

Two Unpublished Psychopelitic Tales

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THE THIRD EDITION of the Bollandists' *répertoire* of Greek hagiography¹ contains some sections that do not strictly speaking list saints' lives. One of these (*BHG*³ III 175–82) Halkin named *Narrationes animae utiles*, accurately reflecting the terms in which many of its contents are described in the manuscripts that preserve them: διηγήσεις ψυχοφελείς, "spiritually beneficial tales." There is another section that is like unto it (*BHG*³ III 191–214) but longer. Although it is entitled *Patrum Vitae*, Πατερικά, Γεροντικά, its contents are very similar to those of the former section; so much so that, towards the end of his life, Père Halkin was known to say that he regretted having made the distinction. In fact the only perceptible distinction seems to be that, by and large, the stories under *Patrum Vitae* tend to occur in recognized collections (Πατερικά, Γεροντικά) rather than floating freely in the manuscripts, but there are exceptions in both sections. In fact the contents of both are almost identical. They almost all consist of a brief story—which may or may not be about named persons—often in a monastic context and usually with a spiritual point to make. And although many of them do carry a heading that describes them as βίος/*vita*, these are by no means saints' lives, but rather single scenes from the lives of persons, many of whom never acquired the epithet "saint" and some of whom did not even aspire to it. Many of the tales were eventually used as building

¹ F. Halkin, ed., *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca*³ I–III (= *Subsidia Hagiographica* 8a [Brussels 1957]). The following collections of tales will be cited by name or initial and number: J=Codex Sinai 448; Mioni=E. Mioni, "Il Pratum Spirituale di Giovanni Moscho: gli episodi inediti del Cod. Mariano greco II.21," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* (1951) 61–94; NAU=F. Nau, "Histoire des solitaires égyptiens," *ROrChr* 12–18 (1907–13); Nissen=T. Nissen, "Unbekannte Erzählungen aus dem Pratum Spirituale," *BZ* 38 (1938) 351–76; W=J. Wortley, *A Répertoire of Byzantine "Beneficial Tales"* (διηγήσεις ψυχοφελείς), forthcoming.

blocks by would-be hagiographers or even chronographers short on data; some them (but probably not many) are episodes that have become detached from the more or less genuine saints' lives that hagiographers used, and probably as many are individual episodes thought to have occurred in the lives of certain holy men. But this they all have in common: something *happens* in them. This distinguishes them from the sayings (*apophthegmata*) of the holy ones, with which they are commonly found in the manuscripts, and with which they are manifestly closely related. It is not impossible that the earliest tales originated as illustrations of sayings, much as in the Gospels certain parables can be seen as illustrations of certain dominical sayings. And like the parables, some of them are very colorful. Taken together, under whatever heading they may come, they form a rich and revealing series of glimpses of life, mainly but not exclusively monastic life in Syria, Palestine, and Egypt *ca* 375–650—with a few additional ones produced in the tenth century.

A comparison of the two supplements to *BHG*² reveals that the two sections mentioned above have increased remarkably in size. The next *Auctarium* will show that this increase has by no means come to a halt. It is exciting that whereas in most genres little new material is coming to light, new psychopelitic tales are being discovered all the time—to be added to the thousand-plus already identified and catalogued by the present writer. It seems that there is no end to them, for they keep turning up, sometimes scribbled on the flyleaf of a codex, sometimes tucked into some well-recognized text for no apparent reason other than the scribe's whim, sometimes in codices that have been gone over so often it seemed impossible that anything could have escaped the diligent cataloguer's notice. The object of the present article is to bring to light two such tales: one, known in translation, though the Greek has not yet been published; the other appears to be completely unknown *hucusque*.

I

It is well known that the huge eleventh-century *codex Parisinus gr.* 1596 is a complex tome containing a great variety of

² F. Halkin, ed., *Novum auctarium Bibliothecae Hagiographicae Graecae* (= *Subsidia Hagiographica* 65 [Brussels 1984]).

hagiographic, psychopelitic, and apophthegmatic material. The present writer was by no means the first to have tried to negotiate a path through that tangled forest,³ nor was it with any great hopes of finding anything previously unnoted that he did so. And in the event, the detailed analysis of pp.410–741, which his research generated, brought few surprises, except for the order in which some of the items, e.g. the *Pratum Spirituale* tales, are presented.

There were, however, two exceptions: the curious tale of an elder and his disciple John buried by lions (pp.427f, W965) and the story of how Abba Longinus and a shipmaster prevent a suicide (pp.438f, W957). A slightly different version of this story is to be found in *codex Sinaiticus* 448. Dom Lucien Regnault has published a translation of that text and, elsewhere, a translation of the Armenian version of the same story,⁴ but hitherto the Greek text remains unpublished. Dom Lucien Regnault having kindly provided the readings of three other known copies of this text, it is now possible to offer the following collation.

J709, W957 (not in BHG)

*mors voluntaria ab Abbate Longino
et nauclero quodam avertitur*

ἔλεγον περὶ τοῦ Ἀββᾶ Λογγίνου ὅτι τίς ποτε ναύκληρος ἦνεγκεν αὐτῷ χρυσίον ἐκ τοῦ πόρου τοῦ πλοίου αὐτοῦ.¹ ὁ δὲ οὐκ ἠθελε δέξασθαι, ἀλλ' εἶπεν αὐτῷ: "τούτων ὡδε οὐκ ἔστι χρεῖα· ἀλλὰ ποιήσον ἀγάπην."² ἀνελθε εἰς τὸ ζῶον σου καὶ σπούδασον καταλαβεῖν τὴν διαβάθραν τοῦ ἀγίου Πέτρου καὶ εὕρισκεις³ νεώτερόν τινα φοροῦντα ἱμάτια τοιάδε. ὄλον αὐτῷ δὸς τὸ χρυσίον· καὶ ἐρώτησον αὐτὸν τί ἐστὶν ὃ ἔχεις."⁴ σπουδάσας οὖν ὁ ναύκληρος καὶ ἀπέλθων εὗρε καθὼς εἶπεν αὐτῷ ὁ γέρον· καὶ ἐρώτησεν⁵ αὐτόν:⁶ "ποῦ ἀπέρχῃ ἀδελφέ; ὅτι ἤμην⁷ πρὸς τὸν Ἀββᾶν Λογγίνον καὶ αὐτὸς ἔπεμψε⁸ με πρὸς σὲ ἵνα δώσω σοι τὸ χρυσίον τοῦτο." τότε ὁ νεώτερος ἀκούσας τὰ περὶ τοῦ Ἀββᾶ Λογγίνου⁹ διηγήσατο αὐτῷ τὴν θλίψιν αὐτοῦ· ὅτι "ἐγὼ¹⁰ εἰς χρήματα πολλὰ σύρομαι καὶ, μὴ εὐπορῶν, ἐξέρχομαι ἀγχόνη¹¹ χρήσασθαι ἔξω τῆς πόλεως· ἵνα δὲ πιστεύσης,¹² ἴδου καὶ τὸ σχοινίον βαστάζω"¹³ καὶ ἐξενέγκας ἐκ τοῦ κόλπου αὐτοῦ ἔδειξεν αὐτῷ. ὁ δὲ ναύκληρος, δοῦς αὐτῷ τὸ

³ See e.g. F. Nau, "Vies et récits d'anchorètes (IV^e–VII^e siècles) I: Analyse du MS. grec de Paris 1596," *ROrChr* 8 (1903) 91–100.

⁴ *Sentences des Pères du Désert: Nouveau recueil* (Solesmes 1977: hereafter 'Regnault, *SPD nouv.*) 270, Arm. II.410 (58) A–B, and *SPD, série des anonymes* (Solesmes 1985: 'Regnault, *SPD anon.*') 294, item 1709/J709.

χρυσίον, ὑπέστρεψεν¹⁴ αὐτὸν εἰς τὴν πόλιν ἀπελθεῖν.¹⁵
 ὑποστρέψας δὲ εἰς¹⁶ τὸν Ἀββᾶν Λογγίνου διηγήσατο αὐτῷ τὸ
 πρᾶγμα· καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ γέρον· “πίστευσον ἀδελφέ· εἰ μὴ
 σπουδάσας καὶ ἔφθασας αὐτόν, ἐγὼ καὶ σὺ κριθῆναι εἴχομεν
 περὶ τῆς ψυχῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου τούτου.”¹⁷

Codices: A=*Paris. gr.* 1596 pp.438f, B=J709=*Sy. gr.* XVII 11;
 E=*Paris. gr.* 914f.121, *Ambbr.* C 30 inf f.133

¹B τῶν πλοίων αὐτοῦ, E τῶν προσφέρων αὐτῷ ²B ἀλλὰ ὑπαγε ποιήσον
 ἀγάπην καὶ ἀνέλθε ³B εὐρήσεις ⁴(τί ἐστιν ὁ ἔχεις) B>τι ἔχει ⁵B ἠρώτησεν ⁶B
 + λέγων ⁷B + ἐν τῷ Ἐννάτῳ ⁸B ἔπεμψεν ⁹(ἀκούσας τὰ περὶ τοῦ Ἀββᾶ
 Λογγίνου) om. B. ¹⁰B + φησὶν ¹¹B ἀγγώνι ¹²B πιστεύσεις ¹³B ἐβάσταζω ¹⁴B ὑπ'
 ἐστρέψεν ¹⁵B ἀπελθεῖν εἰς τὴν πόλιν ¹⁶B καὶ ἐλθὼν πρὸς ¹⁷(τοῦ ἀνθρώπου
 τούτου) B>αὐτοῦ

Translation

Abba Longinus and a Shipmaster Prevent a Suicide

They said of Abba Longinus that once upon a time a certain shipmaster brought him some gold, which he had gained from plying his vessel. The abba was unwilling to receive the gold and said to him: “There is no need of this here, but do me the favor of mounting your beast and going in all haste to Saint Peter’s Stairs. You will find a young man there wearing such and such. Give him all the gold and ask him what is the matter.” The shipmaster took off without delay and found [the young man] just as the elder had told him [he would]. He asked him: “Where do you come from, brother? Because I was with Abba Longinus and he himself sent me to you to give you this gold.” Then, when the young man heard about Abba Longinus, he told [the shipmaster] of his trouble. “I am up to my eyes in debt and, since I am not a man of substance, I have come out here to hang myself, outside the city. If you do not believe me, look—I am carrying the rope”—and he took it out of his breast and showed it to him. The shipmaster gave him the gold and prevailed on him to go back to the city. [Himself] he returned to Abba Longinus and told him the affair. The elder said to him: “Believe me, brother, if you had not moved quickly and got to him [in time,] both you and I would have had to stand trial for the soul of that man.”

Comment

The prevention of suicide is a theme in two other beneficial

tales, one of which is John Moschus' *Pratum Spirituale*⁵ 207, a collection of tales assembled before and after the year 600 (W003, *BHG* 1448n, *de muliere quae virum salvum fecit*). Ambrogio Traversari calls this tale "The life of an Alexandrine girl who was received from the sacred font by angels." It tells of a wealthy young orphan girl of Alexandria who saved a man from hanging himself by giving him all her wealth to pay off his debts. Thus impoverished, she was reduced to prostitution, but then repented and sought baptism, not without difficulty—for she had to find guarantors. In the absence of any others willing to do so, angels in disguise stood surety for her at the font. The Pope of Alexandria recognized that this was a case of divine intervention. Questioned by him, the girl reluctantly confessed her one good deed (the one mentioned above) and then died. Here the prevention of suicide appears to be a means to an end rather than an end in itself; it belongs to a well-developed story-type, in which one outstanding disinterested deed excuses all.⁶

In the other known mention of suicide prevention, the prevention is very much the main point of the story, as it is here. The story of "The suicide of a debtor averted" appears only to have survived in an Arabic version, which may or may not be the original.⁷ In this story a man of Ascalon received a large amount of money from a pious woman, to be given to the poor. He was then sent by an anonymous saint to Scythopolis (Beisan) to bring relief to a man who was about to kill himself on account of his debts. It is thus structurally very similar to the story now under review; a man receiving unexpected wealth sent by a holy man to prevent a debtor from killing himself.

The use of a shipmaster (ναύκληρος) as a principal character of this story might give a clue to its age. There is scarcely a mention of such a person in the psychopelitic tales apart from one collection, in which a well-known story is attributed to a

⁵ Migne, *PG* LXXXVII 2851–3112, with the Latin translation of the Florentine humanist "Fra Ambrogio," Ambrose Traversari (1346–1439); French tr.: M.-J. Rouët de Journel, *Le Pré Spirituel* (=SC 12 [Paris 1946]); Italian tr.: R. Maisano, *Giovanni Masco, Il Prato* (Naples 1982); English tr.: J. Wortley, *The Spiritual Meadow* (Kalamazoo 1993); a new edition of the Greek text with French translation by Philip Pattenden is in preparation.

⁶ See J. Wortley, *The Spiritually Beneficial Tales of Paul, Bishop of Monembasia and of Other Authors* (Kalamazoo 1996) 119–26, 190–97 on *BHG* 1449i, "The Tale of Sergius, the *demotês* of Alexandria."

⁷ W234; not in *BHG*; Arabic text: G. Levi della Vida, ed./tr., "Le stratagème de la vierge," *AnnPhilHist* 7 (1943) 83–126 no. 9.

shipmaster named Asiano who was also a deacon, which is curious.⁸ All other references to a shipmaster occur in *Pratum Spirituale* 76, 83, 91, 174, 190; each of them is credited with some good deed, usually for the benefit of monks.⁹ Thus, both in its content and in its atmosphere, the present story resembles John Moschus' tales rather than those of another writer. It might not be far removed from them in time.

Abba Longinus may be a monk—the title *abba* could confirm it. A monk of that name (and only one) appears in the Constantinople *Synaxarion*, or rather one manuscript of it. Speaking of Theodosius the Coenobiarch (*ob.* 529, *aet.* 100), it says that after meeting with Symeon Stylites the Elder (*ob.* 459 near Antioch) he went to “lead the monastic life with a certain Longinus, a memorable man” (ἡσυχάζει παρὰ Λογγίνω τινὶ ἀοιδίμῳ ἀνδρὶ).¹⁰ This is not by any means the only Abba Longinus of whom we know,¹¹ but he is certainly the best known of that name; he is mentioned no less than seven times in a recent book by Dom Lucien Regnault,¹² and as many as seventeen apophthegmata are attributable to Abba Longinus, five of them in the *Alphabetikon*.¹³ In his introduction to these, Regnault states that, according to the Arabic Synaxary, Longinus was a Cilician who passed some time in Syria and later resided at the Henaton, a well-known monastery at the ninth milestone to the west of Alexandria, where he was a distinguished anti-Chalcedonian. This fixes the date to the second part of the fifth century. But (Regnault warns) we also know of a Longinus the

⁸ W946bis, ed. in G. Garitte, “‘Histoires édifiantes’ géorgiennes,” *Byzantion* 36 (1966) 396–423 no.20. The tale is W005=BHG 1322ea, *de diacono quem presbyter ligaverat*.

⁹ *Pratum Spirituale* 186, “The Life of Moschus, the Merchant of Tyre,” is sometimes thought to refer to a relation of the author, and it is clear that he was a shipowner. He also had one single selfless deed to his credit.

¹⁰ H. Delehaye, ed., *Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae* (Brussels 1902) 384.56.

¹¹ D. J. Chitty, *The Desert a City* (London 1966), lists also Longinus higoumen of St Theoctistus' (368–375; p.95), Longinus higoumen of Sinaï (365; pp.169f), and Longinus, a Cappadocian ascetic in the Tower of David in Jerusalem (p.93).

¹² *La vie quotidienne des Pères du Désert en Egypte au IV^e siècle* (Paris 1990).

¹³ PG LXV 71–440, supplemented by J.-C. Guy, *Recherches sur la tradition grecque des apophthegmata patrum* (Brussels 1962), and tr., *Les Apophthegmes des Pères du Désert* (Bellefontaine 1966); English tr.: B. Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* (Oxford 1975).

wonder-worker, a contemporary of the sixth-century Daniel of Scete;¹⁴ collectors of the *apophthegmata* may have been unsure of which was which.¹⁵ The story of the wonder-working Longinus is fixed in the pontificate of Timothy III (519–537), which could hardly refer to one who had received Theodosius the Coenobiarch fresh from his encounter with Symeon Stylites the Elder, for he died in 459, by which time the famous Longinus must already have been well on in life. Had he lived another forty years (ascetics were extraordinary longevous), he could still have been around at the end of the century, to direct a shipmaster to prevent a suicide. Unfortunately we are not told where this Longinus resided, but from the rest of the material it was clearly somewhere in Syria-Palestine.

There is fairly convincing evidence that the venue of our story is Egypt and not (as one might suspect) Syria. Thus *Pratum Spirituale* 73: “There was a soldier at Alexandria whose name was John. This was the kind of life he led: all day long, from dawn to the ninth hour, he would stay in his monastery near the steps (or ladder, ἡ διαβάθρα) of St Peter[’s church?] wearing nothing but a coarse cloak, and weaving baskets.” From our story we know that the location was not in, but outside the city (“ἐξέρχομαι ἀγγόνῃ χρήσασθαι ἔξω τῆς πόλεως,” the debtor says to the shipmaster). It requires but a little imagination to suppose that it was located on the road to the Pempton, the Henaton (Longinus’), the Oktokaidekaton monasteries, and on *via* St Menas to Scete. The coincidence is striking; but just when it all seems to fit into place, another possibility emerges. When we look for yet another Longinus who might fit the bill, we do not look in vain. Theophanes states (source unknown):

In *A.M.* 5984 (*ca* 491), when Anastasius Δοραχιτιανός¹⁶ the odd-eyed (δίκοπος) was reigning, Longinus, the brother of Zeno (Anastasius’ predecessor and now his own brother-in-law) rebelled against him. [The Emperor] arrested him and sent him into exile in Egypt, to Alexandria, and ordered that

¹⁴ This Longinus is mentioned in Regnault, *SPD nouv.* 1490/92 (K296)=Regnault, *SPD anon.* 171.

¹⁵ L. REGNAULT, *SPD, collection alphabétique* (Solesmes 1981: hereafter ‘Regnault, *SPD alpha.*’) 170.

¹⁶ Δυρραχηνός (“from Dyrrachium”) in Malalas p.392.2.

he be ordained priest. Having survived seven years in Alexandria, he died.¹⁷

Now “priest” is not “monk” to be sure, but, as Lampe points out (*s.v.* [3]), ἄββᾶ came very quickly to be used as a term of respect for senior clergy in general, like the French *abbé*, as well as for monks. It is therefore not impossible (the most that can be said) that the deuteragonist of this little drama set at Alexandria, is an imperial personnage demoted. The suspected time frame remains the same, however, in both cases: towards the year 500.

II

Of the story of the two lions no text appears to be known other than *Cod. Paris. gr. 1596*, pp.427f, which reads thus:

W965 (not in *BHG*)

[*monachus discipulusque eius a leonculis sepulti*] W956

μοναχὸς μέγας εἶχεν οἰκέτην καὶ ἐπαίδευσεν αὐτὸν ἐπὶ ἔτη δύο τὰ τε Ἑλληνικὰ γράμματα καὶ τὸ ψαλτήριον· καὶ ἀποθρίξας τὴν κόμην τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτοῦ περιέβαλεν αὐτῷ μοναχικὸν σχῆμα. μέλλων δὲ ἐξιέναι ἐπὶ τὴν ἔργμον, προσκαλεσάμενος τὸν οἰκέτην αὐτοῦ, λέγει: “ἀδελφὲ Ἰωάννη· βλέπε πῶς διατηρεῖς σεαυτὸν· σπούδασον ἀρέσαι τῷ Χριστῷ ἵνα καὶ δόξης ἀξιωθῆσῃ· καὶ ἰδοὺ παρατίθημί σοι πάντα. καὶ τὸ ψαλτήριον καὶ πάντα ἀόκνως διατέλει· ταῖς ἀγρυπνίαις σχολάζει καὶ ταῖς χαμευνίαις· πάντα ὑπόμεινον διὰ τὸν Κύριον καὶ ὁ Θεὸς τῆς εἰρήνης, τέκνον, ἔσται μετὰ σοῦ καὶ διατηρήσει σε ἀπὸ παντὸς κακοῦ καὶ δῶ σοι λογισμὸν ἀγαθόν· ὅτι αὐτῷ πρέπει ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας· ἀμήν.” καὶ ἀσπασάμενος ἀλλήλους ἀνεχώρησεν ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀπῆλθεν εἰς τὴν ἔρημον καὶ ἦν ὁ Κύριος μετ’ αὐτοῦ. καὶ ποιήσας ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ ἔτη εἰκοσιπέντε ἐσθίων σκίλλας ... [?] εἶχε δὲ δύο λεοντάρια μετ’ αὐτοῦ καὶ αὐτὰ ἥσθιον μετ’ αὐτοῦ τὰς σκίλλας. ἔτυχε δὲ αὐτὸν ἀρρωστήσαι ἀρρωστίαν δι’ ἧς καὶ ἀπέθανε· καὶ ἐκόψαντο αὐτὸν οἱ λέοντες τρεῖς ἡμέρας. μετὰ δὲ τρεῖς ἡμέρας ὀρύξαντα τὰ θηρία ὡσεὶ ὀργυῖαν μίαν, ἔθαψαν αὐτὸν ἐκεῖ. ὁ οὖν Ἰωάννης παραλαβὼν τὸν κανόνα παρὰ τοῦ ἀγίου γέροντος ἀόκνως τοῦτον διετέλει. χρόνου δὲ διελθόντος, φαίνεται κατ’ ὄναρ ὁ γέρων τῷ Ἀββᾶ Ἰωάννην λέγων αὐτῷ: “ἀναστάς δίωξον ὀπίσω μου

¹⁷ Theophanes *Chron.* 137.1–7 De Boor. Another tradition says that the Emperor banished Longinus (his brother-in-law) “to the Thebaid to die of starvation”: T. E. Gregory, “Anastasios I,” *ODB* I 86.

ὅπως σέ διαφυλάξῃ ὁ Χριστός. ἰδοὺ γὰρ τὰ δύο ἀδελφία σου ἐκδέχονται σε· ὁ δὲ Κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς ὁδηγήσει σε.” ἀναστὰς δὲ ὁ Ἰωάννης διετελέσε τὸν συνήθην κανόνα. πρωΐας δὲ γενομένης ἐξῆλθε τοῦ κελλίου ἐν ᾧ ἦν παρκοικήσας ὁ γέρων ἔτη δέκα καὶ πέντε, ὁ δὲ Ἰωάννης ἔτη ιη´· καὶ ποιήσας εὐχὴν, τὴν πορείαν ἐποιεῖτο ἐπὶ τὴν ἔρημον. ἄγγελος δὲ Κυρίου ἦν μετ’ αὐτοῦ ὁδηγῶν αὐτὸν ἡμέρας ιβ´· καὶ πεζεύσαντος αὐτοῦ ἦλθεν εἰς τὸν προδηλωθέντα αὐτῷ τόπον. ἐγγίσαντος δὲ αὐτοῦ πλησίον τοῦ σπηλαιίου παραχρῆμα ἐξῆλθον τὰ θηρία καὶ ἔδραμον ὀπίσω αὐτοῦ θέλοντα εὐλογηθῆναι· ὁδηγήσαντα δὲ αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τὸν τόπον, συνῆλθον αὐτῷ ἐν τῷ σπηλαίῳ. Καὶ ἦν ἐκεῖ δοξάζων τὸν Θεὸν καὶ ποιήσαντος αὐτοῦ ἐκεῖ ἔτη κβ´ μετῆλθε τοῦ βίου· καὶ ἔθηκαν αὐτοῦ τὰ θηρία πλησίον τοῦ κυρίου αὐτοῦ.

Translation

[A Monk and his Disciple Buried by Lions]

A great monk had a servant whom he trained for two years, teaching him Greek letters and the Psalter. Then he sheared the hair of his head and clothed him with the monastic habit. When the monk was about to set out into the wilderness, he summoned his servant and said to him:

Brother John, pay attention to how you comport yourself. Strive to please Christ, so that you will be found worthy of glory. Behold, I am leaving everything to you. Perform the Psalter and all [the rites] with alacrity; persevere in all-night vigils and sleeping on the ground; endure all things for the Lord's sake. And may the God of peace be with you, child, and keep you from all evil and put you in a good frame of mind. For to him is due glory forever; Amen.

They embraced each other; then, leaving [his servant,] he went off into the wilderness and the Lord was with him. When he had been in the wilderness twenty-five years, eating squills [sea onions, *urgingea maritima*]¹⁸ [...] Now he had two small

¹⁸ Cf. Nau 182; *Systematikon* V 36, in J.-C. Guy, ed., *Les Apophthegmes de Pères: Collection systématique* I (SC 387 [Paris 1993]) 274: “When a mother wishes to wean her child, she puts σκίλλα [Pelagius & John: *amarum quid*] on her breast and when the infant comes to nurse as usual it is put off by the bitterness [ἀπὸ τῆς πικρίας].” “La scille est un oignon marin au goût spécialement amer”: Guy *ad loc.* Erasmus (*Adagia* 2.3.42) cites the saying, “To pluck squills from a grave” [*squillas a sepulchri vellat*, σκίλλας ἀπὸ σήματος τίλλειν], saying: “People were told to do this who did not seem quite right in the head, for squills, seaplants, were used in Antiquity as a remedy for this complaint. Theocritus in the *Bucolics*: ‘Off with you! Gather squills from some old hag’s grave’” (tr. Mynors); cf. Theophr. *Char.* 16.14, with instructions from a priest-

lions with him and they ate the squills together with him. It happened that he fell sick with an illness from which he died. Three days the animals mourned for him; after three days, they dug a hole about a fathom deep and buried him there. [Meanwhile, Brother] John, having received his rule of life from the holy elder, was fulfilling it with alacrity. Time went by, and then the elder appeared to Abba John in a dream and said to him: "Behold, your two small brothers are expecting you; the Lord Jesus Christ will be your guide." John arose and discharged his usual rule of life.¹⁹ When dawn broke, he came out of the cell in which the elder had lived for fifteen years and John for eighteen years. He offered a prayer and then set out into the wilderness. An angel of the Lord was with him, guiding him, for twelve days. On he walked and thus he came to the place which had been revealed to him beforehand. As he approached and drew near to the cave, the animals came out and ran behind him, wanting to receive a blessing. He pressed on towards the place—and then they went into a cave with him. There he stayed, praising God; and when he had lived there for twenty-eight years, he departed this life; and the animals buried him close by his master.

Comment

In many ways this little story of the anonymous elder and his disciple, John, buried by lions is within the tradition of the spiritually beneficial story. It would come as no great surprise, for instance, to find it included among the *paraleipomena* of *Pratum Spirituale* or even of *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*. The monk who trains a disciple, who goes out into the loneliness of the wilderness and dies shortly after being discovered by another: these are common themes of the eremitic tradition, with antecedents going back to Antony and Pachomius. The "little lions" would not be out of place in a story of the very earliest stratum of tales. There is in fact a very similar story in a text that could be more or less of that era: *The Life of Saint Paul*

ess to carry around a squill or a puppy dog for purification (σκίλλη ἢ σκύλακι ... περικαθάραι).

¹⁹ There is some indication of the nature of a monastic rule of prayer in the *Alphabeticon* (=SPD *alpha.*), Serapion 1: Serapion followed each psalm with a prayer, then came a reading from the Epistles and, lastly, more prayers, but this was the night office; for the morning office see Macarios 33: "Do you want us to recite the twelve psalms?" ... the younger one sang five psalms by groups of six verses and an alleluia ... likewise for the elder ... and in my turn, I said a little by heart."

of *Thebes*, widely accepted to have been composed (in Latin) by Jerome.²⁰ It will be noted that the lions in that story are not, however, said to be little.²¹ It may be well to note that the lion of which the early monastic literature speaks (and which the Old Testament mentions at least fifty times) is the terrible king of the beasts, *felis leo*, not some lesser breed, such as the American *felis concolor* (cougar, puma, or mountain lion).

The earliest Greek translation of the Jerome passage reads thus (Antony has returned to find Paul dead and is reflecting that, as it would take four days for him to fetch what was needed to bury the corpse from his monastery, he had better stay and die where he was.):

A:

τοιαῦτα αὐτοῦ διαλογιζομένου, ἰδοὺ δύο λέοντες ἐκ τῆς ἔσωτάτης ἐρήμου ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ τρέχοντες. οὓς θεασάμενος, πρῶτον μὲν ἔφριξεν· μετὰ ταῦτα δὲ πρὸς τὸν Θεὸν τὴν διάνοιαν ἐπανάγων, ὡς περιστερὰς αὐτοὺς ὄρων, ἀτρεμῆς διέμεινεν. κἀκεῖνοι τὴν εὐθείαν διανύοντες πρὸς τὸ σκῆνωμα τοῦ μακαρίου γέροντος ἔστησαν, ταῖς τε οὐραῖς κολακεύοντες περὶ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ ἀνέπεσαν βρυγμῶ μεγίστῳ ὠρυόμενοι, ὡς ἐννοεῖν τὸν μακάριον Ἀντώνιον ἀποδύρεσθαι τοὺς θῆρας ἐπὶ τῇ ἀναλύσει τοῦ μακαρίου Παύλου. ἔπειτα ἤρξαντο τὴν γῆν τοῖς ποσὶ σπαράττειν, τὴν τε ψάμμον ἀπωθούμενοι, ἐνὸς ἀνθρώπου τόπον κατάρυξον. καὶ εὐθέως τοῦ κόπου αὐτῶν τὸν μισθὸν ἀπολαβεῖν βουλόμενοι, κινήσει τῶν ὠτων τὴν κεφαλὴν κάτω νεύσαντες, πρὸς τὸν Ἀντώνιον παρεγένοντο, τὰς χεῖρας αὐτοῦ καὶ τοὺς πόδας τῇ γλώσσει καταλαεαίνοντες, ὡς κἀκεῖνον νοῆσαι τοὺς θῆρας τὴν εὐλογίαν παρ' αὐτοῦ ζητεῖν.²²

B:

καὶ ταῦτα λέγοντος αὐτοῦ, ἰδοὺ δύο λέοντες ἦλθον ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ τρέχοντες. καὶ ἰδὼν αὐτοὺς ἐνάρκησεν. καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα τὸν λογισμὸν αὐτοῦ ὑψωσεν πρὸς τὸν Θεόν· καὶ λοιπὸν ἡσύχως αὐτοὺς ἑώρα ὡς περιστερὰς καθιπταμένας. καὶ ἐλθόντες παρέστησαν τῷ σώματι τοῦ μακαρίου Παύλου. καὶ ἔσειον ταῖς

²⁰ In his recent book, however, Regnault (*supra* n.12) appears at several points less than confident with this attribution.

²¹ *λεοντάρια* as the diminutive of lion is very rare. There is a story in *Pratum Spirituale* (18=PG LXXXVI 2865A) of two lion cubs (δύο σκυμνία τοῦ λέοντος). An elder brought them into church wrapped in his pallium, saying: "If we kept the commandments of Christ, these would fear us. But it is not so; so we fear them."

²² *BHG* 1466a, ed. K. T. Corey, "The Greek Versions of Jerome's *Vita Sancti Pauli*," in W. A. Oldfather, ed., *Studies in the Text-Tradition of St Jerome's Vitae Patrum* (Urbana 1943) 143–250 at 170 (c. 16).

οὐραῖς αὐτῶν κολακευτικῶς τῷ Ἀντωνίῳ, καὶ προσέπεσαν τοῖς ποσὶν αὐτοῦ ἐν ἡμερότητι, τρίζοντες τοὺς ὀδόντας αὐτῶν ἐν βρυγμῷ μεγάλῳ ὥστε τὸν Ἀντώνιον γνῶναι ὅτι εὐλογηθῆναι ζητοῦσιν καὶ ἔκλαιον ἐπὶ τῇ ἀναλύσει τοῦ μακαρίου Παύλου. μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα ἤρξαντο ὀρύττειν οἱ λέοντες καὶ διαρρίπτειν τὴν γῆν τοῖς ποσὶν αὐτῶν καὶ βαθύνειν ὅσον διάστημα ἀνθρώπου. καὶ ἔσειον τὰ ὦτα καὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτῶν ἔκλινον τῷ Ἀντωνίῳ καὶ ἔλειχον τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ καὶ τὰς χεῖρας αὐτοῦ ταῖς γλώσσαις αὐτῶν, ὥστε νοῆσαι αὐτὸν ὅτι εὐλογηθῆναι ζητοῦσιν.²³

What Jerome probably wrote was:

Talia eo animo volvente, ecce duo leones ex interioris eremi parte currentes, volantibus per colla iubis, ferebantur. Quibus aspectis, primo exhorruit: rursusque ad Deum referens mentem, quasi columbas videret, mansit intrepidus. Et illi quidem directo cursu ad cadaver beati senis substiterunt; adulantibusque caudis circa eius pedes accubuerunt, fremitu ingenti rugientes, prorsus ut intelligeres eos plangere, quomodo poterant. Deinde haud procul coeperunt humum pedibus scalpere, arenamque certatim egerentes, unius hominis capacem locum foderunt, ac statim quasi mercedem pro opere postulantes, cum motu aurium cervice deiecta, ad Antionium perrexerunt, manus eius pedesque lingentes. at ille animadvertit, benedictionem eos se precari.²⁴

At the end of *The Life of Saint Mary the Egyptian* (attributed to John Moschus' companion, the patriarch Sophronius, *ob.* 638), there is yet another instance of burial by lion. Abba Zosimus, who has attended the saint's demise, finds himself unable to fulfill her dying wish that he should give her decent burial, for he lacks both the strength and the tool with which to dig a grave. He looks up, however, and sees a great lion (ὄρῳ λέοντα μέγα) standing by. Once he has overcome his fear of it, the creature uses its claws to excavate a sufficient grave for the saint's relics.²⁵

²³ BHG 1467, c. 16; Corey (*supra* n.22) 195.

²⁴ H. Hurter, ed., in Oldfather (*supra* n.23) 41; there is as yet no critical edition. In his notes on the vita in *Vitae Patrum* (Antwerp 1615), Heribert Rosweyde says of the two lions: "simile leonum obsequium habes in vita sancti Onuphrii, infra cap. ult." (*PL* LXXIII 114b). For once, however, this most learned man appears to have been mistaken, for nothing of the sort is to be found: see *PL* LXXIII 211–22. The feature the two *vitae* do have in common is a cloak torn in two to make a winding sheet for the corpse.

²⁵ BHG 1042, c. 39=PG LXXXVII.3 3724c–25A.

Inevitably, the late sixth-century stories of John Moschus come to mind when we read of lions. John retails at least six (*Prat. Spirit.* 2, 18, 125, 163, 167, 181) in addition to the famous story of Gerasimus and his lion named Jordanes (107), for it is Gerasimus “to whom originally belongs the story of the lion, the donkey, and the camels, which Jerome—Hieronymus—was to filch from him through the ignorance of Latin pilgrims many centuries after they both were dead.”²⁶ In comparison with *Pratum Spirituale*, there are very few tales about (or containing) lions elsewhere in the psychopelitic literature, but that does not mean they are not mentioned.

Lions often occur in certain frequently quoted and obviously familiar scriptural passages.²⁷ Rather surprisingly, however, these do not include the famous passage in Isaiah: “Let the wilderness and the dry lands exult; let the wasteland rejoice and bloom.” The text goes on to say that this will be where the chosen will walk, and it promises: “No lion will be there nor any fierce beast roam round about it.”²⁸ The message seems to be particularly relevant to eremitic monachism, for there were lions in the wilderness. Indeed, fear of beasts in general and lions in particular was ever-present for the monks.²⁹ The danger of being literally eaten alive—particularly by a lion—was, although rarely expressed, always there (*e.g.* Nau 17, 597).

This might, however, be missing the point, for clearly, no matter how real lions might have been, they were also of symbolic importance, as in the famous words attributed to St Peter: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist steadfast in the faith.”³⁰ *That* is, in a sense, the monk’s ‘call to arms’. Thus elsewhere the monk (surrounded

²⁶ Chitty (*supra* n.11) 90 with n.61.

²⁷ *E.g.* 1 Pet. 5:8 (Isidore the Priest); 1 Sam. 17:35 (Poemen 115, 178).

²⁸ Isaiah 35:1–10 at 9 (Jerusalem Bible): καὶ οὐκ ἔσται ἐκεῖ λέων, οὐδὲ τῶν θηρίων τῶν πονηρῶν οὐ μὴ ἀναβῆ ἔπ’ αὐτήν οὐδὲ μὴ εὐρεθῆ ἔκει, ἀλλὰ πορεύσονται ἐν αὐτῇ λελυτρωμένοι (LXX).

²⁹ Note, however, *BHG* 1448p/14=1442ta (Anastasios the Sinaïte no. 14, *CPG* A14): At Μαλωχάν, John the Sabāite and Demetrius the *Basilikos* and leading doctor (ἀρχιατρός) spotted the traces (σόρμα) of a dragon in a wadi. Demetrius wanted to go away, but John urged prayer. And when the beast was two stades from them, they saw it taken up into the air like a cloud, then dashed into a thousand pieces.

³⁰ 1 Pet. 5:8, AV. *Cf.* the idea of the *lurking* lion at Ps. 10:9: ἐνεδρεύει ἐν ἀποκρύφῳ ὡς λέων ἐν τῇ μάνδρα αὐτοῦ.

by temptations) is compared to Daniel sitting in the den of lions.³¹ Abba Poemen said (*Alphabetikon*, Poemen 178): "When David met the lion, he seized it by the throat and killed it at once (1 Sam. 17:35) and if we hold our throat and our belly [*i.e.*, if the monks abstain from drink and food] we will conquer the invisible lion [τὸν ἀόρατον λέοντα] by the grace of God." David said: "I struck down the lion and strangled the bear" (1 Sirach 17:35), which means: "I cut out wrath and oppressed *porneia* with hard labor" [τὸν μὲν θυμὸν ἀπέκοπτον, τὴν δὲ πορνείαν ἐν κόποις ἔθλιβον].³² One will never know how many monks were eaten by the lions of anger and hunger, but it is easy to understand the triumph of those who succeeded in beating off or in slaying such invisible beasts. They had the promise of the Psalmist to encourage them: "Thou shalt tread upon the lion and the adder; the young lion and the dragon shalt thou tread under thy feet."³³ This may partly explain why, on the whole, the stories about flesh-and-blood lions register a remarkable confidence in the face of such creatures and the evident satisfaction when (for instance) a father is credited with throwing a lion out of its own den in order to find some refuge from the burning heat of midday;³⁴ or when one is coerced into carrying a load, digging a grave or in some other way performing the will of man.

Mastery over the lion may signal mastery over sin, but there is more. Witness the following story that has all the marks of a genuine father's tale:

Un autre jour que Zosimas se rendait à Césarée, tirant un âne qu'il avait chargé de quelques unes des choses qui lui était nécessaires, un lion vint à son rencontre, ravit l'âne et s'en retourna. Zosimas le suivit dans la forêt jusqu'au lieu où le lion se trouvait, repu du festin qu'il avait fait en dévorant

³¹ Regnault, *SPD anon.* 1764 (J764), pp.332–37, referring to Dn. 14:33–39.

³² Poemen 115, *PG* LXV 352b; *Systematikon* 5.11, p.250 Guy (*supra* n.18). The monk himself is occasionally compared to the lion, *e.g.*, *Systematikon* IV 53, p.212= *PG* LXXIX 1480c ("Comme le lion est redoutable pour les onagres, ainsi le moine éprouvé pour les pensées de volupté"). "Le colère est particulièrement symbolisée par le lion, la luxure par l'ours": Regnault (*supra* n.12) 212.

³³ Ps. 90/91:13, *BCP*. LXX and the Vulgate contain no reference to a young lion: καταπατήσεις λέοντα καὶ δράκοντα.

³⁴ Nau 333; Cyril of Scythopolis, *Life of Sabas* 33, p.118.32ff. Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa is also credited with putting a lion to flight: *Sefer Ha-aggadah* 2.1.64=6.1.241; he apologized for calling the king of beasts a weakling.

l'animal. Zosimas lui dit en riant: "Ça ne va pas, mon bon, car le voyage m'a brisé, gros comme je suis et avancé en âge, et je ne puis porter sur le dos ce qu'on avait empaqueté sur la bête. Te voilà donc obligé de porter le faix, si tu veux que Zosimas quitte ces lieux et que tu puisses revenir à tes habitudes de fauve." Le lion, d'un coup, oublia sa fureur, agita la queue, s'approcha aussitôt de Zosimas et manifesta par son attitude qu'il obéissait. Zosimas lui mit sur le dos la charge de l'âne et le mena jusqu'aux portes de Césarée, montrant la puissance de Dieu et que toutes choses sont esclaves des hommes et leur obéissent, quand nous vivons pour lui et ne falsifions pas la grâce qui nous a été donnée.³⁵

The last lines echo of course God's command that man should "have dominion" over "every living thing that moves upon earth."³⁶ In achieving mastery even over the king of the beasts,³⁷ the desert fathers were indeed realizing the new paradise that it was their vocation to achieve. Hence it is not surprising that so many of the lion stories turn precisely upon man's ability to make them do his bidding. Three times St Sabas is credited with coercing lions by his prayers (Cyr. Scyth. *Sabas* 23, 33, 34). Gerasimus' lion (Jordanes) has already been mentioned: this royal beast also performed the duty of the ass it was thought to have slain—by fetching water for the fathers.³⁸ Anastasius the Sinaïte tells the story of Abba Stephan at Malocha who had another feline (a leopard) guard his garden from rock-rabbits (χοιρογούλλοι), which it would slay and eat until the day

³⁵ Evagrius *HE* 4.7=tr. A.-J. Festugière, *Byzantion* 45 (1975) 370f.

³⁶ Gen. 1:28: ἄρχετε τῶν ἰχθύων τῆς θαλάσσης καὶ τῶν πετεινῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ πάντων τῶν κτηνῶν καὶ πάσης τῆς γῆς; also Ps. 8:7–10 (cited below).

³⁷ Prov. 30:30: σκύμνος λέοντος ἰσχυρότερος κτηνῶν ὃς οὐκ ἀποστρέφεται οὐδὲ καταπτήσσει κτήνος. In one Rabbinic tradition the lion is king of all beasts and cattle (*Sefere Ha-aggadah* 4.1.1, 6.1.24), but in another (5.1.4) he is king only of the wild beasts; the ox is king of cattle, the eagle of birds, and man of humankind. The rabbis (2.1.118=6.1.240) do not hesitate to use the lion as a metaphor for God.

³⁸ Cf. *BHG* 2081, W037, in which Copris obliges a bear who has wounded an ass to carry the wood, which the ass normally transported. The story (*Prat. Spirit.* 107) of how Jordanes was eventually delivered from his bondage is worth recalling: "One day an officer came to ask the elder for his prayers; and he saw the lion bringing water. When he heard the explanation, he had pity on the beast. He took out three pieces of gold and gave them to the elders, so that they could purchase an ass to ensure their water supply, and that the lion might be relieved of this menial service."

the abba died.³⁹ It is therefore hardly surprising that a man who might be obeyed by lions in life should be served by them in death: by their performing for him the menial task of a sexton.⁴⁰

These similarities notwithstanding, certain aspects of the story of the abba and his disciple buried by lions set it a little apart from the genre: the 'lion' element is one. To begin, there are two animals here,⁴¹ and they are λεοντάρια, not λέοντες. This can hardly mean "little lions," say a lynx or a bobcat, for, even if they existed in those lands, would they not have great difficulty digging an excavation large enough in which to bury a man? Nor can λεοντάρια⁴² here mean "young lions," *i.e.*, cubs, unless time stood still, for they are said to have lived for many years, far more years (one suspects) than the natural life span of any known feline—well over twenty-eight years. But clearly the spaces of time given here are not meant to be precise. If they were, the arithmetic would be incorrect. The anonymous elder's sojourn in the wilderness (said to be twenty-five years) could not have exceeded Abba John's years at the original cell (said to be eighteen). If the text gave fifteen instead of twenty-five for the odd abba's life with the lions, at least the figures would make sense: one would assume that John had two years of training (as stated), followed by a brief year of probation, and then by fifteen years of solitude after his master went off into the wilderness, making a total of eighteen years, as stated. But this would still mean that the "little lions" must have lived well over twenty-eight years to have buried both master and pupil.

Once one begins to read a text of this kind in such a critical way, it becomes less and less convincing, to be sure. One could go on to observe that if both master and pupil died devoid of human contact, this raises the question of how the information contained in the story was ever communicated to the world at large—not only in broad outline but even with such fine details

³⁹ BHG 1448p/13; Anastasius 13, CPG A13; W083.

⁴⁰ At Sulp. Sev. *Dial.* 1.15 Macarius is nursed by a lioness, perhaps the same one the monks fed at 1.14.

⁴¹ At *Prat. Spirit.* 92a (W304) George the Cappadocian is said to have chased away *two* lions with his club at Phasaelis while herding swine. In the *Life of St Sabas* (34) robbers run into δυοὶ λέουσι παμμεγεθεστάτοις, driven off by the saint's prayers ὡς ὑπὸ μάστιγος τινος.

⁴² The word is rare (see Epicurus' quip to Leontion at D.L. 10.5: Παῖδ' ἄναξ, φίλον Λεοντάριον), but seems to have a peculiarly Palestinian connection. Given that the monks ate sea-onions, it might not be unreasonable to locate this story somewhere along the Gaza Strip.

as the depth to which the little lions dug to bury the elder. In truth, such a reading rather misses the point of the story. One must never ignore Halkin's warning that beneficial tales are "des sortes de paraboles développées dont les héros ne sont pas toujours imaginaires ... qui incarnent pour ainsi dire en un exemple frappant, voire paradoxal, un enseignement théorique difficile et transcendant."⁴³ Yet in spite of these considerations, the great majority of beneficial tales, though they might stretch one's credulity somewhat, are generally at pains neither to stretch it too far nor to exceed the limits more or less already laid down within the Christian tradition of the tale, limits that the story appears to ignore.

That the little lions dug the elder's grave and then dug John's—all by themselves—is not necessarily beyond those limits; precedents are noted above. It has been suggested that in digging a grave "about a fathom [nearly two meters] deep," the lions would have constructed something very closely resembling the traps, which (according to another story) were dug in certain areas for the express purpose of catching lions.⁴⁴ But it is sufficiently clear from a number of other stories that the excavation the author had in mind would have been horizontal rather than vertical—more a cave than a trench.⁴⁵

What are we to make of the relationship between the Abba and John? How is οἰκέτης to be translated here? Was the man the elder's slave, doing his master's bidding? This was not unknown; one story begins: γέρων τις εἶχε μαθητὴν ὠνητὸν αὐτοῦ ("an elder had his slave as a disciple": Nau 53; W534). Was John the abba's slave, or merely his hired servant? And was he (originally) his disciple, or was he won over to discipleship? All these possibilities lie within the scope of the word οἰκέτης. But if he were merely a (reluctant) slave, would the elder have taken the trouble to educate him? The answer is by no means a foregone conclusion; we have the example—late, to be sure (ca 900)—of a governor in the Peloponnese who bought a Scythian child and had him educated by the priest on his estate. He apprenticed the child to the priest (it would seem) so that he could serve his master more efficiently having learned

⁴³ *Recherches et documents d'hagiographie byzantine* (=Subsidia Hagiographica 51 [Brussels 1971]) 303; cf. 261.

⁴⁴ BGH 1442cd, *de vulpe in fosso*; Nissen 10; W490.

⁴⁵ E.g. Anastasius A08 (W078), A42 (W903); A. J. Festugière, *Historia monachorum in Aegypto* (=Subsidia Hagiographica 53 [Brussels 1971]) 1.37–44 (W132).

to read and write.⁴⁶ But why did the monk teach his slave or servant τὰ Ἑλληνικὰ γράμματα (an almost totally unknown expression in psychopelitic literature) and not τὰ ἱερὰ γράμματα, as one might have expected? Why, for that matter, did he teach him letters at all, for there is abundant evidence that much of the devotional life of the desert turned, not upon written but upon memorized and orally transmitted texts? Most significantly, this would be true of the psalms. Therefore there is nothing surprising in the assertion that the elder taught John the Psalter; it is what every monk would have learned by heart, often in addition to some protracted portions of the sacred scriptures.⁴⁷ Then, again, if (as the text suggests) he had taught John to read Greek, why did he not let him learn the Psalter for himself directly from the book? Otherwise, what was the point of the reading lessons? Surely not that he might read Homer and the other poets, as the expression suggests.⁴⁸

One aspect of this story diverges even further from the generally accepted norms of the tradition—its attitude toward animals. It is not that they provided company for their two successive monks, nor that they shared their meals: these things have their parallels elsewhere.⁴⁹ Nor is it their anthropomorphic behavior; the lamentation of Jordanes provides a striking case of that. When he appeared to John in a vision, the dead Abba referred to the λεοντάρια as “your two little brothers.” The tales and sayings of the fathers often reveal considerable tenderness and affection for animals of various kinds. Yet, as we

⁴⁶ BHG 1449e; W709; J. Wortley, ed., *Les Récits édifiants de Paul, évêque de Monembasie et d'autres auteurs* (Paris 1987) 76–81 lines 1–4 (see also the English tr. [*supra* n.6], with copious notes and several more tales); cf. the case of St Andrew the Fool (*PG CXI 629D–32B, c.2*), a Slav and a slave who was taught his letters so he could (as he did) serve his master as *notarius*. His *vita* is a notorious fiction, but fiction rarely portrays what is totally unknown.

⁴⁷ See *Prat. Spirit.* 160 (W343); for the Psalter, Nau 146, 229, 523, 629; other parts of the Scriptures, Nau 150, 232, 626; note also Nau 418 concerning a holy man who had learned all the psalms and prayers from *no man*, but yet knew them all. Was this an exceptional case of one who had them from a book or by divine revelation? We are not told.

⁴⁸ As Lemerle indicates (*Le premier humanisme byzantin* [Paris 1971] ch. 5), the expression τὰ Ἑλληνικὰ γράμματα is far more reminiscent of ninth-tenth-century Byzantium than of the fifth-sixth-century desert.

⁴⁹ Abba Poemen the solitary slept with a lion (*Prat. Spirit.* 167, W347), so possibly Abba Peter: ὅπου ἠύρισκεν κοίτην λέοντος, ἐκεῖ ἐκάθευδεν (*Prat. Spirit.* 18, W261). Gerasimus (*ut supra*) shared his food with a lion, but an ass is known to have done as much: Antoninus, *Itinera Hierylolymitana* 1 (Geneva 1879) 110; W870.

above, almost always the point that is being made is in some way or other related to the belief that everything in creation is "in subjection" to man: καὶ κατέστησας αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τὰ ἔργα τῶν χειρῶν σου, πάντα ὑπέταξας ὑποκάτω τῶν ποδῶν αὐτοῦ κτλ. (Ps. 8:7; cf. Gen. 11:28). In other words, there is a great gulf between man and the beasts: the gulf between master and slave, so much more acutely perceived in former times than in our own. It is difficult to think of any other story that allows a similar blurring of the sharp distinction between mankind and the rest of creation. We seem almost to be in the world of St Francis of Assisi here rather than in the desert of the fathers. For this reason, one is tempted to suspect that the tale under review, much though it might resemble the rest of the tales in many ways, is probably not to be reckoned germane to the tradition.

Inevitably this raises the question: what might be the provenance and age of this tale? This is by far the most difficult of all questions to answer for the διηγήσεις ψυχοφελεῖς. For instance, given the tales' general relationship to the Judeo-Christian tradition, one might well suppose that many of them would derive from recognizable Judaic sources. Yet this can only very rarely be demonstrated. Of over a thousand known tales, the present writer has only been able to identify Hebrew origins for two. The first, a story *de Dei iudiciis*,⁵⁰ bears a remarkable likeness to the well-known episode of "The Hermit" almost at the end of Voltaire's *conte philosophique, Zadig ou la destinée*. As the commentators on Voltaire point out, the origins of the episode are to be found in the Talmud. The other one is *de Hebraeo divite / de lapide pretiosa in veste Aaron*.⁵¹ Otherwise, the tales are strangely innocent of Judaic elements. They are also, one must add, surprisingly sparing of New Testament references. This is not to suggest that the story presently under consideration might have such origins, for, as already indicated, it has elements—some obvious—that render

⁵⁰ BHG 1442nb/1449mb; Mioni 6/Nissen 2; W491.

⁵¹ BHG 1322zk/1438p, *Systematikon* 5.48, Nau 450, W600. A man at Jerusalem who had acquired great riches by unjust means, prompted by Prov. 19:17, sold all and gave to the poor, thereby lending to God. But nobody helped him in his poverty, until one day he had the good fortune to buy, very cheaply, a stone that a jeweller recognized as the much sought-after gem that had fallen from Aaron's ephod. In return for it, the high priest generously rewarded the man—and made him rich again. The story is also in Georg. Monach. *Chron.* pp.216.24–218.8 De Boor=PG CX 268f.

this unlikely. But it does underline the extraordinary difficulty of detecting the origins of most stories in the tradition.

There is a further difficulty. It is becoming increasingly clear that those who copied out tales allowed themselves an inordinate liberty in their work. The extent to which some of them revised, amended, adapted, conflated, and generally transformed the text before them is beyond the imaginings of a modern editor. And it would not be in the least surprising if some scribe, one day, just for a change, actually permitted himself to put together a 'new' story from all the bits and pieces with which he was so familiar. Some writers in the ninth century, one known by name, did this quite openly, setting forth the fruits of their labors as 'new' stories.⁵² Would it be so surprising to discover that they had a predecessor who attempted to do the same thing in his own small way, and thus produced our story of the two little lions?

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January, 1997

⁵² See J. Wortley, *Récits* (*supra* n.46), introduction *passim*; for a specific case, see J. Wortley, "de latrone converso: The Tale of the Converted Robber (BHG 1450kb, W861)," *Byzantion* 66 (1996) 219-43.