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MONEY IN THE APOPTHHEGMATA PATRUM*

Late-antique and Byzantine hagiographic texts are difficult to interpret. They abound in *toposes* and often reveal chronological inconsistency in the presentation of events. Nevertheless, they remain valuable sources of historical knowledge, especially about the daily life in eastern provinces of the Roman Empire. Events presented in hagiographic texts most frequently take place in the countryside, as well as in small and medium-sized towns, and very rarely concern large cities of the Empire; in all cases the action is connected to a short stay of the main hero in a given place. These conditions apply to *Apophthegmata Patrum*, a collection of stories – accounts by famous Egyptian ascetics. The Sayings of the Desert Fathers were probably written at the turn of the 5th and 6th century¹. It is a valuable source of information about the Egyptian monasticism and offers insight into the social and economic conditions in this province². That is why the issue of money

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¹ W. HARMLESS, *Desert Christians. An Introduction to the Literature of Early Christian Monasticism*, New York 2004, p. 19sqq.

² Editions of *Apophthegmata Patrum*: *Apophthegmata Patrum. Collectio alphabetica*, [in:] PG, vol. LXV, col. 71–440 (cetera: *Coll. alph.*) (= CPG 5560); *Apophthegmata Patrum. Adhortationes sanctorum patrum (Verba seniorum)*, [in:] PL, vol. LXXIII, col. 855–1022 (= CPL 5570). Numbering of individual *Apophthegmata* according to the system introduced by K. HEUSSI, *Der Ursprung des Mönchtums*, Tübingen 1936, p. IX–XII. Cf. also L. REGNAULT, *Les Sentences des Pères du désert. Collection alphabétique*, Solesmes 1981, p. 201–289. On *Apophthegmata Patrum* cf. also W. BOUSSET, *Apophthegmata. Studien zur Geschichte des ältesten Mönchtums*, Tübingen 1923, p. 1–93; M. VAN ESBROECK, *Apophthegmata Patrum*, [in:] *Dictionnaire encyclopédique du christianisme ancien*, vol. I, Paris 1983, p. 192–193; J.C. GUY, *Recherches sur la tradition grecque des Apophthegmata Patrum*, ²Bruxelles 1984; L. REGNAULT, *Les Apophthegmes des Pères en Palestine aux V^e–VI^e siècles*, Ir 54, 1981, p. 320–330; IDEM, *Les pères du désert à travers leurs apophthegmes*, Sablé-sur-Sarthe 1987, p. 67–69. Cf. also G.E. GOULD, *Moving on and Staying put in the Apophthegmata Patrum*, [in:] SP, vol. XX, ed. E.A. LIVINGSTONE, Leuven 1989, p. 231–237; O. HESSE, *Das Verhältnis von Stadt und Land in den Apophthegmen*, [in:] SP, vol. XX..., p. 250–255; D. BURTON-CHRISTIE, *The World in the Desert*, New York–Oxford 1993; H. RAMELLI, *Apophthegmata patrum*, [in:] *Encyclopedia of Ancient Christianity*, vol. I, ed. A. DI BERARDINO, Downers Grove 2014, p. 187–189; J. PAULI, *Apophthegmata patrum*,

in the context of this work is definitely worth investigating. However, before we begin our discussion, a few words will be devoted to *Apophthegmata* itself, as well as its main locations.

***Apophthegmata Patrum*. A few remarks on the source and places of interest**

Apophthegmata (ἀποφθέγματα τῶν πατέρων) is a collection of stories, sayings and the so-called inspiring examples from the lives of ascetics who lived in Early Byzantine Egypt. The text itself was probably collected at the turn of the 5th and 6th century. *Apophthegmata* consist of the names of famous ascetics, which are arranged alphabetically and are accompanied by sentences (most often of moral value) that were allegedly uttered by the monks, as well as descriptions of their deeds (praying habits, fasting and begging for miracles). For this reason they played a substantial role in shaping the Egyptian monasticism, notably the ideals of monks' asceticism and devotion³. The unknown author, or probably authors, of the collection, used the sentences of famous eremites of previous centuries for their own reasons, and they relied heavily on the oral tradition.

A few words also need to be said about the clusters of hermitages in the Early Byzantine Egypt, where the heroes of *Apophthegmata*, the famous Egyptians hermits, lived⁴. In the 4th century three independent centres of anchoritic life were founded, the earliest in Central Egypt, and two other West to the Nile Delta, at the Sketis desert and in Nitria. The oldest center of eremitic life came to being around 305 in Pispir under the lead of Anthony⁵. Later, around 320, Ammun, his follower, founded a similar establishment in Nitria at the Western Desert, and another center formed twenty kilometers from Nitria itself⁶. According to Palladius of Helenopolis, around 390 the place was inhabited by 600 monks⁷. The founder of the third most important eremitic establishment in Egypt was Macarius, who around 330

[in:] *Lexikon der antiken christlichen Literatur*, ed. S. DÖPP, W. GEERLINGS, Freiburg im Breisgau-Basel-Wien 1998, p. 45–46.

³ Cf. E.A. JUDGE, *The Earliest Use of Monachos for "Monk" (P. Coll. Youtie 77) and the Origins of Monasticism*, JAC 20, 1977, p. 72–89.

⁴ Here you can only refer to the most relevant literature in selection, cf. for example H. HENNE, *Documents et travaux sur l'anachoresis*, [in:] *Akten des 8. Internationalen Kongresses für Papyrologie*, Wien 1956, p. 59–66; A. GUILLAUMONT, *Un philosophe au désert. Evagre le Pontique*, RHR 181, 1972, p. 29–56; IDEM, *La conception du désert chez les moines d'Égypte*, RHR 188, 1975, p. 3–21; IDEM, *Histoire des moines aux Kellia*, OLP 8, 1977, p. 187–203.

⁵ ATHANASIUS ALEXANDRINUS, *Vita s. Antonii*, 12, 3–4 (cetera: ATHANASIUS, *Vita S. Antonii*) (= ATHANASE D'ALEXANDRIE, *Vie d'Antoine*, ed. et trans. G.J.M. BARTELINK, Paris 1994 [= SC, 400], p. 168); PALLADIUS, *Historia Lausiaca*, 21, 1, vol. II, ed. C. BUTLER, Cambridge 1904 (cetera: PALLADIUS, *Historia Lausiaca*); *Coll. alph.* 457, Macarius 4; *Coll. alph.*, Sisoës 48 (49).

⁶ ATHANASIUS, *Vita S. Antonii*, 60, 2–4; 10 (= SC, 400, p. 294–296); *Historia monachorum in Aegypto*, 22, 9; 29, 1, ed. A.J. FESTUGIERE, Bruxelles 1971 [= SHa, 53] (cetera: *Historia monachorum in Aegypto*); *Coll. alph.* 34, Antonius 34.

⁷ PALLADIUS, *Historia Lausiaca*, 7, 2.

settled in Sketis, a desert located circa 100 kilometers south of Alexandria⁸. They were the three main hermitage centers in Egypt in the 4th century, places where the heroes of *Apophthegmata* lived and worked. However, a close analysis of specific accounts indicates that in many cases we are unable to determine the centre from which a given author originates, with the exception of stories that seem to point to the desert around Alexandria as a place of action⁹.

Money in everyday life of the Egyptian monks

The monks became members of small communities in the Egyptian desert in various circumstances and for various reasons, as their incentives were not always religious, but, for the most part, they were penniless. However, a number of *Apophthegmata* indicate that they did own money. Where did it come from? A close analysis of the available accounts reveals three sources: small alms collected during visits in cities, donations of pilgrims visiting hermitages (these were often large sums, as the example of Melania the Younger indicates¹⁰) and the work of the monks' own hands, which involved the production of pots, mats, baskets and clothing – often cheap and of poor quality, but nevertheless necessary (it was mostly for slaves as well as field and construction workers)¹¹. Some of the Egyptian monks performed

⁸ *Historia monachorum in Aegypto*, 21; JOANNES CASSIANUS, *Collationes Patrum*, 15, 3, 1 (= CPL 512); JOANNES CASSIANUS, *Institutis coenobiorum et octo principalium remediis libri XII*, 5, 41 (= CPL 513); *Coll. alph.* 454, Macarius 1; *Coll. alph.* 455, Macarius 2; *Coll. alph.* 456, Macarius 3; *Coll. alph.* 460, Macarius 7; *Coll. alph.* 475, Macarius 22; *Coll. alph.* 479, Macarius 26; PALLADIUS, *Historia Lausiaca*, 17, 2–3; SOZOMENUS, *Kirchengeschichte*, III, 14, hrsg. J. BIDEZ, G.CH. HANSEN, Berlin 1995. Cf. also I. DALMAIS, *Aux origines du monachisme scétiote au Wadi – Natrun: saint Macaire le Grand* (c. 300–390), *MCop* 21/22, 1993, p. 45–49; A. GUILLAUMONT, *Le problème des deux Macaires dans les Apophthegmata Patrum*, *Ir* 48, 1975, p. 41–59; J.C. GUY, *Le centre monastique de Scété au IV^e et au début du V^e siècle. Prosopographie et histoire*, Roma 1964; IDEM, *Le Centre Monastique de Scété dans la littérature du V^e siècle*, *OCP* 30, 1964, p. 129–147; W. HARMLESS, *Desert Christians...*, p. 19.

⁹ Cf. E. WIPSZYCKA, *Moines et communautés monastique en Égypte (IV–VIII siècles)*, Varsovie 2009, p. 403–436.

¹⁰ PALLADIUS, *Historia Lausiaca*, 54–55, 6. Also Melania the Elder, when travelling through Egypt, offered a silver chest containing 300 pounds of silver (προσήνεγκα αὐτῷ ἀργενταρίαν τριακοσίων λιτρῶν ἀργυρίου) to Pambo, a famous monk inhabiting the Nitrian Desert. Allegedly, Pambo claimed he had no use for the riches and handed it to the poor, specifically to the monks from Libya, because, as he claimed, *the monasteries there are destitute* (ταῦτα γὰρ τὰ μοναστήρια πένεται πλέον). Pambo handed the silver over to the community's treasurer, the little-known Orygenes, and forbade him from sharing the money with his brothers. In his opinion, Egypt was a wealthy land and the monks were able to make a living off the work of their own hands, cf. PALLADIUS, *Historia Lausiaca*, 10, 2; 4. Melania the Younger (granddaughter of Melania the Elder) gave the money, amounting to 500 gold pieces (πεντακόσια νομίσματα), to Dorotheus, one of the monks from Antinoe, who, not knowing what to do with such a large sum, left only three gold pieces to himself (τρία λαβὼν μόνα). He handed the rest over to Diocles who most probably was a treasurer, cf. PALLADIUS, *Historia Lausiaca*, 58, 2.

¹¹ Cf. account of HIERONYMUS (*Epistulae*, 125, 11 (= CPL 620)), who claims: *In Egypt the monasteries make it a rule to receive none who are not willing to work; for they regard labour as necessary not*

more demanding tasks, for instance as calligraphists, and were commissioned with different tasks by workshops in Alexandria which in late antiquity was the largest centre where the Bible was copied¹².

For some of the monks, visiting the city, especially the market, was an occasion for collecting alms. Meanwhile, others tried to sell products entrusted to them by other brothers. The authors of *Apophthegmata* note that the alms were accepted due to the monks' poverty. They mention the case of Arsenius who collected alms and indeed was extremely poor, which was supported by the fact that he could not even afford to buy sheets¹³. Additionally, which the author does not mention, Arsenius, like most of his brothers, was an elderly man. An "unknown senator" (?) traveling through Egypt got acquainted with him, appreciated his virtue and decided to bequeath his property to the monk. However, Arsenius rejected the offer¹⁴. We are not sure if it actually happened, but it is a confirmed fact that monks accepted alms which were often very generous and, in time, contributed to the community's economic activities, as the financial surplus had to be managed. The turn of 4th and 5th century was the time when monasteries did not have an established legal status yet but individual monks, often coming from wealthy families, owned large fortunes (which they usually inherited). Such income served as financial means for

only for the support of the body but also for the salvation of the soul (trans.: JEROME, *Letters and Select Works*, trans. W.H. FREMANTLE, G. LEWIS, W.G. MARTLEY, [in:] NPFC II, vol. VI, ed. P. SCHAFF, H. WACE, New York 2007, p. 248). Cf. also E. WIPSYCKA, *Les aspects économiques de la vie de la communauté des Kellia*, [in:] *Le site monastique copte des Kellia. Sources historiques et explorations archéologiques. Actes du Colloque de Genève (13–15 août 1984)*, ed. P. BRIDEL, Genève 1986, p. 117–144; EADEM, *Le monachisme égyptien et les villes*, TM 12, 1994, p. 1–44; P. BALLET, *Potiers et poteries de l'Égypte chrétienne*, [in:] *Les Coptes. Vingt siècles de civilisation chrétienne en Égypte*, Paris 1997, p. 42–49; IDEM, *L'Approvisionnement des monastères. Production et réception de la céramique*, [in:] *Egypt 1350 BC – AD 1800. Art Historical and Archaeological Studies for Gawdat Gabra*, ed. M. EATON-KRAUSS, C. FLUCK, G.J.M. VAN LOON, Wiesbaden 2011, p. 27–33; A. KONSTANTINIDOU, *Aspects of Everyday Life in a Monastic Settlement. Amphorae and Cooking-wares (4th–7th c.) from the Old Monastery of Baramus in the Wadi Natrun (Egypt): A First Glance*, [in:] *Late Roman Coarse Wares, Cooking Wares and Amphorae in the Mediterranean. Archaeology and Archaeometry. Comparison between Western and Eastern Mediterranean*, ed. S. MENCHELLI, S. SANTORO, M. PASQUINUCCI, G. GUIDUCCI, Oxford 2010 [= BAR, 2185 (II)], p. 951–961; J.E. GOEHRING, *Monasticism in Byzantine Egypt: Continuity and Memory*, [in:] *Egypt in the Byzantine World, 300–700*, ed. R.S. BAGNALL, Cambridge 2007, p. 390–407; D. CANER, *Wealth, Stewardship, and Charitable "Blessings" in Early Byzantine Monasticism*, [in:] *Wealth and Poverty in Early Church and Society*, ed. S.R. HOLMAN, Grand Rapids 2008, p. 221–242.

¹² Cf. an example of this is Philoromos who after 40 years of working as a calligraphist allegedly saved a sum of 250 *solidi* (διακόσια πεντήκοντα νομίσματα ἐκ τοῦ ἔργων χειρῶν αὐτοῦ), which is quite probable. On the benefits of working as a calligraphist, cf. PALLADIUS, *Historia Lausiaca*, 45, 3. About the profitability of the calligraphy profession, cf. also MARC LE DIACRE, *Vie de Porphyre, évêque de Gaza*, 5; 9, trans. et ed. H. GRÉGOIRE, M.-A. KUGENER, Paris 1930 [= CB].

¹³ *Coll. alph.* 58, Arsenius 20.

¹⁴ *Coll. alph.* 67, Arsenius 29.

developing religious centers and communities¹⁵. Of course, similar instances must have occurred earlier, but this aspect of the monastic history is not thoroughly explored¹⁶.

In *Apophthegmata* the issue of property ownership is discussed on several occasions, for instance with questions of private property, or what can be seen as luxury. There were surely various views on the matter, but the general approach taken in *Apophthegmata* is that any form of luxury (that is, “property surplus”) should be foreign to monks. In other words, one can own only what is necessary for life, what can be called a man’s “biological existence”. This approach is depicted in the example of Theodore of Ferme who one day acquired three books, for which he was criticized by other eremites. He sold the books (their price is not mentioned), and he offered the money to the poor, regaining respect of the brothers¹⁷.

Prices and wages

In *Apophthegmata Patrum*, like in other Early Byzantine hagiographic texts, we find little information about prices and wages. In one of them we read about Gelasios, who was the owner of a volume consisting of the Old and New Testament worth 18 solidi (ἄξιον δεκαοκτὼ νομισμάτων), which lay in the church for any of the brothers who would like to read it. Another anchorite, visiting Gelasios, stole it and attempted to sell it at the market for a sum of 16 solidi (νομίσματα δεκάξι)¹⁸. Regardless of the specific context, the financial side of the event is worth considering. Is the mentioned sum of money in any way relevant? Do other written sources of that time offer any information about the price of the Bible? We find it in *Pratum spirituale* which mentions a copy of the Gospels worth 3 solidi¹⁹. However, this account seems implausible as Early Byzantine authors tend to determine prices, wages and taxes with certain numbers they prefer, including the digit “three”²⁰. Unfortunately, we do not have access to any reliable data on the book market at that time, but only to very general negative comments about high prices of books.

¹⁵ M. CHOAT, *Property, Ownership and Tax Payment in Fourth-Century Monasticism*, [in:] *Monastic Estates in Late Antique and Early Islamic Egypt. Ostraca, Papyri, and Essays in Memory of Sarah Clackson*, ed. A. BOUD’HORS, J. CLACKSON, C. LOUIS, P. SIJPESTEIJN, Cincinnati 2009, p. 129–140. The earliest accounts describing monasteries as land owners can be found in *Codex Theodosianus*, 5, 3, 1, ed. T. MOMMSEN, Berolini 19.

¹⁶ E. Wipszycka, *Moines et communautés...*, p. 471–565.

¹⁷ *Coll. alph.* 268, Theodor 1.

¹⁸ *Coll. alph.* 176, Gelasios 1.

¹⁹ JOANNES MOSCHOS, *Pratum spirituale*, [in:] PG, vol. LXXXVII, col. 2997 (= CPG 7376).

²⁰ Cf. R. MEHRLEIN, *Drei*, [in:] RAC, vol. IV, ed. T. KLAUSER, Stuttgart 1959, col. 269sq; B.L. IHSEN, *John Moschos’ Spiritual Meadow. Authority and Autonomy at the End of the Antique World*, Washington 2013, p. 45–69.

In *Apophthegmata* we find only two accounts that refer to wages. One of them depicts a monk, Lucius, whose job was weaving mats from palm fibre. He earned 16 nummi (ποιῶ πλεῖον ἢ ἔλαττον δεκαἕξ), two of which (δύο νομμία) he placed at the gate (εἰς τὴν θύραν) of the church probably not as alms for the poor but as a payment for someone who would pray for him when he was asleep or maybe also having a meal²¹. In a different part of the text we read about a monk whose job, which remains unspecified, earned him daily two *siliquae* (δύο κεράτια καθ' ἡμέραν), which constituted quite a decent income. It is doubtful that such a sum of money could be earned by weaving ropes or mats (monks' most common occupations). If we accept this account as reliable, the monk's task must have been much more demanding, and therefore profitable, such as calligraphy which was often commissioned by merchants from Alexandria, the centre where copies of famous and valuable texts were produced²². However, it is also possible that the aforementioned account should be treated with caution, especially if we realise its context. And so, Abba Pambo was visited by two monks seeking his advice. One of them asked if it was appropriate to eat two cakes every two days, and the other if it was not too high a salary to earn two *siliquae* daily. The accumulation of number two, both as quantity and value, makes this account rather implausible²³.

In the *Apophthegmata* we also find less specific references to the issue of purchasing and selling goods. Abba Agathon and Abba Amon allegedly never bargained when buying products, for instance linen used for ropes; they accepted the price offered by the seller, which was probably exploited by traders. Allegedly, they did the same when selling their own products, and accepted the prices offered by buyers²⁴. What is the meaning of this account? Is it fictional? Not necessarily. The monks' attitude (not bargaining when buying and selling) resulted from a specific worldview. Selling self-made products served to support themselves, and not to have a large income. What did they sell? They usually sold woven baskets which were commonly used, not only in Egypt, and due to their common use wore off quickly²⁵. The second most needed product were palm mats used for sleeping and other forms of recreation. What did the monks buy at the market? *Apophthegmata* mentions the purchasing of palm leaves, used for mat weaving²⁶, and linen, used

²¹ *Coll. alph.* 446, Lucius 1.

²² Cf. C. WENDEL, *Der Bibel-Auftrag des Kaiser Konstantins*, ZBi 56, 1939, p. 165sq; G.A. ROBBINS, *Fifty Copies of the Sacred Writings (VC 4.36): Entire Bibles or Gospel Books?*, [in:] *SP*, vol. XIX, ed. E.A. LIVINGSTONE, Leuven 1989, p. 92; B.M. METZGER, B.D. EHRLMAN, *The Text of the New Testament. Its Transmission, Corruption and Restoration*, New York–Oxford 2005, p. 69sq.

²³ *Coll. alph.* 763, Pambo 2.

²⁴ *Coll. alph.* 98, Agathon 16. Cf. also P. ROUSSEAU, *Ascetics, Authority and the Church in the Age of Jerome and Cassian*, Oxford 1978, p. 43.

²⁵ *Coll. alph.* 363, Isidor 7.

²⁶ *Coll. alph.* 937, Or 4.

for clothing (that the monks wore as well as sold)²⁷, ropes²⁸ and food (which is not found in *Apophthegmata*).

When it comes to purchasing raw materials for manufacturing craft, although they were not very expensive, the monks sometimes needed to borrow money from anachorites living in neighbouring cells. It follows from this that the monks, even though they lived in communities, were not always well organized. Of course, this applies to early phases of forming the Egyptian monasticism. *Apophthegmata*, although completed and collected between the 5th and 6th century, are mostly concerned with the life of monks in the second half of the 4th century. On the verge of the 4th century, as Palladius confirms²⁹, some of the communities already had a treasurer. He appears to be a person managing alms from insistent visitors, for instance from Roman matrons and devoted officials visiting hermitages in Egypt, most often on their way to the Holy Land.

Taxes

In *Apophthegmata Patrum* we also find references to the issue of taxes. To some extent, they influenced the number of peasants seeking refuge on the desert, trying to escape from tax collectors. Some of them arrived to hermitages and stayed there for the rest of their lives. It is confirmed by an eyewitness, Sulpicius Severus who, describing his journey from Carthage to Alexandria, met near Trypolis a group of Christians leading ascetic lifestyle. They settled on the desert only in order to evade taxes³⁰. Tax collectors were aware of such mass escaping, and they attempted to find the fugitives. In the *Apophthegmata* of Abba Ammonatas we read about an instance when an imperial official (ἄρχων) visited a hermitage intending to collect capitation tax (ἐπικεφάλαια τοὺς μοναχοὺς). His appearance caused uneasiness as the monks simply did not have the money to pay. What is interesting, the account does not argue whether the tax is valid or not. Further description is clearly fictional, if not infantile. The monks decided to travel and see the Emperor to receive a tax exemption, and they succeeded, thanks to Ammonatas who claimed to go to-and-fro one night and got the exemption with the Emperor's seal on it (ἔχων τὴν Σάκραν ὑπὸ τοῦ βασιλέως ἐσφραγισμένην). On his way back, the eremite also visited Alexandria where the document was further confirmed by the local officials (ὑπέγραφα αὐτὴν παρὰ τῶν ἀρχόντων). This story, although largely fictional, nevertheless depicts the process of acquiring imperial immunity by monks or bishoprics with accrued tax debts³¹.

²⁷ *Coll. alph.* 417, Joannes Persicus 2.

²⁸ *Coll. alph.* 584, Poemen 10.

²⁹ PALLADIUS, *Historia Lausiaca*, 10.

³⁰ SULPICIUS SEVERUS, *Dialogus*, I, 3, 6, [in:] CSEL, vol. I, ed. C. HALM, Wien 1866, p. 155.

³¹ *Coll. alph.* 154, Ammonatas.

When it comes to the capitation tax, concerning the monks from Sketis, we read about it in another account in *Apophthegmata*. The hero of the story, Abba Mios, most probably a fugitive slave, traveled each year to Alexandria to pay his owners *a tax fee for himself* (φέρων τὴν μισθοφορίαν τοῖς κυρίοις αὐτοῦ). The character of this payment is not specified, but it is most probably a capitation tax that the owners had to pay for their slave³². This account, although brief, indicates one of the problems arising in contacts with hermitages (not only in Egypt), that is, the practical aspect of collecting capitation tax which had to be paid by all inhabitants of the Empire. The clergy was exempted from it, but the exemption did not include monks, who at that time had the status of lay people, and slaves, whose owners had to make the payment (which is well illustrated in the example above).

Apophthegmata also signals the problem of slavery for debts which was very common, and mainly caused by insolvency of the debtor (who often fell victim to a usurer) or the inability to pay taxes. References to the latter can be found in one of the accounts in *Apophthegmata*. It describes a woman who had to pay a deposit originally taken by her husband who died and did not reveal the place where he kept the money. The account is, however, brief. The circumstances of taking the deposit are not explained, and we do not know who the deceased was – a banker or a private person (a friend or a neighbour) who only managed the capital (for the time of a journey?). The widow, who did not know the location of the money, was threatened with slavery, and she was accused of appropriating the money. Of course, it cannot be excluded that similar situations really took place, especially regarding women who suddenly became widows. What is worse, the woman's children were also under threat. It was only the "miraculous" intervention of Abba Macarius which saved her from being sold as a slave³³. The eremite simply "asked" the deceased about the place where he kept the money. The deposit was found, and the widow's good name was regained.

Moral evaluation of money

Among the many illustrations of everyday life, in *Apophthegmata Patrum* we find only two accounts about the moral evaluation of money. We read about one of the monks, Agathon, who never offered any alms, as he considered *offering as well as collecting anything* to be a form of compassion. He recognized a sign of compassion even in creating opportunities for others to do good (in this case, offering alms)³⁴. His views are peculiar, and suit a Buddhist monk rather than an Egyptian hermit.

Another issue that seems important to the authors of *Apophthegmata* is the source of the money for alms. In other words, whether a dishonest way of acquiring

³² *Coll. alph.* 540, Mios 2.

³³ *Coll. alph.* 460, Macarius 7.

³⁴ *Coll. alph.* 99, Agathon 17.

money can disqualify it from becoming charity, or conversely, is a perfect opportunity for the donor (often a wealthy heir of a family fortune) to redeem his faults (often committed when actually getting the money). In the analysed example the income comes from prostitution. Can the money be given away as alms, then? According to Abba Timothy, it can, as the money earned this way and offered to the poor becomes an act of faith. It is also a way to support those without the means necessary to live, and it is far more important than the way the money was earned. The example from *Apophthegmata*, most probably fictional, describes a woman who got more and more involved in prostitution, but at the same time offered larger sums of money to charity. And it is in this increase that Abba Poemen sees hope and growing religious devotion, and the realization that her way of earning money is improper (although he refrains from calling it sinful). The woman finally abandons her old way of life and understands that a Christian should not work in this profession³⁵.

The analysed cases constitute merely two accounts concerning the moral assessment of money found in the impressive collection of *Apophthegmata*. As I mentioned in the introduction, the small number of instances of this kind is a characteristic quality of the Early Byzantine hagiographic texts. Why did their authors not consider it necessary to propagate “proper” Christian ways of dealing with money, to create and to found a conviction, as was done by authors of sermons at that time, that material goods, including money, should be viewed as nothingness, a value of little importance? Providing a rational explanation in this regard is difficult.

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Monetary issues are sporadically mentioned in *Apophthegmata Patrum*. What is the epistemic value of these accounts? It is difficult to determine. Personally, I would not take for granted any specific data, for instance prices and wages. However, the analysed collection holds unquestionable epistemic value as it offers insight into the daily life in the Egyptian province, it depicts the problems that the heroes of *Apophthegmata*, the eremites as well as people seeking their advice and refuge (for instance from tax collectors), had to face. Most importantly, however, they describe the daily lives of the Egyptian eremites. In other words, despite the general lack of precision in the analysed accounts (including poor chronological indicators), *Apophthegmata* are a valuable source of knowledge in the research on the social and economic history of the Early Byzantium.

³⁵ *Coll. alph.* 917, Timotheus 1.

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Abstract. The objective of this paper is to discuss accounts related to money in *Apophthegmata Patrum*, a collection of sayings attributed to famous Egyptian monks. The collection as we know it was produced in the 6th century. By describing the organisation of monastic centres in Egypt in the 4th and 5th century *Apophthegmata* also offer us some information about the period’s economic aspects. However, by and large, the data is very general. It pertains to: prices, wages, tax issues as well as money that was given to monks by pilgrims. Limited as it is, the data confirms that money was present in the everyday lives of Egyptian monks in late antiquity. Naturally, the major consideration behind whether a monk possessed money was whether he had contact with the outside world. This included selling self-made handcraft at markets, particularly woven mats and ropes, clay pots and sometimes also more specialised items (such as copied codices of the Bible). In *Apophthegmata Patrum*, similarly to what is the case with other Early Byzantium hagiographic texts, we find little information about moral evaluation of money or about the “appropriate” way to manage it.

Keywords: *Apophthegmata Patrum*, early Byzantine hagiography, late Roman economy, early Byzantine economy, early Byzantine monasticism.

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