syst. 6.21–24). Even sacred books were too much of a possession for some (Theodore of Pherme 1, Serapion 2; Syst. 6.6), although Epiphanius thought that owning them was an obligation for those who could afford to (Epiphanius 8). It hardly needs saying that a serious monk would have shabby clothing and not much of it (*e.g.*, Isaac 7, 8, 12). When it was beneficial to leave a place, the fact that it meant abandoning significant amounts of property was of no concern (Ammonios 5). Euprepios helped thieves carry away everything in his cell, even pressing them to take his stick when they forgot it (Euprepios 5; similarly Makarios the Great 18, 40).

²Greek text and French translation in the edition of J.-Cl. Guy, *Les apophthegmes des pères: Collection systématique I* (SC 387 [Paris 1993]). An English translation of chapter 6 made from the Latin version of Pelagius and John is given in Helen Waddell, *The Desert Fathers* (New York 1936) 83–86.

It is with this very firm tradition about poverty (ἀκτημοσύνη, literally “absence of possessions”) in mind that I turn to the story about Gelasios that struck me so forcibly (Gelasios 2; *PG* 65.148):

A cell and the garden plot around it were once left to this Abba Gelasios by an old man, himself also a monk, who lived near Nikopolis. But a tenant farmer of Bakatos,³ who was then *proteuôn* of Nikopolis in Palestine, being a kinsman of the old man who had died, approached Bakatos and asked to get this garden plot, on the grounds that it ought by law to come to him. And he—for he was a violent man—tried to take the plot by force from Abba Gelasios. Not wanting to surrender a monk’s cell to a secular, this Abba Gelasios did not yield it. When Bakatos observed the animals of Abba Gelasios transporting the olives from the garden that had been left to him, he seized them forcibly, took the olives to his own household, and barely let the animals and their drivers go with abuse. The blessed old man did not make any claim to the crop, but he did not concede ownership of the garden, for the stated reason. Incensed at him, and because other needs impelled him (for he was litigious), Bakatos set out for Constantinople, making the journey on foot. When he came to Antioch, as Saint Symeon was then illuminating it like a giant lamp and he had heard reports of him (for he was beyond human scale), he desired—being a Christian—to see the saint. But Saint Symeon, seeing him from his pillar, asked

³The name is a puzzle. Βακάτος in Greek, it does not appear to be attested elsewhere. It does not appear in a search of the DDBDP, of the inscriptions on the PHI 7 disk, or the TLG. It is equally absent from Preisigke’s *Namenbuch* and Foraboschi’s *Onomasticon*. Spelling it Ουκάτος (supposing the commonplace interchange of Β- and Ου- in late Greek) produces an identical result from these searches. It is possible, however, that the Ουκάτιος of *O. Wilck.* 1364 is another Greek rendering of the same name, which the Latin version printed in Migne renders as Vacatus. I have not, however, succeeded in locating any attestation of it as a Latin name. I have also considered the possibility that it is Semitic, but this has yielded no result either. A referee suggests that it is a misspelling of Pacatus, which does occur, *e.g.*, in a 4th-century inscription from Trikomia, near Bostra (*LBW* 1999, dated to 345/6: Πάκατος, one of the masons of a family tomb). This is possible, but not in my view entirely compelling. The use of beta for the phoneme /v/ is extremely common in later Greek, whereas beta/pi interchange is much less common: F. T. Gignac, *A Grammar of the Greek Papyri of the Roman and Byzantine Periods I* (Milan 1976) 63–64, 83–84. As Syriac, unlike Arabic, has a distinct /p/ sound, there is not any obvious pressure from local usage to displace pi in Pacatus with beta, either.

him, “Where are you from, and where are you going?” He said, “I am from Palestine, and I’m going to Constantinople.” He said to him, “For what reason?” Bakatos said to him, “For many needs. And I hope to return and kiss your holy footprints through the prayers of your holiness.” And Saint Symeon said to him, “Reject of men, you don’t want to say that you are going up against the man of God. But it will not be a good trip for you, nor will you see your household again. If you take my advice, you’ll leave here and set out for him, and ask his forgiveness—if, that is, you’re still alive when you get there.” Seized at once by a fever and put to bed by his retinue, he hurried to reach the country in accordance with the instructions of Saint Symeon. But on reaching Beirut he died, without seeing his own home, according to the saint’s prophecy. His son, also called Bakatos, narrated these events after his death to many trustworthy men.

The situation deserves careful analysis. A certain γέρων, who was also himself a monk, has left a χωρίον with cell to Abba Gelasios.⁴ A cell surrounded by a garden plot—at least partly an olive grove, as it develops—suggests an anchoritic existence or membership in a laura-type community. Why it is necessary to specify that he is both “old man” and “monk,” I do not know. The usage of the *Apophthegmata* generally assumes that all Old Men are monks, but not all monks qualify for the title *gerôn*. The property appears to be substantial, as multiple donkey-drivers are involved in carting away the olives, and each driver will have been responsible for two or three donkeys. The unnamed farmer who lays claim to the garden is a kinsman of the deceased, and his claim is based on the view that the property ought to come to him ἐκ τῶν νόμων, presumably meaning on the basis of the rules governing intestate succession. The legacy to Gelasios, by contrast, seems to be embodied in a will (καταλείπω is a regular technical term for testamentary bequest,

⁴I discuss the usage of *chorion* in the later Roman period in *ChrEg* 74 (1999) 329–333. Further discussion on its late antique usage can be found in T. M. Hickey, *A Public “House” but Closed: Fiscal Participation and Economic Decision Making on the Oxyrhynchite Estate of the Flavii Apiones* (diss. U. Chicago 2001).

the equivalent of the Latin *lego* in the language of a legally precise writer).⁵ We are apparently to suppose that the farmer challenged the validity of the will and asserted that the property should pass instead by intestate succession.

The farmer does not, however, trust solely to the strength of his legal arguments. He relies on the fact that his landlord, Bakatos, is also *proteuôn* of Nikopolis in Palestine, as Emmaus was known from *ca* 220.⁶ The precise sense of *proteuôn* has been debated. It sometimes occurs in the papyri in conjunction with other titles, usually high imperial offices, but not always. One interesting example (*Pap.Lugd.Bat.* XIII 13) from A.D. 421 is a declaration addressed to the *proteuôn* of the Herakleopolite nome by a woman who had been accused of assault in a petition from a fellow-villager to the *proteuôn*. This *proteuôn* thus had judicial duties. Generally speaking, the term seems to indicate the very highest status in the local administration, and in one papyrus the term is used to refer to the *curator civitatis*.⁷ But it is not clear that it is itself a specific office.

Bakatos is thus both the patron of his tenant farmer and a civic magistrate in a position to assist the farmer materially. Indeed, the farmer is said to ask Bakatos that he receive the plot, suggesting at first blush that in his official capacity Bakatos was competent to rule on the petition concerning the validity of the will. If he were in fact a *curator civitatis*, this apparently would be the case, as we shall see. That matters were

⁵See H. Kreller, *Erbrechtliche Untersuchungen auf Grund der Graeco-Aegyptischen Papyrusurkunden* (Leipzig 1919) 61–62, 300.

⁶*Der Kleine Pauly* IV 126 s.v. “Nikopolis (7),” citing Eusebius; it was the seat of a bishop in Gelasios’s time. See for the conversion of central villages into cities in the Severan period Hannah M. Cotton and Ada Yardeni, *P.Hever* (Oxford 1997) p.151; Lydda became Diospolis, Beth-Govrin Eleutheropolis.

⁷For a recent list of relevant texts, see K. A. Worp, *ZPE* 115 (1997) 219–220, concluding that “there is no good reason to think that only one particular office in the municipal government brought the title with it.” The case strikes me as remaining open. Hermaion in *P.Lips.* 40.ii.9–16 is *curator* (*logistes* in Greek), but also ἀνὴρ ἀξιόπιστος ... πρωτεύων τῆς Ἐρμοπολιτῶν. In some texts, however, one finds a plural. See *Pap.Lugd.Bat.* XIII 13.1n. and *P.Laur.* II 27.2–3n. for earlier discussions.

more complex, however, is indicated by the fact that ultimately Bakatos does not seem able to prevail locally and must take the case to higher authority—outside the province, in fact. In all likelihood, it was a provincial imperial official, not one at the city level, who had ultimate jurisdiction over the matter, and the appeal to Constantinople may indicate that Gelasios had been successful at the level of the local governor. Bakatos' role, therefore, is indeed one of patron and legal supporter rather than of judge.

Before considering the legal aspect of the situation, it will be useful to turn to an Oxyrhynchos papyrus (*P.Oxy.* XLVI 3311) containing a petition to the *curator civitatis*, or *logistes*, concerning an inheritance. Although no exact date survives, the *curator* is known and the papyrus must date about 373–374. I quote the editor's translation:

To Flavius Sarapodorus, logistes of the Oxyrhynchite nome, from Aurelia Cyrilla and Aurelia Martha, both daughters of Castor, from the same city. Gemellus is a son of Rhodon, our uncle on our father's side. On the point of death he allowed (?) the property left behind by him (to come?) under the control of a certain Ammonius, a monk, who happened to be his uncle on his mother's side, exhorting us not to cause him any trouble. It came about that the said Ammonius, who happened to be a monk, not long after departed from among mankind. Since, then, Ammonius neither drew up a will nor designated heirs, and lived his life to the end as a monk, but a certain Ammon is detaining by force this property that does not belong to him, not being the heir, for this reason we beg your Providence to order the said Ammon to make an appearance in court and to be compelled, since he is not a son of Ammonius or an heir, to restore to us the property of Gemellus, since we are of his father's family, so that as a result of your assistance we may be able to avoid suffering any loss.

There is one significant difficulty in the text of the sentence concerning the passage of Gemellos's property to Ammonios, namely the operative verb. Nonetheless, that stage of the story does not seem really doubtful. Gemellos may have passed his

property by a *donatio mortis causa* or by will, but there is no reason to think that Ammonios's title was unsound, and Cyrilla and Martha do not claim that it was. Their uncle's instructions to them not to disturb Ammonios do not mean that his title was insecure; rather, they are no doubt a reflection of Gemellos's appreciation of the potential for harassment of the monk by his relatives. The succession to Ammon is more doubtful. The women say that Ammonios did not designate heirs or draw up a will; they also assert that Ammon was not the son of Ammonios or his heir. They thus give the impression that his detention of the property was wholly illegitimate. The editor was skeptical:

Ammon is said not to be the heir (11), but probably this means only that he was not, according to the women, heir to the estate of Gemellus. Very likely he was next of kin and heir to Ammonios all right, but the textually doubtful and perhaps deliberately vague form of words in 4–5 was probably meant to imply that Ammonios was never the full legal owner of the estate of Gemellus.

This is perhaps an overstatement of the vagueness; the women do state clearly their view that Ammon was not Ammonios's heir. But it is true that in saying that he was not his son they do not specifically mention other relationships, and it is entirely possible that they were trying to avoid the subject. It is less likely that they are lying outright about the existence of a will. Ammonios might have used a *donatio mortis causa*, however; the petitioners do not at any rate deny that he did so.

The editor raises in a note another issue of importance for our purposes. The word translated "monk" is *apotaktikos*, a term that has been the subject of much discussion. There is no doubt that it derives from the use of ἀποτάσσω to refer to renunciation of the world, a usage common in the ascetic literature, along with the substantive ἀποταγή for the act of renunciation. But to what precise status it refers—or even if it has a precise

meaning—is less clear.⁸ Another suggestion of the Press reader is reported, namely that an *apotaktikos* was not legally permitted to own property. It is clear enough, as the editor points out, that monks appear in papyrological documents owning property. It could be argued that practice did not follow the law. On the whole, however, the evidence in the papyri, particularly in legal documents, for monks' property and financial transactions is so extensive that it is hard to suppose that we are dealing entirely with illegal actions.⁹ Certainly the legislation of Theodosius and Valentinian included in the *Codex Theodosianus* (5.3) takes it for granted that monks and nuns continued to own property, for it specified what was to happen to that property in the event the monk or nun died without written will or a surviving relative entitled to inherit by intestate succession. There is no mention of the possibility that a monk might be unable to own property by virtue of having changed status from secular to religious. Alternatively, if *apotaktikoi* were a particular subgroup of monks, to whom alone applied this prohibition, the suggestion might be saved. But not only is this in itself doubtful; it is impossible to reconcile with the clear evidence of *P.Herm.Landl. G505/F722*, showing an *apotaktikos* named Makarios owning 16 arouras of land in the Hermopolite around A.D. 350. Because this is an official register, we would be ill-advised to suppose illegal ownership.

We must therefore reject the notion that the Oxyrhynchite petition is explained by any otherwise unattested legal prohibition on monks' ownership of property. Instead, the situation seems to be similar to what we may surmise of the incident involving

⁸ E. A. Judge, "The Earliest Use of *Monachos* for 'Monk' (*P.Coll.Youtie 77*) and the Origins of Monasticism," *JbAC* 20 (1977) 72–89, discusses this matter, concluding that *apotaktikos* was an official church designation for recognized male ascetics; *monachos*, by contrast, he thinks was a popular term for the same group. His approach (focused on *P.Col. VII 171*) is rejected by E. Wipszycka, *P.Thomas 8* (*Äm.Stud.Pap. 42* [2001]) pp.45–50.

⁹ See my *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton 1993) 298.

Gelasios. The property was destined by the monk for another monk. Whether he carried out his intentions by will, by a lifetime gift effective at death, or (conceivably, in the case of Ammonios) through intestate succession, the surviving relatives, who may not have been at all close—Cyrilla and Martha are children of Ammonios’s sister’s husband’s brother!—are incensed at the thought of property moving out of the family and try to prevent this from happening. Despite our inability to pin down the exact circumstances, the petition does give an impression of disingenuousness, just as we may imagine was true of the petition against Gelasios.

But we must now return to Gelasios himself, and ask just what a monk was doing receiving productive property and defending his ownership of it against all comers. He is said to be unwilling that a secular should have control of the cell. A suspicious mind may be inclined to see this as an excuse. But we should look more closely at Gelasios, because most of the handful of stories in the *Apophthegmata* that take a different view of property-holding come from him. As far as I know, we have no information about Gelasios except what these stories tell us, and he is nowhere else attested except in the *Synaxarium Alexandrinum*, the information in which also seems to come from two of the anecdotes in the *Apophthegmata*.¹⁰ He supported Juvenal against Theodosius in the conflicts inside the church of

¹⁰ In her introduction to Gelasios (*The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* [London 1979] 45), Benedicta Ward claims that “Gelasios trained as an ascetic in Egypt. He became abbot of Nilopolis in the mid fifth century.” There is no basis for either statement; Nilopolis is Ward’s own alteration (found also in her translation, even though “Nilopolis of Palestine” is hardly a likely toponym) of the Nikopolis found in the Greek text. On the account in the *Synaxarium Alexandrinum* of Michael bishop of Athribis, see J.-M. Sauget in *Bibliotheca Sanctorum* 6 (1965) 89. This source says that Gelasios had a Christian education, became deacon and priest, lived an anchoritic life, and founded a monastery. *Ap.Patr.* Gelasios 1, 3, and 5 suffice to provide all of the details except ordination, which is probably no more than surmise. No sources other than the *Apophthegmata* are cited in F. Halkin, *BHG Nov.Auct.* (Subs.Hag. 65 [1984]) 237 no. 2159h.

Jerusalem after Chalcedon, and his staunchness is the subject of *Ap.Patr.* Gelasios 4. Here is a telling anecdote (Gelasios 5):

They said about him that in youth he adopted the life of poverty and withdrawal. There were also many others at the same time and in the same places embracing the same way of life with him. Among them was an old man of extreme poverty and destitution, who lived in a one-room cell until his death, even though he had disciples in his old age. This man practiced keeping the rule of not owning two tunics nor taking care for the morrow, along with his companions, until death. When it happened that Abba Gelasios, at divine prompting, established the *koinobion*, many garden plots were also offered to him. He also acquired transport animals and cattle for the needs of the *koinobion*. For he consulted the divine Pachomios at the outset about establishing a *koinobion*, and he worked with him in the entire establishment of the monastery. The aforementioned old man, looking at him in these circumstances, and retaining a genuine love for him, said to him, "I fear, Abba Gelasios, lest your mind be bound to the gardens and the other possessions of the *koinobion*." He replied, "Your mind is more bound to the awl with which you work than the mind of Gelasios is to the property."

A nice comeback, a snappy putdown. But the story puts things into perspective. The *chôria*, garden plots, and the transport animals reappear from the previous anecdote. There they were simply (as far as the story recounted) the property of Gelasios; here they are acquired for the sake of the support of the cenobitic monastery, not for Gelasios himself. And Pachomios is invoked in support of the abbot's actions: the patron saint of cenobitic monasticism is said to have been consulted—or so I have rather neutrally translated *χρηματίσας*, which could mean to negotiate with someone, to transact business, to deliberate. It is of course a gross anachronism in this sense, as Pachomios died a century before Gelasios's *floruit*. I am tempted to try to save the narrator's credit by adopting "to be influenced by" which LSJ cite from Plutarch. But the following *τούτῳ συνήργει* shows that this is wasted effort—unless, to be sure, we want to

suppose that Pachomios, operating from the other world, is the subject of the verb, and Gelasios the “him” with whom Pachomios cooperated.

The *Apophthegmata* include another anecdote aimed at showing that Gelasios himself was not tenacious of property (Gelasios 1):

They said about Abba Gelasios that he had a parchment book worth eighteen solidi; it contained the Old and New Testament written in full, and it lay in the church for any of the brothers who wished to read. When a brother from outside came to see the old man and saw it, he desired it, stole it, and went away. The old man did not chase after him to catch him, even though he was aware of the theft. When the man went to the city, he sought to sell it, and when he found someone who wanted to buy it, he demanded sixteen solidi as the price. The man who wanted to buy it said, “First give it to me, I’ll check it, then I’ll pay you the price.” So he gave it to him. He took it, brought it to Abba Gelasios to check it, telling him the amount the seller had stated. The old man said, “Buy it. It is fine and worth the price you have named.” And the man went and said otherwise to the seller, not as the old man had said: “Look, I showed it to Abba Gelasios, and he said to me that it’s steep, not worth the price you stated.” He, on hearing this, said to him, “Didn’t the old man say anything else to you?” He said to him, “No.” Then he said, “I don’t want to sell it any more.” Stung, he went to the old man repenting, and begging him to accept it. But the old man refused to take it. Then the brother said to him, “If you do not take it, I will not have peace.” The old man said to him, “All right, if you won’t have peace I’ll take it.” And the brother stayed until his death, benefited by the old man’s action.

Here the desire to have valuable possessions for the monastery came into collision with the ideal of not resisting evil, in order to transform the evildoer. How to handle an erring brother was a source of some disagreement, and others were harsher on theft. But Gelasios accepted the risk of not getting his Bible back for the sake of trying to recover the monk. This Bible must have been a work of the copyist’s art worthy to stand beside *Codex*

Sinaiticus and similar productions. The value, 18 solidi, or a quarter of a pound of gold, was a sizable amount, enough to buy a nice little olive grove, for example, or to support an ordinary family for several years. Despite his restrained reaction, then, Gelasios is again seen acquiring for the monastery's use property of high value—aristocratic possessions, in fact.

In this regard, Gelasios stands very much alone in the midst of the *Apophthegmata's* celebration of *aktemosyne*. The most obvious reason lies in the origin of the work. The *Apophthegmata* are for the most part a product of the tradition of Sketis and its anchoritic way of life, with some influence from the lauras of Kellia and similar places.¹¹ At least some title-pages of manuscripts mention Sketis explicitly as the source of the sayings.¹² The major figures of cenobitic monasticism play only a limited role in it, although they are not completely absent. A brief detour into the textual history of the work will perhaps clarify matters.

There are two major traditions, the alphabetic/anonymous and the systematic. Jean-Claude Guy showed, conclusively to my mind, that in the form we have them these both go back to a common ancestor, which he thought was of an alphabetic/anonymous type but lacking some of the material now found in that type of manuscript.¹³ Be that as it may, the Latin translations of late antiquity go back to a point when the two traditions had already branched, but before they acquired some of the accretions found in later manuscripts. One of the major absentees from the Systematic Collection as translated into

¹¹ A detailed discussion of the centrality of Sketis in the *Apophthegmata* is given in Guy's introduction to his edition (*supra* n.2) 35–46.

¹² See 'Ιερὰ Μονὴ καὶ Ἀρχιεπισκοπὴ Σινᾶ, Τὰ νέα εὐρήματα τοῦ Σινᾶ (Athens 1998), Catalogue (by P. G. Nikolopoulou) M154, an unpublished minuscule manuscript dated to the 10th–11th century: βίβλος περιέχουσα ἀποφθέγματα τε καὶ πράξεις ἁγίων γερόντων τῶν ἐν τῇ Σκίτη.

¹³ *Recherches sur la tradition grecque des Apophthegmata Patrum* (Sub.Hag. 36 [1962]). See also the introduction to his edition of the Systematic Collection (*supra* n.2).

Latin in the mid-sixth century by Pelagius and John (both deacons, later popes) is precisely our Abba Gelasios. Only the anecdote about the stolen Bible, which was a nice object lesson in long-sufferingness, appears. All the rest is missing. The Sahidic translation of the Systematic Collection, which appears to date from the same era and to have been made from a Greek text similar to the original of the Latin, is ignorant of Gelasios (the Bible anecdote, if it was included, would have come in a part now lost).¹⁴ It should follow that Gelasios was largely or entirely absent from the original, ancestral collection, and that he represents an enhancement of later editors, of the sixth century (the case of the purloined Bible) or later (the remainder), and probably in Palestine. As Gelasios's activity falls precisely in the period when the first written collections seem to have been composed, this is hardly surprising.¹⁵ The enhancement of the Systematic Collection did not include these additional items, perhaps because they were not obviously suitable for any of the chapters. Just which virtue, after all, is displayed in exemplary fashion? There is no chapter on the virtue of acquisitiveness or litigiousness in the Systematic Collection. If we were to prepare a handbook on the virtues desirable in the head of a monastery, with his administrative duties in mind, Gelasios would be a prime source. But that was never an interest in editing the *Apophthegmata*, which were intended for the development of the individual monk by way of imitation of the great monks of the past.

¹⁴ M. Chaîne, *Le manuscrit de la version copte en dialecte sahidique des "Apophthegmata Patrum"* (Cairo 1960); see the table on p.157 for the state of the manuscript, which breaks between xv.88 and xvii.11.

¹⁵ Apart from the introduction to Guy's edition, cf. generally L. Regnault, *Les pères du désert à travers leurs apophthegmes* (Sablé-sur-Sarthe 1987) 67–69. Regnault argues further for the Palestinian origin of the earliest alphabetic/anonymus collection (70–72). For the apophthegmata in Palestine see in more detail his remarks at 73–83. He points out that Palestinian anecdotes like Gelasios 1, by figuring already in the Latin version, suggest that the latter was based on a Greek text edited in Palestine.

If this analysis is correct, the tensions visible inside the *Apophthegmata* in matters of monks' property come in large measure from the distinction between the more solitary forms of asceticism and the cenobitic form, and particularly from the collection's origins in the one but preservation and development in the other. But even outside of the cenobitic environment there are cracks in the façade of propertylessness. Isaac the priest of Kellia (4) reports, "I knew a brother harvesting in a field, and he wanted to eat a stalk of wheat. And he said to the lord (*kyrios*) of the field, 'May I eat one stalk of wheat?' And he, hearing him, was amazed, and said to him, 'The field is yours, father, and are you asking me?' That's how punctilious the brother was." Since we are curious rather than in search of edification, we would like to know just what *kyrios* means, if the brother had leased the field out to this person, or if the *kyrios* was instead the property agent of the brother and managing it directly for him. The story would have a bit more force if the latter were the case, but in either case the brother still owned agricultural property and presumably derived an income from it. Another case, in which the monk actually worked the land himself, is reported in the sayings of Poimen (22). The monk gives the produce away in charity. Poimen praises him, but after a rebuke from Abba Anoub he reverses course and on the monk's next visit tells him that this is not appropriate work for a monk. "I know no other work but this, and I can't not sow my field," replies the brother sadly. Poimen was undoubtedly not sympathetic with the dilemma faced by the heads of cenobitic monasteries in dealing with property. He is quoted (181) as saying to the *hegoumenos* of one such *koinobion* who asked him how to acquire the fear of God, "How can we acquire the fear of God, with bellies full of cheese, and jars of pickles?"

The very fact that the monks of Sketis were so insistent on the need for renunciation of property is a sign that the issue posed a problem for them too, and not only for cenobitic monasteries.

They thus confirm what the papyri lead us to suspect, that true renunciation of property was, like not drinking wine, at the heroic end of the spectrum, not in the average part. This should not be surprising. Monks had to be supported somehow, and it is improbable that this support could have come entirely from the products of the craft work, like ropes, mats, and baskets, that the monks mention so often. It was, evidently, just barely possible for a very ascetic monk to provide for his food needs from such work. Lucius is said to have earned 16 nummia a day, of which he spent 2 as support for someone to pray for him when he was asleep or eating; the remaining 14 nummia bought his food. In the fifth century, an income of 5,110 nummia per year would have amounted to a bit less than three-quarters of a solidus; at best it would have bought 7 artabas of wheat, yielding Lucius about 1,840 calories a day—probably a bit below subsistence even for a sedentary life.¹⁶ And that takes no account of other expenses. Who paid for the Old Men's disciples? Even a single garment (and most—unlike the Old Man who rebuked Gelasios—had more) cost something. The tales of robberies would be meaningless if cells were devoid of material possessions. In fact it is by now well known that anchoritic and laura cells were mostly not extremely spartan, but often multi-roomed and well-equipped. Renunciation did not necessarily come cheap.

The choices were essentially to accept gifts or to retain some source of income other than basketweaving. There are many signs of discomfort about this matter. Selling products for more than their market value or to a buyer who did not really want

¹⁶ The nummus or nummion was the standard bronze coin (with barely a trace of silver now) in circulation. The normal rate of the period was 7,200 nummia to a solidus (*Nov. Val.* 16, of A.D. 445). If Lucius worked every day, 14 nummia for 365 days = 5,110 nummia, or .71 of a solidus. Wheat was rarely cheaper than 10 artabas per solidus and could go 20–30% higher even without a major famine. Even on an optimistic assessment, that would buy 7 artabas. At a caloric yield of 3,200 calories/kg and about 30 kg of wheat per artaba, we come to about 1,840 calories per day.

them was one form of covert gift, but the sterner ascetics denounced this escape.¹⁷ There are also anecdotes about refusal of gifts, as I mentioned earlier. Once again, these may point to the prevalence of both of the practices thus denounced, however much their avoidance was held up as an example to be followed. Ownership of property was the other main possibility. Although (as Poimen pointed out) active working of agricultural land was incompatible with devoting one's time to prayer, receiving rents from leased land or (for the really wealthy) land managed by a steward did not interfere with basketweaving, mortification, and prayer. To be sure, it also was a form of trusting in worldly wealth rather than in God, allowing the appearance rather than the reality of renunciation and poverty. But we can hardly doubt that it was common enough. After all, the anchorite was responsible for his own keep.¹⁸ Many ascetics came from privileged backgrounds, and even the heroic Arsenios kept a coverlet, a small pillow, and sandals, and his feet were clean.¹⁹

The exigencies of cenobitic monasticism were more considerable. One might expect economies of scale, but numbers also opened up possibilities for possessions that an individual would not have had, including institutional-sized buildings and boats. A responsible abbot would take more precautions

¹⁷ Pachomian *Paralipomena* 23 (transl. Armand Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia* II [Kalamazoo 1981] 19–70; this section at 47–48). E. Wipszycka, *JJurP* 26 (1996) 194–195, sees this as a fiction, alien to Pachomios's thought, because he was otherwise willing to take gifts. But Poimen (10) has a similar reaction to purchase of unwanted ropes as a form of disguised gift. It is entirely possible that Pachomios might have found outright gifts preferable to concealed ones, particularly because overpayment for mats, sandals, and the like left too much discretion in the hands of an ordinary monk.

¹⁸ Cf. Wipszycka (*supra* n.17) 189: "Les moines vivant dans les ermitages prenaient sur eux la responsabilité de leur subsistance. Ils tiraient les moyens pour vivre non seulement de leur travail, mais aussi des biens qu'ils avaient portés avec eux du 'monde' ou qu'ils possédaient encore dans le 'monde', par exemple d'une terre donnée à bail."

¹⁹ Abba Romaios 1, generally recognized to be Arsenios by similarity of the anecdote with Arsenios 36.

against shortages of food than a zealous anchorite would for himself alone. Ewa Wipszycka has emphasized the difficulty and burdensomeness of the task abbots faced in managing the feeding and supply of communities of several hundred, particularly since the extreme asceticism celebrated in the sources was certainly not typical of most monks.²⁰ Even if (as Wipszycka emphasizes) gifts for current use were not reliable enough to be the main source of income, gifts of capital—what we would call endowment today—would be of long-term value in guaranteeing part of the needed revenue. Communities could receive both types of gifts as corporate bodies without necessarily compromising the discipline of individual members, although surely more temptations were present where goods abounded. An abbot could be protective of property as a kind of trustee for the community, where as an individual he might have felt inclined to let it go.

It is in this context that we must see the literary and textual problem posed by the sayings of the desert fathers. As a collection of disparate sayings and stories, drawn from oral tradition, rather than a unitary work composed by an individual, they contained from the earliest compilations various tensions between contradictory views. The Old Men were conscious of these contradictions and explained them in part as the product of the different stages in the development of the monks to whom sayings were given.²¹ The sayings were certainly part of the instruction of cenobitic monasteries—after all, that is where they were edited and copied. The passages dealing with virtues like self-control, chastity, patience, avoidance of judgment, prayer, hospitality, obedience, humility, and charity would be as applicable to cenobitic life as to eremitic, perhaps in some cases even more applicable—there would be more opportunities

²⁰ Wipszycka (*supra* n.17) 184.

²¹ Cf. Guy (*supra* n.2) 24.

to obey and to avoid judgment of others in a community than in solitary life.²² But it was precisely in the matter of property that matters were not so simple. The gap between the ideology of the *Apophthegmata* and the reality of the monastery cannot have escaped the eyes of the more zealous.²³ Not everyone would grasp easily the distinction between individual and corporate property and the difference between what one does as an individual and what one does in a position of responsibility for others. Abba Gelasios, added to the alphabetic collection, may have helped to reassure monks that they should not apply the rhetoric of Sketis too literally to their corporate life.

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²² The injunction μή κρίνετε is prominently displayed today at the Monastery of St Catherine (Sinai).

²³ For a general discussion of the social and economic realities of Egyptian monasticism, see James Goehring, "The World Engaged: The Social and Economic World of Early Egyptian Monasticism," in *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert: Studies in Early Egyptian Monasticism* (Harrisburg 1999) 39–52.