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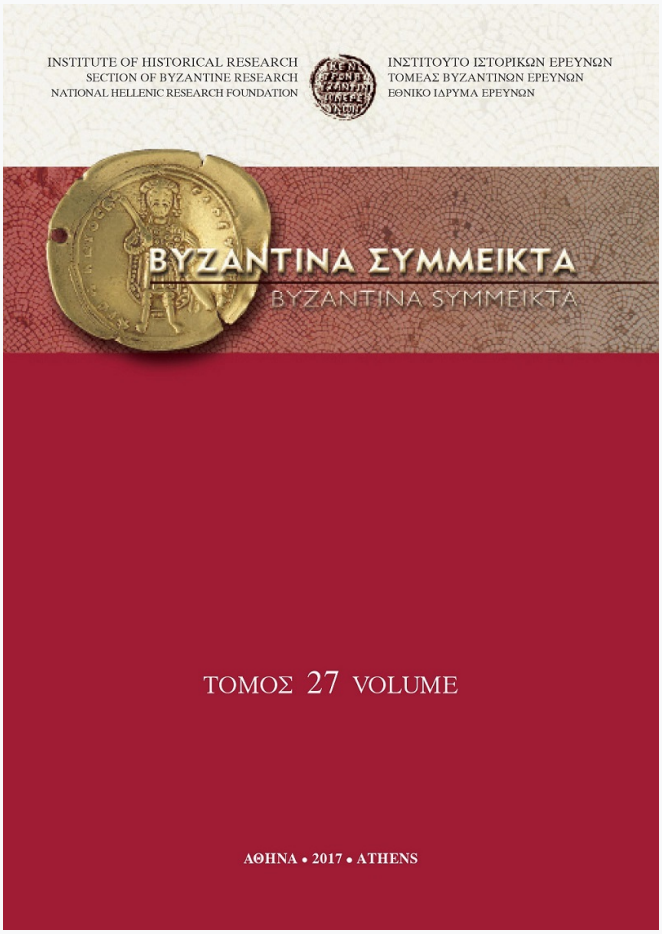

"Something Good for the Soul". Crime and Repentance in Apophthegmata Patrum

Fotis VASILEIOU

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ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΝΑ ΣΥΜΜΕΙΚΤΑ
BYZANTINA SYMMEIKTA

Fotis Vasileiou

Something Good for the Soul. Crime and Repentance in *Apophthegmata Patrum*

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Fotis Vasileiou

Something Good for the Soul. Crime and Repentance in *Apophthegmata Patrum*.*

In his *New History*[1], the historiographer Zosimus famously explains Constantine's conversion to christianity as following:

> (Constantine) *ταῦτα* (the deaths of Crispus and Fausta) *συνεπιστάμενος ἑαυτῷ, καὶ προσέτι γε ὅρκων καταφρονήσεις, προσήει τοῖς ἱερεῦσι καθάρσια τῶν ἡμαρτημένων αἰτῶν εἰπόντων δὲ ὡς οὐ παραδέδοται καθαρμοῦ τρόπος δυσσεβήματα τηλικαῦτα καθῆραι δυνάμενος. Αἰγύπτιός τις ἐξ Ἰβηρίας εἰς τὴν Ῥώμην ἐλθὼν καὶ ταῖς εἰς τὰ βασίλεια γυναξὶν συνήθης γενόμενος, ἐντυχὼν τῷ Κωνσταντίνῳ πάσης ἁμαρτάδος ἀναιρετικὴν εἶναι τὴν τῶν Χριστιανῶν διεβεβαιώσατο δόξαν καὶ τοῦτο ἔχειν ἐπάγγελμα,*

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1. Zosimus, *New History*, ed. F. Paschoud, *Zosime*, *Histoire nouvelle*, Paris 2003, 2.29.3; cf. engl. transl. by R. T. Ridley, Canberra 1982: "Since he (Constantine) was himself aware of his guilt and of his disregard for oaths as well, he approached the priests seeking absolution, but they said that there was no kind of purge known which could absolve him of such impieties. A certain Egyptian, who had come from Spain to Rome and was intimate with the ladies of the court, met Constantine and assured him that the Christian religion was able to absolve him from the guilt and that it promised every wicked men who was converted to it immediate release from all sin. Constantine readily believed what he was told and, abandoning his ancestral religion, embraced the one which the Egyptian offered him".

τὸ τοὺς ἀσεβεῖς μεταλαμβάνοντας αὐτῆς πάσης ἁμαρτίας ἔξω παραχρῆμα καθίστασθαι. Δεξαμένου δὲ ῥᾷστα τοῦ Κωνσταντίνου τὸν λόγον καὶ ἀφεμένου μὲν τῶν πατρίων, μετασχόντος δὲ ὧν ὁ Αἰγύπτιος αὐτῷ μετεδίδου, τῆς ἀσεβείας τὴν ἀρχὴν ἐποιήσατο τὴν μαντικὴν ἔχειν ἐν ὑποψίᾳ.

In a few words, the pagan historian managed not only to undermine the Emperor's devotion to his new religion, but also to stage Christian bishops as unscrupulous men, without limits in their thirst for power, and their congregation as a gathering of impure sinners that no other religious group would have accepted. To be sure, Constantine's conversion started well before 326, the year Crispus and Fausta were executed[2]. He saw his famous vision, which was associated with his turn to Christianity, around 312, before the battle of the Milvian Bridge; and even before that, he had shown his concern and sympathy for the Christians and their Church[3]. Constantine's motivation for converting to Christianity, however, is not the subject of this article. I am more interested in the truism on which Zosimus built this argument: Christians forgave the unforgivable; their church welcomed the abominated.

The fact that repentant sinners could be accepted in the Christian congregation was not a complete fabrication by the devoted pagans. Christianity invested in the power of repentance and forgiveness. The Gospels offer many examples of repentance and absolution. Zaccheus (*Luk.* 19.1-10), the Publican of the parable (*Luk.* 18.9-14), the penitent thief (*Luk.* 23.40-43), and even st. Peter (*Mat.* 26.33-37; *Mar.* 14.29-31; *Luk.* 22.33-34; *Joh.* 13.36-38), the rock the Church was build on, lapsed,

2. On Crispus see H. A. Pohlsander, Crispus: Brilliant Career and Tragic End, *Historia. Zeitschrift für alte Geschichte* 33 (1984), 79-106. On Fausta see D. Woods, On the Death of the Empress Fausta, *Greece & Rome* 45.1 (April 1998), 70-86.

3. The bibliography on Constantine's relation with the Christians is extensive. See the more recent discussions of T. D. Barnes, *Constantine: Dynasty, Religion and Power in the Later Roman Empire*, Malden, MA and Oxford 2011, as well as his classic *Constantine and Eusebius*, Cambridge – London, 1981. Also, H. Dörries, *Das Selbstzeugnis Kaiser Konstantins*, Göttingen 1954; H. A. Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops. The Politics of Intolerance*, Baltimore 2000; T. G. Elliott, *The Christianity of Constantine the Great*, Scranton 1996; T. Grünewald, *Constantinus Maximus Augustus: Herrschaftspropaganda in der zeitgenössischen Überlieferung*, Stuttgart 1990; P. Stephenson, *Constantine. Unconquered Emperor, Christian Victor*, London 2009, 167-189; R. van Dam, *The Roman Revolution of Constantine*, Cambridge 2007.

repented and was pardoned. Moreover, influential fathers of the Church like Origen, Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa, taught that God would forgive everything, provided that the sinner demonstrated true repentance, while hagiography offered examples of holy sinners, male and female[4]. Nevertheless, this kind of generosity towards the fallen was not embraced by all Christians. Novatians in Rome, Donatists in North Africa, and most probably the Melitians in Alexandria did not accept the return of the *Lapsi*, and ended up creating their own churches. Yet, the dominant view among Christians, the one the Synods asseverated, considered that there are always opportunities for the sinners and the fallen who seek for forgiveness. The past can be erased; a new beginning is possible; anyone can be reborn through repentance.

The call to express contrition, which over time became the principal message of the Church, gave the opportunity of remission to self-reproached –i.e. what Zosimus was criticizing. The hope of forgiveness and the expectation of an afterlife dominated the Christian *imaginaire* and the question is, if it affected the lives of the believers and in what way. Zosimus focuses on Emperor Constantine, but late antique Christian literature offers us the opportunity to glimpse into the lives of commoners and see, how they were shaped by this idea –or how they *should* have been shaped. So, in the next pages, we would leave Constantine in his palace and turn our attention to the Egyptian pasture. We would meet there a shepherd who sinned heavily, and we will explore how the call for repentance affected his life and helped him to reconstruct his identity. In addition, I would discuss

4. On repentance in early Christianity, see A.C. Torrance, *Repentance in Late Antiquity: Eastern Asceticism and the Framing of the Christian Life c. 400-650 CE*, Oxford 2012, esp. the first part that explores repentance in New Testament and the patristic literature (9-86). Also, on repentance in *Apophthegmata Patrum*, see S. Ramfos, *Like a Pelican in the Wilderness. Reflections on the Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, trans. N. l. Russell, Massachusetts 2000, 228-233; on repentance in patristic thought, see I. L. E. Ramelli, Forgiveness in Patristic Philosophy: The Importance of Repentance and the Centrality of Grace, in: *Ancient Forgiveness: Classical, Judaic, and Christian*, eds. C. L. Griswold and D. Konstan, Cambridge 2012, 195-215; D. Konstan, *Before Forgiveness: The Origins of a Moral Idea*, Cambridge – New York 2010, offers invaluable insights on the concept of forgiveness and repentance in ancient and early medieval worlds, see esp. 91-145, where he discusses Hebrew and early Christian perceptions on forgiveness.

monastic attitudes toward criminals and the justice system of the early byzantine empire.

Apollo

In the alphabetical collection of *Apophthegmata Patrum* we read the story of Apollo of Scetis:

> *Ἔλεγον περί τινος ἀββᾶ Ἀπολλὼ εἰς Σκῆτιν, ὅτι ποιμὴν ἦν ἀγροῖκος. Καὶ ἰδὼν γυναῖκα ἐν γαστρὶ ἔχουσαν ἐν τῷ ἀγρῷ, ἐνεργηθεῖς ὑπὸ τοῦ διαβόλου, εἶπε· Θέλω ἰδεῖν πῶς τὸ βρέφος κεῖται ἐν τῇ κοιλίᾳ αὐτῆς καὶ ἀναρρήξας αὐτὴν εἶδε τὸ βρέφος. Καὶ εὐθέως ἐπάταξεν αὐτὸν ἡ καρδία αὐτοῦ καὶ κατανυγεὶς ἦλθεν εἰς Σκῆτιν καὶ ἀνήγγειλε τοῖς πατράσιν ὃ ἐποίησεν. Ἤκουσε δὲ αὐτῶν ψαλλόντων· Αἱ ἡμέραι τῶν ἐτῶν ἡμῶν ἐν αὐτοῖς ἑβδομήκοντα ἔτη, ἐὰν δὲ ἐν δυναστείαις, ὀγδοήκοντα· καὶ τὸ πλεῖον αὐτῶν κόπος καὶ πόνος. Καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· Εἰμὶ τεσσαράκοντα ἐτῶν, μίαν εὐχὴν μὴ ποιήσας καὶ νῦν, ἐὰν ζήσω ἄλλα τεσσαράκοντα ἔτη, οὐ παύομαι εὐχόμενος τῷ Θεῷ, ἵνα συγχωρήσει μοι τὰς ἁμαρτίας μου. Οὐδὲν γὰρ ἐργόχειρον ἐποίει, ἀλλὰ ηὔχετο λέγων· Ἥμαρτον ὡς ἄνθρωπος, ὡς Θεός ἱλάσθητι. Καὶ γέγονεν αὐτῷ ἡ εὐχὴ αὕτη, εἰς μελέτην νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας. Ἦν δὲ ἀδελφὸς μένων μετ' αὐτοῦ καὶ ἤκουσεν αὐτοῦ λέγοντος· Ὤχλησά σοι, Κύριε, ἄφες μοι, ἵνα ἀναπαύσωμαι μικρόν. Καὶ ἐγένετο αὐτῷ πληροφορία, ὅτι συνεχώρησεν αὐτῷ ὁ Θεὸς πάσας τὰς ἁμαρτίας αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ τῆς γυναικός· εἰς δὲ τὸ παιδίον οὐκ ἐπληροφορήθη. Καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ τις τῶν γερόντων, ὅτι· Καὶ τὸ τοῦ παιδίου συνεχώρησέ σοι ὁ Θεός· ἀλλὰ ἀφίει σε ἐν τῷ πόνῳ, ὅτι συμφέρει τῇ ψυχῇ σου*[5].

5. "It was said of a certain Abba Apollo of Scetis, that he had been a shepherd and was very uncouth. He had seen a pregnant woman in the field one day and being urged by the devil, he had said, 'I should like to see how the child lies in her womb.' So he ripped her up and saw the foetus. Immediately his heart was troubled and, filled with compunction, he went to Scetis and told the Fathers what he had done. Now he heard them chanting, 'The years of our age are three score years and ten, and even by reason strength fourscore; yet their span is but toil and trouble.' He said to them, 'I am forty years old and I have not made one prayer; and now, if I live another year, I shall not cease to pray God that he may pardon my sins.' In fact, he did not work with his hands but passed all his time in prayer, saying, 'I, who as man have sinned, do you, as God, forgive.' So his prayer became his activity by night and day. A brother who lived with him heard him saying, 'I have sinned against you, Lord; forgive me, that I may enjoy a little peace.' And he was sure that God had forgiven him all his sins, including the one against the woman; but for the one against the child, he was in doubt. Then an old

Apart from this Apollo, who is at the centre of my paper, we meet other monks with the same or similar name in the early Christian monastic literature of the Egyptian desert[6]. The most notable case is Apollo of Hermopolis, "father of 500 monks", who is mentioned in *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*[7]; this might be the same Apollo who is associated with st. Phib in the Coptic life of the latter[8]. According to the narrator of the *Historia Monachorum*, Apollo of Hermopolis left the world very young, at the age of 15, and became a leader not only to the monks who "lived round about in scattered hermitages (and) kept coming to join him making gifts of their own souls to him as if to a true father"[9], but also to the local communities, as he successfully resolved conflicts between the nearby villages and contributed decisively to their conversion to Christianity. His spirituality stands on the antipode of the uncouthness of Apollo of Scetis.

Nevertheless, there are significant similarities between the two namesakes suggesting that the traditions about them were intertwined at some point. They were both portrayed to be committed to their ascetic canon, Apollo of Scetis due to remorse, while his namesake after a divine call[10].

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man said to him, 'God has forgiven you even the death of the child, but he leaves you in grief because that is good for your soul.'": Apollo 2, in *Apophthegmata Patrum, series alphabetica* in *PG* 65:71-440. The Alphabetical Collection will be cited by the name of the desert father and the number of the saying; The Anonymous Collection (ed. F. Nau, Histoire des solitaires égyptiens (MS Coislin 126, fol. 158f.), *ROC* 13 (1908), 47-57, 266-283; 14 (1909), 357-379; 17 (1912), 204-211, 294-301; 18 (1913), 137-140) will be cited by N and the saying number. The Systematic Collection (ed. J.-C. Guy, *Les Apophtegmes des Pères: collection systématique* [*SC* 387, 474, 498], Paris 1993, 2003 and 2005) by the Latin number of the chapter and the saying number. I use the English translation by B. Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers. The Alphabetical Collection*, Kalamazoo 1975 with some alterations.

6. For a distinction between the various namesakes see the introduction of J.-C. Guy in his edition of the Apophthegmata Patrum, *Les Apophtegmes*, v. 1, 64-5.

7. *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, ed. A.-J. Festugière, Brussels 1971, VIII; transl. by N. Russell, and introduction by B. Ward, in *The Lives of the Desert Fathers, the Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* [*Cistercian Studies* 34], London-Oxford 1981.

8. For Phib and Apollo see, T. Vivian, Monks, Middle Egypt, and Metanoia: The Life of Phib by Papohe the Steward (Translation and Introduction), *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7:4 (1999), 547–571.

9. *πάντες οἱ πέριξ σποράδην μοναχοὶ πρὸς αὐτὸν ἀεὶ ἔφθανον ὡς πατρὶ γνησίῳ τὰς ἑαυτῶν ψυχὰς δῶρα προσφέροντες*: *Historia Monachorum* VIII, 7.8

10. *Historia Monachorum* VIII, 3.

They relentlessly prayed, day and night, without undertaking any other task, not even the simple manual work other anchorites occupied themselves with. This work was integrated to spiritual exercises, but it was also a way for the ascetics to earn their living[11]. When Ioannes Kolovos (the Dwarf) decided to live "free of all care, like the angels, who do not work, but ceaselessly offer worship to God", and faced starvation, his spiritual brother told him that if he was a human being in need for food, he "must once again work in order to eat"[12]. The fact that the two Apollos survived without working was very unusual for the textual reality of the late antique ascetic literature, and it could only be explained due to unusual circumstances, either great holiness (in *Historia Monachorum* an angel brings Apollo food)[13] or a haunting past.

In addition, the same teaching on receiving visitors is attributed to both of them. It seems possible that the compiler or a scribe added at some point the teaching of Apollo of Hermopolis from *Historia Monachorum* to *Apophthegmata Patrum* under the name of Apollo of Scetis, assuming that they were the same person. This is not a unique case; the interrelation between *Apophthegmata Patrum* and other ascetic and hagiographical texts has been noted. For example, sayings of Anthony and Syncletica were extracted from their Lives, while *Historia Monachorum* confuses the two Macarii[14].

The Text

As S. Rubenson convincingly argued, *Apophthegmata Patrum* is not a historical account of the monastic roots, and it is difficult, if not

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11. On the spiritual dimension of working, see G. Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*, Oxford 1993, 98-100; on the economic aspects E. Wipszycka, *Moines et communautés monastiques en Égypte (IVe-VIIIe siècles)*, Varsovie 2009, 471-565, where Wipszycka's classic essay, "Aspects économiques de la vie aux Kellia" (first publication in *Le site monastique copte des Kellia. Sources historiques et explorations archéologiques*, Genève 1986, 117-144) is also included; Eadem, Resources and economic activities of the Egyptian monastic communities (4th-8th century), *Journal of Juristic Papyrology* 41 (2011), 159-263.

12. *ἄνθρωπος εἶ, χρείαν ἔχεις πάλιν ἐργάζεσθαι ἵνα τραφῇς*: Ioannes Kolovos 2.

13. *Historia Monachorum* VIII. 6.

14. C. Rapp, The Origins of Hagiography and the Literature of Early Monasticism: Purpose and Genre between Tradition and Innovation, in: *Unclassical Traditions, vol. 1. Alternatives for the Classical Past in Late Antiquity*, eds. C. Kelly – R. Flower – M. Stuart Williams, Cambridge 2010, 119-130. On the confusion of Macarii, see A. Guillaumont, Le problème des deux Macaires, *Irénikon* 48 (1975), 41-59.

impossible, to reconstruct the first steps of the anchoretic movement relying entirely on them[15]. We surely read about the acts and the words of Anthony, Arsenius, the two Macarii, and, of course, Apollo, but these are captures from a specific angle with a certain lens, and not a chronicle. The surviving sayings underwent a process of idealization and adjustment to the (political, ecclesiastical, ideological, etc) environment of the compilers. In other words, the *Apophthegmata Patrum* is not a window to the world of the pioneers of the anchoretic movement, but rather offers a clear view to the perceptions the ascetics of the 6th century had on their predecessors and ascetic life in general. Significantly enough, Zosimus wrote *New History* about the same time.

Unlike the Lives of the saints, *Apophthegmata Patrum* do not interpret the lives of their heroes according to the life of Jesus. The protagonists of this literature do not imitate Christ; they are not lighthouses of holiness in a sinful world. On the contrary, they are in a constant struggle with their thoughts, desires, and temptations in order to answer the divine call. Even the most distinguished ascetics are suffering from the battle against temptations. The textual form supports this perpetual endeavor: Short narrations, without rhetorical decoration that recycle the same problems, the same questions and the same answers, the same practices. There is no beginning or an end here; there is no evolution; the *Apophthegmata Patrum* constructs, as Patricia Cox Miller puts it, "an extended 'middle'"[16]. In other words, these sayings and stories provided ascetics specific examples to understand and identify themselves in their current situation, while the Lives offered them wider narrations to inscribe themselves into. The differences in the portrayal of Anthony in the athanasian *Life* and in the *Apophthtegmata Patrum* are indicative. Anthony of the *Life* proceeds gradually to spiritual perfection and becomes what David Brakke described as "simply the ideal Christian, the most dramatic example of someone who thanks to Christ's victory on the cross is making his journey on the way up to heaven"[17]. In

15. S. Rubenson, The Formation and Re-formation of the Sayings of the Desert Fathers, in *Early Monasticism and Classical Paideia*, ed. S. Rubenson, *Studia Patristica* 55.3 (2013), 5-22.

16. P. Cox Miller, *The Corporeal Imagination: Signifying the Holy in Late Ancient Christianity*, Philadelphia 2009, 123.

17. D. Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, Oxford 1995, 216; on the representations of Anthony in other contemporary works, see ibid., 203 ff.

the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, on the other hand, abba Anthony is a venerable old man, who gives simple and practical advices; he does not take part in theological debates and seems more vulnerable[18]. There is no evolution or progress of any kind; Anthony remains stable and static.

The *Apophthegmata Patrum* not only contributed in the construction of a certain tradition, but also to the initiation of the inexperienced monks into it and the exemplification of the others. Evagrius of Pontus urged the anchorites "to make diligent enquiry of the upright ways of the monks who have gone before [them] and to correct themselves with respect to those, for one can find many noble things said and done by them", and went on writing down some apophthegms[19]. This function was acknowledged and considered as innovative by Jean-Claude Guy[20]. However, recently Lillian Larsen placed the *Apophthegmata Patrum* in their wider rhetorical and pedagogical environment, underlining the similarities to other late antique educational methods[21]. These laconic texts, where the heroic past and the contemporary experiences co-existed, demonstrated practical ways to deal with everyday problems, lifestyles to pursue spiritual perfection and how to build and use spiritual authority –many sayings, for example, explain how a holy man or woman should administer properly his or her fame and power[22].

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18. W. Harmless, *Desert Christians. An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticicm*, Oxford 2004, 167-169.

19. Evagrius of Pontus, *Praktikos*, engl. transl. by R. E. Sinkewicz in: *Evagrius of Pontus. The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, Oxford 2003, 112.

20. J.-C. Guy, Educational Innovation in the Desert Fathers, *Eastern Churches Review* 6 (1974), 44-51.

21. L. Larsen, On learning a New Alphabet: The Sayings of the Desert Fathers and the Monostichs of Menander, in *Early Monasticism*, [as in n. 15], 59-77; Eadem, The *Apophthegmata Patrum* and the Classical Rhetorical Tradition, *Studia Patristica* 39 (2006), 409-16; Eadem, The *Apophthegmata Patrum*: Rustic Rumination or Rhetorical Recitation?, *Meddelanden från Collegium Patristicum Lundense* 22 (2008), 21-31; on the relation to the Greco-Roman Philosophical tradition, see H. Rydell Johnsén, Renunciation, Reorientation and Guidance: Patterns in Early Monasticism and Ancient Philosophy, *Studia Patristica* 55.3 (2013), 79-94.

22. On achieving and managing power in asceticism, see the contribution of R. Valantasis, Constructions of Power in Asceticism, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 63 (1995), 775-821, now in his *The Making of the Self: Ancient and Modern Asceticism*, Eugene 2008, 14-59.

It may come as a surprise to the modern reader, who has identified late antique anchorites with peaceful and mild, wise old men, the fact that the story of Apollo of Scetis would have been considered appropriate for the spiritual education of ascetics. Apollo's deed should be one of the most atrocious crimes in late antique Christian literature. The only similar example comes from early-eighth century Pergamon[23]. During the Arab siege of 716, the inhabitants of Pergamon killed a pregnant woman and boiled the fetus, in order to make a magic potion. The defenders dipped their weapons in the filter believing that it would strengthen them. According to our sources, for this crime, the citizens of Pergamon were overtaken by divine wrath and their city fell to the Arabs[24].

Despite the fact that in both cases a pregnant woman was murdered, the narrations of Apollo and the citizens of Pergamon share very little in common. Wolfram Brandes has shown that the incident of Pergamon derives from a well-known Syriac tradition on Gog and Magog. Usually, Gog and Magog are identified with "barbarian" peoples, like the Huns, not with the residents of a Christian city. Brandes argued though that the apocalyptic expectations of the seventh century provided fertile ground for such a transmission[25]. Undoubtedly, a sense of the end of days emerges from the dark, dystopian setting on the eve of the fall of the city, the description of the horrendous sacrifice for which every citizen bore responsibility, and the divine wrath that followed. On the other hand, Apollo butchered his victim alone in a typical day at the Egyptian countryside, the magical element is completely absent, and the story manifests a lenient and forgiving God. Moreover, the reality seems to be the springboard for this narration, as Egypt was considered particularly violent in late antiquity. It is indicative that papyri from the Hellenistic and Roman Egypt document assaults against pregnant women[26].

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23. I would like to thank Eleonora Kountoura-Galaki for bringing this to my attention.

24. Theophanis, *Chronographia*, ed. C. DE BOOR, Leipzig 1883, 390.26-391.2. Nikephoros Patriarch of Constantinople, *Short History*, ed. C. MANGO, Washington D.C. 1990, 53.

25. W. BRANDES, Apokalyptisches in Pergamon, *Bsl* 48 (1987), 1-11; see also his account in Byzantine Cities in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries: Different Sources, Different Histories?, in *The Idea and Ideal of the Town between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, eds. G. P. BROGIOLO and B. WARD-PERKINS, Leiden 1999, 25-57, esp. 44-47.

26. On violence in Roman Egypt, see A. Z. BRYEN, *Violence in Roman Egypt: A Study*

Crime and Repentance

Apollo is introduced as an "abba" and a few words later is characterized as "uncouth" (ἀγροῖκος). Abba means father, and in the context of ascetic literature the term implies a spiritually refined and cultivated person; someone that the other anchorites respected for his charisma. On the other hand, the adjective ἀγροῖκος denotes the country dweller, and consequently a savage, uncivilized, and cruel person. Thus, the first sentence constructs a contradictive portrait of Apollo, while at the same time expectations of an explanation are raised.

The first act of the story takes place at the fields, the natural environment of a shepherd. It has been pointed out that there is a sharp distinction between the world and the desert in the monastic literature[27]. The communal life in the Nile valley comes along with conventions which prevented Christians from perfection. In the harsh environment of the desert, the monks, liberated from responsibilities and obligations, could avoid some of the distractions and temptations of the world and concentrate on repentance and perfecting themselves[28]. In this story though, the fields seem as a place between the residential space of the world, and the colony of the anchorites. We meet Apollo outside the cities and the villages, but not in the desert; he is alone, but he is not a *μοναχός*; he was not a member of the anchorite community, but he did not fit well in the world either. He lived in the margins of society, outside the cities, and away from the monasteries. Stripped of all human contact, the pasture, where Apollo was alone with

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in Legal Interpretation, Philadelphia 2013, 26-50. On violence against pregnant women in papyri, see S. Adam, La femme enceinte dans les papyrus, *Anagennesis* 3 (1983), 9-19, and M. Parca, Violence by and against Women in Documentary Papyri from Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt, in *Le rôle et le statut de la femme en Égypte hellénistique, romaine et byzantine. Actes du colloque international. Bruxelles – Leuven 27-29 Novembre 1997* [Studia Hellenistica 37], eds. H. Melaerts and L. Mooren, Paris – Leuven – Sterling 2002, 291-293.

27. C. Rapp, Desert, City, and Countryside in the Early Christian Imagination, in *The Encroaching Desert. Egyptian Hagiography and the Medieval West*, eds. J. Dijkstra and M. Van Dijk, Leiden – Boston 2006, 93-112; P. Brown, *Body and Society. Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, Columbia 1988, 243-44.

28. The 11th λόγιον of Anthony is indicative: *ὁ καθήμενος ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ καὶ ἡσυχάζων τριῶν ἀπαλλάττεται πολέμων, τῆς ἀκοῆς καὶ τῆς λαλιᾶς καὶ τοῦ βλέπειν πρὸς ἕνα μόνον ἔχειν, τὸν τῆς πορνείας.*

his herd, had nothing to remind him of the communal life of a late antique village or city. At the same time, this field lacked the spirituality and the peacefulness of a monastery or a laura and it was in sharp contrast with the gardens that Anthony and other anchorites created in the middle of the desert. As Claudia Rapp notices, these "gardens became harbingers of Paradise where all creatures live in harmony", while devil lurked in the fields of Apollo[29].

There is where he met the woman. Females constitute a powerful temptation for the ascetics in the monastic literature[30]. In the *Apophthegmata Patrum* we read of anchorites who were visited by demons in the shape of women[31]; others avoided meeting female relatives or even touching their own mother, because of the fear of scandal[32]. It was stories such as these that constructed what Peter Brown called the "unbridgeable distance" between the settlers of the desert and the residents of the villages and towns[33]. Yet, in the world, even in the margins of the world, in the fields, where uncouth men lived, the presence of a female was not considered a scandal, but part of everyday life. Moreover, it would not be a surprise, in the context of *Apophthegmata Patrum*, for a layman like this shepherd, who lived in the pasture, detached from the society, to be excited by the unexpected presence of a female. Nonetheless, the devil did not raise Apollo's lust for the woman; this was a temptation appropriate for those who took the vow of celibacy. He created a sick curiosity for him instead; a powerful and destructive desire for knowledge that blurred his senses and reminds one of Eve tempted to taste the forbidden fruit of knowledge of good and evil (*Gen.* 3.1-6).

The narrator did not describe the crime nor did he judge it; the word "murder" (φόνος) never appears in the text. His act is simply mentioned and ascribed to diabolic influence. This is of critical importance, as it shows that Apollo was not evil by nature. Thus, room for repentance and forgiveness is left to him; an opportunity he seized at once. On another

29. Rapp, Desert, City, and Countryside, 101.

30. On the danger females constituted in the late antique ascetic narratives, see D. Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity*, Cambridge 2006.

31. For example, V.27, V.41, V.54.

32. N 159.

33. Brown, *Body and Society*, 141ff.

level, this lack of details diminishes the dramatic interest of the murder, removed the attention from the victim, and put the emphasis on Apollo and his decisions. It is difficult for the audience to identify with the victim, as we learn nothing about her. Who was this woman? The narrator did not give any relevant information; whether she was carrying her first child; whether she was married; whether she had any relatives and how did they reacted to her slaughter. The story focuses exclusively on Apollo, who might be repugnant, but he also appears to be the real victim, the one who was deceived by the enemy of all human beings. This creates anticipation regarding what happened next: how he ended up an "abba".

Immediately after the murder, his qualms manifested, not in a psychological or sentimental level, but in a very physical way –certainly, a suitable reaction for a "very uncouth" man. Apollo felt his body revolt against him; his own heart struck him. Heart is frequently mentioned in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*. The old men, of course, were not referring to the vital organ; the word καρδία signifies the deepest human desire, "one's own thoughts" (*ἴδιον λογισμόν*), as abba Isidore the Priest explained it. The synchronization of the heart with the law of God was considered the ultimate aspiration of an ascetic[34]. If the heart is one's own thoughts, then Apollo's desire for repentance was not a divine call. The remorse came from his inner self; Apollo never walked on his own road to Damascus. He just could not bear the fact of being a devil's pawn.

Apollo ran away to Scetis. He did not confess his crime to the authorities; he did not face human justice. Nor did he confess to the bishop. A bishop had the authority to inflict a spiritual punishment to a member of his congregation for every sin, regardless of how heavy it was[35]. For example, according to Basil of Caesarea, a repented murderer would be excommunicated for twenty years, while the 22th canon of the Synod of Ancyra allowed him/her to Eucharist only before his/her death[36]. He asked instead the old men

34. Isidore 9.

35. On bishop's jurisdiction, see S. Troianos, *Ἡ ἐκκλησιαστικὴ δικονομία μέχρι τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ Ἰουστινιανοῦ*, Athens 1964, esp. 15 ff.

36. Basil of Caesarea, Ep. 217, ed. Y. Courtonne, *Saint Basile. Lettres II*, Paris 1961. On the formation of canon law see, *The History of Byzantine and Eastern Canon Law to 1500*, eds. W. Hartmann and K. Pennington, Washington D.C. 2012, esp. the contributions of S. Wessel (1-23) and H. Ohme (24-114).

to bestow him with space and time to seek alone for forgiveness. This flight is polysemous, as it signifies not only his desire and need to be forgiven, but also the punishment he imposed on himself. Roman law prescribed exile for many serious crimes, like castration, use of magic, offering refuge to fugitives etc. Homicide was punished by death, but *honestiores* were only banished from their residents[37]. Apollo of course was not a member of the privileged class, but still his flight resembles an exile. Furthermore, departure from the world and adoption of monastic lifestyle was considered equivalent to death. Arsenius, for example, refused to accept an inheritance arguing that he had died before the testator[38]. In this manner, Apollo seems to impose himself the capital penalty in a spiritual and symbolic level.

This uncouth man was not the only criminal who found refuge in the anchoretic colonies of Egypt. Other men with criminal history resided there also –abba Moses the Ethiopian (the Black), who used to be a notorious thief and murderer, but ended up a spiritual teacher and a martyr is perhaps the most notable example[39]. The monks did not hand them over to the authorities, as this would constitute an indirect judgment, a sin which was considered very serious[40]. Abba Alonius famously favored lying rather than delivering a murderer to the magistrate to be executed. "It is better for you to abandon him unconditionally to God, for he knows all things", he suggested[41]. In other words, he questioned on principle the right of a human being to judge others, even if he was the governor and they were lawless criminals. Theoretically speaking, a fugitive could feel safe at the Egyptian desert, especially someone who had demonstrated honest repentance and took up an ascetic lifestyle. "I prefer a sinful man who knows he has sinned and repents, to a man who has not sinned and considers himself to be righteous", abba Sarmatas used to say[42].

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37. J. Hillner, *Prison, Punishment and Penance in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge 2015, 117 ff.

38. VI.2.

39. On abba Moses, see Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 203-206; Ramfos, *Like a Pelican*, 196-206; V.L. Wimbush, Ascetic Behavior and Color-ful Language: Stories about Ethiopian Moses, *Semeia* 58 (1992), 81-92.

40. Gould, *Desert Fathers*, 123-132.

41. *Μᾶλλον ἄφες αὐτὸν ἐνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ χωρὶς δεσμῶν Αὐτὸς γὰρ οἶδε τὰ πάντα*: Alonius 4.

42. *Θέλω ἄνθρωπον ἁμαρτήσαντα, εἰ οἶδεν ὅτι ἥμαρτε καὶ μετανοεῖ, ὑπὲρ ἄνθρωπον μὴ ἁμαρτήσαντα καὶ ἔχοντα ἑαυτὸν ὡς δικαιοσύνην ποιοῦντα*: Sarmatas 1.

In the *Spiritual Meadow*, abba Zosimus shows the same thinly veiled contempt for both the law and its enforcers. In a story very similar to Apollo's, he made an unnamed robber a monk, and a few days later helped him to abscond to the monastery of abba Dorotheus to hide from the governor and his enemies. Nine years later, the robber-monk asked abba Zosimus to give him back his old clothes in order to return to the world. Most of his sins were forgiven he said, except the murder of a child. He could see him everywhere, in the church, in the refectory, constantly asking him "Why did you kill me?" He could not bear that, so he went back to the world and was arrested. The next day he was executed[43].

The law is a very important element of the plot of this story. Unlike Scetis in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, this monastic community was not out of the reach of the law and it could not become shelter for the robber-monk. Abba Zosimus made an attempt to bypass it and sent him away, but in the end it was the repentant robber who asked to fall under it. Ascetic canon, obedience, and repentance failed to heal his guilt; this could only be washed out by his own death. The world order here needs a kind of symmetry between sin and the act of penance to be restored (a death for a death) that is very different from the one found in the *Apophthegmata*. The repentant robber was not alone with his God; the murdered child was also with him, and by extension the whole community was following him too. Thus, he asked for his old clothes. He did not want to go back to the world dressed as a monk; he did not want to hide behind his new identity. Wearing his old apparel is a *de facto* confession of his deeds, and also recognition that his crimes prevented him from becoming what Richard Valantasis described as "the new emergent person, the one who is the imaginary being who is being fashioned into existence by asceticism"[44].

There is another similar tale in the *Meadow*, but with a different result[45]. There, David, another robber-turned-monk did not have to worry

43. John Moschos, *Pratum Spirituale*, *PG* 87.3, 166; English translation by J. Wortley in *The Spiritual Meadow*, Kalamazoo 1992, 136-137. It is notable that in the story that preceded this one, Kyriakos, a robber and a murderer so cruel that was called "the wolf", escaped the death penalty because of his compassion towards children (*Pratum Spirituale*, 165).

44. Valantasis, *The Making of the Self*, 39-40.

45. *Pratum Spirituale* 143.

about getting arrested or being haunted by his victims. He carried out his canon, until an angel visited him and informed him that his sins were forgiven and henceforth he could perform miracles[46]. Significantly enough, this story also takes place in the Egyptian desert, just like the story of Apollo, while the unnamed robber-monk lived in Palestine. It is possible though that the story of David of Thebaid demonstrates an older version of the monastic legend that all these stories, including Apollo's, were based on. This legend most probably was created in Egypt, but it was transmitted and appropriated in Palestine to comply with the new relations between the monks and the byzantine State. Moreover, the differences towards the law in these narrations may also reflect the different ways Egyptian and Palestine monks cope with the institutions of the Empire and the different stages of integration of each community.

Apollo was permitted to settle in Scetis and perform an ascetic canon he imposed to himself[47]. From this point on, his life became a constant supplication for forgiveness, a constant quest for inner peace. Or a constant struggle for becoming a "new man". This new person appeared for the first time just after the murder, the moment he was stricken in his heart. At the same time, this blow was his very first ascetic performance, followed immediately by a second, the departure to the desert, and a third, the confession to the elders of Scetis. God was the audience of the first and the second performances, along with Apollo's emerging self. The third performance, though, as well as the exercise he assumed was public; other people watched and participated in it –the old men, his spiritual brother, and the visitors he would have received. God and his own self remained of course his privileged audience[48].

The discussion between the aspirant anchorite and the desert fathers revolved around a Psalm –the book of Psalms is the most frequently

46. For a discussion of illness and curing in the *Spiritual Meadow*, see B. Llewellyn Ihssen, *John Moschos' Spiritual Meadow: Authority and Autonomy at the End of the Antique World*, Farnham 2014, 71-103.

47. On repentance and self-imposed sentence, see Harmless, *Desert Christians*, 238-241.

48. On asceticism as performance, see Valantasis, *The Making of the Self*, 8-10; P. Cox Miller, Desert Asceticism and 'The Body from Nowhere', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2.2 (1994), 137-153.

mentioned biblical text in *Apophthegmata Patrum*[49]. Significantly enough, this was Psalm 90, a Psalm that does not praise repentance. Theodoret of Cyrrhus in his commentary to the Psalms noted that, on the one hand, Psalm 90 indicates the mortality of the human nature and on the other proclaims the transition to a better condition[50]. In other words, the old men received Apollo while chanting not only of the difficulties of the human life, which was considered more bitter for an ascetic, but also of the optimistic expectations. And it was these prospects to which Apollo committed himself.

Years later, according to the story, he was informed (but in what way?) that he received absolution for all his crimes, except for the death of the fetus. An old man explained to him that having a sinful remainder to ask for forgiveness was good for his soul. It would keep him in constant repentance. This interpretation convinced him to continue his ascetic canon and not give up, like the robber-monk in the *Meadow*. The desert, especially the textual desert of the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, is a locus between the labors of this life and the expected pleasure of heaven and an ascetic should remain stable on this spot until the moment of his/her death. At the same time, asceticism in this context is an endless transition, a perpetual procession to a "new subjectivity"[51]. The anchorite never achieves his/her new emergent self; he/she always struggles to accomplish it. So he/she endlessly repeats the same rituals, praying, fasting, abstinence, etc., until this transition becomes his/her new self. Repose in this life, would endanger the prospect of an eternal rest. This appears clearly in the story of Macarius, who discovered in the desert a copy of the "true paradise" that the Egyptian magicians Jannis and Jambres had planted. Two holy men welcomed him in that glorious garden. But after enjoying the fruits

49. D. Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism*, New York 1993, 97. On the use of Old Testament texts by the early Christian ascetics, see ibid., 107 ff.; also, D. Krueger, The Old Testament in Monasticism, in *The Old Testament in Byzantium*, eds. P. Magdalino and R. Nelson, Washington D.C. 2010, 199-221. Valuable insights on early Christian perceptions of the Psalms in *The Harp of Prophecy. Early Christian Interpretations of the Psalms*, eds. B. E. Daley, S.J. and P. R. Kolbet, Notre Dame 2015.

50. Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Interpretations to the Psalms*, *PG* 80, 1597-1608.

51. Valantasis, *The Making of the Self*, 43.

of paradise for seven days, Macarius went back to guide the other monks there; he wanted all anchorites to enjoy those delights. Nevertheless, they refused to follow him, saying "Could it not be that this paradise has come into being for the destruction of our souls? For if we were to enjoy it in this life, we should have received our portion of good things while still on earth. What reward would we have afterwards when we come into the presence of God? For what kind of virtue would we be recompensed?"[52] Their argument was so convincing that Macarius never returned to the paradise. He remained in the desert with them, toiling in his ascetic exercise [53]. The story demonstrates that the very moment an ascetic stops performing his/her canon, he/she quits being an ascetic. Either in an oasis or in the world, a life of pleasure stands on the antipode of asceticism and destroys any expectation or hope for an afterlife reward.

Through his ascetic performance, Apollo erased his violent past and reconstructed his identity –just like Moses the Ethiopian. Through their example a function of asceticism is manifested: It was not only a lifestyle appropriate for charismatic men and women, like Anthony or Syncletica, who were seeking for a closer relationship with God; it was also a safe way for a guilty conscience to be relieved. Great sinners, even murderers, could achieve divine absolution, provided that they were prepared to perform the harsh ascetic life. Whereas human justice punishes the guilty in order to restore balance in society, the anchorite way of life restores the balance within the

52. *Μὴ ἐπ' ὀλέθρῳ τῶν ψυχῶν τῶν ἡμετέρων ὁ παράδεισος ἐκεῖνος γέγονεν; Εἰ γὰρ αὐτοῦ νῦν ἀπολαύσωμεν, ἀπειλήφαμεν τὰ ἀγαθὰ ἡμῶν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς. τίνα δὲ μισθὸν ὕστερον ἕξομεν πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ἀφικόμενοι ἢ ὑπὲρ ποίας ἀρετῆς τιμηθησόμεθα; καὶ ἔπεισαν αὐτὸν τοῦ μηκέτι ἀπελθεῖν: Historia Monachorum* XXI, 5-12.

53. Another version of Macarius' visit to Jannis and Jambres paradise in Macarius 2; see also the Bernard Flusin's excellent analysis of that version, Le serviteur caché, ou Le saint sans existence, in *Les Vies de saints: genre littéraire ou biographie historique?*, [Dossiers byzantins 4], eds. P. Agapitos and P. Odorico, Paris 2004, 59-71, as well as D.J. Kyrtatas, Seeking Paradise in the Egyptian Desert, in *The Cosmography of Paradise. The Other World from Ancient Mesopotamia to Medieval Europe*, ed. A. Scafi, London 2016, 127-135. For the byzantine perceptions on the Garden of Eden, see V. della Dora, *Landscape, Nature, and the Sacred in Byzantium*, Cambridge 2016, 99-107 and D. Kyrtatas, Early Christian Visions of Paradise. Considerations on their Jewish and Greek Background, in: *Hellenic and Jewish Arts: Interaction, Tradition and Renewal*, ed. A. Ovadiah, Jerusalem 1998, 337-50.

person and helps someone to come to terms with oneself and consequently with God –this was what abba Moses the Ethiopian accomplished, this was what Apollo was seeking[54].

Moreover, Apollo became an equal part of the anchoretic colony. Despite the heinous murder or his uncouth personality, he was not isolated anymore, nor did he live on the fringe of the community. The days he resided in the fields, at the skirt of the world and outside the desert, belonged to the past, a fact that seems to amaze even him: He joyfully followed without hesitation anyone who asked him to do a piece of work, as this proved his participation in community life[55]. In a community where everybody –even the most righteous– considered themselves as sinners and lived in a perpetual grief, a repentant murderer was a perfect match. Thus, he was addressed as "abba", he interacted with the other anchorites, a disciple went to live with him, and he became so well-known, that three sayings survive under his name. The uncouth murderer became a paradigm of repentance and hope. "Since he was forgiven, there is hope for everyone" seems to be the moral of the story.

At the end, stories like these contributed in establishing not only the Christian expectation for salvation, but also the truism on which Zosimus grounded his criticism on Constantine and the Christian church. If Apollo reconstructed his identity through Christian asceticism, the emperor reshaped his public image through a version of Christianity appropriated to the needs of Roman imperial rule and at the same time he established a new imperial exemplar[56]. In the context of imperial power and authority, there was no room for repentance –Constantine never showed any remorse for anything in public; he was always the unbeatable victor to his subjects. Nevertheless, this was quite different from the call to express contrition, or what men and women like Apollo made out of it. For them repentance

54. Julia Hillner in her recent monograph (*Prison, Punishment and Penance*) underscores the educative and reforming character of the Roman penal system. She acknowledges though that social expectations and political pursuits often blurred these principles.

55. Apollo 1.

56. On Constantine as paradigm see, *New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th–13th Centuries* [Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies 2], ed. P. Magdalino, Hampshire 1994.

was the convincing answer to a very urgent question that affected their present state and their future prospects, the relations with their community and also with their own selves. This answer was so powerful that it was eventually incorporated into his image. Strangely enough this happened not by his Christian subjects, who responded to it, but by his pagan critics, who detested it.

«ΣΥΜΦΕΡΕΙ ΤΗ ΨΥΧΗ»
ΑΜΑΡΤΙΑ ΚΑΙ ΜΕΤΑΝΟΙΑ ΣΤΑ *ΑΠΟΦΘΕΓΜΑΤΑ ΤΩΝ ΠΑΤΕΡΩΝ*

Τὸ ἄρθρο ἀναφέρεται στὴν πεποίθηση χριστιανῶν καὶ ἐθνικῶν τοῦ 5ου αἰώνα, ὅτι ἡ Ἐκκλησία ὑποδεχόταν στοὺς κόλπους της ὅλους ἀνεξαιρέτως τοὺς ἁμαρτωλούς, ἀκόμα καὶ ἐκείνους ποὺ βαρύνονταν μὲ εἰδεχθῆ ἐγκλήματα, καὶ τοὺς παρεῖχε τὴν εὐκαιρία νὰ βροῦν συγχώρηση. Ἑστιάζοντας στὴν διήγηση τοῦ ἀββᾶ Ἀπολλὼ τοῦ Σκητιώτη ἐξετάζεται ὁ τρόπος ποὺ ἐπέδρασε ἡ ἰδέα τῆς μετάνοιας κυρίως στὴ ζωὴ τῶν ἁπλῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ στάση τῶν ἀσκητῶν ἀπέναντι στὸ δικαϊκὸ σύστημα τῆς Αὐτοκρατορίας. Ὁ «ἀγροῖκος» Ἀπολλὼ μετὰ ἀπὸ ἕνα ἀποτρόπαιο ἔγκλημα ἐγκατέλειψε τὰ ἐγκόσμια καὶ βρῆκε καταφύγιο στὴ Σκήτη. Ἐκεῖ μέσω τοῦ σκληροῦ ἀσκητικοῦ κανόνα ποὺ ἐπέβαλε στὸν ἑαυτό του, κατάφερε ὄχι μόνο νὰ νιώσει ὅτι συγχωρήθηκε, ἀλλὰ νὰ ἐνταχθεῖ πλήρως στὴν ἀναχωρητικὴ κοινότητα καὶ να διαμορφώσει μιὰ νέα ταυτότητα, ἐκείνη τοῦ «ἀββᾶ» Ἀπολλώ.