MORE SAYINGS OF THE DESERT FATHERS

Most of the *Tales and Sayings of the Desert Fathers (apophthegms)* have survived in Greek, and most of them are now available in English, almost 2500 in number. A further 600 items in six languages have been available in French for some time, but often only in second- or even third-hand translations. These have now been newly translated directly from the original languages by scholars skilled in those languages and are presented, alongside an Introduction and brief notes, to the English reader who wishes to know more of those men and some women who rejected 'the world' and went to live in the desert regions of Egypt and elsewhere in the fourth to seventh centuries AD.

JOHN WORTLEY was born and educated in Britain, where he studied under Joan Hussey and Cyril Mango. Appointed Professor of Medieval History at the University of Manitoba in 1969, he developed a program of Byzantine studies there until his retirement in 2002, since when (as Professor Emeritus) he continues to research and publish, latterly concentrating on the *Apophthegmata Patrum.* In retirement he has held visiting fellowships at the Universities of Belfast (Queen's, twice), Princeton, and Durham. He has always maintained close ties with the Paris Byzantinists; it was at the instigation of the late Joseph Paramelle that he began work on the *Répertoire of Byzantine Beneficial Tales*. His translation of John Skylitzes' *Synopsis Historiarum* (Cambridge, 2010) was made in close cooperation with Bernard Flusin and Jean-Claude Cheynet. His pioneering work on the role of relics in Byzantine society can now be conveniently consulted in *Studies on the Cult of Relics in Byzantium up to 1204* (2009). He has produced a translation of the Systematic series of Sayings of the Fathers, *The Book of the Elders* (2012); a select edition and a translation of *The Anonymous Sayings of the Desert Fathers* (Cambridge, 2013); a new translation of the Alphabetical Sayings, *Give Me a Word* (2014); and a new translation of Palladius' *The Lausiac History* (2015). Ordained in the Church of England in 1959/60, he continues to serve as an honorary assistant priest in a city parish.

MORE SAYINGS OF THE DESERT FATHERS

An English Translation and Notes

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with a preface by

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For Kiera and Thea
εὐλογήσαι σε Κύριος καὶ φυλάξαι σε

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Abbreviations

AP	*Apophthegmata Patrum*, Sayings [of the Desert] Fathers.
APalph	The 'alphabetic' series of the above, *Apophthegmata Patrum, collectio alphabetica*, ed. Jean-Baptiste Cotelier, in *Monumenta Ecclesiae Graecae*, vol. 1 (Paris 1647); re-ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, *PG* 65:71–440; tr. John Wortley, *Give Me a Word* (Yonkers, NY 2014).
APanon	The 'anonymous' sayings, ed. and trans. John Wortley, *The Anonymous Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, Cambridge, 2013.
APsys	The 'systematic' sayings, ed. and trans. Jean-Claude Guy, *Les apophtegmes des pères: Collection systématique*, 3 vols., SC 387, 474, and 498, Paris, 1993, 2003, 2005; tr. John Wortley, *The Book of the Elders*, Cistercian, 2012.
CSCO	*Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*
Guy	Jean-Claude Guy, *Recherches sur la tradition grecque des Apophthegmata Patrum*, Brussels, 1962, reprint 1984 with corrections.
HL	Palladius, *The Lausiac History*, ed. G. J. M. Bartelink, *Palladio, La Storia Lausiaca*, Mondadori, 1974; trans. John Wortley, *Palladius of Aspuna, Lausiac History*, Cistercian, 2015.
HME	*Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, ed. André-Jean Festugière, Brussels, 1961; ed. Michelle Szkilnik, *Historia monachorum in Aegypto / L'histoire des moines d'Egypte; suivie de la vie de Saint Paul le Simple*, Geneva, 1993; tr. Festugière, *Les moines d'Orient*, Paris, 1964; tr. Norman Russell, *The Lives of the Desert Fathers*, Oxford and Kalamazoo, 1981.

PG	*Patrologia Graeca*
P&J	Pelagius and John, *Verba Seniorum*, ed. Heribert Rosweyde, *Vitae Patrum*, Antwerp, 1615, Books v and vi, reprinted in Jacques-Paul Migne, *PL* 73:855–1022; trans. Benedicta Ward, *The Desert Fathers: Sayings of the Early Christian Monks*, London: Penguin, 2003.
PL	*Patrologia Latina*
PO	*Patrologia Orientalis*
PS	John Moschos, *Pratum Spirituale*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, *PG* 87:2851–3112; tr. John Wortley, *The Spiritual Meadow*, Kalamazoo, 1992, reprint 1996, 2001; tr. Jean Bouchet, *Fioretti des moines d'orient*, Paris, 2006.
ROC	*Revue de l'Orient chrétien*
SC	*Sources chrétiennes*
Synagogê	Paul Evergetinos, *Synagogê*, Venice, 1783; 6th edition, 4 vols. Athens, 1980.
VA	*Vita Antonii,* ed. and tr. G. J. M. Bartelink, *Athanase d'Alexandrie, Vie d'Antoine*, SC 400, Paris, 1994; Athanasius of Alexandria, *The Life of Antony, the Coptic Life and the Greek Life*, tr. Tim Vivian and A. N. Athanasakis, Cistercian, 2003.

Preface

Samuel Rubenson

The sayings of the Desert Fathers, known as the *Apophthegmata Patrum,* are among the most widely read and frequently quoted texts in the history of Christianity. Originating in late fourth-century Egyptian monasticism and enriched by later generations of monks, collections of sayings rapidly spread throughout the ancient Christian world and were soon translated into all the languages of the early medieval Christian world. In the pointed sayings and dialogues, as well as in short, often witty, anecdotes, the wisdom and the experiences of the monastic tradition are transmitted. The often drastic and exaggerated words and deeds of the monastic figures are fashioned to be remembered, if not memorized. In a form similar to proverbs and caricatures, the sayings are both educational and entertaining. Although depicted against the background of the desert in the language of late antiquity and clothed in monastic garb, the sayings have a timeless quality, reflecting people's hopes, efforts, failures, and successes in relation to each other and to God.

Although the sayings are sometimes used as reliable evidence for the daily life of fourth-century monks in the deserts of Egypt and are even regarded as representing their authentic words, they should rather be seen as vehicles for conveying a tradition of formative wisdom. The precise location and identity of such-and-such a teacher or his/her disciples are clearly secondary to the maxim, dialogue or parable. This is evident in the textual transmission, for the context of each saying often differs, while the essence remains unchanged. The absence of any larger narrative or of direct connections between the sayings has resulted in a fluid tradition with innumerable variants. There are collections ranging from a few dozens to thousands of sayings, in which selection and sequence varies *ad infinitum*. The extant manuscripts indicate that each collection of sayings has its own logic and purpose. Every manuscript is an edition based on

what was available to the scribe and prescribed by the interests and needs of the readers for whom it was intended.[1]

It is thus not as primary sources for historical research, nor as archaeological remains to be puzzled over, that the sayings have come down to us. The collections preserved are rather the result of conscious efforts to preserve an understanding of how an ideal life (or rather, the true life) can be formed, through spiritual and mental training; how virtues can be cultivated and vices be uprooted. The purpose is formative, not informative; and the kind of formation proposed is more concerned with self-knowledge than knowledge of the world. Although the sayings were created and transmitted within the monastic tradition, they do not deal exclusively with monastic issues or details of monastic life. They deal with those fundamental human issues identified by Evagrius Ponticus as the eight fundamental 'thoughts' or passions: gluttony, lust, and avarice, resentment, wrath, and despair, vainglory and pride.[2] The sayings do not, however, transmit a specific teaching on these, but rather a wide variety of examples of how to and how *not* to deal with them. Far from promoting any rules or even any confidence in rules, the sayings are designed to provoke reaction, repentance and renewal. Rather than teaching one standard to live by, they present an almost infinite number of examples, leaving it to the reader to discern which examples speak most directly to his/her own striving.

On the surface the impression gained from reading the sayings may deceive, and has deceived much of modern historically oriented scholarship. We encounter a radical and harsh desert environment in which the elders appear as figures larger than life, demonstrating a lifestyle with little, if any, concern for bodily needs or even for bodily health. But, as recent scholarship has been able to show, the image is largely a literary construct.[3] Just as icons are not, and are not intended to be, photographic reproductions, but images for contemplation, so are the sayings objects to be used for self-formation. The early monastic movement was not a movement of poor and uneducated radical Christians who turned their back on society to defeat their own weaknesses and become divine. It was rather an attempt to develop an educational setting for the Christian tradition.[4] The sayings were shaped, collected, and organized to

[1] Guy, pp. 231–3.
[2] Evagrius, *Practicus* cc. 6–14, Eng. tr. Robert Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, Oxford, 2003, pp. 97–100.
[3] James Goehring, 'The Encroaching Desert: Literary Production and Ascetic Space in Early Christian Egypt', *JECS* 1 (1993), 281–96.
[4] Lillian Larsen, 'The Apophthegmata Patrum and the Classical Rhetorical Tradition', *Studia Patristica* 39 (2006), 409–16.

transmit a formative tradition of wisdom, deeply rooted in the ancient world and now filled with Biblical references.[5]

Our earliest written evidence of a set of monastic sayings is found in the writings of Evagrius Ponticus, a Cappadocian monk who settled in Egypt in the late fourth century and died in 399. Many of his writings are themselves in the form of a series of gnomic sayings, and at the end of one of his most important works, the *Practicus,* he underlines his teaching by a series of sayings.[6] This, however, is probably not the beginning of the sayings-tradition but rather an example of it. Here we see how ascetic teachers adapted models of teaching inherited from the classical schools to their own ends. Sayings attributed to wise men and set in dialogues or short stories had been in use at all levels of teaching.[7] A generation before Evagrius both Basil of Caesarea in his *Rules*, and Gregory of Nyssa in his biography of his sister, mention the replacement of material from the classical myths by proverbs and other Biblical texts for teaching young Christians. The rules of Pachomius attest, moreover, to an emphasis on using the Bible for elementary teaching that most probably reaches back to the first decades of the monastic tradition.

The Biblical texts could not, however, satisfy the need for teaching materials capable of transmitting the legacy of the first monastic generations to the rapidly growing monastic community in Egypt and abroad. The roots of our collections of sayings and of hagiographic tales too are to be found in that need. Although the context for the majority of sayings in the early collections is the monastic environment of Lower Egypt, our earliest evidence of their use comes from Palestine. There are good reasons for regarding the monastic communities of the Gaza region as instrumental in the shaping of the literary tradition of the sayings. Here there was a strong connection with Egypt, as a number of influential monks had an Egyptian background; there were also close connections to the educational and literary traditions of the city of Gaza.[8] A further consideration is that the ecclesiastical conflicts of the later fifth and early

[5] For the use of the Bible, see Per Rönnegård, *Threads and Images: The Use of Scripture in Apophthegmata Patrum*, Winona Lake, IN, 2010.

[6] Evagrios, *Practicus* cc. 91–100, Eng. tr. Sinkewicz, pp. 112–13. (See the appendix to the Introduction, below.)

[7] Lillian Larsen, 'On Learning a New Alphabet: The Sayings of the Desert Fathers and the Monostichs of Menander', *Studia Patristica* 55 (2013), 59–77.

[8] Lucien Regnault, 'Les apophthegmes en Palestine aux ve–vie siècles', *Irénikon* 54 (1981), 320–30 and Samuel Rubenson, 'The Egyptian Relations of Early Palestinian Monasticism', in *The Christian Heritage in the Holy Land,* ed. Anthony O'Mahoney, Göran Gunner and Kevork Hintlian, London, 1995, pp. 35–46.

sixth centuries made it important to manifest an adherence to the tradition of the fathers of monasticism in Egypt.

As far as we can discern, the literary tradition of sayings developed first in Greek and was only subsequently translated into Coptic and other languages. Our earliest evidence of Greek collections (except for the writings of Evagrius) is found in certain early sixth-century authors from Palestine. These do not indicate what kind of collection they refer to, but there are good reasons to think that the original form of the two main and closely interrelated Greek collections, the systematic collection (GS),[9] with the sayings organized in thematic chapters, and the alphabetic collection (G),[10] with its attached anonymous sayings (GN),[11] in which the sayings are organized alphabetically according to the names of the fathers to whom they are attributed, were made at the end of the fifth century.[12] But although these two collections, with all their variations, dominate the manuscript tradition, and are the only Greek collections edited thus far, there is ample evidence that there have also been numerous other collections transmitting sayings in Greek, collections not necessarily dependent on the two main strands.[13]

The first translations of sayings collections date back to the same time as the early references to the Greek collections. A Latin translation of the early systematic collection is in the manuscripts attributed to Pelagius and John, identified as Pelagius, bishop of Rome in the mid-sixth century, and his disciple John, and thus usually referred to as the collection of Pelagius and John (PJ).[14] This collection is of great importance because both the text and the earliest manuscripts containing it predate the earliest Greek manuscripts of the same collection. PJ has been the most prominent collection in the Latin tradition, but there are manuscripts containing several other Latin collections, all most probably made in the

[9] Ed. Jean-Claude Guy, *Les apophtegmes des pères: Collection systématique*, 3 vols., SC 387, 474 and 498, Paris: Cerf, 1993–2005.

[10] Ed. Jean-Baptiste Cotelier, *Ecclesiae Graecae monumenta*, vol. 1, Paris, 1677, pp. 338–712, reprinted in *PG* 65:71–440.

[11] Ed. John Wortley, *The Anonymous Sayings of the Desert Fathers: A Select Edition and Complete English Translation*, Cambridge, 2013.

[12] Jean-Claude Guy, 'Introduction', *Les apophthegmes des pères I–IX*, SC 387, Paris: Cerf, 1993, pp. 79–84.

[13] Chiara Faraggiana di Sarzana, *'Apophthegmata Patrum:* Some Crucial Points of Their Textual Transmission and the Problem of a Critical Edition', in *Historica, Theologica et Philosophica, Critica et Philologica*, ed. E. A. Livingstone, *Studia Patristica* 29, Leuven: Peeters, 1997, pp. 455–67 and Britt Dahlman, 'The Collectio Scorialensis Parva: An Alphabetical Collection of Old Apophthegmatic and Hagiographic Material', in *Early Monasticism and Classical Paideia*, ed. S. Rubenson, *Studia Patristica* 55.3, Leuven: Peeters, 2013, pp. 23–33.

[14] Ed. Heribert Rosweyde, *Vitae Patrum V–VI*, Antwerpen, 1615, reprinted in *PL* 73:851–1024, 1060–2.

sixth century. Three of these, the collection of Martin of Braga (MD), that of Paschasius of Dumium (PA), and the one called *Commonitiones Sanctorum Patrum* (CSP), have been edited,[15] the fourth, preserved in a Darmstadt manuscript (LD) remains unedited.[16] Although strongly interrelated in content, all four present independent selections and organizations of the material.

The earliest manuscripts preserving the sayings are, however, a number of Syriac manuscripts dated to the 530s. These testify to one or more translations into Syriac in the same period. Although they contain more or less the same material as the early Greek and Latin collections, the Syriac manuscripts are clearly independent in their organization of their material. Thus they probably depend on Greek collections that predate the creation of the systematic and alphabetic collections.[17] These early Syriac collections were replaced in the seventh century by a huge collection of sayings edited by Paul Bedjan (Be) and E. A. W. Budge (Bu).[18]

Of the systematic collection known in both its Greek and its Latin form, there is also a Coptic translation (Ch), most probably from the sixth or seventh century. The text is unfortunately still unknown except for minor fragments, only identified as preserved in one manuscript – and this has ended up divided between a number of libraries.[19] Although mostly following the same text and sequence as the Greek and Latin, it includes a number of sayings not attested in any other known collection. A number of sayings attributed to St. Antony and St. Macarius are,

[15] MD–Barlow, ed. Claude W. Barlow, *Martini Episcopi Bracarensis Opera Omnia*, Papers and Monographs of the American Academy in Rome 12, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950. CSP–Freire, ed. José Geraldes Freire, *Commonitiones Sanctorum Patrum. Uma nova colecção de Apotegmas, Estudio filológico, Texto critico*, Coimbra, 1974. PA–Freire, ed. José Geraldes Freire, *A versão latina por Pascásio de Dume dos Apophthegmata Patrum*, vols. 1–2, Coimbra, 1971.

[16] The manuscript was transcribed by the late René Draguet, but never published. It has now been thoroughly revised and published by Lund University as Darmstadt_1953 on http://monastica.ht.lu.se.

[17] Bo Holmberg, 'The Syriac Collection of *Apophthegmata Patrum* in MS Sin. syr. 46', in *Early Monasticism and Classical Paideia*, ed. S. Rubenson, *Studia Patristica* 55.3, Leuven: Peeters, 2013, pp. 35–57.

[18] Ed. Paul Bedjan, *Acta martyrum et sanctorum Syriace*, vol. 7, Paris, 1897 (repr. Hildesheim, 1968) and E. A. W. Budge, *The Book of Paradise, Being the Histories and Sayings of the Monks and Ascetics of the Egyptian Desert by Palladius, Hieronymus and Others. The Syriac Texts, According to the Recension of 'Anân-Îshô' of Bêth 'Âbhê,* Edited with an English Translation, vols. 1–2, London, 1904.

[19] Ed. Marius Chaine, *Le manuscrit de la version copte en dialecte sahidique des 'Apophthegmata Patrum'*, Bibliothèque d'études coptes 6, Cairo, 1960 and Alla I. Elanskaya, *The Literary Coptic Manuscripts in the A.S. Pushkin State Fine Arts Museum in Moscow*, Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae:* Texts and Studies of Early Christian Life and Language, vol. 18, Leiden, 1994, pp. 11–40.

moreover, found in a Bohairic collection of material concerning these two central figures of the early monastic tradition.[20]

In addition to the very early translations into Latin, Syriac, and Coptic, we do also have evidence for an early translation into Palestinian Aramaic.[21] Collections of sayings were subsequently translated into Sogdian, Georgian, Armenian, Arabic, and Ethiopic, as well into Church Slavonic. Of the Sogdian version only fragments have come to light,[22] but for the others there is a substantial manuscript tradition and thus evidence for a wider use of the sayings. In Georgian both an alphabetic-anonymous collection (IA and IN) and a systematic collection (IS) have been critically edited from a number of manuscripts, in both cases similar to and clearly dependent on the Greek equivalents, but with significant variants.[23] In Armenian two different translations of a collection have been published (HSa and HSb),[24] the earlier one being significantly shorter than the second, but no studies based on the numerous manuscripts preserved have yet been undertaken.

The sayings also enjoyed a considerable popularity in Arabic, but until now only one Arabic manuscript has been studied in detail.[25] Studies on a number of Arabic manuscripts have shown that the transmission is very complex, not least due to the fact that the Arabic versions were made on the basis of Greek as well as Syriac and probably Coptic models.[26] In Ethiopic the sayings are preserved in a number of collections, often

[20] Ed. Émile Amélineau, *Monuments pour servir à l'histoire de l'Égypte chrétienne aux IVe et Ve siècles*, Mémoires de la mission archéologique française au Caire IV.2, Paris, 1895.

[21] The Palestinian Aramaic fragments have been edited by P. Kokowzoff, *Nouveaux fragments syro-palestiniens de la Bibliothèque Impériale publique de Saint-Pétersbourg*, Saint Petersburg, 1906 and H. Duensing, *Christlich-palästinensisch-aramäische Texte und Fragmente nebst einer Abhandlung über den Wert der palästinensischen Septuaginta*, Göttingen, 1906, pp. 38–41, as well as *Neu christlich-palästinensisch-aramäische Fragmente* (Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, Philologisch-historische Klasse, Jahrgang 1944 no. 9), Göttingen, 1944, pp. 223–7.

[22] Ed. Nicholas Sims-Williams, *The Christian Sogdian Manuscript C2*, Schriften zur Geschichte und Kultur des Alten Orients, Berliner Turfantexte 12, Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1985.

[23] Ed. Manana Dvali, *Šua saukunet'a novelebis jveli k'art'uli t'argmanebi*, vol. 1, *K'art'uli paterikis ert'izveli redak'c'iis Ek'vt'ime At'onelis t'argmani XI s. xelnaceris mixedvit'*, Tbilisi, 1966 and vol. 2, *Abanur-anonimuri paterikebi*, Tbilisi, 1974.

[24] Nerses Sarkisian, *Vark' srbots' harants' ew k'aghak'avarut'iwnk' nots'in [Lives and Deeds of the Holy Fathers]*, vols. 1–2, Matenagrut'iwnk' naxneats' series, Venice, 1855.

[25] Ed. Jean Mansour, *Homélies et légendes religieuses: un florilège arabe chrétien du xe siècle (Ms. Strasbourg 4225)*, PhD dissertation, Strasbourg, 1972. A new edition of the Copto-Arabic version based on manuscripts held at the Monastery of St. Macarius was published by the monastery in 2013.

[26] Jean-Marie Sauget, *Une traduction arabe de la collection Apophthegmata Patrum de 'Enānīšō': Étude du ms. Paris arabe 253 et des témoins parallèles*, CSCO 495, Leuven, 1987.

mixed with material from other early monastic literature such as the *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* and John Moschos' *Pratum spirituale*.[27] No comprehensive study of their transmission or models has, however, yet been done.

Since each individual saying is a verbal image of its own, sayings can be and have been combined freely. In the manuscript traditions in the various languages we thus find a very high degree of fluidity in transmission. The selection of sayings as well as their sequence varies from manuscript to manuscript, the variations indicating both what was available and what was of interest to the scribe of the manuscript. Individual sayings are often divided or combined in various ways, sometimes with change or even loss of attribution. Sayings are a living tradition that in every generation has been adapted to the needs of the people who used and transmitted them. Thus the manuscripts cannot provide a basis on which to reconstruct the original text or the order of the sayings; and they certainly cannot be organized into a simple stemma. What they do provide and what we are able to study is a variety of preserved glimpses of a rich tradition at diverse stages in its process of transmission.[28]

[27] Four Ethiopic collections have been published by Victor Arras, *Collectio Monastica*, CSCO 238–39, Script. Aeth. 45–46, Lovanii: Peeters, 1963; *Patericon Aethiopice*, CSCO 277–8, Script. Aeth. 53–54, Lovanii: Peeters, 1967; *Asceticon Aethipicae*, CSCO 459, Script Aeth. 78, Lovanii: Peeters, 1984; and *Geronticon*, CSCO 477, Script. Aeth. 80, Lovanii: Peeters, 1986.

[28] For a dynamic research tool for the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, see http://monastica.ht.lu.se.