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Title: Pots for monks : ceramics and life in the Old Monastery of Baramus (Wadi al-Natrun, Egypt) 4th - 9th c.

Issue Date: 2012-12-12

CHAPTER 4 – THE TEXTUAL EVIDENCE

As presented and discussed in chapter 3, ceramic objects seem to witness more about their manufacturing process, their production and distribution than they do about themselves as functional entities in relation to their owners. Of course they do shed light on the history of the Old Monastery of Baramūs, as every ceramic assemblage does on any excavated settlement, but there are still some issues remaining intact. These issues concern on the one hand the objects (*the pots*), on the other hand the people related to them after their production and prime distribution (in our case *the monks*).

In order to answer the subsequent questions, one should turn to the fascinating, yet often tricky and ambiguous, world of the literary sources. Attention is focused on texts that refer to the Lower Egyptian *semi-anchoretic* settlements in Sketis, Nitria and Kellia, which share common characteristics. Key sources are the alphabetical (Migne) and systematic (Guy) collections of the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, Palladius' *Historia Lausiaca* (Migne), the *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* (Migne), the *Instituta* and *Conlationes* of John Cassian (Petschenig) as well as certain *Vitae* of famous monks. These texts, rich in information, are written to exalt the *golden age* of Egyptian monasticism, namely the late fourth and the fifth century. An account of what was going on in the sixth century is given by the *Patrum Spirituale* of John Moschus (Migne), while information about the situation in Sketis is to be found in the *Life of Abba Daniel* (Clugnet). Another source is the Arabic *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria* (Evetts) (DenHeijer 1996; *Idem* 2009). The unreliability of these sources, due to their edifying character and/or the long-process of re-writing before obtaining their final form is discussed in chapter 2. However, when it comes for secondary, more insignificant details, such as naming a pot and referring to its use, I find no reason to mistrust them. Furthermore, next to the ideal models, there is still indirect information included, which should not be far from reality.

There is no doubt that in terms of authenticity, literary texts cannot be compared with real life documents, such as documentary papyri, ostraca and so on.⁷⁰ Unfortunately the Lower Egyptian *semi-anchoretic* sites have not released as much documentation as the Middle or Upper Egyptian hermitages and monasteries. Despite of the fact that they refer to other 'monastic' environments, often of different organisation, the papyrological evidence is taken into account, especially when confronting with the exaggerations of the literary texts. It must be noted, though, that this chapter should not be considered as an outcome of the thorough and elaborate study of documentary papyri.

The discussion that opens in the following chapters has been the subject of many scholars (such as Goehring, Layton, Wipszycka and others) who mainly study the textual evidence. Thanks to their acute and critical attitude towards the sources new questions and interpretations are suggested, which take into account, or are simply confirmed by archaeological research. It is therefore important to stress once again that archaeology needs texts as much as texts need archaeology, which is in position to confirm or overrule testimonies from the past and bold theoretical approaches.

⁷⁰ During the last years, databases gathering and giving easily access to papyrological documentation appeared on the internet (<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/projects/digital/apis/>)

1 THE POTS

Understanding objects may well help in understanding the people associated to them. If one is allowed to slightly modify the view of Tringham (1995, 98) one can claim that *each object has to be considered as a dynamic entity whose every month of life is significant for the men and women who act with and around it*. Gosden and Marshall (1999, 170) add about objects that apart from changing through their existence, they are often capable of accumulating histories. Consequently, *the present significance of an object derives from the persons and events to which it is connected*. In the effort to analyse and understand objects, several points in their existence, such as the processes and cycles of production, exchange and consumption should be examined as a whole (Kopytoff, 1986). Although, all the above processes are more or less discussed in the presentation of the ceramic assemblage discovered in the Old Monastery of Baramūs (chapter 3), it is still possible to elaborate our initial observations and attempt to reinstate our objects in their afore time vital role.

One does not need to browse a lot of books about ceramics to realise the diversity of types and variants according to functional category. While each type is mostly used as a time and provenance indicator, there is still a lot to learn about its proper identification, that is its name and exact function, which relate it to its owner. Suggestions about use are general and based on technical features, while they often encompass more than a single form. However, ethno-archaeology proves that a high level of specialisation for every object and a multiplicity of functions must have been a fact. Furthermore, it is quite possible that the variety of words designating pots mentioned in the literary sources⁷¹ is in favour of the above assumption. Still nowadays in Egypt, especially in villages where people follow a more traditional way of life, various different pots with distinct features and names are used to serve, prepare, contain or transport specific victuals and other substances. Between stories in texts about the use of mundane vessels by monks withdrawn in the wilderness of the desert to excel in spirituality and life in Egyptian villages of today, numerous pots await re-integration into their functional milieu.

In the frame of the present study it was not possible – not even intended – to search all names and references to pots in literary sources and papyri dating from the late fourth to the ninth century. The stories narrated in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* were a starting point, and it turned out that an almost complete list of vessels (*ἀγγεῖα*) could be composed that is elaborated by further references.

The monastic table was equipped with various open and closed table wares, in which food and drinks were presented and served. They may be divided into vessels that contained a larger portion of food or drink to be shared by all messmates, and vessels that would contain the ration for each individual. As a result, vessels belonging to the first group must be larger than those belonging to the second. Such a distinction may be indicated even by one and the same word and its diminutive, when its termination is slightly altered.

A characteristic example is the case of the dish mentioned in the sources as (*pinax*), *πινάκιον* (*pinakion*), *πινάκισκος* (*pinakiskos*), the object *par excellence* for the presentation and serving of the meals. John Chrysostom (*PG* 59, 763), in his recitation of Saint John the Baptist's decapitation, mentions that this vessel normally contained food, but it came to signify a horrible crime. Koukoules (1952, 150-151)

⁷¹ It should be added here that the Coptic dictionary of Crum (1939) includes almost seventy different names of ceramic vessels.

through his assiduous study of numerous Byzantine sources concluded that *πίναξ* refers to a large and probably deep dish containing food shared by all table-companions, while *πινάκιον* and *πινακίσκος* would be a smaller plate containing the individual meals. These objects were wooden, clay, or metallic – often silver or golden. Focusing on the ceramic dishes and plates under discussion, it is very probable that they were slipped and / or decorated with several animal, vegetable or geometric motifs, impressed, incised or painted. The Coptic word ΠΙΝΑΞ, identical to its Greek equivalent, is defined by Crum (1939) as a good-quality plate, probably red slip ware. In the *Apophthegmata Patrum* (Achilles, 3; Daniel 2; Guy 1993, 4.10.3, 188) the word *πινάκιν* (*pinakin*) was also used to designate such dishes. In a story Abba Isaiah is presented having put salt and water in his *πινάκιν* to macerate his bread (AP, Achilles, 3). It is possible that these dishes would also contain water for drinking (Koukoules 1952, 151).

The commonest drinking vessel – what we would call a cup – was the *ποτήριον* (*poterion*) (AP, Eulogius; Isaiah, 4; Theodore of Pherme, 6; Isaak the Theban, 2; Romaeus; Sisoës, 2, 8; Guy 1993, 4.29.3, 200; 4.44.3, 208; 4.45.6, 208; 4.63.2, 216; 4.64.2, 216; 4.91.2, 230). Water or wine would be served in this object; the *Apophthegmata Patrum* (e.g. Romaeus) often refer to a *ποτήριον* of wine (*ποτήριον τοῦ οἴνου*) as if it was a vessel destined to contain especially wine. This assumption is not so absurd taking into account that even nowadays wine-glasses are distinguishable by their particular morphological features. The word *ποτήριον* and next to it the Coptic word ΑΠΟΤ are also used to designate a liturgical vessel: the *holy chalice* (Schmelz 2002, 102). At this early stage *holy chalices* were gold, silver or bronze.⁷² In an *Apophthegm* (Epiphanius of Cyprus, 16) one reads about a cup that would keep its content cool (*ψυχρόν ποτήριον*) (*psychron poterion*), probably an allusion to the cup known as *ψυκτῆρ* (*psykter*) (Koukoules 1952, 157).

Another drinking vessel, similar in form and closely bonded to the *ποτήριον*, is considered to be the *καυκάλιον* (*kaukalion*) or *βαυκάλιον* (*baukalion*) (AP, Eulogius; John the Little, 7, 8; Isaak priest of Kellia, 2; Macarius Aegyptius, 33; Poemen, 183; Guy 1993, 4.82.2, 226). Linchpin between a *ποτήριον* and a *καυκάλιον* is thought to be a hemispherical ceramic drinking vessel mostly for wine known as *καῦκος* (*kaukos*) or *καυκί(ο)ν* (*kauki(o)n*) (Koukoules 1952, 156; Bakirtzis 1989a, 106). However the *καυκάλιον* or *βαυκάλιον* is referred to as containing water (*καυκάλιον / βαυκάλιον ὕδατος*). A *καυκάλιον / βαυκάλιον* could be wooden (Leroy-Molighen 1965, 213), metallic (copper or silver), clay or even crystal (Bakirtzis 1989a, 106 and note 12). It appears that there is a misunderstanding about this vessel, as contradictory views are expressed about its actual form. The so far argumentation is in favour of an open form. In his discussion of *κωθώνιον*⁷³ (*kothonion*) Bakirtzis (1989, 106-109)

⁷² I did not manage to find any example of ceramic *holy chalice* from the Egyptian territory. Examples, however, come from the twelfth century byzantine glazed pottery. In Corinth (Morgan 1942, 121, Pl. XLI, j, No. 1047), the region of Pylia in Messenia (unpublished), Thessaloniki (Bakirtzis and Papanikola – Bakirtzis 1981, 422, Fig. 1) and Thrace (Asdracha and Bakirtzis 1980, 250, No. 8) sherds of glazed open vessels that bear incised inscriptions ('Take, eat.. or 'Drink from it, all of you') (Matthew 26: 26-28) are found and identified as *holy chalices*. They may date to a much later period and come from a different *milieu*, they stand however as indications that after a certain moment holy chalices were not necessarily made of very expensive materials.

⁷³ *Κωθώνιον* is described as an open vessel, a sort of drinking pot used by soldiers and sailors; it also used to designate water pumping vessels and open bowls containing holy water. It is also mentioned that in this vessel blood and small pieces of veal was put and was left there for days (*Geoponica* 20.10). *Κωθώνιον* was made of copper, or silver, clay, wood or even crystal (Bakirtzis 1989, 106-109).

argues that a closed form cannot be utterly accepted and provides enough evidence to prove that an open form is more likely.

But Leroy-Molighen (1965), who was the first to associate *βαυκάλιον* to *κωθώνιον*, already thought that it was probably a closed vessel. The same information one gets from the definition of the Coptic word **ΒΑΥΚΑΛΙΟΝ**, which is interpreted as a vessel – probably a sort of bottle – with narrow neck (Crum 1939). Torallas Tovar (2004, 182) refers to *βαυκάλιον* as a bottle for olive oil. It is generally very tempting to associate the word to the Italian *bochale* (*boccale*, *bocchale* *bocchali*), which is defined as a trefoil-mouthed bottle with one handle (Berti 1997, 302-303) or even the Arabic *būkla* (), a water-jar with two handles (Henein 1992, 47, No. 62). No doubt the case of *βαυκάλιον* / *καυκάλιον* appears rather complicated. Is it possible that the whole confusion derives from its connection (wrongly?) to other vessels (such as *καῦκος* / *καυκίον* and *κωθώνιον*), most likely open? At any rate, in its Egyptian context it looks more probable that it was a closed vessel that each monk would keep in his cell standing or hung as implied by an *Apophthegm*⁷⁴ (Poemen, 183). It is present in numerous meals of monks, as narrated in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*. Whether *βαυκάλιον* should be identified with the beautifully decorated painted jugs (Nos. 158-224, 226) is difficult to say, given the perplexity of the entire discussion about this vessel.

The term *κρατήρ* (*crater*) is used in one *Apophthegm* (Theodore of Pherme, 22) to designate an open bowl containing onions. One may therefore deduce that it is a sort of utilitarian ware in which certain provisions would be kept. However, in other fourth and fifth century sources (Basil the Great, 31.456; John Chrysostom, 52.471; 55.239; 58.566; Gregory of Nyssa, 46.468) craters are mentioned among the table wares and Koukoules (1952, 157) supposes that they had more or less the same shape and use with their ancestors. Later they came to signify the large drinking cups (Koukoules 1952, 157). The same word exists in Coptic as well (**ΚΡΑΤΗΡ**).

Another rather *archaic* form is attested in an interesting *Apophthegm* (Macarius Aegyptius, 3): *when Abba Macarius dwelt in the great desert, he was the only one living as an anchorite, but lower down there was another desert where several brothers dwelt. The old man was surveying the road when he saw Satan drawing near in the likeness of a man and he passed by his dwelling. He seemed to be wearing some kind of cotton garment, full of holes, and a small vessel hung at each hole* (Ward 1984, 126-127). The word that designates these vessels is *ληκόνθιον* (*lekynthion*), obviously something like the ancient *lekythus*, but apart from the fact that it probably refers to a closed vessel no further comment can be made on the basis of our *Apophthegm*.

The story continues with Abba Macarius asking Satan where he was going and what was the purpose of all those pots he was carrying. He answered that he wanted to disturb the brothers by offering them different kinds of food that he kept in the pots and he departed. This is interesting information about the variety of foodstuffs put in a single vessel type; but what kind of foodstuffs would they be? It is a pity that no example is mentioned so as to infer if the *ληκόνθιον* would indeed be a closed vessel. It is difficult, however, for me to imagine a narrow-necked vase, in the model of the ancient *lekythus*, if it was to carry delicious cooked non-liquid food...

⁷⁴ *The nature of water is soft, that of stone is hard; but if a baukalion is hung above the stone, allowing the water to fall drop by drop, it wears away the stone* (Ward 1984, 192).



Fig. 4.1. Woman selling *κωθώνια*.
Detail from the procession of the icon
of the Virgin Hodhegetria, late 13th c.
Arta, Vlacherna Monastery, narthex
(after Acheimastou-Potamianou 2009, Fig. 52)

When reading this recitation I cannot help recalling – although seemingly irrelevant – a scene represented in a wall-painting in the narthex of the Vlacherna Monastery near Arta (Greece): the procession of the miraculous icon of the Virgin Hodhegetria in Constantinople (Acheimastou-Potamianou 2009, 71-73, fig. 52). The wall-painting, which dates to the late thirteenth century, includes everyday life scenes. Among them is depicted an old woman carrying eight pots that appear hanging from a chain around her neck. It looks like a common practice for wandering sellers to attach their merchandise on themselves in one way or another and it is interesting to see it reflected in two different and chronologically divergent cases.

Several references to frying (*e.g.* AP, Gelasius, 3) and cooking (*e.g.* AP, Isaiah, 6) are to be found in the literary sources so that one gets an idea about what kind of vessels were used in these processes.

A pan known as *τήγανον* (*teganon*), *τηγάνιον* (*teganion*) or *τήγανος* (*teganos*) was used for frying food with the help of oil or fat, as well as for parching pulses or dried fruits (Bakirtzis 1989a, 49). In an *Apophthegm* (AP, Gelasius, 3) the act of frying a fish is narrated. In Coptic the **ΤΗΚΑΝΟΝ** (*tekanon*) – etymologically similar to its Greek equivalent – and in Arabic the *tāḡan* () designate more or less the same vessel, which probably has multiple applications. A *τήγανον* used to be a shallow vessel of various sizes, usually with sloping walls and rounded base; a pan-handle or two small horizontal handles often occur attached below the rim (*e.g.* No. 269). The most characteristic form of *τήγανον* in the Old Baramūs assemblage is the type with carinated body and no handles attached (Nos. 274-279). It is worth noting that the *tāḡan* was used by Egyptians not only as a frying pan (Henein 1992, 26, No. 31; 40, No. 49; 41, 52.), but also as a pan to cook food in the oven (Wissa Wassef 1971, 402). One can deduce how it was used according to the shape of its base: ⁷⁵ a rounded base implies cooking on a brazier⁷⁶, while a flat base was proper for cooking in the oven.

The principal cooking pot was the *χύτρα* (*chytra*) (Bakirtzis 1989a, 31-35; *Idem* 2005), differing from the pans described above by being deep and generally closed in shape. I suspect that the hemispherical casserole (Nos. 281-295), which was made at the same time with its lid (Nos. 338-360) may also be called *χύτρα*; since it can be

⁷⁵ Analogous discussion about the bases of certain cooking-pots in: Bakirtzis 1989a, 33-34.

⁷⁶ In Arabic the brazier is known as *kānūn* () (Henein 1992, 25: No. 28; 48: No. 63). The same word is applied for an improvised structure of three simple bricks with a flat upper face. Two of them are put in parallel juxtaposition and this is where the vessel stands. The third brick is put perpendicularly to the other two, constraining the fire which is put on, so as to cook the meal.

fully covered by its lid that is equipped with one or more steam holes, it does not differ from any of the closed cooking wares. It is possible that each vessel, identified as necked cooking-pot and cooking-jar (Nos. 322-337) can be identified as *χύτρα*. All these pots are appropriate to hold any liquid substance (water, oil or fat) in which the food would boil. In an *Apophthegm* (AP, Isaiah, 6) a monk threw a handful of lentils in a *χύτρα* and boiled them – most likely in water only.

It is noteworthy that apart from preparing food, *χύτραι* might have been used for other purposes. Water to be used for daily hygiene was heated in these objects. Medicines, poisons and other chemical preparations were concocted in such cooking-pots (Bakirtzis 1989a, 42).⁷⁷ Nowadays, in the Monastery of Virgin Mary of Baramūs (Dayr al-Baramūs), water is boiled in a cooking-pot, so as to clean the censers or to melt the candles for recycling wax. This act takes place in the *doksar*, a place in the south entrance of the church of the Virgin.

An odd use of the *χύτρα* is illustrated in an *Apophthegm* concerning the early life of Abba Macarius. When he was held up to public ridicule, the mob hung around his neck sooted cooking-pots (*ἡσβολωμένας χύτρας*) and amphora handles (*ὠτία κούφων*) in order to humiliate him (AP, Macarius Aegyptius, 1) (Von Lemm 1972, 55). This expression of moral and social disgrace is found in Old Testament (Joel 2:6: *ἀπό προσώπου αὐτοῦ συντριβήσονται λαοὶ πᾶν πρόσωπον ὡς πρόσκαυμα χύτρας*; Nah 2:11: *καὶ τὸ πρόσωπο πάντων ὡς πρόσκαυμα χύτρας*) and other passages (e.g. discussion in: Kazhdan and Maguire 1991, 2).⁷⁸ Van der Vliet (1991, 217-221) discussed a magic ritual, according to which the names of demons are written on the rim of a pot that was about to be burnt. Hard curses were hurled against the victim. Just like the pot that was blackened by fire, the demons would bring to the victim's face *the fire of the winds, the anger of heat and the execration of banishment*. The effect of this operation would be that the victim's face would become *black as the sooted pot*, shamefaced and rejected by the entire human race!

Finishing with the cooking wares, in an *Apophthegm* (AP, Poemen, 111) the word *λέβης* (*lebes*) occurs, as being an object exposed to fire, and therefore used in a cooking process. This is right, but a *λέβης* used to be a resistant metallic vessel, often appearing in proverbs as a contrast to friable clay cooking vessels (Bakirtzis 1989a, 31-32).

A multitude of other utilitarian wares, used for storing provisions and for various other purposes, supplemented the household of the monks.

The storage vessel *par excellence* was the *πίθος* (*pithos*) (Bakirtzis 1989a, 110-121). Such storage containers were made in various shapes and sizes. The large versions were not moved once they had been placed in position, while the smaller could be moved and transported. One gets an idea of the actual size that a large *πίθος* could reach from the *Apophthegmata Patrum* (AP, Ammonas, 10; John the Little, 15), where it is mentioned that a woman could be hidden in such a jar!⁷⁹ Transferrable *πίθοι* would be probably large enough, as one may deduce from a story narrated in the *Historia Monachorum* (HM 22). Abba Amoun asked two men to bring him such a jar,

⁷⁷ Bakirtzis (1989, 41-43) cites a multitude of different usages for a *chytra*. Nevertheless, they are not mentioned, as they refer to a different *milieu* and distant chronological periods.

⁷⁸ I owe these remarks to Prof. Dr. Jacques Van der Vliet, who additionally urged me to broaden my perspectives looking for the 'symbolic meaning' of pots. Unfortunately, I did not find the time to carry out thorough research in this respect, but I keep his advice for a future study, which would definitely give significant results.

⁷⁹ Episodes with people hiding in large storage jars are very widespread in folk stories and fairy-tales. More recently, a funny example is illustrated in the movie *Kaos* of Paolo and Vittorio Taviani (1984), where one watches how a craftsman is trapped in a storage jar after repairing it.

where he would store the water to offer his visitors. One of them refused to transport it for fear that his camel would die on the way, due to the heaviness of this jar. But the other managed to carry the jar on his donkey, overcoming his weariness.

From the early years of human civilisation until the present the necessities of life impose the use of this long-lasting container, which could have been made of clay or stone. Large quantities of provisions, such as wine, oil, cereals, flour, salted fish and meat, dried fruits and so on were stored in such storage jars. Large *πίθοι* were illustrated in a sixth century wall-painting representing the miracle at Cana, in the sanctuary of the Abū Ḥinnis Monastery (Clédat 1902, 52-53, Pl. 3; Zibawi 2003, 64, fig. 63). This is the only such representation known in a wall-painting from the Egyptian territory of that period.



Fig. 4.2. *Zal'a* (photo: Imke Fleuren)

In the Monasteries of Wādī al-Naṭrūn a large oval-shaped vessel with two handles and flat base, known as *zal'a* () (Wissa-Wassef 1971, 402), appears to be the most typical storage jar, where provisions were stored until some seventy years ago. Its outer surface is often covered with a special mat, while various types of stoppers block its mouth. It is generally characterised by a light-coloured very hard and dense fabric, which contains considerable amount of calcite. This successor of ancient *πίθος* must have appeared somewhere during the tenth century, as the excavations in the Old Baramūs show (No. 407), and evolved ever since. It shares common morphological characteristics with certain vessels identified as ‘Arabic’ amphorae, due to the Arabic inscriptions that are written on their handles (Michaelides and Bakirtzis 2003), while technologically resemble jars produced in

Nebi Samwil (Gascoigne and Pyke 2011, 420-423).

Abūna Maṣṣūr al-Baramūsi – and Abūna Makary al-Baramūsi, who acted as translator – patiently explained an interesting process related to this vessel. Wissa Wassef (1971, 108-109) referred to this very process, mentioning that it was followed for the preparation of the Eucharistic Wine. Dry raisins, imported from Cyprus, Palestine or Izmir, after very thorough washing they were put in the large *zal'a*. Then water was added, in a proportion of two thirds of raisins for one third of water. After three days they were pressed in a wine-mill and the liquid produced was again put in large storage vessels, where it was kept for forty to sixty days. The wine to be produced should be pure, not pressed with the feet, and acid free. This preparation of the wine for the Holy Communion was tolerated rather than recommended by the Church (Wissa Wassef 1971, 109; Ishaq 1991, 1066). Its history goes back to times of persecutions. In 852, the last Arab governor of Egypt ‘Anbasa Ibn Ishāq al-Ḍayyi (Lane – Poole 1901, 41-42, 57; Kennedy 1998, 84) banned the wine commerce and the viniculture so as to keep Christians from celebrating the Liturgy. Raisins were secretly imported and arrived dry so that they had to be pressed in water.

In the discussion about the utilitarian vessels it is not possible to ignore the bowls with sloping walls and flat base that are found in considerable quantity in the Old Baramūs (Nos. 375-393). In this case, our only starting point is the shape, being impossible to trace in the sources any word, corresponding to it. About some of these vessels one could suggest a possible interpretation, although with reservation. One may note that they are rather similar to the *māḡūr* () (Wissa Wassef, 1971, 401; Henein 1992, 59, No. 79), a kneading trough, which is still used in the preparation of the dough. Nowadays, such troughs may often be glazed.



Fig. 10.3. Modern day glazed *māḡūr*
(photo: abūna Makary al-Baramūsi)

In an *Apophthegm* (AP, Poemen, 181), *γαστήριον* (*gastrion*), a clay vessel (Koukoules 1952, 34), where cheese would be kept is mentioned. It could have been in the shape of a jar with two handles and a flat base, judging by modern clay vessels, where cheese or other provisions are stored (Henein 1992, 12, No. 3; 14, No. 7).

A water jar called *ὕδρια* (*hydria*) is also mentioned in the sources (Palladius, HL, 19.8), unfortunately without any further notion that would help us understanding its shape. In Coptic the word remains the same (ΖΥΔΡΙΑ) and it also refers to a vessel wherein water would be stored (Crum 1939). In antiquity, the *ὕδρια* was a large, closed vessel, characterised by its three handles, a vertical one attached to the neck and two horizontal attached to the upper body. In the period of our study, closed vessels with such three handles do not occur. As a result, the term probably describes a jar with one or two handles, the form of which would facilitate its transportation to the well, wherefrom the water would be pumped, and back to the Monastery. To what extent the Arabic word *qadra* () has anything to do with the *ὕδρια* is difficult to ascertain, although a similarity between words is obvious. *Qadra* is a closed vessel with two handles, narrow neck, ovoid body and a flat base used to store various provisions, such as white cheese, pickled or salted food, melted butter, the molasses and so on (Wissa Wassef 1971, 400; Henein 1992, 82).

One more vessel mostly connected to water is the *λαγόνιον* (*lagynion*) (AP, John the Little, 1; Moses, 13; Paul the Great, 3; Chaeremon; Guy 1993, 4.41.2, 206). This vessel is known as a water, wine or olive-oil container, smaller in size than an amphora (Koukoules 1950, 97-98; Bakirtzis 1989a, 89). A *λαγόνιον* was a closed vessel with narrow neck and generally two handles that would facilitate its transportation. Medieval Byzantine sources (P. Pr., IV, 129c-e) often compare its shape with that of the plum (Koukoules 1952, 108; Bakirtzis 1989a). Consequently, one may infer that it was a spherical or oval-shaped vessel. It is considered that its base was not flat, but rounded or turned (see Nos. 394-395), so that it was necessary to use a sort of wooden, ceramic or metallic stand (Bakirtzis 1989a, 94). Such stands do exist in Byzantine Egypt (Badawy 1967; Van Lohuizen – Mulder 1991; Rutschowscaya 1991) and apart from supporting the vessel they were destined to keep the stored water cool.

Studies of this type concern examples dating from the eighth century on, found in Rome (Mazzucato 1977; Whitehouse 1980) and in South Greece – mainly in Athens (Robinson 1959, 120, M388-M389), Corinth (Stillwell – MacKay 1967, 272-

274, 279-288, Pls. 64, 67, 68; Williams and Zervos 1992, 146-149, Fig. 5, Pls. 34-36; 1995, 28-33, Fig. 5, Pls. 9, 13) and Argos (Piérart and Thalmann 1980, 466-470 (group B), Figs. 5-6). Until some decades ago, on the island of Rhodes *λαγήνα* was identified with a water jar, known as *κουμάρι*, a sort of bottle characterised by a narrow neck and equipped with a pierced filter (Koukoules 1952, 162-163 and note 6). One would drink directly from this vessel (Koukoules 1952, 163) that had no handles – like the seventh century jugs found in Kellia (Egloff 1977, 216-217, types 212-214). Despite the above information, it is still unclear, which exactly is the Egyptian type that could be identified as a *λαγόνιον*. Taking into consideration the description of its shape – even if it comes from later sources – it is only the fifth century variants of the Egyptian *bag-shaped* amphora that seem to correspond!

Similar to the *λαγόνιον* was probably the *στάμνος* (*stamnós*) (Bakirtzis 1989a, 95-99), whose name implies the fact that it could stand on its own,⁸⁰ without the use of a support being necessary. The word is still used in Modern Greek to designate a closed vessel with two handles and a flat base, containing mostly water or wine. It is often associated with amphorae due to its function as a transport and storage vessel. Although there is much information about its actual shape in Byzantine sources, while many such jars are found in various sites in Greece, the Balkans and Italy (Bakirtzis 1989a, 95-98), the sources referring to early monasticism are not instructive at all. In two different cases in the *Historia Monachorum σταμνίων / στάμνος* is mentioned as a container for milk (*HM*, 8), or honey (*HM*, 24).

In *Historia Lausiaca* (Palladius, *HL*, 2.4) the word *κάδος* (*kados*) is mentioned as a vessel that one would use to pump water from the well and then bring it, filled up, back to his cell. In the specific case I am not sure if it represents the jar lashed to the *sāqiya* or a sort of bucket with handle, easy to transfer and appropriate to draft water. I even suspect that the particular object is not a clay one.

Various words are used to designate amphorae, namely the jars primarily destined to serve as package containers of goods to be traded. These very jars were often re-used after their prime distribution, so that it is not always possible to draw safe conclusions in an attempt to associate the rich textual evidence to specific vessels found in archaeological sites. The word *κοῦφον* (*koufon*) – in Coptic **ΚΟΥΦΩΝ** – which occurs in an *Apophthegm* (*AP*, Macarius Aegyptius, 1) appears very often in Greek papyri from Egypt (Youtie 1977; Cockle 1981; Mayerson 1997; Morelli and Schmelz 2002; Mayerson 2000b) and it is generally translated as *jar* or *vessel*, while the word *empty* is also suggested (discussion in Mayerson 1997, 47). Mayerson (1997) argued that in fact the term *koufon* is to be taken as an empty jar, observing that the word is not found as a jar filled with wine or another substance. He also noted that when the word is used as a substantive it does not signify a vessel of standardised size, shape, or quality, except when explicitly stated in the document.

In a number of documents, such as contracts dealing with vineyard and pottery (leases for potters, wine sale, petitions, cargos of pottery, etc.) *κοῦφον*, as empty jar, is clearly contrasted with *κεράμιον* (*keramion*), which designates the filled jar.⁸¹ Such a distinction is apparently not found in the documents of the Ptolemaic period, but in documents of later periods (Mayerson 1997, 48, 51). The term *κεράμιον* does not only occur in numerous papyri (Mayerson 1997; Kruit and Worp 1999 etc.), but also in an *Apophthegm* (*AP*, Poemen, 181). In the last case it is mentioned in connection with its

⁸⁰ Deriving from the ancient Greek verb *ἵστημι*.

⁸¹ *Κεράμιον* was also the predominant measure for wine, certainly during the first century AD; its size can vary (Kruit and Worp 1999, 118).

content, which is identified as pickles (*κεράμιον ταρίχων*). Furthermore, it seems that a *κεράμιον μονόχωρον* (*keramion monochoron*) or *δίχωρον* (*dichoron*) designates a particular type of Egyptian wine amphora. Bailey (1998, 126) investigated if it actually refers to the most characteristic Egyptian amphorae of the Roman times, the bitroncoconical Egyptian A or Egyptian amphorae 3.⁸² Interesting information is given by Łukaszewicz (2010, 941), who referred to a number of *ostraca* mentioning the number of donkeys that would carry *κεράμια*, as well as the name of their drivers. It is also mentioned that each donkey would carry five *κεράμια*.

In the discussion of words referring to amphorae one should not ignore the use of geographical jar names (Kruit and Worp 1999, 118: note 30; Kruit and Worp 2000) to designate certain vessels.⁸³ Among them, it is the *κνίδιον* (*knidion*) (Casson 1939, 6-8; Rathbone 1983, 83-84; Bailey 1998, 129-130; Kruit and Worp 2000, 72-73, 82-83; Mayerson 2000b), which chiefly appears in the sources that describe the life of the monks (*AP*, Sisoës, 8; Guy 1993, 4.44.2, 208). This vessel is *by far the most prominent among jars bearing names from Aegean and Palestinian ports that have made their way into Egypt* (Mayerson 2000b, 165). Initially, it was taken for granted that it represented the vessels manufactured in Cnidus in Asia Minor. However, further investigation in the documents showed that Egyptians adopted it as one of their own, supplanting the common *κεράμιον* as a container for wine (Kruit and Worp 1999, 118; Mayerson 2000b, 165).

According to papyrological evidence, the *κνίδιον* emerged during the Ptolemaic period in numbers that cannot be compared with those that occur in the Byzantine and early Arab periods (from the fourth to the eighth century). Probably these late *κνίδια* were not the genuine, made in Cnidus vessels, but Egyptian versions of a popular type of Cnidian wine jar (Bailey 1998, 130; Mayerson 2000b, 165-166). Important production centre in Egypt must have been the Hermopolite Nome as indicated by respective documents (cited in: Bailey 1998, 129). This is the area where chiefly the *Egyptian Amphorae 7* were produced and Bailey (1998, 129-130) gathered enough evidence to prove that they most likely correspond to the *κνίδια* jars. Only a few observations could be made taking into consideration some more recent studies:

To draw his conclusions, Bailey (1998, 129) was based on capacity measures of his amphorae from al-Ašmūnayn. Determining the capacity of *κνίδια* is a composite issue. So many *κνίδια* are noted in the documents, without any indication of their capacity. In general, documents often provide only scattered references of the specific capacity for jars of a certain type (Mayerson 2000b, 166). In an effort to solve the mystery various different capacities are suggested (discussion in Casson 1939, 6-8). It seems however more probable that the *κνίδιον* contained 3, 4, or 5 sextarii of wine (Kruit and Worp 1999, 116; Mayerson 2000b, 166-167), not seven or eight, as Bailey took into account. Even so, Bailey's measurements correspond in most cases to the *κνίδιον*, if calculated in *sextarii castrenses* of 0.81 litres, which were more common in the Late Empire, and not in *sextarii italici* of 0.541 litres. The variation manifested in the case of an eighth-ninth century vessel may be explained by differentiations that possibly occurred in the 'Abbāsīd period.

In texts the *κνίδιον* appears as a wine container, but also as package (after prime use?) of various dry, liquid and semi-dry / liquid goods, such as grapes, oil, cheap wine, vinegar, honey / wine drink, honey / water drink, *garum*, fish sauce, sweet

⁸² This type was eventually identified with the *spatheion* (discussion in chapter 3).

⁸³ New jar names with a geographical background were (re-)introduced during the second century AD (Kruit and Worp 1999, 118, note 30).

olives, olives, honey, pickles, cheese and maybe pickled calf meat. Coins are also mentioned (Kruit and Worp 2000, 107-110).

An interesting notion is given in the *Historia Lausiaca* (Palladius, *HL*, 27.1), where the term *κεράμιον κιλικίσιον* (*keramion kilikision*), meaning *Cilician jar*, is mentioned. Given that the assumption of Kruit and Worp (2000, 74), who regard most foreign geographical jar names are related to import, is right, one may relate this jar to the Cilician Late Roman amphora 1.

Finally, the ‘plastered’ oil-jar (*ἀγγεῖον ἐλαίου ζέστον γεγυψωμένον*) mentioned in an *Apophthegm* (*AP*, Benjamin, 1) evokes a process described in the *Geoponica* (9.19.10-11), according to which clay vessels that would store oil should be coated with plaster or dregs on their interior to maintain a cool temperature, which was ideal for the oil.

Other objects, such as the *λύχνος* (*lychnos*), the lamp (*AP*, John the Little, 18; Jacob, 3; Orsisius, 2), and the *θυμιατήριον* (*thymiaterion*) (Wigand 1912, 2-16), the censer (*AP*, Isaak priest of Kellia, 6), are also mentioned in the texts. Such vessels were not always made of clay; metal or glass was used, in the manufacture of somewhat more ‘luxurious’ objects.

2 THE MONKS

Mossakowska-Gaubert (2004, 1452), in her study of the glass objects from the hermitage No. 44 in Naqlūn, has raised a point, which may definitely refer to any object that accompanied the life of an individual. Her question was: what were the needs of the monks once lived there, and under which circumstances did they make use of their glass vessels? This very question, which concerns the relation between people and things, reflects a *crucial area of thought in all the social sciences* (Gosden and Marshall 1999, 169). It can be transcribed in various versions, according to the social environment of an investigated site and the material of the objects examined. In the present study, there is no need to modify it significantly. I would only add: *who* were the monks once lived in the Old Monastery of Baramūs? What were their needs and how did they cover them using the ceramic objects, some of which we achieved to unearth and identify? Furthermore, *how* did all these vessels arrive in the site? And what was the actual relation of the monks with the wider world?

WHO?

According to the literary texts, which present the ascetics as ideal figures and exceptional paradigms, most of them belonged to the lower orders before their initiation to the community (Evelyn-White 1932, 189); in most cases they appear to have been mere shepherds (*e.g. AP*, Apollo, 2; Macarius the Homicide, Palladius, *HL*, 15) and peasants (*e.g. Paul the Simple*, Palladius, *HL*, 22) or slaves (*AP*, Mius, 2; Moses the Black, Palladius, *HL*, 19), even criminals (Palladius, *HL*, 19; *AP*, Apollo, 2; Budge 1907, 270), who have received little or no education (Evelyn-White 1932, 189). Allusions to brothers coming from the middle class are scarce (Palladius, *HL*, 13, 14); well-educated brothers, who came from the upper class, are even less (*e.g. AP*, Arsenius, 29).

In spite of the above references, the reality must have been different. The tendency to imagine monks coming from the lowest social stratum derived from a simplistic aspect of Byzantine Egypt’s social reality (Wipszycka 1986, 132; 2009, 493). This reality was initially sketched as if the non-Egyptian element was the only

to represent the rich and well-educated elite, while the Egyptian element was almost equal to *rustic* (see also: Wilfong 1998, 177; Wipszycka 2009, 356-357). Even in a saying of Arsenius (*AP*, Arsenius, 5) *rustics* and Egyptians are treated as synonymous (Evelyn-White 1932, 189). Socrates, in his *Ecclesiastic History* (*HE* 4.7) mentions that most monks were simple-minded and illiterate (discussion in: Wipszycka 2009, 356). However, in Egypt Coptic elite, whose importance grew in time, did exist and developed its own culture, even if its status was inferior to that of the Greek (Wipszycka 1986, 132; Bagnall 1993, 230-260; Wipszycka 2009, 357). It would be hence risky to accept that the majority of monks were illiterate peasants.

Van der Vliet (2009, 285-286) explains how the *rustic* element and the lack of civilisation were used as positive characteristics. Thanks to them, Egyptian ascetics resisted imported philosophies and remained attached to *a pure and unspoiled faith*. Most brothers appear as shepherds to denote their quality as metaphoric spiritual shepherds. Shenoute of Atripe (c. 348-c.464) (Harmless 2004, 445-448; Wipszycka 2009, 61-65), for example, may be seen as a sort of *peasant leader*, but it is well-shown that he was an educated bilingual author and preacher, *much appreciated by the rich and mighty of his time* (Van der Vliet 2009, 285-286); likewise, Pesynthios of Koptos (569-632) (Wipszycka 2007, 340-345; *Eadem* 2009, 30-34), although springing from a wealthy family, he is presented as shepherd in his youth. Poverty and illiteracy are part of the *ideology* of early monasticism (Van der Vliet: comments) and are hence highlighted.

As for the actual education level of the Egyptian monks, it is certain that most of them could read and write, without of course denying that there existed illiterate monks too (Wipszycka 1984; *Eadem* 2009, 361-365). The poor opinion of the cultural level of Egyptian clergy and ascetics does not seem to correspond to reality. The myth of illiterate monks is furthermore disconfirmed by the Greek or/and Coptic literature that monastic centres produced or read. The need to enrich the ascetic experiences, through hagiographic texts was probably introduced by educated brothers. For a number of monks their education took place in a monastic centre. Cases of monks writing texts are not rare (Wipszycka 2009, 359-360). Wipszycka (2009, 361-365) maintains that after all illiterate monks were only a minority, base on the great deal of everyday life texts written on *ostraca* and papyri; texts, such as private letters, contracts, bills and so on (*e.g.* in: Clackson 2008; Delattre 2007; *Idem* 2008; Boud'hors and Heurtel 2010).

The status to which monks would come after their initiation is discussed in two different Sayings that probably reproduce the same event. The first refers to Abba Arsenius (*AP*, Arsenius, 36) and the second to Abba Romaeus or a Roman father (*μοναχός τις Ρωμαῖος*) (*AP*, Romaeus, 1), who is most likely Arsenius himself (Evelyn-White 1932, 101, 124). This story – especially the second, more elaborate version – speaks of how a peasant and a noble would have lived before and after initiating the ascetic life: the first actually found ease, while the second abandoned a life of luxury for a life of hardship, poverty and humility.

Is it true that living as a monk would somehow be like living as a peasant in better circumstances? To what extent such a generalised view corresponds to the reality of monastic life? It seems that the literary sources, if examined solely, may in fact be in favour of this idea. However, there is papyrological evidence that upholds the opposite, indicating a special economic vitality of the monastic units (Barison 1938, 32; Wipszycka 1986; *Eadem* 2009). Furthermore, it is obvious that there used to exist both 'wealthy' and poor brothers, mainly as a result of their status before initiation. Archaeological investigation has in fact revealed *lauras* with beautiful wall-

paintings and more or less 'luxurious' objects, against primitive and poor *lauras*, which have barely left their traces (Wipszycka 2009, 359).

Wipszycka (1986, 132; *Eadem* 2009, 358) also pointed to a text, usually ignored in the discussion about the social origin and economic status of monks: a constitution of Valentinian and Valens issued in 370 or 373 (*C. Th.*, XII, 1, 63), which authorised the dignitaries to force monks to return to their secular duties; those who refused to abandon monastic life would have their belongings confiscated. This edict refers especially to Egyptian monks, and it may serve as indication that people of at least moderate wealth were certainly among them. And if the emperors considered necessary to promulgate this document that means that these wealthy people are more than we usually assume.

At any rate it is almost impossible to draw certain conclusions about the social origin and the cultural level of ascetics. Only the ratio between rich, middle-class and poor, educated and illiterate brothers would give an idea of the reality, but there is no way to reach this information (Wipszycka 2009, 355).

WHAT?

Let us now examine what were the everyday tasks of the monks. According to the sources, the anchorites of Sketis and Kellia should spend their life withdrawn in their cells for five days in the week, gathering together only on the *Sabbath* (Saturday) and on the *Lord's Day* (Palladius, *HL*, 7). Each monk should work hard and carefully, so as to earn by his own labour a daily supply of food for himself and for those in need (John Cassian, *De institutis*, 2.3; *AP*, Poemen, 69), such as ill and old brothers (Delattre 2008, 58).

The standard handicraft (*ἐργόχειρον*) practised in the monasteries of Lower Egypt is the making of baskets (*σπυρίδες*) (gathered information on basket making in: Evelyn-White 1932, 198; Regnault 1990, 112-114), mats (*ψίαθοι*, *ψιάθια*) (Wipszycka 1986, 119-121; Regnault 1990, 114), ropes (*σολάκιν*), and sandals (*σανδάλια*) from palm-blades and rushes. Textual references to these works are numerous. Other forms of manual labour were: weaving (*HM*, 18; Nau 1907, 189, Nos. 58, 59; Wipszycka 1986, 121-122), harvesting (*θέρος*, *θερισμός*) (*AP*, Macarius, 7; John the Little, 6, 35; Isaak priest of Kellia, 4, 7; Poemen, 22; Pior, 1; Serinus, 1; Nau 1909, 376, No. 291; Wipszycka 1986, 128-129), copying (*καλλιγραφία*) (*AP*, Marcus the disciple of Abba Silvanus, 1; John Cassian, *De institutis*, 5.39; Wipszycka 1986, 122-124; Regnault 1990, 114-115), gardening (*AP*, Arsenius, 22), manufacture of sieves or necklaces (*AP*, Silvanus) (*κόσκινα*) and flax weaving (*λινυφικόν*) (Nau 1913, 141, No. 375; Regnault 1990, 114-115). It seems that the brothers Paul and Timotheus, who were barbers, worked hard throughout the day, since Timotheus complained that the other monks would not let them live in peace (*AP*, Paul the Barber, 2). Wipszycka (1986, 125-126) wondered if the two barbers would render surgical or other therapeutic services, given that it is not so logic to be so busy when monks are not supposed to cut their hair or shave their beard. To all the above occupations Wipszycka (1986, 124) added those who probably created leather and wooden artefacts.

Possessions were not forbidden to ascetics living in *semi-anchoretic* congregations. Papyrological evidence confirms the sources' statement that each ascetic should work in order to earn the living. A list of activities that the ascetics practiced comes from the Monastery of Bawīt (Delattre 2007, 80-93), where agriculture seems to be the main occupation next to pasturage, fishing, bee-keeping,

wine production, basketry, wood-carving, metallurgy, and pottery production. Congregations owning land or workshops often rented them to individuals, as the various leasing contracts reveal (Delattre 2007, 62-63). Many monks exercised certain professions; carpenters, masons, smiths, potters, weavers, bakers, camel-drivers, painters, notaries, male nurses, physicians, even grave diggers and other specialties lived and worked in the Monastery of Bawīt (Delattre 2008, 57-58).

Monks had to earn their living and the best way to do so was through disposing their finished articles. In many cases the monks themselves carried their wares to the market in the adjacent city, somewhere in the Delta, or merchants came to the monasteries to transact with the monks (Evelyn-White 1932, 184; Delattre 2008, 51). It is a pity that the archaeological investigations in the Lower Egyptian semi-anchoretic settlements have released no documentary evidence so as to learn more than what the literary sources mention about such transactions. Interesting information comes from the correspondence of anchorite Frange, who lived in the eighth century. He established himself in the tomb of Amenemope (or Amenemipet), vizier of Amenophis II (18th dynasty), near Dayr al-Baḥarī. Frange worked mainly as weaver, but also as copyist and bookbinder. Thanks to his occupations he was able to cover his needs. He sold or exchanged his artefacts in order to get food and other supplies (Delattre 2008, 54; Boud'hors and Heurtel 2010). Monastic settlements, such as Bawīt owned land, which was often situated in great distance from the monastery. In order to obtain the products after harvesting, camel-drivers, who were often monks of the monastery, had to travel. They held an *osracon*, on which it was written their destination, the product and the quantity that they had to receive. For really long journeys boats were used (Delattre 2008, 57).

It is now time to raise the question of the monks' dietary practices. Food consumption in a monastic context (Devos 1986; Regnault 1990, 75-94; Layton 2002, 25) should be dealt with caution, due to the perplexity and density of its significance in ascetic practices. The constant effort to overcome sin through the absolute repression of any desire (Rom. 8) evoked the model of scrawny monks, whose achievements in fasting and abstinence were often supernatural. But are those models indeed followed by the majority of monks? Let us now try to answer this question.

Bread appears as the main nourishment of the monks. In fact bread was the principal food of the Egyptians since Pharaonic times⁸⁴ (Wissa Wassef 1971, 392; Regnault 1990, 79; Delattre 2007, 85), as well as that of the Byzantines – who were in rule at the time when the texts describing life in the Egyptian deserts were written (Koukoules 1952, 12). Α *παζαμάτιον* (*paxamation*) (*AP*, Agathon, 20; Isaak the Theban, 2; Serinus, 1) was rather a hard biscuit usually made of barley (Koukoules 1952, 29) and belonged to the group of breads known as *διπυρίται* (*dipyritai*) (Koukoules 1952, 24-30), which were possible to store for long periods. For that reason they were especially consumed by the army (Koukoules 1952, 29). Such bread is prepared in Egypt and in Coptic Monasteries until today (Regnault 1990, 79).

References to monks eating their bread – (*ψωμὸν*, *ψωμίον*: Battaglia 1989, 74-87) (*AP*, Bessarion, 12; Macarius Aegyptius, 33; Xoius, 1; Pambo, 2), (*ἄρτος*: Battaglia 1989, 97-99) (*AP*, Arsenius, 34; Epiphanius of Cyprus, 16; Theodore of Pherme, 7; Theodore of Ennaton, 1; Theodore of Eleutheropolis, 2; Megethios, 2; Poemen, 51; Serapion, 1; Syncletica, 4; Phocas, 2; Philagrius; *HM* 1, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 20, 24) – are numerous, showing its fundamental role in the daily diet. Generally bread was divided into two main groups (Koukoules 1952, 28): the soft and the dry

⁸⁴ Even nowadays in Egypt the alimentation of lower classes is based on bread.

bread (*ἄρτοι ξηροὶ*) (*HM* 8), also known as *διπυρίται* (*dipyritai*). There were several bread-types of various qualities; among them, bread of barley and lentils (*ἄρτος κρίθινος καὶ ἀπὸ φακοῦ*) (*AP*, Dioscorus, 1) and bread made of flour (*ἄλευρον*) from grinded chick-peas (*ἐρεβίνθια*) (*AP*, Theodore of Pherme, 7) are mentioned in the sources. These varieties were generally shoddy. Against them stood the *σιλίγιον* (*silignion*), high-quality bread, which was made of brayed wheaten white flour, clean from any kind of bran⁸⁵ (Koukoules 1952, 15-16; Battaglia 1989, 68, 93-95). It was not prepared in the monasteries, but was brought from the city along with the supplies that would be offered to the sick monks (*HL*, 13.2).

During their meals monks are often mentioned combining bread with salt (*ἄρτος καὶ ἄλας*) (*AP*, Ares; Eulogius; Helladius; John the Little, 29), or slightly macerate it with water (*ἄρτος καὶ ὕδωρ*) (*HM* 10). In an extreme case of *ascesis* a monk mixed his bread with ashes from the censer (*σποδὸν τοῦ θυμιατηρίου μετὰ τοῦ ἄρτου*) (*AP*, Isaak priest of Kellia, 6). On the contrary, the act of eating bread (*ψωμὸν*) with salt (*ἄλας*) soaked in water (*ὕδωρ*) (*AP*, Achilles, 3) was considered by Abba Achilles as a sort of luxury. So when he caught Abba Isaiah taking such a meal, he said: ‘Come, all of you, and see Isaiah eating broth in Scetis... Eating bread with cheese (*ἄρτον καὶ τυρὸν*) (*AP*, Simon, 2) was considered to be luxurious, if not scandalous, by the writers of the edifying literary sources. This is why Abba Simon is presented eating such a ‘sandwich’ in front of the Monastery’s gate, so as to avoid a magistrate who wanted to visit him. And his trick worked; the magistrate left at the same moment wondering if this was the anchorite of whom he had heard so much...

Although bread appears as the ordinary food of the monks, there were some who rarely ate it and others who did not eat it at all (*e.g.* *AP*, Abraham, 3; *HM* 1, 2, 8). These monks usually preferred simple uncooked vegetarian meals that can be found in nature and eaten as they are.

The main cereal consumed was wheat (*σῖτος*) (*AP*, Arsenius, 17; Isaak priest of Kellia, 4). Eating grains of barley (*κοκκία κριθῶν*) in a rather unorthodox way is reported in an *Apophthegm* concerning Abba Sisoës (*AP*, Sisoës, 31): After being robbed, Abba Sisoës and his brother were separately wandering in the desert searching of something to eat. The old man found some camel dung and, having broken it up, he found some grains of barley in it. He started eating, but he put aside half of the grains for his brother.

From a saying of Abba Gelasius (*AP*, Gelasius, 6) we are informed that the one who walks in the desert does not eat bread, but herbs, (*βοτάνας*) (*HM* 12), (*χόρτα*) (*AP*, Euprepus, 4). While walking in the desert, a disciple of Abba Agathon is presented wanting to collect a small green pea (*μικρὸν ἀράκιον χλωρὸν*) (*AP*, Agathon, 11); even if he finally didn’t take it, his intention shows that peas would be eaten by the monks. Herbs, wild herbs (*βοτάναι ἄγρια*) (*HM* 10), (*ἀγριολάχανα*) (*HL*, 26.2) and a variety of bitter herbs, called *πικρίδαι* (*pikridai*) (*HM* 20) were consumed along with sweet roots (*ρίζας γλυκείας*) (*HM* 2) and vegetables (*λάχανα*) (*AP*, Gelasius, 6; *AP*, Dioscorus, 1; Theophilus the archbishop, 3; Poemen, 109; Poemen, 186; Romaeus; *HM* 10, 8, 12) (Koukoules 1952, 88-96). Texts also refer to pickled vegetables (*σύνθετα λάχανα*) (*HM* 2), which are eaten even nowadays in Egypt (Wissa Wassef 1971, 352-354) and other areas of the Eastern Mediterranean. Wissa Wassef (1971, 352) cites that especially people from unprivileged classes use to combine their bread with vegetables conserved in salt and vinegar. The vegetables that are most

⁸⁵ In the Roman times, such flour was known as *siligo* (Plini, *Nat. Hist.*, 18: 86-88) and was cultivated in Campania, Etruria and the Gaul (André 1961, 54).

frequently pickled are cucumbers, turnips, black egg-plants, small lemons, olives and onions. Finally, bulbs (Koukoules 1952, 99-102) that would be eaten raw were the beets (*σευτλία*) (Guy 1993, 4.84.4, 228) and the onions (*κρόμμυα*) (*AP*, Theodore of Pherme, 22).

Next to bread, pulses (*ῥσπρια*) (*HM* 8) (Koukoules 1952, 96-99), especially lentils (*φακοί*) (*AP*, Isaiah, 6; Moses, 13; Paul the Great, 3) and chick-peas (*ἐρεβίνθια*), used to be the commonest nourishment of the Egyptians (Regnault 1990, 82). Egyptian lentils were considered fine quality products by the Byzantines. Two varieties were known, the yellow and the black lentils. They are mainly cultivated in Upper Egypt, in the area around Ena and Isnā (Wissa Wassef 1971, 349). Green branches with the seeds of chick-pea on them are sold in spring in the roads of Cairo. The seeds are dried, slightly baked in the oven and salted to eventually obtain their yellow colour (Wissa Wassef 1971, 358). Pulses were usually boiled by the monks or simply macerated (*AP*, Isaiah, 6).

Apart from pulses, several other cooked meals (Koukoules 1952, 38-40) were prepared by the monks. These were mainly gruels, broths (*ζωμοί*) (*HM* 3) and soups, which like pulses, were often prepared for the visitors. *Ἀθήρα* (*athera*) (Battaglia 1989, 103-104) (*AP*, Isaak priest of Kellia, 10; Sisoës, 15) was a simple pulpy broth made of flour diluted in hot water; semolina may be used instead of flour and some oil can be added. This broth used to be a typical children's meal (Koukoules 1952, 39). *Ἐψημα* (*epsema*), which is also mentioned in the sources (*AP*, Macarius Aegyptius, 33; Moses, 5), is usually translated as cooked meal or gruel, without referring to its composition. This was a very sweet gruel made of boiled must, also known as *σίραιον* (*siraion*) (*Geoponica*, 4.15.8).

Although in most of the sources the consumption of fish (*ὀψάριον*) (*AP*, Gelasius, 3; Pistus) is not pronounced, it was and still is the only meat that one is allowed to eat in periods of abstinence, some days exempted (Wissa Wassef 1971, 338).⁸⁶ In Egypt, fish, which is found in abundance in the Nile, the big lakes of the Delta and the Fayum, in the Red Sea and the Mediterranean, is considered to be the *meat of the poor*. In the Byzantine times fish was one of the common plates, preferred especially by monks and bishops. Byzantine doctors considered fish, in majority and most of the other aquatic animals as food of high nutritional value providing substantial benefits to human health (Chronē – Vakalopoulos and Vakalopoulos 2008, 125). There are various ways to cook fish (Koukoules 1952, 79-86; Wissa Wassef 1971, 338-345); in the period of our study salted fish products (John Cassian, *De institutis*, 4.22), such as *garum* (Curtis 1991) were extremely widespread. In the Monastery of Apa Apollo in Bāwīt salted fish products are found inside amphorae that date to the seventh century (Van Neer *et al.* 2007), proving that they were not so rarely consumed after all. Documentary papyri from the same monastery serve as further evidence for the wide consumption of salted fish products (Delattre 2007, 88).

Meat (*κρέα*) (47-62, 68-75; Wissa Wassef 1971, 381-384) was not completely absent from the monastic diet, despite the fact that literary sources do their best to show that this happened only very rarely. An example showing the rare or no consumption of meat is the following: during a meal that Theophilus the Archbishop organised, some fathers ate some veal that was served without realising what it was. *The Bishop, taking a piece of meat, offered it to the monk sitting beside him, saying, 'Here is a nice piece of meat, Abba; eat it.' But he replied, 'Until this moment, we*

⁸⁶ In Coptic Monasteries the consumption of fish is forbidden on Wednesdays and Fridays, except for the feast days between Easter and Pentecost.

believed we were eating vegetables, but if it is meat, we do not eat it.' None of them tasted any more of the meat which was brought (Ward 1984, 81). Literary sources refer to the consumption of meat in special occasions, such as when a sick monk needed to regain his strength, or in order to honour a visitor. Nevertheless, at the end of this unit it will be shown that bones are indeed found in various monastic settlements.

Fruits (*ὀπῶραι*) (*AP*, Arsenius, 19; Dioscorus, 1; *HM* 8, 12) (*καρποί*) (*AP*, John the Little, 1) (Koukoules 1952, 102-110) appear as rare luxuries given to the monks by visitors and often distributed by the presiding priest or steward to the sick (Evelyn-White 1932, 203). Apples (*μῆλα*) (*AP*, Achilles, 2) were really precious, so that outside a monastic context they were often served in glass or even metallic dishes (Koukoules 1952, 103-104). Other fruits that the monks occasionally consumed were: pomegranates (*ρόα*) (*HL*, 13.2); grapes (*σταφυλὰ*) (*HM* 8); dry raisins (*σταφίδες*) (*HL*, 13.2); dates (*φοινίκια*) (*AP*, Aio); plums (*μυζάρια*) (*AP*, Isaak priest of Kellia, 10); mulberries (*συκάμιννα*) (*AP*, Joseph of Panephrisis, 5); figs (*σῦκα*) (*HM* 8) and dry figs (*ἰσχάδια*) (*AP*, Arsenius 16), which were often combined with nuts (*κάρυα*) (*HM* 8).

There were some more foodstuffs referred to as luxuries, which like fruits were given to the monks by visitors or they were usually provided to the sick. Apart from the *σιλίγγιον* (*silignion*) and some fruits that are already cited above, eggs (*ῥά*) (Koukoules 1952, 66-68; Wissa Wassef 1971, 379) are mentioned among the supplies for the sick (*HL*, 13.2). Although eggs were really common, monks do not appear eating them. The Byzantines used to eat chicken-, duck-, grouse-, and pheasant-eggs. They were usually boiled or fried, but they could be eaten raw for therapeutic reasons (Koukoules 1952, 66-68).

A sort of pastry, known as *πάστιλος* (*pastilos*) (Battaglia 1989, 119), is what a sick monk asked Abba Macarius to bring him from Alexandria (*AP*, Macarius Aegyptius, 8). This should not be confused with the modern *παστέλι* (*pastel*), the sweetmeat made of honey and sesame, which is still produced and consumed in Greece and elsewhere. *Πάστιλος* was actually made of must mixed either just with flour either with flour and semolina. The ingredients were boiled together and then left to create a cake (Koukoules 1952, 113-115).

Milk (*γάλα*) (*HM* 8) and honey (*μέλι*) (Guy 1993, 4.72.5, 220; *HM* 8, 12, 24) also occur in the sources. It happened once that Abba Apollo with five disciples had run out of supplies, right when they were about to celebrate Easter. So they decided to pray, and immediately after finishing their prayer, some unknown men came from a faraway region to offer them all kind of fruits (grapes, pomegranates, figs and nuts), warm fine-quality bread, as well as fresh milk in a jar and some honeycombs (*HM*, 8).

Finally, according to an *Apophthegm* of Abba Poemen (*AP*, Poemen, 181) eating preserved / salted meat (*ταρίχη*) (Koukoules 1952, 62-66) and / or cheese (*τυρός*) (Guy 1993, 8.23.6, 416) (Regnault 1990, 89) was a sign of decline. However, the fact that it is noted, as a not acceptable attitude, may serve as implication that both foods were indeed consumed.

Olives are attested in the diet of the monks (John Cassian, *De institutis*, 4.22), but the references are scarce. The best quality Egyptian olives are those cultivated in the Fayum (Wissa Wassef 1971, 354).

Oil (*έλαιον*) is one of the nourishments, whose consumption is underestimated by literary sources. According to them, it was *used sparingly* (Evelyn-White 1932, 203; Regnault 1990, 87-89). Against this attestation stand several contracts and bills concerning oil trade, such as those found in the Monastery of Bawīt (Delattre 2007, 87), as well as oil presses discovered in monasteries, such as Saint Symeon in Aswān

(Walters 1974, 217) and Apa Jeremiah in Saqqāra (Quibel 1912, 29-30). Various types of oils were probably in use (Wissa Wassef 1971, 335-337). An *Apophthegm* (*AP*, Benjamin, 3) refers to oil of horse-radish (ῥαφανέλαιον) (Mayerson 2001). This variety was appreciated and largely used in ancient Egypt; however it is not prepared nowadays, despite the fact that horse-radish is abundantly cultivated (Wissa Wassef 191, 337). Sesame oil was also common (Bagnall 2000). Not only oil for cooking, but also oil for the lamp would be kept by each monk in his cell (Mossakowska 1994). It is noteworthy that often the same oil would be used both for cooking and putting in the lamp (Regnault 1990, 87-88).

Evelyn-White (1932, 203) noted that the attitude of the monks regarding wine (οἶνος) was variable (*AP*, Abraham, 1; Ephrem, Eulogius the Priest; Elias, 4; Isidore the Priest, 1; Isaak the Theban, 2; Macarius Aegyptius, 10; Matoes, 11; Xoius, 1; Xanthias, 2; Poemen, 4, 19; Peter the Pionite, 1; Paphnutius, 2; Romaeus; Sisoës, 8; Syncletica, 4; Hyperechius, 4; Phocas, 2). In earlier days drinking wine *was regarded as perfectly lawful* (Evelyn-White 1932, 203). At any rate, its *axiomatic* rejection, as expressed by Abba Poemen (*AP*, Poemen, 19), did not represent the general rule. It is possible that monks kept some wine in their cell to offer their visitors and drank with them; probably the main occasion, when wine would be drunk, was in the meals during the monks' weekly assemblies. No matter what the literary texts say, textual evidence from Bawīt indicates that wine production played an important role in the economy of the monastery. Wine was produced in monastic sectors and the monastery itself used to be an important centre of production and distribution. It administered an elaborate transport and control system, in order to obtain the wine produced in the vineyards situated in far distance (Delattre 2007, 85-86). Once more it is a pity that no such evidence comes from any of the Lower Egyptian monastic sites, where wine distribution and consumption is implied by the considerable quantities of wine amphorae. In general, it would be interesting to investigate if an amount of wine brought in monasteries was fermented or not. Let us not forget that unfermented wine is used in the Mass.

Water (ὕδωρ), appears as the ordinary drink of the monks. Literary sources mention that even water was to be drunk in small portions for it may provoke *movements of the flesh and night fantasies* (John Cassian, *Conlationes*, 12.11). It is hard to believe that such an austerity was indeed followed, taking into consideration how the attitude of monks towards wine and oil is described by the sources and what the documentary papyri and the archaeological fieldwork have revealed. The use of water is related with one more practice, which took place during entertaining visitors. It was boiled to be used for washing the visitors' feet before eating (Eucharistus the Secular; Isaiah, 6; John the Persian, 3), or for washing hands after the meal (*AP*, Basil).

In conclusion, the following points concerning the life standards of the monks, through their diet may be suggested. The variety of bread consumed by monks was the one that mostly the poor could afford to have. Likewise herbs, vegetables, bulbs, pulses and broths, but also olives, cheese and eggs were simple foods usually connected with the lower classes (Koukoules 1952, 46; André 1961, 49). Hence, according to the foodstuffs mentioned in the texts, the diet of the monks who settled in the great communities of Lower Egypt can be compared with that of the peasants (Wipszycka 1986, 130), generally the Egyptians – and the Byzantines – of lower classes; only exception the more luxurious species, such as σιλίγγιον, and πᾶστιλον, which were usually given to sick monks. Furthermore, biscuits (παζαμάτια), which stand among the basic nourishments of the monks, were largely consumed by the

army (Koukoules 1952, 29; André 1961, 73: *bucellatum*). In isolated places, where the supplies were not easily renewed, biscuits would definitely not go bad. In general it seems that there is still way to go in the investigation of the monks' dietary practices, since next to the textual evidence, archaeological research has probably a lot more to reveal.

Archaeological research in several Egyptian monastic sites has brought to light remains of various foodstuffs, some of which are not mentioned in the literary sources, while others are presented as *forbidden*, or against monastic *ideals*. In Isnā kernels of dates, skins of acacia and doum fruit (*hyphaene thebaica*) are discovered (Sauneron 1972, 33). Kernels of dates are unearthed in the hermitages of Naqlūn as well, next to other seeds, remains of pomegranates and onions (Mossakowska – Gaubert 2004, 1454). Kernels of dates (Bonnet 1986, 55) and fish-bones (Egloff 1977, 111) are found in Kellia. Unfortunately, so far the excavations in the Old Monastery of Baramūs have not brought to light many seeds and other food remains, except for some melon seeds, samples of fish products and numerous animal bones that await identification. Likewise, in the monastic site of Kūm al-Na‘na‘, near Tall al-Amarna, along with a variety of seeds (Harlow and Smith 2001; Pyke 2005, 215), many products that in the literary sources are mentioned as not so appropriate for the diet of a monk are found: beef, pork, ovicaprid flesh, fish, shellfish, chicken, eggs, quail and pigeons (Luff 2007). In Kūm al-Na‘na‘, fish seems to have been one of the basic nourishments. Fish products have been also found in seventh century amphorae in the Monastery of Apa Apollo in Bāwīt (Van Neer *et al.* 2007).

Even if the strong presence of fish products is already against the vision of undernourished *vegetarian* monks, who appointed themselves rules of extreme abstinence, the discovery of other animal bones utterly corrupts it... It seems that monks ate fish and meat more frequently than the sources mention. At the same time, one should keep in mind that many seculars would probably visit or even work for the monasteries, without being obliged to undergo any alimentary restriction. Nowadays, in the Monasteries of Wādī al-Naṭrūn, olive-plantations, henneries, dovecots, farms with cows and buffalos and other facilities are in function, certainly not only to cover the individual needs of the monks. Therefore, it is anyway impossible to verify in which case *forbidden* foodstuffs were consumed by monks or seculars. At any rate, there is a lot to learn about the interesting and particular issue of monastic diet.

HOW? MONKS AND THE WIDER WORLD: ROUTES

Monasticism infers life in seclusion; seclusion being monasticism's most significant aspect that all primary sources persistently highlight. Separation from the *inhabited world* (*οἰκουμένη*) through *withdrawal* (*ἀναχώρησις*) into the *desert* (*ἔρημος*) or behind the monastery wall represents a central unifying theme. In this respect, the necessity for each monk to stay in his cell, avoiding going out and meeting people, is stressed (Wipszycka 2009, 391). That is understandable, taking into account that sources were designed for edification and therefore present the life of the monks in idealised form. Economic and social interactions, as facts of daily subsistence, concern sources only marginally, but that does not mean that such interactions were not real; on the contrary they were inevitable (Goehring 1999, 41).

Although subsidiary, evidence for regular contacts with the outer world is present in the sources and it is necessary that one gathers *the few sherds of non-monastic evidence that is accruing* (Goehring 1999, 43). The desert in Egypt, while sharply distinct from the inhabited land, was not remote. At the same time, the

necessities of life required contact with the external world, often in the form of trade. These contacts were carried out with the migration of monks *from* a monastic settlement, and the arrival of individuals (other monks or clergymen, as well as laymen, mostly pilgrims or merchants) *to* it. The last interchange, taking place in the opposite direction, namely the secular visitors who went to the cells and monasteries to meet the monks, is more frequently stressed in the literature, as it corresponds more closely with the edificatory theme of withdrawal expressed in terms of movement of individuals from the world to the spiritual realm (Goehring 1999, 46: note 32).

At the same time, the international character of a monastic settlement is expressed through the presence of foreign monks and communities in its environment. This is the factor that should be examined first, as being a spontaneous influence of the foreign element in a settlement. Once more, difficult to approach reality, taking into account that many of the literary sources were written by or for strangers; hence they emphasise the foreign presence in Wādī al-Natrūn. Even so, I believe that it would worth citing the national groups that inhabited the monasteries.

In the Coptic Life of Macarius the Egyptian (Amélineau 1894, 99) one reads that not only Egyptians inhabited the desert of Sketis, but also monks who arrived from various other countries of the world, such as 'Romania', Spain, Libya, Pentapolis, Cappadocia, Byzantium, Italy, Macedonia, Asia, Syria, Palestine and Galatia. Apart from the *Young Strangers* and Arsenius, other prominent non-Egyptian monks were Palladius from Galatia, Evagrius from Ibora in Pontus (Palladius, *HL*, 38), Porphyry of Gaza native of Thessalonica (Marcus Diaconus, *Vita Porphyrii*), Eunapius and Andrew, Syrians and natives of Lydda (*Synax.* in Basset 1904, 292-293), Moses the Black from Ethiopia (*AP*, Moses, 3), and other (Brune 2009, 15).

The presence of many foreign monks coming from the same region would have led to the formation of an entire community. Such is the case of the Syrian monks, who settled in Sketis and even came to officially possess a monastery of their own, the famous Monastery of the Syrians (full discussion in Evelyn-White 1932, 309-321; Wilfong 1998, 193-194; Brune 2009, 20-21). Similarly, somewhere in the eleventh century the groups of Armenian and Abyssinian monks founded their own monasteries (Evelyn-White 1932, 365-370) somewhere in the surrounding of the Monastery of Saint John the Little (*al-Maqrīzī* in Wüstenfeld 1845, 111). This indicates that the international character of Sketis would have remained for centuries. No doubt, the presence of these foreign communities made Sketis an intellectual and cultural centre of great importance to the patriarchate of Alexandria and beyond.

Even if ideally a monk was urged to remain in his abode, spending his day in meditation, the sources are full of notions about monks who moved from their monastic compounds in order to: a) live in another place (Regnault 1990, 174-175; Wipszycka 2009, 392); b) visit other (famous) monks and ask for their advice (Wipszycka 2009, 394-395); c) acquire all necessary supplies for their community; d) sell their artefacts in the neighbouring village or city (Regnault 1990, 166-167; Wipszycka 2009, 392).

Although there was a certain time, when visits were allowed, guests, who had to cover a long distance in their journey, could not be so punctual. Hence one may infer that there probably existed established *routes* connecting monasteries inside and outside Egypt; *routes* that were also followed by pilgrims and traders, who dealt with the monasteries. The *Apophthegmata Patrum* allows one to map only some of them.

Monks departed from Sketis following various directions. Many of them wanted to visit Abba Antony (*AP*, Macarius Aegyptius, 4, 26; Sisoës, 28) and it is attested that they travelled by boat (*AP*, Antony, 18) in order to reach him. Abba Carion

travelled with his son Zacharias in the Thebaid and from there back to Sketis (*AP*, Carion, 2). At a certain moment Abba Marcus is presented leaving Sketis in order to go to Sinai and live there (*AP*, Marcus the disciple of Abba Silvanus, 4). Close relations would have been developed between the monks of Sketis and those settled in Terenuthis (*AP*, Anoub, 1; Macarius Aegyptius, 13, 14; Xanthias, 2), Pherme (*AP*, Theodore of Pherme, 26) and Nitria (*AP*, Amoun, 3; Macarius Aegyptius, 2; Pambo, 3), while journeys to Alexandria were also frequent (*AP*, Macarius Aegyptius, 8; Mius, 2) (Regnault 1990, 169-170).

Although this study mainly refers to the desert of Sketis, it would be interesting at this point to cite some more of the directions that monks would have followed, according to the *Apophthegmata Patrum*.

Some brothers travelled from Alexandria to the Thebaid to find flax, and they dropped by at Sketis so as to meet Abba Arsenius (*AP*, Arsenius, 26). Likewise, some other monks, who wanted to meet the same Abba, went from Alexandria to Petra of Troe, where he lived at that time. These monks, eventually met Abba Arsenius in Lower Egypt, where he had found refuge after a barbaric invasion (*AP*, Arsenius, 34). Also Abba Lot went from Arsinoe to Abba Arsenius (*AP*, Lot, 1). And Abba Amoun of Rhaitho came to Clysma one day to meet Abba Sisoës (*AP*, Sisoës, 26).

Interesting details concerning the way that monks would travel are given in the narration of a journey that Abba Arsenius made (*AP*, Arsenius, 32): *In the days when Abba Arsenius was living in Lower Egypt he was continually interrupted there and so he judged it right to leave his cell. Without taking anything away with him, he went to his disciples at Pharan, Alexander and Zoilus. He said to Alexander, 'Get up, and get into the boat,' which he did. And he said to Zoilus, 'Come with me as far as the river and find me a boat which will take me to Alexandria; then embark, so as to rejoin your brother'* (Ward 1984, 15). It seems that monks would often travel by boat, even when they needed to cover shorter distances. Abba Ammonas for instance got into the *ferry-boat* when he wanted to cross the river (*AP*, Ammonas, 6).

Travelling outside the confines of Egypt was also a fact, although the notions are rarer. According to a story that Abba Joseph of Pelusium narrated to Abba Cronius, the monks of a Monastery in Sinai had to send ten brothers to the emperor about a matter that rests undefined (*AP*, Cronius, 5).

Probably in a regular basis, monks had to move from their abodes in order to sell their artefacts, so as to earn their living. In most cases they head to the market place (*AP*, Daniel, 3; Isidore, 7; Philagrius) of the neighbouring town (*AP*, Agathon, 27; 30). An ideal example of the monks' behaviour in the market is described in an *Apophthegm* as follows: *it was said of him (Abba Agathon) and of Abba Amoun that, when they had anything to sell, they would name the price just once and silently accept what was given them in peace. Just as, when they wished to buy something, they gave the price they were asked in silence and took the object adding no further word* (*AP*, Agathon, 16).

At times monks went to the market, whenever they needed to exchange their handiwork, but often merchants came to the monks to deal with them. The disciple of Abba Theodore exchanged a basin of wheat for a basin of onions, when a merchant came to him (*AP*, Theodore of Pherme, 22). In another case, a merchant came with his donkey to exchange the bread he carried with the necklaces that Abba Silvanus made in his cell using dried peas as beads (*AP*, Silvanus). A merchant cameleer pretended that he needed ropes and bought the artefacts from Abba Poemen (*AP*, Poemen, 10). Finally, again a camel-driver is presented arriving one day to *pick up some goods and take them elsewhere* (*AP*, John the Little, 31).

Contacts with the outer world were not achieved exclusively through the mobility of monks themselves. Each monastic settlement attracted and received many visitors, more or less eminent (from simple people to aristocrats; from other monks to patriarchs) (Regnault 1990, 159-161). Archbishop Theophilus often visited Sketis, alone (*AP*, Theophilus the archbishop, 2) or with a *magistrate AP*, Arsenius, 7). Some priests came – probably from Alexandria – *to the monasteries where Abba Poemen was* (*AP*, Poemen, 3). Many monks visited Sketis from various other Egyptian regions, such as the Thebaid (*AP*, Achilles, 7), Nitria (*AP*, Achilles, 2), and Kellia (*AP*, Achilles, 5). So did the seculars, such as the magistrate, who came to Sketis to visit Abba Moses (*AP*, Moses, 8). Finally Sketis was often a place, where thieves would arrive looking for swag (Regnault 1990, 161-162). When Abba Macarius found such a thief looting his cell, he helped him load the spoils on his camel (*AP*, Macarius Aegyptius, 40). The presence of *Saracens robbers* is also attested on the mountain of Abba Antony, where they robbed Abba Sisoës and his brother (*AP*, Sisoës, 31).

Sketis was not the only destination of pilgrims and other visitors. Abba Hilarion travelled from Palestine to the mountain of Abba Antony (*AP*, Hilarion). A *very rich and God-fearing* woman of senatorial rank made a journey from Rome to Canopus, *through the maritime route* in order to see Abba Arsenius (*AP*, Arsenius, 28). Magistrates, pious seculars (*AP*, Poemen, 109; Sisoës, 21), relatives of the monks (*AP*, Poemen, 5, 76) and other people (*AP*, Poemen, 9) approached renowned monks, such as Abba Arsenius, Abba Poemen (*AP*, Poemen, 5, 9, 109), Abba Sisoës (*AP*, Sisoës, 18; 21) and others (*AP*, Ammonas, 9; Felix; Simon, 1, 2) asking for their advice.

This was merely an example of (hypothetic?) routes that specialists should replenish, on the basis of papyrological evidence. Drawing a map of routes in time would be a useful contribution to the better understanding of monastic history.