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On Learning a New Alphabet: The Sayings of the Desert Fathers and the Monostichs of Menander

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On Learning a New Alphabet

One would be hard put to find even one reader of early monastic texts who is unfamiliar with the Athanasian portrayal of Antony, the 'founder' of the *anachoretic* strain of early Egyptian monasticism, as not only 'unlettered', but explicitly uninterested in becoming so. Many could recite the pertinent lines of Athanasius' *Vita* by heart:

[Antony was] cognizant of little else besides [his parents] and his home. As he grew and became a boy, and was advancing in years, he could not bear to learn letters, wishing also to stand apart from friendship with other children. All his yearning ... was for living, an unaffected person, in his home.[1]

Conjoined with Antony's studied a-literacy, two *apophthegms* featuring the famously literate monks, Arsenius and Evagrius, are as familiar.[2] In one account, Evagrius queries Arsenius: 'How is it that we educated and learned

[1] Καὶ παιδίον μὲν ὤν, ἐτρέφετο παρὰ τοῖς γονεῦσι, πλέον αὐτῶν καὶ τοῦ οἴκου μηδὲν ἕτερον γινώσκων· ἐπειδὴ δὲ καὶ αὐξήσας ἐγένετο παῖς, καὶ προέκοπτε τῇ ἡλικίᾳ, γράμματα μὲν μαθεῖν οὐκ ἠνέσχετο, βουλόμενος ἐκτὸς εἶναι καὶ τῆς πρὸς τοὺς παῖδας συνηθείας· τὴν δὲ ἐπιθυμίαν πᾶσαν εἶχε ... ὡς ἄπλαστος οἰκεῖν ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ αὐτοῦ. Athanasius (*VAnt* 1 [Gregg]); Samuel Rubenson's *Letters of St. Antony: Monasticism and the Making of a Saint* (Minneapolis, 1995), presents a close counter-reading of Athanasius' caricature in light of Antony's letters. In turn, David Brakke's, *Athanasius and Asceticism* (Baltimore, 1995), offers a convincing assessment of Athanasius' political and ecclesial agendas. Both Rubenson and Brakke raise critical questions about the historical value assigned to Athanasius' rendering of Antony as ἀγράμματος. While long-standing and widely affirmed, it is however striking that their assessments have failed to dislodge the residual emphases that picture the *abbas* and *ammas* of the Egyptian desert as shadowy ciphers of Antony. Despite compelling arguments to the contrary, the Egyptian monks remain fictively framed as 'uninterested in learning letters' and 'taught only by God.'

[2] See, for example, Douglas Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* (New York, 1993), 59; Jean Claude-Guy, 'Educational Innovation in the Desert Fathers', *Eastern Churches Review* 6 (1974), 44-51, 45; William Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (New York, 2004), 71.

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men have no goodness, and the Egyptian peasants have a great deal?'[3] Arsenius responds: 'We have nothing because we go chasing after worldly knowledge. These Egyptian peasants have got their goodness by hard work.'[4]

In a second *apophthegm*, where Arsenius is challenged while consulting an Egyptian γέρων about his thoughts, an unidentified interlocutor queries: 'Abba Arsenius, how is it that you with such a good Latin and Greek education, ask this peasant about your thoughts?'[5] Arsenius replies: 'I have indeed been taught Latin and Greek, but I do not know even the alphabet of this peasant.'[6]

Numerous narrative allusions to early monks reading, writing, and commenting on scripture, overtly challenge these well-worn depictions.[7] Nonetheless, binaried caricatures of the a-typical and exceptional literacies of Antony, Evagrius and Arsenius, loom large in the annals of monastic history. Arguably as significant, however, is the central role these caricatures play in recounting the history of education.

Ancient Education

In his epic *Histoire de l'éducation dans l'antiquité*, Henri Marrou deems resistance to literate pursuits 'one of the most characteristic features of "Eastern" monasticism.'[8] In fact, taking Athanasius' caricature of Antony's a-literacy as representative, Marrou introduces his discussion of 'the monastic school in the East' with the premise that the earliest monks would have received 'a kind of training that was ascetic and moral, spiritual rather than intellectual.'[9] Obliquely

[3] '*Quomodo nos excitati eruditione et scientia nullas virtutes habemus, hi autem rustici in Aegypto habitantes tantas virtutes possident*'? (AP/PJ X 5 [Ward]); see also Πῶς ἡμεῖς ἀπὸ τοσαύτης παιδεύσεως καὶ σοφίας οὐδὲν ἔχομεν, οὗτοι δὲ οἱ ἀγροῖκοι καὶ Αἰγύπτιοι τοσαύτας ἀρετὰς κέκτηνται (AP/G Arsenius 5). The Latin collection of sayings, attributed to Pelagius and John, is thought to be one of the oldest extant collections (see essays by Britt Dahlman and Samuel Rubenson in this volume). Benedicta Ward's readily available translations of the Latin Systematic and the Greek Alphabetic collections have, in turn, made these the most routinely referenced by English-speaking scholars.

[4] '*Nos quia mundanae eruditionis disciplinis intenti sumus, nihil habemus; hi autem rustici Aegyptii ex propriis laboribus acquisierunt virtutes*' (AP/PJ X 5 [Ward]); see also Ἡμεῖς ἀπὸ τῆς τοῦ κόσμου παιδεύσεως οὐδὲν ἔχομεν· οὗτοι δὲ οἱ ἀγροῖκοι καὶ Αἰγύπτιοι ἀπὸ τῶν ἰδίων πόνων ἐκτήσαντο τὰς ἀρετάς (AP/G Arsenius 5).

[5] Ἀββᾶ Ἀρσένιε, πῶς τοσαύτην παίδευσιν Ῥωμαϊκὴν καὶ Ἑλληνικὴν ἐπιστάμενος, τοῦτον τὸν ἀγροῖκον περὶ τῶν σῶν λογισμῶν ἐρωτᾷς (AP/G Arsenius 6 [Ward]).

[6] Τὴν μὲν Ῥωμαϊκὴν καὶ Ἑλληνικὴν ἐπίσταμαι παίδευσιν· τὸν δὲ ἀλφάβητον τοῦ ἀγροίκου τούτου οὔπω μεμάθηκα (AP/G Arsenius 6 [Ward]).

[7] See Lillian I. Larsen, *Pedagogical Parallels: Re-reading the Apophthegmata Patrum*, Ph.D. Dissertation (Columbia University, 2006), 48-54.

[8] Henri Irénée Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, George Lamb (tr.) (Madison, 1956), 333.

[9] Marrou writes: 'St. Antony, the great founder of monasticism, was an illiterate Coptic peasant who was able to get on quite well without any books, as he soon proved to any philosophers

alluding to comments attributed to Arsenius and Evagrius in the *apophthegmatic* exchanges noted above, Marrou suggests that a 'fundamental feature of Eastern monasticism' was its emphasis not on 'learning ... [but] forgetting ... poetry and secular knowledge.'[10]

As a mid-twentieth century historian, Marrou's romanticized views of early monasticism are hardly surprising. His assertions echo those readily encountered across a broader swathe of the scholarly landscape.[11] Repeatedly re-framed and re-assessed, however, the significance of Marrou's *opus* is undeniable. In gauging the scope of Marrou's influence, the trajectory of his monumental study is suggestive. First published in France in 1948, Marrou's volume saw five further editions in French. Between 1950 and 1969, it was translated into Italian (1950), English (1956), German (1957), Greek (1961), Spanish (1965), Polish (1969), and Portuguese (1969).[12]

The power of Marrou's assertion that 'monasticism brought back into the Christian tradition the virtues of the simple and unlettered,'[13] is particularly patent in a recently published anthology, explicitly devoted to 're-thinking ... Marrou's totalizing narrative.'[14] In a rich range of studies, the volume's impressive cast of scholars re-considers almost every aspect of Marrou's overarching construct. Essays range from the question of 'Public' and 'Private' in early Greek institutions of education,[15] to consideration of 'Schools of Platonic Philosophy' in the Late Roman Empire.[16] A penultimate treatise addresses the inclusion and subtraction of 'Pagan Elements in Christian education'.[17]

who came and argued with him. This was a fundamental feature of Eastern monasticism and it was never lost: these desert people were less concerned with learning than with forgetting the poetry and secular knowledge they had picked up in the schools before conversion. Monasticism brought back into the Christian tradition the virtues of the simple and unlettered, as against the intellectual pride fostered by the old culture, which, as is clear from the Gnostics and the Alexandrians, was in the third century threatening to destroy the original simplicity of the Gospels' (*History of Education* [1956], 330).

[10] H.I. Marrou, *History of Education* (1956), 330.

[11] See, among others, discussion in Burton Mack, *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* (Philadelphia, 1988); Elizabeth Clark, *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton, 1999), 19-20; For a more detailed overview of this trajectory with relation to the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, see also, L.I. Larsen, *Pedagogical Parallels* (2006), 4-24.

[12] See discussion in Pierre Riché, 'In Memoriam Professeur Henri-Irénée Marrou', *Pedagogica Historica* 17 (1977), 491-515, 493.

[13] H.I. Marrou, *History of Education* (1956), 330.

[14] Yun Lee Too (ed.), *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity* (Leiden, 2001).

[15] Mark Griffith, '"Public" and "Private" in Early Greek Institutions of Education', in Y.L. Too (ed.), *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity* (2001), 23-84.

[16] Robert Lamberton, 'The Schools of Platonic Philosophy of the Roman Empire: The Evidence of the Biographies', in Y.L. Too (ed.), *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity* (2001), 433-58.

[17] Sara Rappe, 'The New Math: How to Add and to Subtract Pagan Elements in Christian Education', in Y.L. Too (ed.), *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity* (2001), 405-32.

As this essay traces a trajectory through the writings of the early Church Fathers, a final segment takes up the question of monastic education. Re-analysis begins with immediate reference to the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, and more specifically, the well-worn exchange between Evagrius and Arsenius cited above. Prescient in naming Evagrius' pedagogical preoccupations 'a kind of absent chapter' in the history of education, the author, nonetheless, leaves uninterrogated Marrou's underlying premise that monasticism remained a type of Christian school 'that was wholly devoted to religion and had none of the features of the old classical school.'[18] As Evagrius is himself deemed 'one of the most original thinkers and radical teachers in the tradition,' he is framed 'pitted against the fathers', an urban intellectual 'facing off' with 'desert wisdom.'[19] Encountered in a volume explicitly devoted to 're-thinking Marrou's totalizing narrative', the echoed assumptions and isolated caricatures that bookend a scholarly discussion that spans six decades must give pause.[20]

In what has become a tangled skein of fact and fiction, or as often, competing fictions, a simple query presents itself. If one chooses an alternate starting point, 'what comes out differently that is of interest?'[21] Here challenging the adequacy of long-lived assessments, three foundational premises invite re-consideration. The first is the normative character of the habits Marrou frames as exceptional. The second is the common foundational forms that bridge traditional binaries. The third is the degree to which reading the broad array of monastic gnomic and *apophthegmatic* material, 'in light of the literary genre to which it belongs',[22] contextualizes the caricatured figures of Antony, Evagrius and Arsenius in a richly evocative landscape.[23] Within this frame, the pedagogical premises implicit in the 'simple gnomic texts' that have long been used to instantiate conventional binaries are particularly provocative.

Exceptionally Normative

If one truly aims to 're-think' monasticism as an 'absent chapter' in the history of education, recognizing the normative character of monastic pedagogical praxis is key. Here non-narrative refractions shift the interpretive spotlight in productive

[18] H.I. Marrou, *History of Education* (1956), 330.

[19] S. Rappe, 'New Math' (2001), 423.

[20] S. Rappe, 'New Math' (2001), 430.

[21] Karen King, 'Mackinations on Myth and Origins', in Elizabeth A. Castelli and Hal Taussig (eds), *Re-imagining Christian Origins* (Valley Forge, 1996), 157-72; See also L.I. Larsen, *Pedagogical Parallels* (2006), 4-7.

[22] Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (Blackwell, 1995), 65.

[23] Of particular interest is the character of texts that have been used to argue against proto-monastic investment in literate pursuits, most specifically, the collections of *monostixoi* and *apophthegms* that are routinely, and a-critically marshaled as evidence in support of routinized monastic resistance to 'learning letters'.

ways. Situating larger than life caricatures in life-sized landscapes, uniform patterns become patent, and a dynamic spectrum of literate investment emerges.

Basil of Caesarea (329-379 AD; Cappadocia)

Within this frame, Basil's *Asketikon* affords an enticing glimpse of the types of pedagogical practice that may have structured monastic investment in literate pursuits. In his *Longer Rule*, Basil mandates that boys, and arguably girls, 'should be trained in all godliness as common children of the brotherhood.'[24] He recommends that both boys and adults meet together for prayer, but that groups be kept separate with respect to houses and meals. This is to insure, among other things, that 'the house of the monks will not be disturbed by the repetition of lessons necessary for the young.'[25]

As Basil outlines what might be most accurately characterized as the beginning of a monastic 'school curriculum', he suggests that as children engage in literary studies appropriate 'to [the monastic] ideal',[26] their teachers seek to incorporate 'the language of Scripture … and educate them by maxims drawn from the Proverbs.'[27] In place of 'myths', they should be told stories of wonderful deeds, 'so [that their] soul[s] may be led to [practice] good immediately and from the outset, while [they are] still plastic and soft, pliable as wax, and easily molded by the shapes pressed upon [them].'[28] The goal of this instruction is to assure that 'when [with maturity] reason is added, and the power of discrimination, [this early training will] run its course.'[29] Grounded in 'elementary lessons … already learned and the examples of religion delivered to it; reason will suggest utilitarian motives, [and] habit will make success easy.'[30]

[24] ἀλλ' ἐκτρέφεσθαι μὲν αὐτὰ ἐν πάσῃ εὐσεβείᾳ ὡς κοινὰ τέκνα τῆς ἀδελφότητος (Basil, *Regulae fusius tractate* 15), in W.K.L. Clarke (tr.), *The Ascetic Works of Saint Basil* (London, 1925); Basil's Rules for the monastic life are significant because they are the earliest to survive in Greek. Clarke notes that this is the only section in the Rule, where Basil specifically references girls (175[8]).

[25] καὶ ἅμα οὐδὲ θόρυβον ἕξει ὁ οἶκος τῶν ἀσκητῶν ἐν τῇ μελέτῃ τῶν διδαγμάτων ἀναγκαίᾳ οὔσῃ τοῖς νέοις (*Reg. Fus.* 15 [Clarke]).

[26] δεῖ δὲ καὶ τὴν τῶν γραμμάτων μελέτην οἰκείαν εἶναι τῷ σκοπῷ … (*Reg. Fus.* 15 [Clarke]).

[27] ὥστε καὶ ὀνόμασιν αὐτοὺς τοῖς ἐκ τῶν Γραφῶν κεχρῆσθαι … καὶ γνώμαις παιδεύειν ταῖς ἐκ τῶν Παροιμιῶν, καὶ ἆθλα μνήμης ὀνομάτων τε καὶ πραγμάτων αὐτοῖς προτιθέναι (*Reg. Fus.* 15 [Clarke]); See also Gregory of Nyssa, *Vita Macrina* 962D.

[28] καὶ ἀντὶ μύθων τὰς τῶν παραδόξων ἔργων ἱστορίας αὐτοῖς διηγεῖσθαι … εὔπλαστον οὖν ἔτι οὖσαν καὶ ἁπαλὴν τὴν ψυχήν, καὶ ὡς κηρὸν εὔεικτον, ταῖς τῶν ἐπιβαλλομένων μορφαῖς ῥᾳδίως ἐκτυπουμένην, πρὸς πᾶσαν ἀγαθῶν ἄσκησιν εὐθὺς καὶ ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἐνάγεσθαι χρή (*Reg. Fus.* 15 [Clarke]).

[29] ὥστε τοῦ λόγου προσγενομένου, καὶ τῆς διακριτικῆς ἕξεως προσελθούσης δρόμον ὑπάρχειν (*Reg. Fus.* 15 [Clarke]).

[30] ἐκ τῶν ἐξ ἀρχῆς στοιχείων, καὶ τῶν παραδοθέντων τῆς εὐσεβείας τύπων, τοῦ μὲν λόγου τὸ χρήσιμον ὑποβάλλοντος, τοῦ δὲ ἔθους εὐμάρειαν πρὸς τὸ κατορθοῦν ἐμποιοῦντος (*Reg. Fus.* 15 [Clarke]); See also Quintilian, *Inst. Or.* I 1.4.

Jerome (ca. 320-420 AD; Bethlehem, Palestine)

Relatively contemporary writings originating from a Palestinian frame are as explicit. In a letter to one Laeta, about the education of her daughter Paula, Jerome suggests that young Paula's 'tongue must be imbued with the sweet music of the Psalms.'[31] Echoing a sequence of well-documented strategies in framing 'lessons necessary for the young', Jerome recommends that Laeta have 'a set of letters made for [young Paula], of boxwood or of ivory', so that Paula may learn to call each by its proper name.[32] In order to know them by sight as well as by sound ('*ut eas non sonu tantum, sed et visu noverit*'), she should likewise 'not only [be made to] grasp the right order of the letters and remember their names in a simple song, but also frequently upset their order and mix the last letters with the middle ones, the middle with the first.'[33]

Moving from letters to syllables to words, Jerome suggests that the very names ('*ipse nomina*') Paula uses in forming sentences should not be assigned haphazardly, but 'chosen and arranged on purpose'. To aid in training both tongue and memory, Jerome recommends that Paula's wordlists include 'the names of the prophets and the apostles, and the whole list of patriarchs from Adam downward, as [given by] Matthew and Luke.'[34]

As Paula progresses to sentences and short passages, Jerome suggests that rather than 'jewels or silk' her treasures ought to be '... manuscripts of the holy scriptures.' In these, she should prefer 'correctness and accurate [punctuation]' rather than 'gilding, and Babylonian parchment, with elaborate decorations.'[35] Jerome advises that Paula repeat a portion of Scripture as a fixed daily task. These 'verses' should be learned first in Greek, then in Latin. Like Basil, Jerome suggests that after Paula has first learned the Psalter, she turn to the 'lessons of life [found] in the proverbs of Solomon.'[36]

It is only after laying out his ideal curriculum that Jerome makes what is arguably his real purpose clear. Emphasizing the difficulties implicit in Laeta's tackling such lofty instructional goals amidst her busy duties in Rome, Jerome urges Laeta to instead send young Paula to Bethlehem, to be educated in the

[31] '... *adhuc tenera lingua psalmis dulcibus inbuator*' (*Ep.* 107 [Wright, LCL]).

[32] '*Fiant ei litterae vel buxeae vel eburneae et suis nominibus appellentur*' (*Ep.* 107 [Wright, LCL]).

[33] '... *et non solum ordinem teneat litterarum, ut memoria nominum in canticum transeat, sed ipse inter se crebro ordo turbetur et mediis ultima, primis media misceantur ut eas non sonu tantum, sed et visu noverit*' (*Ep.* 107 [Wright, LCL]); See also Quintilian, *Inst. Or.* I 1.27.

[34] '*Ipsa nomina, per quae consuescet verba contexere, non sint fortuita, sed certa et coacervata de industria, prophetarum videlicet atque apostolorum, et omnis ab Adam patriarcharum series de Matheo Lucaque descendat, ut, dum aliud agit, futurae memoriae praeparetur*' (*Ep.* 107 [Wright, LCL]); See also Quintilian, *Inst. Or.* I 1.30-5.

[35] '*Pro gemmis aut serico divinos codices amet, in quibus auri et pellis Babyloniae vermiculata pictura, sed ad fidem placeat emendata et erudita distinctio*' (*Ep.* 107 [Wright, LCL]).

[36] '*Discat primum Psalterium ... et in Proverbiis Salomonis erudiatur ad vitam*' (*Ep.* 107 [Wright LCL]).

monastery. Here, in an establishment run by the child's grandmother, the elder Paula, and her aunt, Eustochium, Jerome offers his own services as tutor. As Paula's ideal instructor, a man of 'approved years, life, and learning' (*'magister probae aetatis et vitae atque eruditionis'*), he likens his proposed role to that of Aristotle's in teaching Alexander 'his first letters' (*'initia ei traderet litterarum'*).[37]

While one might read Jerome's suggestion as an isolated instance of service to a close family friend, it is arguably significant that Rufinus also pictures Jerome in a teaching role – this time in charge of the education of young boys.[38]

John Chrysostom (347-407 AD; Antioch)

It is striking that John Chrysostom likewise proposes that Christian parents send their children to be educated in monasteries – in this case by local Antiochene monks.[39] As reported, Chrysostom recommends that instruction begin once boys have reached the age of ten and continue for at least ten years.[40] Like Basil and Jerome, he emphasizes the value of children being tutored by spiritually approved masters, who will encourage young students to develop both intellectual and moral strength.[41] While Marrou suggests that, in later writing, Chrysostom appears to speak against such practice,[42] there is good evidence to indicate that this diversity of position, even within the writings of a single author, reflects wider debate.[43]

Pachomius (320-340/340-404 AD; Egypt)

Per the caricatured depictions of Antony, Arsenius and Evagrius noted above, Egyptian monasticism has traditionally been framed as anomalously 'rustic'.[44]

[37] In fact Jerome offers to serve as 'both her tutor and her foster-father'. Carrying her on his shoulders, he will 'train her stammering lips ... tak[ing] more pride in [his] task than ... the worldly philosopher; for ... [rather than] teaching a Macedonian king, destined to die by poison in Babylon, [he will instruct] the handmaid and bride of Christ who one day [will] be presented to the heavenly throne'. '*Ipse, si Paulam miseris, balbutientia senex verba formabo multo gloriosior mundi philosopho, qui non regem Macedonum Babylonio periturum veneno, sed ancillam et sponsam Christi erudiam regnis caelestibus offerendam*' (Jerome, *Ep*. 107 [Wright, LCL]).

[38] Rufinus reports that after Jerome 'had settled in the monastery at Bethlehem, he took the office of a teacher in grammar'. Within this frame, Rufinus likewise critiques Jerome for not limiting the sources of his instruction to biblical texts, but also introducing 'the comedians ... lyrical and historical writers to the young boys who had been entrusted to him' (*Apol*. II 8 [NPNF^2]).

[39] John Chrysostom, *Adversus oppugnatores vitae monasticae* III (PG 47, 319-92).

[40] Chrysostom, *Adv. Opp*. III 17-18.

[41] Chrysostom, *Adv. Opp*. III 11-13.

[42] H.I. Marrou, *History of Education* (1956), 332.

[43] Thomas of Marga, *Book of Governors* I 74.3-10, 75.1-14; see translation and discussion in Adam Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom: The School of Nisibis and the Development of Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia* (Philadelphia, 2006), 169-71.

[44] Marrou's discussion of Egyptian monasticism is one of the most explicit examples, but implicit references abound. For example, in their archeological report of the excavations at the

However, texts hailing from a Pachomian milieu likewise portray training in basic literary skills as part of the monastery's daily rhythms. While perhaps addressing an alternate demographic,[45] included among the Pachomian *Praecepta* is the mandate that each newly entering monk, if 'unformed',[46] should be given 'twenty psalms or two of the Apostle's epistles, or some other part of the Scripture'.[47] If illiterate (*'litteras ignorabit'*), he is directed to go at the first, third and sixth hour:

> ... to someone who can teach and has been appointed for him. He shall stand before him and learn very studiously with all gratitude. Then the fundamentals of a syllable, the verbs, and nouns shall be written for him, and even if he does not want to, he shall be compelled to read.[48]

An accompanying Pachomian 'Precept' makes the aim of this instruction clear: 'There shall be no one whatever in the monastery who does not learn to read and does not memorize something of the Scriptures.'[49]

Monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes, H.E. Winlock and W.E. Crum note the presence of pedagogical texts among extant monastic artifacts but resist including literate investment among the various occupations attributed to the monastery's population. Reading material evidence in light of the narrative texts named above, they assert that 'the teaching of youth as an occupation is not one in which we should expect to find non-coenobitic monks concerned' (*Monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes* [New York, 1926], I 165). More recently, in an otherwise detailed description of the occupations represented by the documentary evidence that derives from this same Egyptian, monastic complex, Darlene Brooks-Hedstrom makes no mention of this body of pedagogical material. She likewise omits reference to investment in the copying and production of books, despite a sizable cache of letters that explicitly attest the same (*Your Cell Will Teach You All Things*, Ph.D. Dissertation [Miami University, 2001]); For a contrasting assessment, see Chrysi Kotsifou, 'Books and Book Production in the Monastic Communities of Byzantine Egypt', in William E. Klingshirn and Linda Safran (eds), *The Early Christian Book* (Washington, D.C., 2007).

[45] See L.I. Larsen, 'Meals and Monastic Identity' in *Mahl und religiöse Identität* (Dresden, 2012); *id.*, 'Resisting a Reclining Culture' in *Meals in the Early Christian World: Social Formation, Experimentation, and Conflict at the Table* (New York, 2012).

[46] *'qui rudis monasterium fuerit ingressus'* (*Praecepta* 139) in Amand Boon (ed.), *Pachomiana Latina* (Louvain, 1932), 13-52; Armand Vielleux (ed. and tr.), *Pachomian Koininia 2: Chronicles and Rules* (Kalmazoo, 1981), 175-95.

[47] *'dabunt ei uiginti psalmos uel duas epistulas apostoli, aut alterius scripturae partem'* (*Praec.* 139 [Vielleux]).

[48] *'... hora prima et tertia et sexta uadet ad eum qui docere potest et qui ei fuerit delegatus, et stabit ante illum, et discet studiosissime cum omni gratiarum actione. Postea uero scribentur ei elementa syllabae, uerba ac nomina, et etiam nolens legere compelletur'* (*Praec.* 139 [Vielleux]).

[49] *'... et omnino nullus erit in monasterio qui non discat litteras et de scripturis aliquid teneat'* (*Praec.* 140 [Vielleux]); there is striking consonance between the explicit regulatory emphasis on literacy articulated in the Pachomian *Praecepta* and the density of extant 'school' artifacts whose provenance is linked to loci in the relative vicinity of the Pachomian nexus of monastic establishments. Although, like the descriptions surveyed above, each of these respective 'find sites' has historically been treated as exceptional, viewed together, the range and focus of the material evidence more readily suggests monastic pedagogical investment that is decidedly normative.

Summary

The explicit role accorded education across this geographically disparate spectrum of monastic communities raises interesting questions about the place assigned literate pursuits in early monastic life. Albeit privileging an alternate set of authoritative sources, the pedagogical strategies named by Basil, Jerome, Chrysostom and Pachomius parallel those widely documented in a broader Greco-Roman frame. Likewise, the language used in describing 'lessons necessary for the young' reflects established norms. Working with models that intertwined intellectual and moral formation, articulated strategies and ideals are those known to have structured ancient education from the Hellenistic era, through the Byzantine period, and beyond. Such straightforward attestations are likewise consistent with monastic pedagogical investments in education in subsequent eras. Reconsidering perceptions of widespread monastic a-literacy in light of this apparent and overt continuity, makes the 'conventional wisdom' that has treated each of these scenarios as exceptional, itself something of a historical curiosity.

Bridging Binaries: A Common Curriculum?

Per above, as Basil, Jerome, Chrysostom and Pachomius frame a fourth-century 'monastic curriculum', they are working with well-established models. Here, and across a wider array of sources, students moved from writing letters, to manipulating alphabets, syllables, and words. As pupils progressed, however, the central role accorded ongoing work with gnomic maxims, sentences, and sayings, is a point of repeated emphasis.

In her examination of *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds*, Teresa Morgan notes that 'more texts of gnomic sentences survive [in schoolhands] than fragments of any other literature or any other kind of exercise.' Displaying a full range of expertise they 'appear to have been used at every stage [of learning] … from elementary reading and writing to rhetorical exercises.'[50] Students first encountered maxims and sayings in exercises of penmanship and memorization. The same sentences were rehearsed at every succeeding level of education.

Eloquently summarized in Raffaella Cribiore's study of *Literate Education in Graeco-Roman Egypt*: 'A pupil's initial taste of … [a gnomic articulation], gained by copying a short text as an exercise in penmanship, was enriched when he [or she] attempted to read the same text with words and syllables separated.'[51] In something of an iterative cycle, students 'chew[ed]' gnomic sentences and maxims 'over and over, making collections of them and expanding their

[50] Teresa Morgan, *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds* (Cambridge, 1998), 122.

[51] Raffaella Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Princeton, 2001), 179.

content … until' they could (at an opportune moment or in a well-turned phrase) incorporate them into everyday speech and writing.[52]

With a view to moral formation, gnomic material was employed in teaching elementary grammar and rhetoric because of its inherent capacity to 'arouse and catalyze virtue' and to 'strengthen judgment concerning good and evil.'[53] In fact, across extant delineations of the *enkyklios paideia*, the importance of incorporating character-forming maxims and sayings is a topic of repeated emphasis. Articulated as early as the writings of Plato, the stated goal of engaging such pedagogical content was not only that a student gain wide familiarity with grammatical structures and literature, but to 'make a good and wise [individual] of him/[her].'[54] Pseudo-Isocrates suggests that:

> … noble behavior results from a mind 'fraught with many noble maxims; for, as it is the nature of the body to be developed by appropriate exercises, it is the nature of the soul to be developed by moral precepts.'[55]

Quintilian recommends that as students moved from working with words to short sentences, the most useful formulations would not 'express thoughts of no significance, but convey some sound moral lesson.'[56] Even at an advanced age, the student might 'remember such aphorisms … and [over time] the impression made upon his [or her] unformed mind [would] contribute to the formation of … character.'[57] Plutarch premises that teachers themselves be selected by virtue of their ability to 'with all care set … precepts and exhortations beside the young, in order that [children's] characters [might] grow to be upright.'[58] From the Classical period to Late-Antiquity and beyond, affirmation of the qualitative 'usefulness' of maxims, gnomic sayings and stories, echoes a recurring refrain.

Encountered within a monastic frame, such content has often been treated as exceptional. It is, however, more accurately construed as common.[59] If in

[52] R. Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind* (2001), 179.

[53] John S. Kloppenborg, *Formation of Q: Trajectories in Ancient Wisdom Traditions* (Harrisburg, 1987), 304; See also Seneca, *Ad Lucilium* 94.28-9, 32, 34.

[54] οἱ δὲ ἐκ πάντων κεφάλαια ἐκλέξαντες καί τινας ὅλας ῥήσεις εἰς ταὐτὸν συναγαγόντες, ἐκμανθάνειν φασὶ δεῖν εἰς μνήμην τιθεμένους, εἰ μέλλει τις ἀγαθὸς ἡμῖν καὶ σοφὸς ἐκ πολυπειρίας καὶ πολυμαθίας γενέσθαι (Plato, *Leg.* 810E-812A [Bury, LCL]).

[55] Οὕτω δὲ τὴν γνώμην οὐ δυνατὸν διατεθῆναι τὸν μὴ πολλῶν καὶ καλῶν ἀκουσμάτων πεπληρωμένον· τὰ μὲν γὰρ σώματα τοῖς συμμέτροις πόνοις, ἡ δὲ ψυχὴ τοῖς σπουδαίοις λόγοις αὔξεσθαι πέφυκε (Ps.-Isocrates, *Ad Demonicum* 12 [Norlin, LCL]).

[56] '*non otiosas velim sententias habeant sed honestum aliquid monentes*' (Quintilian, *Inst. Or.* I 1.35 [Butler, LCL]).

[57] '*prosequitur haec memoria in senectutem et impressa animo rudi usque ad mores proficiet*' (Quintilian, *Inst. Or.* I 1.36 [Butler, LCL]).

[58] οἱ νόμιμοι τῶν διδασκάλων ἐμμελεῖς τὰς ὑποθήκας καὶ παραινέσεις παραπηγνύουσι τοῖς νέοις, ἵν' ὀρθὰ τούτων βλαστάνῃ τὰ ἤθη (Plutarch, *De liberis educandis* 4C [Babbitt, LCL]).

[59] Yun Lee Too cogently underscores the civic agenda attached to this mimetic enterprise, suggesting that 'antiquity seems to have produced a whole body of writing which was consciously

hagiographical nomenclature the rustic simplicity of the *Apophthegmata Patrum* has long been used to frame early monastic contexts as 'universities of the desert' in a spiritual sense, it is subtly ironic that one can likewise imagine these same texts serving more practical ends.[60] In fact, perhaps the most striking evidence for monastic investment in conventional pedagogical pursuits lies in the structures that link monastic *apophthegmatic* sources – the content long used as 'evidence' in arguing against such investment – with broader use of gnomic material.

Contextualizing Caricature: Reading 'Sayings' in light of the literary genre to which they belong

Encountered in an ancient/late-ancient frame, maxims, sentences, sayings and stories, served as 'grist' in an iterative cycle of 'elementary exercises' (*progymnasmata*) that constituted the first stage of training in grammar and rhetoric.[61] Instruction began with reading out loud, listening to others read, and paraphrasing models.[62] Once students had learned the definition of a particular form of a gnomic saying, its etymology, and differentiation from related forms, they turned to reworking sayings and maxims in a series of increasingly complex manipulations. To the end of gaining greater dexterity with the spoken and written word, students 'learned how to recite a [saying/gnomic sentence], to paraphrase it, to elaborate it, to confirm or refute its message, [and] to change its inflection through various cases and numbers.'[63] Like the words included in Paula's lists, such gnomic formulations were doubly useful. Whether explicitly or by allusion, with each iteration a saying's gnomic content retained implicit capacity to promote virtue and shape character.

concerned with, and often declared itself as concerned with, *paideia* because this was a political issue'. 'Much of the Platonic corpus [addresses] the education of young men and indeed whole communities, precisely because the formation of the soul was the means by which the ideal community could be formed. The philosopher-king of the *Republic* speaks emphatically to the intricate connection between knowledge and power. Aristotle devotes sections of his works, especially the *Politics*, to the issue of how to instruct and socialize children and young people within the civic community. As with Plato, it is understood that what children hear, read and watch determines who they will be and in turn, what the community they inhabit will become' ('Writing the History of Ancient Education', in *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity* [2001], 1-21, 13).

[60] See, for example, J.-C. Guy, 'Educational Innovation' (1974).

[61] For an accessible compilation of these forms see George A. Kennedy, *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric*, Writings from the Greco-Roman World 10 (Atlanta, 2003).

[62] See further discussion in George A. Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric under Christian Emperors* (Princeton, 1983), 57.

[63] Edward N. O'Neil, 'The *Chreia* in Greco-Roman Literature and Education', Marvin W. Meyer (ed.), *Institute for Antiquity and Christianity Report: 1972-1980* (Claremont, 1981), 19-22, 20.

Maxims

At the most basic levels of composition, students were introduced to cryptic maxims like those attributed to the seven sages: γνῶθι σεαυτόν (know thyself), θεοὺς σέβου (fear the gods), γονεῖς αἰδοῦ (honor [your] parents). At a subsequent stage, these small and infinitely malleable injunctions were encountered again in combinations that comprised the simple monostichs found in collections loosely attributed to the figure of Menander.

Extant re-formulations blur long instantiated boundaries between 'lettered' and 'rustic', in provocative ways. For example, a fourth-century student copybook combines the second and third of these:

γέροντα τίμα, τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν εἰκόνα.
Honor elders [as] the image of God.[64]

The *Carmina Moralia* of Gregory Nazianzen offers an alternate re-working of the same combination:

θεὸν φόβου πρώτιστα, καὶ γονεῖς τίμα.
First fear god, and [then] honor your parents.[65]

A third permutation appears among sentences preserved on a sixth century ostracon from the Monastery of Epiphanius in Thebes:

γονεῖς τιμῶν μάλιστα θεὸν φοβοῦ.
Honor your parents, [but] fear God most of all.[66]

In each articulation component elements are variously articulated and arranged. However, as shorter maxims are recombined and reconfigured, the requisite manipulations remain simple, formulaic and transparent.

Alphabetika

Along similar lines, a conventional classroom exercise required that students supply and/or re-work familiar maxims to fit a sequence corresponding to each letter of the Greek (or Coptic) alphabet.[67] Here again, parallel structures link application encountered in schooltext exercises with alphabetized sequences of monastic provenance.

[64] Paul Collart, *Les Papyrus Bouriant* (Paris, 1926), 17-27.
[65] Gregory Nazianzen, *Carmina Moralia* 2.7.
[66] MMA 14.1.210, as published in Winlock and Crum, *Monastery of Epiphanius* (1926), II 615.
[67] See John Barns, 'A New Gnomologium: With Some Remarks on Gnomic Anthologies I', *Classical Quarterly* 44 (1950), 126-37; J. Barns, 'A New Gnomologium: With Some Remarks on Gnomic Anthologies II', *Classical Quarterly* (New Series) 1 (1951), 1-19.

Student Copybook (4th c. C.E.)	Evagrius, *Capita Paranetica* (4th c. C.E.)
Ἀρχὴ μεγίστη τοῦ φρονεῖν τὰ γράμματα.	Ἀρχὴ σωτηρίας ἡ ἑαυτοῦ κατάγνωσις.
The beginning of great wisdom is learning letters.	The beginning of salvation is condemnation of yourself.
Βίος βίου δεόμενος οὐκ ἔστιν βίος.	**Β**έλτιον λίθον εἰκῇ βαλεῖν ἢ λόγον.
A life lived in bondage is not life.	Better to throw a stone at random than a word.
Γέροντα τίμα, τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν εἰκόνα.	Γίνου τοῖς πᾶσιν ὡς σὺ θέλεις τοὺς πάντας.
Honor elders [as] the image of God.	Be to all as you wish all to be to you.
Δένδρον παλαιὸν μεταφυτεύειν δύσκολον.	Δικαιοσύνην μᾶλλον ἔργῳ ἢ λόγῳ ἄσκει.
An old tree is not easily replanted.[68]	Practice righteousness more in deed than in word.[69]

While within Evagrius' 'monastic' sequence, a progressive blending of Christian and classical content is apparent, any structural distinction is hardly definitive.

Later in this same *alphabetikon*, Evagrius re-works material that is elsewhere assigned to Sextus and Pythagorus. The latter, respectively take as their subject a Cynic philosopher:

Κυνικοῦ μὴ τὸ σχῆμα ἀποδέχου ἀλλὰ τὴν μεγαλοψυχίαν ζήλου.

Accept not the outward appearance of the Cynic philosopher, but rather emulate his greatness of soul.[70]

Evagrius frames his sentence with 'a Christian man' as its protagonist:

Χριστιανοῦ ἀνδρὸς μὴ τὸ σχῆμα ἀποδέχου, ἀλλὰ τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς φρόνημα.

Accept not the outward appearance of a Christian man, but rather the attitude of [his] soul.[71]

While, in the alphabetical sequencing of Sextus and Pythagoras this maxim aligns with κ, Evagrius' alterations shift the sentence to the χ position. Beyond these small adjustments, the premise remains consistent. Truly only the names have been changed.

Sayings/Chreiai

At an alternate stage in the pedagogical sequence, the same monostich might be re-formulated as a *chreia* – a maxim 'aptly' attributed to a named or anonymous protagonist.[72] The equivalent sentence might likewise be re-attributed to

[68] *P. Bour.* f. 7v-9.
[69] Evagrius, *Capita Paranetica* 1-4 (Sinkewicz).
[70] Sextus 462 = Pythagoras 54 (Chadwick).
[71] Evagrius, *Capita Paranetica* 22 (Sinkewicz).
[72] Theon, 'On the Chreia' 201.20 (Walz).

an alternate protagonist, and/or incorporated into a longer narration. For example, formulated as a maxim, the δ monostich in the copy-book exercise charted above, states:

Δένδρον παλαιὸν μεταφυτεύειν δύσκολον.

An old tree is not easily replanted.[73]

Two additional re-formulations of the same maxim appear in monastic *apophthegmatic* collections. In each of these 'monastic' re-workings, the saying is 'aptly' attributed to an 'old man'.

Dixit senex: Sicut arbor fructificare non potest, si saepius transferatur, sic nec monachus frequenter migrans potest fructificare.

An [old man] said: 'Just as a tree cannot bear fruit if it is often transplanted, so neither can a monk bear fruit if s/he frequently moves.'[74]

Εἶπεν γέρων· ὥσπερ δένδρον καρποφορῆσαι ἀδύνατον συνεχῶς μεταφυτευόμενον, οὕτως οὐδε μοναχὸς μεταβαίνων ἐκ τόπου εἰς τόπον ἀρετὴν ἐπιτελέσαι δύναται.

An old man said: 'Just as a tree cannot bring forth fruit if it is always being transplanted, so the monk who is always going from one place to another is not able to accomplish virtue.'[75]

Like the *alphabetikon* of Evagrius, as this gnomic sentence is variously paraphrased, its respective articulations include additional narrative detail that locates the saying within a Christian, and more explicitly, monastic frame.[76]

Stories and Fables

A similar botanical motif serves to introduce a narration included in the writings of Plutarch. Underscoring the pedagogical importance of interspersing relaxation with disciplined application to set tasks, Plutarch enjoins:

ὥσπερ γὰρ τὰ φυτὰ τοῖς μὲν μετρίοις ὕδασι τρέφεται, τοῖς δὲ πολλοῖς πνίγεται, τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον ψυχὴ τοῖς μὲν συμμέτροις αὔξεται πόνοις, τοῖς δ' ὑπερβάλλουσι βαπτίζεται. δοτέον οὖν τοῖς παισὶν ἀναπνοὴν τῶν συνεχῶν πόνων, ἐνθυμουμένους ὅτι πᾶς ὁ βίος ἡμῶν εἰς ἄνεσιν καὶ σπουδὴν διῄρηται. καὶ διὰ τοῦτ' οὐ μόνον ἐγρήγορσις ἀλλὰ καὶ ὕπνος εὑρέθη, οὐδὲ πόλεμος ἀλλὰ καὶ εἰρήνη, οὐδὲ χειμὼν ἀλλὰ καὶ εὐδία, οὐδ' ἐνεργοὶ πράξεις ἀλλὰ καὶ ἑορταί. συνελόντι δ' εἰπεῖν ἡ ἀνάπαυσις τῶν πόνων ἐστὶν ἄρτυμα. καὶ οὐκ ἐπὶ τῶν ζῴων μόνων τοῦτ' ἂν ἴδοι τις γιγνόμενον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἀψύχων· καὶ γὰρ τὰ τόξα καὶ τὰς

[73] *P. Bour.* f. 7v-9.

[74] AP/PJ VII 36.

[75] AP/GN 204.

[76] See L.I. Larsen, 'The *Apophthegmata Patrum*: Rustic Rumination or Rhetorical Recitation', *Meddelanden från Collegium Patristicum Lundense* 22 (2008), 21-31; See also Ronald F. Hock and Edward N. O'Neil (eds), *The Chreia in Ancient Rhetoric: Volume 1, The Progymnasmata* (Atlanta, 1986).

λύρας ἀνίεμεν, ἵν' ἐπιτεῖναι δυνηθῶμεν. καθόλου δὲ σῴζεται σῶμα μὲν ἐνδείᾳ καὶ πληρώσει, ψυχὴ δ' ἀνέσει καὶ πόνῳ.

For, just as plants are nourished by moderate applications of water, but are drowned by many in succession, in the same fashion the mind is made to grow by properly adapted tasks, but is submerged by those which are excessive. Children must be given some breathing-space from continued tasks, for we must bear in mind that our whole life is divided between relaxation and application. For this reason there have been created not only waking hours but also sleep, not only war but also peace, not only storm but also fair weather, not only periods of vigorous activity but also holidays. In short, rest gives relish to labour. We may observe that this holds true not merely in the case of living creatures, but also in the case of inanimate things, for we unstring bows and lyres that we may be able to tighten them again. The body generally is maintained by hunger and its satisfaction, and the mind by relaxation and labour.[77]

Alternately, and 'aptly' re-configured, Plutarch's exemplar likewise supplies the outline for a familiar *apophthegm* featuring Abba Antony 'relaxing with the brethren.'

ἦν δέ τις κατὰ τὴν ἔρημον θηρεύων ἄγρια ζῷα, καὶ εἶδε τὸν ἀββᾶν 'Αντώνιον χαριεντιζόμενον μετὰ τῶν ἀδελφῶν. θέλων δὲ αὐτὸν πληροφορῆσαι ὁ γέρων, ὅτι χρὴ μίαν συγκαταβαίνειν τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς, λέγει αὐτῷ· βάλε βέλος εἰς τὸ τόξον σου, καὶ τεῖνον· καὶ ἐποίησεν οὕτως. λέγει αὐτῷ· πάλιν τεῖνον· καὶ ἔτεινεν. καὶ πάλιν φησί· τεῖνον. λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ θηρευτής· ἐὰν ὑπὲρ τὸ μέτρον τείνω, κλᾶται τὸ τόξον. λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ γέρων· οὕτως καὶ εἰς τὸ ἔργον τοῦ θεοῦ· ἐὰν πλεῖον τοῦ μέτρου τείνωμεν κατὰ τῶν ἀδελφῶν, ταχὺ προσρήσσουσι. χρὴ οὖν μίαν μίαν συγκαταβαίνειν τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς. ταῦτα ἀκούσας ὁ θηρευτής, κατενύγη, καὶ πολλὰ ὠφεληθεὶς παρὰ τοῦ γέροντος, ἀπῆλθε· καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοὶ στηριχθέντες ἀνεχώρησαν εἰς τὸν τόπον αὐτῶν.

A hunter in the desert saw Abba Anthony enjoying himself with the brethren and he was shocked. Wanting to show him that it was necessary sometimes to meet the needs of the brethren, the old man said to him: 'Put an arrow in your bow and shoot it.' So he did. The old man then said: 'Shoot another', and he did so. Then the old man said: 'Shoot yet again', and the hunter replied: 'If I bend my bow so much I will break it.' Then the old man said to him: 'It is the same with the work of God. If we stretch the brethren beyond measure they will soon break. Sometimes it is necessary to come down to meet their needs.' When he heard these words the hunter was pierced by compunction and, greatly edified by the old man, he went away. As for the brethren, they went home strengthened.[78]

In its monastic re-formulation, Plutarch's pedagogical motif explicitly links with Antony's monastic investments in 'forming' a new generation of 'brothers'.

Similar patterns are readily apparent in gnomic maxims and monostichs that supply the requisite 'moral' in monastic re-workings of familiar fables. Here,

[77] Plutarch, *Lib. educ.* 9C-D (Babbitt, LCL).

[78] AP/G Antony 13 (Ward); see also AP/PJ X 2.

a final example included in the Aesopic corpus, but originally drawn from the writings of Hesiod, serves well to illustrate. As encountered in the fable collections of Babrius, the story is shaped as an etiology:

Θεῶν Προμηθεὺς ἦν τις, ἀλλὰ τῶν πρώτων. τοῦτον πλάσασθαί φασι δεσπότην ζῴων ἄνθρωπον ἐκ γῆς· ἐκ δὲ τοῦ δύω πήρας κρεμάσαι φέροντά φασι τῶν ἐν ἀνθρώποις κακῶν γεμούσας, τὴν πρόσω μὲν ὀθνείων, ἰδίων δὲ τὴν ὄπισθεν, ἥτις ἦν μείζων. διό μοι δοκοῦσι συμφορὰς μὲν ἀλλήλων βλέπειν ἀκριβῶς, ἀγνοεῖν δὲ τὰς οἴκοι.

Prometheus was a god, but of the first dynasty. He it was, they say, that fashioned man from the earth, to be the master of the beasts. On man he hung, the story goes, two wallets filled with the faults of humankind; the one in front contained the faults of other men, the one behind the bearer's own, and this was the larger wallet. That's why, it seems to me, men see the failings of each other very clearly, while unaware of those which are their own.[79]

Two monastic re-framings of the fable leave the narrative's gnomic premise intact, but aptly place respective monks in the protagonist's role.

One version includes extensive additional detail. It likewise features Abba Moses as exemplar:

ἀδελφός ποτε ἐσφάλη εἰς Σκῆτιν· καὶ γενομένου συνεδρίου, ἀπέστειλαν πρὸς τὸν ἀββᾶν Μωϋσῆν. ὁ δὲ οὐκ ἤθελεν ἐλθεῖν. ἀπέστειλεν οὖν πρὸς αὐτὸν ὁ πρεσβύτερος, λέγων· ἐλθὲ, ὅτι σε ὁ λαὸς περιμένει. ὁ δὲ ἀναστὰς ἦλθε. καὶ λαβὼν σπυρίδα τετρημμένην, καὶ γεμίσας ἄμμου, ἐβάστασεν. οἱ δὲ ἐξελθόντες εἰς ἀπάντησιν αὐτοῦ, λέγουσιν αὐτῷ· τί ἐστι τοῦτο, πάτερ; εἶπε δὲ αὐτοῖς ὁ γέρων· αἱ ἁμαρτίαι μού εἰσιν ὀπίσω μου καταῤῥέουσαι, καὶ οὐ βλέπω αὐτάς· καὶ ἦλθον ἐγὼ σήμερον, ἁμαρτήματα ἀλλότρια κρῖναι. οἱ δὲ ἀκούσαντες, οὐδὲν ἐλάλησαν τῷ ἀδελφῷ· ἀλλὰ συνεχώρησαν αὐτῷ.

A brother at Scetis committed a fault. A council was called to which Abba Moses was invited, but he refused to go to it. Then the priest sent someone to say to him: 'Come, for everyone is waiting for you.' So he got up and went. He took a leaking jug, filled it with water and carried it with him. The others came out to meet him and said to him: 'What is this, Father?' The old man said to them: 'My sins run out behind me, and I do not see them, and today I am coming to judge the errors of another.' When they heard that they said no more to the brother but forgave him.[80]

A second, condenses the active aspect of the narrative into a simple saying, attributing its exemplary teaching to John Colobos:

Εἶπεν ὁ ἀββᾶς Ἰωάννης· Τὸ ἐλαφρὸν φορτίον ἐάσαντες, τουτέστι τὸ ἑαυτοὺς μέμφεσθαι, τὸ βαρὺ ἐβαστάσαμεν, τουτέστι τὸ δικαιοῦν ἑαυτούς.

Abba John said: We have put the light burden on one side, that is to say, self-accusation, and we have loaded ourselves with a heavy one, that is to say self-justification.[81]

[79] Babrius, *Fabula* 66 (Perry, LCL).
[80] AP/G Moses 2 (Ward).
[81] AP/G John Colobos 21 (Ward).

As this maxim is expanded, condensed, and variously presented in both a 'mixed' and pure '*chreiic*' form, it serves as something of a textbook example of the types of manipulations arguably most at home in a classroom setting.[82]

Summary

While scholars have long treated monastic *apophthegmatic* texts as exceptional, placed in conversation with their Greco-Roman counterparts, the conventional manner in which these texts re-work a rich spectrum of gnomic material appears quite common.[83] If their fluid character has perennially presented something of a riddle, read 'in light of the literary genre to which such texts belong,'[84] the established pedagogy that structures these narratives adheres to familiar and customary forms.

Countering the legacy of an interpretive trajectory that has persistently framed hagiography as history, the importance of re-situating monastic investments within this more plausible trajectory is patent. Here Teresa Morgan's consideration of the formative aspects of ancient education, and more recently, the interface between gnomic traditions and moral philosophy, is particularly provocative. Construing the Roman social landscape as a 'patchwork [of] multicultural' ethics and social structures, of 'multiple overlapping communities with overlapping moralities',[85] Morgan suggests that just as 'the degree of common moral ground between socially and geographically different groups is considerable',[86] so the range of positions captured in a given body of *apophthegmatic* material is a measure of the diversity of its constituency.

Asserting that as a genre, gnomic re-formulations do not seek to explicitly delineate 'what is right or wrong, good or bad', but rather 'to raise questions and possibilities – to problematize … [and] provoke', Morgan argues that the essence of gnomic articulation lies not in 'simplicity' but 'multivalency, not in the resolution of moral dilemmas but the expression of probably insoluble tensions.' Within this frame, 'the appearance and distribution of topics in *apophthegmatic* sayings and stories reflect[s] neither their social importance nor their marginality nor their disputability, [nor I might add, their historical accuracy,] but what one might call their ponderability: the degree to which they are felt to require ethical advice and consideration.'[87] Mapping 'a landscape which

[82] See, among others, Theon, *Prog.* 202.20-206.10.
[83] See L.I. Larsen, 'The *Apophthegmata Patrum* and the Classical Rhetorical Tradition', *SP* 39 (2007), 409-15; L.I. Larsen, 'Ørkenfedrenes *Apophthegmata* og den klassiske Retoriske Tradisjon', *Meddelanden från Collegium Patristicum Lundense* 16 (2001), 26-35.
[84] P. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (1995), 52.
[85] Teresa Morgan, *Popular Morality in the Early Roman Empire* (Cambridge, 2007).
[86] T. Morgan, *Popular Morality* (2007), 2.
[87] T. Morgan, *Popular Morality* (2007), 18.

can be read from many directions in many configurations', Morgan suggests that such articulation reflects 'communities commit[ed] ... to engage, not to agree with one another.'[88]

So situated, both the density of monastic gnomic material and its diversity is provocative. Following Morgan, if one assumes that the caricatures that inhabit the monastic narrative landscape are more nuanced than those suggested by the readings with which we began our discussion, the well-rehearsed exchange between Evagrius and Arsenius brings our conversation full circle:

> Evagrius once said to Arsenius: 'How is it that we educated and learned men have no goodness, and Egyptian peasants have a great deal?' Arsenius answered: 'We have nothing because we go chasing after worldly knowledge. These Egyptian peasants have got their goodness by hard work.'[89]

Reading generously, in a diverse social landscape, comprised of a range of literacies, the value of having two illustrious monastic exemplars affirm the importance of shouldering one's share of the 'hard work' over 'softer' intellectual pursuits is clear. Imagining a more stratified framework, interactions between literate and less-literate have been re-valued in such a way that communal tensions can be engaged and, in an ideal frame, addressed. The 'apt' detail included in each gnomic vignette, in turn, reinforces the normative character of the 'exceptional' scenarios encountered in the non-narrative descriptions noted above.

Implications/Conclusions

Because scholars of both monasticism and education have taken monastic disdain for 'learning letters' as their starting point, larger-than-life caricatures have been framed as representative of monastic practice, overall. With something of a domino effect, positing illiteracy has simultaneously pre-determined the range of historical questions that may be asked and the 'allowable' conclusions that necessarily follow. While such interpretive emphases have been particularly problematic in treating narrative texts describing life in the Egyptian desert, they have inversely influenced sketches of the broader monastic landscape, as a whole. Here uninterrogated instantiation of arbitrary distinctions between Egypt and Palestine, city and desert, lettered and rustic, has effectively obscured the more particular and more nuanced intersections that characterize and link

[88] T. Morgan, *Popular Morality* (2007), 20.

[89] '*Dixit aliquando abbas Evagrius abbati Arsenio: Quomodo nos excitati eruditione et scientia nullas virtutes habemus, hi autem rustici in Aegypto habitantes tantas virtutes possident? Respondit abbas Arsenius: Nos quia mundanae eruditionis disciplinis intenti sumus, nihil habemus; hi autem rustici Aegyptii ex propriis laboribus acquisierunt virtutes*' (AP/PJ X 5 [Ward]); see also AP/G Arsenius 5 (Ward). See discussion above.

the spectrum of diverse texts and contexts that comprise and derive from this range of settings.[90]

Within this frame, as a-critical readings of the sayings and narratives included among the *Apophthegmata Patrum* have historically served a central role in writing both the history of monasticism and the history of education, the place that critical engagement of such texts must hold in re-writing and/or amending these respective narratives, is more nuanced. Resisting the impulse to simply replace one a-dimensional historical construct with its inverse, it is arguably significant that in ancient rhetorical handbooks, maxims, gnomic sentences, sayings, and fables consistently constitute the three most elementary stages of the 'elementary exercises'. Per above, this makes the sheer density of *gnomic/ apophthegmatic* material that derives from an early monastic milieu, at minimum, suggestive (Elsewhere, I have argued that it is, in fact, more akin to an elephant in the living room).

As the non-exceptional norms that structure this content invert long-lived, but loosely-grounded assumptions premised in monastic a-literacy, they likewise invite more textured exploration of the particular curricular choices that arguably characterized early monastic school contexts. Choosing an explicitly pedagogical starting point in approaching these texts underscores the range and diversity of the content included across extant collections of the *Apophthegmata Patrum*. It is, in the end, only by placing this material in conversation with wider norms that the distinctive aspects of monastic praxis become meaningful. Here, the question of 'whether' the earliest monks engaged in literate pursuits is more usefully reframed as 'how' and 'to what degree'. So situated, both similarity and difference affords a rich vantage point for exploring the manner in which early monastic communities preserved and reconfigured widely practiced received traditions, and using established models to teach a '*new* alphabet', turned them to their own ends.

[90] James Goehring offers a provocative re-analysis of the Egyptian desert landscape in 'The Dark Side of Landscape: Ideology and Power in the Christian Myth of the Desert', in Dale B. Martin and Patricia Cox Miller (eds), *The Cultural Turn in Late Ancient Studies: Gender, Asceticism, and Historiography* (Durham and London, 2005), 136-49.