TRANSLATOR’S NOTE

It would be misleading to suggest that the present work is any other than a temporary measure. It has no pretensions to do anything else but supply the English reader with a general idea of what is contained in that delightful collection of tales dating from about the year 600 AD generally known as Pratum spirituale, ‘The Spiritual Meadow’. No matter how good the translator may be, no translation can be better than the text from which it is made; and there simply is no adequate edition of the Greek text yet in existence. One is in preparation to be sure, and in due course it will appear. But to trace, collect, evaluate, collate and edit the many manuscripts of a work of this complexity and magnitude is a major undertaking requiring many years of thankless toil. All credit is due to those who undertake such projects but, alas, whilst they create their meticulous editions which the translators impatiently await, the texts in question remain inaccessible to the many who can no longer read the ancient languages. This is particularly regrettable in the case of John Moschos’ incomparable collection of sayings and stories; for even the French translation of Rouët de Journel (Paris, 1946) has been so long out of print that it is almost unobtainable. (There is, however, an excellent Italian translation by Riccardo Maisano, Giovanni Mosco, Il Prato, Naples, 1982.) Yet good translations of other great collections of early monastic lore are readily available (see the bibliography for details:) The History of the Monks in Egypt written before 400 AD; Palladios’ Lausiac History written towards 419; both collections of apophthegmata, the Systematikon, alias ‘Pelagius and John’, (early sixth century perhaps, not yet in English but available in French) and the Alpha-
betikon (mid-sixth century) can all be easily obtained. In fact, of the seven known major collections (of tales and apophthegmata) of the fathers) only three remain unavailable in modern translation: the sixth-century Tales of Daniel of Scéte, the late-seventh century Tales attributed to Anastasios the Sinaïte, and John Moschos' Spiritual Meadow.

As many readers are aware since the publication of Derwas Chitty's excellent book, The Desert a City: an introduction to the study of Egyptian and Palestinian Monasticism in the Christian Empire (Oxford, 1966), the work attributed to John Moschos is the sixth of the seven Greek Paterika; but it is also, in a number of ways, the most remarkable of them. It is thus not only lamentable that so many generations of students and readers have been denied direct access to its contents; it is also a serious deprivation for those who seek to gain a balanced picture of the entire tradition of eremitic monachism down to and beyond the Moslem cataclysm. This is why the present translation, imperfect and unsatisfactory though it must be, has been made and published. It would appear to be better to 'see through a glass darkly' than not at all. For no matter how grimy the glass, there is no doubt that the contents of the Pratum are of great value from many points of view, not least to those who would gain a glimpse of life as it was being lived just before the Christian empire sustained the blow which might well have been the coup de grâce of any less well-founded state.

Yet the question of what exactly its contents are is a daunting one. Even the number of sections is unsure; the published edition includes only two hundred and nineteen, But Photios (Bibliotheca, cod.198) described a volume which is obviously Mochos' Pratum, containing three hundred and four stories. The reader will in fact find two hundred and thirty-one stories in the present volume, for we have included tales which two modern scholars, Theodor Nissen and Elpidio Mioni, have edited and which they believe—rightly or wrongly—to belong to this collection.
Equally complex, however, is the question of what the text should actually say. It is an inescapable fact of life that manuscripts vary; the editor's task is to compare all the extant manuscripts and to determine as nearly as possible what the original text said. As indicated above, this task (though under way) has not yet been accomplished for the Pratum. Although there are known to be very many manuscripts of all or parts of the collection in existence, the translator had only the published texts to guide him, and these are a trumpet which gives forth an uncertain sound.

The Pratum was first published in Italian translation at Venice in 1475; a Greek text of the work was not published until 1624—by Fronto Ducaeus at Paris (Bibliotheca Venerum Patrum t.2:1057-1159)—which is said to be very unsatisfactory. It was superseded half a century later by an improved edition which made use of some Paris manuscripts, the work of Jean Baptiste Cotelier (Ecclesiae Graecae monumenta t.2:341-456, Paris, 1681)—and that is almost as far as the matter has gone. Cotelier's edition was reprinted and somewhat augmented by Jacques Paul Migne in volume 87:2851-3116 of his celebrated Patrologia Graeca and it is on the basis of Migne's text that the present translation has been made. It is not by any stretch of the imagination a satisfactory edition but, for the time being, it is almost all there is to work from.

Fortunately, however, accompanying Migne's edition is a Latin translation which first appeared in Venice, in 1558. It is reprinted in Patrologia Latina 74:119-240 from Heribert Rosweyde, Vitae Patrum t.10, Antwerp 1615, the pierre fondamontale of the Acta Sanctorum. This Latin version (from which the above-mentioned Italian translation was made) is a source of considerable help to the translator, for two reasons. First, it is the work of a careful and intelligent scholar, Ambrose Traversari ('Fra Ambrogio', 1346-1439) the Florentine humanist. Secondly, he used a Greek text (or texts) which was/were independent of the ones the Paris scholars were to know. Thus (for instance) it is his, and not the published Greek
text, which supplies the section headings. These have been retained here even though the Greek originals (if such there are) have not yet been published. There are also significant passages which are found only in the Latin text (indicated by square brackets in the translation), and there are many other passages where the Greek would make little or no sense without the Latin to shed some light on what was misunderstood, omitted or distorted by the Greek scribe(s).

Yet even with Fra Ambrogio's Latin text to hand, there are places where the meaning is less than clear; where a lacuna is suspected, or where the text is manifestly in disarray. In these circumstances, common sense sometimes indicates what in all probability needs to be supplied; at other times, one's knowledge of the general literature of this genre suggests the most likely reading, given the context and the situation. Yet the reader must be cautioned: there are still a few places in this translation which are little better than guesswork; intelligent guesswork one hopes, but no more than that. The translator's prostheses are indicated thus: <...>. The reader will easily perceive whether it is a simple case of replacing an ambiguous (English) pronoun with something more precise, or a more radical piece of reconstruction.

It might not be unhelpful to add a word here about why the Greek text is in such disarray, because this will also indicate why the editor's task is such a difficult one, a task likely to take far more time than the editing of texts in general. Anybody who has anything whatsoever to do with the Greek texts of what may be generally labelled paterika, fathers' tales, is both impressed and frustrated by the degree of variation encountered. Even a copyist who is well known to be capable of giving a fairly faithful reproduction of the exemplar before him, will, when it comes to tales, grant himself complete licence to change whatever he likes into almost anything he chooses.

This licence operates at two levels. So far as collections of tales are concerned, he will omit or include at will: hence the variation in
Translator's Note

the number of items in manuscripts containing collections bearing
the same name. But the texts themselves will often be handled with
the same nonchalance: abbreviations, expansions, stylistic re-
touchings are common. Names of places and persons are often
changed indiscriminately; stories may be conflated or divided,
circumstances transformed and so forth. Such and many other
similar variants are commonplace in collections of tales. A good
example is the later part of Cod. Paris. Graec. 1596. This eleventh-
century codex contains (amongst other things) an apparently
arbitrary selection of tales from Pratum Spirituale, more or less in
the order of the present translation, but often so changed that they
are difficult to recognise. For instance: c. 60 is merely summarised;
in c. 130 Athanasios has become Thalassios, and so forth.

The explanation of this degree of variation may be a simple one:
it may be that, in the case of this monastic folk-lore, we are dealing
with something which not only started out as, but also remained, an
oral tradition for many years after the first written texts were made.
Hence, a copyist might well have both a written form of a tale
before him and an oral version registered in his head, of which the
second would obviously be the more familiar. Small wonder then if
he preferred ‘his’ version in what he wrote. But it does mean that
the quest for a stable text is a very difficult, if not an impossible,
one. It may be that there was not one Meadow, but as many
Meadows as there were ‘copies’, which in truth are versions in many
cases, rather than copies. The quest for an Urtext will, nevertheless,
continue; but until it is successful, we have no choice but to make
do with temporary measures—such as Migne’s text and the present
translation.

There are those who will cry that the translation is inaccurate,
and they will be right. But in this it does no more than reflect the
inaccuracy and variability of the tales-tradition itself. For, in the
final analysis, those who passed these tales down to succeeding
generations did so, not to transmit an accurate text, but to convey
a message; a message which is contained in the dimensions of the
story itself, rather than in the precision of its wording. Therefore, its
undeniable (and undenied) imperfections apart, this translation is
offered in the hope that it will, nevertheless, be of some use to a
generation of readers who would otherwise remain largely unfamil-
liar with this fascinating chapter in the history of eremitic mona-
chism and of western civilisation.

The author wishes to express his sincere appreciation of the
work of Ms. Helga Dyck of the Institute for the Humanities at the
University of Manitoba, who prepared the camera-ready copy of
this book and improved it considerably in the process.

GLOSSARY OF THE TRANSLATION

The word *gerôn* is translated *elder* as usual; it should however
be noted that it does not necessarily mean one who is old in years,
but one who has seniority of some kind or other (usually spiritual
here).

The Aramaic word *abba*, sometimes *appa* (father, hence *abbot*),
has been retained in its original form, as it was in the Greek text (*cf*
Mark 14:36; Romans 8:15; Gal. 4:6). *Abba* usually means a monk,
but it is sometimes used (in the form *abbas*) to mean the chief monk
(c. 54, c. 80), in which case it *could* be translated to *abbot*. *Abba*
can even designate a bishop, presumably a monk-bishop (c. 79), but
there is some indication that towards the end of the seventh century
it was beginning to be used generally of clerics, much like the
French *abbé*.

The word *hêgoumen* is represented by the usual English form
of the word (higoumen), meaning the monk in charge of a communi-
ity. This is because none of the English expressions (*e.g.* ‘father
superior’, ‘prior’) exactly responds to the eastern office. The text will
sometimes refer to ‘him who ruled the community’ (*koinobiarchês*)
rather than use the word *higoumen* and on rare occasions, this person is referred to as *the* abba.

Many of the sections are titled ‘*vita/bios* of Abba NN’ and this we have not hesitated to translate literally, ‘life’. But it must be understood that this does not mean *biography* or anything like it. It means rather ‘the way of life’, how he lived (*politeia*).

*Koinobion* we have rendered *community*; *monê* and *monastērion* (which are used interchangeably in the text) are both represented by *monastery*; *laura* is represented by *lavra*. Strictly speaking a *lavra* is a base for anchorites whereas a *koinobion* is (as suggested above) an integrated community, but in fact John sometimes uses the terms interchangeably.

Demons and devils have been differentiated as in the text, but in fact the terms are used interchangeably (see c. 63).

The following equivalents have been consistently used even though, especially in the case of the monastic virtues, they are scarcely adequate (see the notes):

- ἀκτημοσύνη (*aktēmosunê*) poverty
- ἀναχωρητής (*anachoretês*) anchorite
- ἀσκησίς (*askēsis*) asceticism
- διάκρισις (*diakrisis*) discernment
- ἐγκλειστος (*egkleistos*) recluse
- ἔρημος (*erēmos*) wilderness*
- ἡσυχαστής (*hēsuchastês*) solitary
- θεῖος (*theios*) godly
- ὁ ἐν ἁγίοις (*ho en hagios*) saintly
- οἰκονομία (*oikonomia*) providence
- οἶκουμένη (*oikoumenê*) urban/village society
- προσκυν-ἐω (*proskunó*) venerate

*—the more usual translation ‘desert’ has been avoided on account of its connotations of sand-dunes and cacti. Parts of the monastic wilderness were undoubtedly like that, but not by any means all. What they all had in
common was their wildness; the fact that man had not yet set his taming, civilising stamp on them, which creates oikouμενη, oikoumenē.

JOHN MOSCHOS

John Moschos, surnamed Euocrates, is obviously more than a name, although the task of discovering what lies behind the name is not an easy one. There are two documents which supply the main outlines of John’s life, including a few valuable details: a brief anonymous biography and the description of Pratum Spirituale in Photios’ Bibliotheca (Cod.199) composed in the second half of the ninth century. But by far the greater part of our knowledge of John is to be gleaned from his own work, of which the Pratum is almost the only surviving example. The watchful reader will detect many autobiographical details in the tales he set down. But as John was not in the least concerned to write about himself, these may easily escape notice, or be given less than their full importance. To Siméon Vailhé goes the credit of having first drawn attention to these details. Combining them with the documentation mentioned above, he was able to construct a comprehensive curriculum vitae of John Moschos, ‘ce juif- errant monastique’ as he called him ['this wandering Jew-of-a-monk]. Subsequent writers have further elucidated Vailhé’s pioneering effort; English readers will discover for themselves that the articles of Norman H. Baynes and Henry Chadwick


are particularly informative. What follows here is little more than a summary of Vailhé's *curriculum*.

It appears that both John and his disciple Sophronios, the future Patriarch of Jerusalem, hailed from Damascus. Sophronios was almost certainly born there, and at one point (c. 171) John speaks of their affection for a certain Zoilos: 'because we shared the same homeland and upbringing' (<\(\delta\)\(\iota\)\(\alpha\) τ\(\delta\) κοινὴν ἔχειν πατριδα καὶ τὴν ἀναστροφὴν.>) Unfortunately, if this indicates where John was born, it gives no indication of when. It can be assumed that he was somewhat older than Sophronios since they seem to have stood in the relationship of spiritual father and son. One does not have to be an exact contemporary to share another's homeland and upbringing; witness the affinity one feels for somebody who 'went to the same school', or came from the same town—albeit a generation later or earlier than oneself. Since Sophronios is known to have lived on beyond 634 (to 638?) and John to have died (at the earliest) in 619, it would not be unreasonable to suppose that they were born, the one a little before, the other somewhat after, the middle of the sixth century; at all events, both in the reign of Justinian I (527-565).

At some point, John must have left his family (of whom he says nothing) and embraced the religious life, or 'renounced the world' as he and most Greek writers express it. He was tonsured at the Monastery of Saint Theodosios (Deir Dosi) five miles west of Bethlehem on the road to the Great Lavra of Saint Saba (Mar Saba). Saint Theodosios' was founded after 478 on a conspicuous

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4 See G. Bardy, 'Sophrone de Jérusalem', *DThC* 14/2 (1941) 2379-2383.
hill-top containing a cave in which the Magi were believed to have rested on the return journey from Bethlehem. It became the largest and best-organised of the Judaean communities and, with over four hundred brethren, it was also famed for its hospitality and its care for those in need. Both the anonymous *Life* and Photios affirm that this was John's home-monastery and this is born out by the inference of his own words: he refers to the superior of that monastery (Abba George) as *our* father (cc. 92, 93, 94;) he had Sophronios professed there and in no part of the world is he more familiar with so many monks as in the vicinity of Saint Theodosios'. In short, this would appear to have been his spiritual home.

After undergoing basic training there, in accordance with the then prevalent custom, he withdrew to a remoter station: Paran ( Pharôn) in the Judaean desert, the first monastic foundation of Saint Charitôn, with a history going back to the time of Constantine the Great (d.337). Here he stayed for ten years (c. 40), possibly 568/9–578/9. It is not improbable that here he was joined by Sophronios the Sophist, his inseparable friend and disciple for the rest of his life (John calls him ο ἐπαφρος μου, 'my companion', in c. 92). Then, at the beginning of the reign of Tiberius, he (and Sophronios?) undertook a journey to Egypt for the purpose of collecting the lore of the great elders, whom he believed to be the guardians of a monastic tradition which was fast being eroded away by the slackness of the new generation of monks and ascetics. He made the rounds of the communities of the Thebaïd and even visited the Desert of the Oasis. From there he went to the Lavra of the Αelixotes on Mount Sinai, and there he stayed for ten more years (c. 67). This was at the time when another John was Patriarch of Jerusalem, 575-593.

Sophronios attests to this himself: see *PG* 87:3380, 3421, 3664.
John then left Sinaï and he was present when Amos was installed as Patriarch of Jerusalem in 594. He seems then to have spent some time travelling around and staying at various Palestinian communities, in search of examples of great holiness such as the fathers describe. But in 602 two things happened which led him to leave the Holy Land for good—although Sophronios would return. The first was the murder of the God-fearing Emperor Maurice (602) by the bloodthirsty tyrant, Phocas: an event which promised (and brought) evil days to the whole empire. The second was the renewed antagonism of the Persians whom Maurice had successfully held in check. John was not being unduly pessimistic; in fact, scarcely a decade later, they occupied the Holy City. As early as 603-604 Persian raids were sufficiently alarming for John (and Sophronios) to leave. They travelled north up the coast, through Phoenicia, Syria Maritima and so came to Antioch. From there they visited Cilicia whence they sailed to Alexandria. They arrived there before 607 as Eulogios was still pope (as they called the patriarch of that city). John and Sophronios seem to have been taken into the patriarchal service and to have served not only Eulogios but also his two successors, John the Almsgiver and Theodore Scribo. It was particularly under the second of these popes that they carried on the struggle against Severus Akephalos, whose heresy and co-religionists are mentioned in several tales.

The fall of Jerusalem to the Persians in 614 interrupted whatever had been the normal course of life for the two in Egypt. There were refugees to be cared for by the thousand, and all too soon the Persians were at the threshold of Egypt. In 615 John and Sophronios fled, possibly with the pope, to Rome. It was here that John put the finishing touches to the Pratum and it was here that he died (in 619). The faithful Sophronios fulfilled his wishes and brought back his remains to be buried at Saint Theodosios, in September of 619.
It should however be noted that this date is by no means certain. We have a firm statement that Sophronios came to Jerusalem with the remains of his friend 'at the beginning of the eighth indiction'. That could mean either September 619 or September 634. For the most part, learned opinion has tended to accept the earlier date, but a recent study of the matter has shown that it is still not possible to state with certainty which is the correct one.  

A NOTE ON THE SIGNS USED IN THIS TEXT

[...] indicates text which is found in the Latin text but not in the Greek, but please note that since all the titles of the chapters fall into this category, these have not been placed in square brackets.

<...> indicate words added by the translator which are either necessary to make the meaning clear or desirable to fill a real or suspected lacuna in the text.

An asterisk (*) indicates that there is a brief note on the word or passage by which an asterisk stands. Please see pages 231-256 for the endnotes.

There is a general note on money and currency beginning on page 231.

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6 Enrica Follieri, "Dove e quando morì Giovanni Mosco?" *Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici* NS25 (1988) 3-39, seeks to demonstrate that John Moschos died at Rome after 11 November 620 but before spring-summer 634.