

Draft – Not for Citation

"The Wise, the Simple, the Pachomian Koinonia and the *Apocalypse of Paul*"
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Over the last several years, the participants in this session have grappled with the question of the relationship between wisdom and apocalypticism in early Judaism and the earliest stratum of Christianity. The collective findings have produced a new paradigm in which wisdom and apocalyptic have been found to be the literary artifacts of the same groups of people. The contribution that I would like to make is to test this paradigm for Late Antiquity, beginning at the end of the fourth century. When I first came to the question, I was quite certain that my argument would be a negative one. I was thinking primarily of the *Apocalypse of Paul*, one of the singularly most important visions of Late Antiquity, if we go by the sheer numbers of manuscripts and fragments of manuscripts in nearly ever imaginable language. This preeminent apocalypse seems particularly opposed to wisdom themes. However, when considering potential social locations for the composition of the *Apocalypse of Paul*, it is my personal contention that it is hard to imagine any more likely location than a communal Pachomian monastery in Egypt. Intriguingly enough, wisdom themes are common in the Pachomian literature. Thus, my revised understanding is that apocalyptic visions and wisdom literature continue to be produced in the same social location, even if that social location is now the Egyptian monastery and no longer the wisdom circles of early Judaism.

The *Apocalypse of Paul* could almost be characterized as an anti-wisdom apocalypse. It never mentions “wisdom” or the “wise,” does not emphasize “seeking” after anything, does not engage in “two ways” discourse, never mentions humans observing nature, and exhibits little interest in cosmological secrets aside from detailing individual punishment and reward. In fact, in a couple of these cases, the inverse of wisdom is emphasized. Notably, although humans do not observe nature and draw conclusions, nature does observe humans – and finds them lacking. At the beginning of the *Apocalypse of Paul* (3-6), in successive order the sun, the moon and the stars, the sea, the waters and the earth all watch and condemn the actions of human beings. Unable to act against the “impieties and injustices of men” without the consent of God, these forces of nature are reduced to observers of human beings. However, at no point in the text do we see human beings observing the *natural* world. Nonetheless, Paul is an observer of sorts. He sees, and through him the reader sees, the various rewards and punishments detailed in the apocalypse, as well as images drawn from the real world such as pastoral scenes, city walls and the river ocean. But the text only seeks to instruct its reader through revelation. Observation is limited to the secrets of the universe as they are revealed, not as they can be discovered through wisdom.

Moreover, in the *Apocalypse of Paul*, it is not the wise who are feted, but the simple. In the city of Christ, the most coveted real estate in the afterlife as it is presented in this text, we find a group of souls praised for their simplicity (29). They sit upon thrones of the greatest glory and they are referred to as “guileless” (*akeraios*) and

“simple” (*haplous*).¹ They are expressly uneducated and unlearned. They know very little scripture, but keep to a strict monastic regime (*politeia*). Simplicity is a known virtue among Egyptian monks. The *Lausiaca History*, written by Palladius around the year 420, lauds the blessed Innocent who was simple beyond measure. Palladius describes Innocent as “guileless (*akakos*) and simple (*haplous*).”²

Despite the fact that Pachomius seemed to have insisted upon some literacy for all of his monks, the Pachomian literature also mentions simplicity as a virtue. The *Instructions of Saint Pachomius Concerning a Spiteful Monk* adjure the monk to “Become guileless and be like the guileless sheep whose wool is sheared off without their saying a word.”³ Likewise, quoting Matthew 10:16, the monk is instructed to “be wise as serpents and simple as doves.” However, wisdom dominates simplicity in many of these texts. For example, the *Instructions* begin with, “My son, listen and be wise, accept the true doctrine for there are two ways.”⁴ The text then continues with praise of Joseph’s wisdom. The *Letters of Saint Pachomius* are even more indebted to wisdom themes. Letter three, a mere six pages of printed texts, contains the sentences “the great wealth of man is wisdom,” “the wisdom of the saints is to know the will of God, and also “man of God, return to the high place, which is the knowledge of wisdom.”⁵ This same letter ruminates on the “birds of heaven,” who eat what they do not plant, and declares that they exist to instruct us not to commit theft. Thus, observations from nature join with the praise of wisdom. Wisdom and its techniques were alive and well in the fourth century Pachomian monastery and far more important in these monasteries than the generally held monastic value of simplicity.

However, despite these apparent different attitudes towards wisdom, I would argue that the *Apocalypse of Paul* is a product of a Pachomian monastery. The *Apocalypse of Paul* was composed at the end of the fourth century CE, after 388, the date included in the preface for the “discovery” of the apocalypse in Egypt. I have made the argument elsewhere that at every turn the magnificent city of Christ in the *Apocalypse of Paul* reflects the monastery and the values of the Egyptian monks.⁶ First of all, the city of Christ is reserved for those who abstain from the married life, whereas the righteous married get the lesser reward of the land of promise, a paradisaical setting.⁷ Thus, even before Paul, the reader’s proxy on this extraordinary otherworldly tour, enters the textual landscape of the city, he is informed by his angelic guide that the main requirement to enter the city is a celibate life. The centrality of celibacy for the inhabitants of the city of Christ is reiterated with the first group whom Paul meets within the city, namely, “all

¹ These are the Greek loan words used in the Coptic version of the *Apocalypse of Paul*. Interestingly, *haplous* is used only positively in the Greek translations of Hebrew wisdom literature. See Prov 10:9, 11:25; Job 22:3. Negative words for simple in this same literature include: *akakos*, *asebeis*, and *aphron*.

² 44.3; trans. Robert T. Meyer, *Palladius: The Lausiaca History* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1965), 121. A. Lucot, ed., *Palladius Histoire Lausiaque: Texte grec, introduction et traduction française* (Paris: Librairie Alphonse Picard et Fils, 1912), 298.

³ *Instructions of Saint Pachomius* 25; trans. Armand Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian, 1982) 3:23.

⁴ *Instructions of Saint Pachomius* 1; trans. Veilleux, *PK*, 3:13.

⁵ *Letters of Saint Pachomius* 3:4-7; trans. Veilleux, *PK*, 3:54-5.

⁶ See Kirsti Copeland, “The Earthly Monastery and the Transformation of the Heavenly City in Late Antique Egypt” in Annette Yoshiko Reed and Ra’anan Abusch, *Heavenly Realms and Earthly Realities in Late Antique Religions*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

⁷ *Apocalypse of Paul* 22.

who keep their chastity and purity” according to the Latin and “all holy men who will guard the purity of their virginity from any pollution” in the Coptic version.⁸ Horsiesios, one of Pachomius’ disciples, makes a similar connection between purity and entering the city of God: “We have been taught: O wretched man, keep purity, and you will enter into the city of God. And the foolish man says, ‘I wish to enter the city, but the pleasures of impurity I cannot renounce.’”⁹

The rest of the inhabitants of the city exhibit monastic virtues. Just outside the city, Paul meets a group of “renunciants,” who “keep a monastic regime” and “fast,” but who are not worthy of entering the city because of their arrogance regarding the intensity of their own practices and their lack of hospitality towards others.¹⁰ Positive counterparts to these monks are described in conjunction with the various rivers flowing through the city. At the river of oil, Paul sees men who have “no pride in themselves” and who “rejoice in the Lord God and sing psalms to the Lord with their whole heart.”¹¹ Not only have these men conquered the pride of the monks kept outside of the city, but the textual description of them greeting visitors while singing songs is a known trope in monastic literature.¹² Likewise, at the river of wine, Paul is shown individuals who were exemplary in their hospitality, as opposed to those renunciants kept outside of the city. Additionally, Paul meets souls at the river of honey who exhibit the monastic virtue of abandoning one’s own will in favor of God’s.¹³

In the context of fourth century Egypt, this image of the entire city of Christ as a walled off enclosure surrounding the souls of individuals who exhibit monastic values evokes the coenobitic monastery, primarily associated with the figure of Pachomius and the federation of monasteries that he left behind. Intriguingly, indisputably Pachomian materials contain visions detailing reward and punishment after death. It has been suggested that two of these visions, one of heaven and one of hell, can claim the *Apocalypse of Paul* as a source. However, close readings of the text demonstrate that literary dependence in either direction is impossible to establish. I would suggest that a more fluid model fits the data, namely that the parallels between the *Apocalypse of Paul* and the *Life of Pachomius* might be explained if both were the result of speculation about the afterlife while meditating on similar values in a similar environment. Or put differently, not only is the *Life of Pachomius* a product of a Pachomian monastery, but so may be the *Apocalypse of Paul*.

Both of the visions in the *Life of Pachomius* begin with 2 Corinthians 12:2-4, Paul’s allusion to his own ascension to heaven, and then travel to locations that do not

⁸ *Apocalypse of Paul* 26, trans. J.K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in English Translation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993. The Coptic translation can be found in my unpublished dissertation, “Mapping the Apocalypse of Paul,” Princeton University, 2001. The Syriac version of the *Apocalypse of Paul* also mentions virginity, not chastity.

⁹ Hors. Fragm., *CSCO* 159, pp. 81–82; trans. Veilleux, *PK*, 3:169.

¹⁰ *Apocalypse of Paul* 24; trans. Copeland from the Coptic.

¹¹ *Apocalypse of Paul* 28; trans. Elliott.

¹² For example, *History of Monks in Egypt* 8.48: “they came running to meet us, singing psalms. For this is what they generally do with their visitors.” Trans. Norman Russell and Benedicta Ward, *The Lives of the Desert Fathers: The Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian, 1980), 77.

¹³ In the *Apocalypse of Paul* 25, these souls are described as “every one who shall have afflicted his soul and not done his will because of God” (trans. Elliot). For comparison, see Poemen 36: “To throw himself before God, not to assess himself, and to cast his own will behind him: these are the tools of the soul,” cited after Graham Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 34.

exist in the biblical base text, but are familiar from the *Apocalypse of Paul*, namely cities for the righteous and hell for the wicked. The positive vision of the cities of the saints and the adjoining pastoral scene found in SBo 114 of the *Life of Pachomius* has few exceptional details that relate it to the vision of the city of Christ and the land of promise found in the *Apocalypse of Paul*, so I will focus on the vision of hell in the *Life of Pachomius* SBo 88. Although there are some intriguing connections between the two visions, literary dependence is unlikely. At different points during their visit to the underworld, both Paul and Pachomius are taken to the north and to the west to view punishments. These punishments bear some resemblance to one another in that they are fiery and there are pits of various sorts. However, looking closely at the unfortunate souls being tortured in hell shows more shared values than the literary repetition of images. Notably homosexuals, defiled virgins, and monks are among the groups singled out for eternal torment in both texts.

One of the great concerns of monastic orders is the sexual temptations that lie within the walls of the monastery itself. In a single gender society with strict limits on interaction with members of the opposite sex, homosexual acts provide the final remaining challenge to sexual continence. In Armand Veilleux's words, "Homosexuality seems to have been a vice Pachomius was particularly anxious to extirpate from his monasteries."¹⁴ The vision in the *Life of Pachomius* punishes those termed "effeminate" by placing them with their feet on both sides of a cistern of fire with the uncomfortable implication that their genitalia are directly over the fiery cistern.¹⁵ This rather grim prospect underscores the vision's desire to discourage homosexual acts through a direct attack on the involved body part. Although the punishment in the *Apocalypse of Paul* for committing the "iniquity of Sodom and Gomorrah, the male with the male" is not a measure for measure punishment with a particular attack on the genitalia, it does lead to unceasing penalties. In this case, the offending parties find themselves "in a pit of pitch and sulphur running in a fiery river."¹⁶ Thus, both the *Apocalypse of Paul* and the *Life of Pachomius* seek to remove the sexual temptation of one's fellow monks through threatening eternal hell-fire.

But it is the shared value, in this case opposition to homosexual acts, that resonates between the two texts; the images themselves do not require – or even really imply – borrowing. The language used to describe those who commit homosexual acts differs. The Pachomian vision uses the word "effeminate" or "soft" drawn from 1 Corinthians 6:9 and the *Apocalypse of Paul* uses the language of "Sodom and Gomorrah" drawn from Genesis 18-19.¹⁷ The gruesome imagery surrounding these offenders is also distinct with one over a cistern and the other in a fiery river. Ultimately, there is no evidence for direct literary borrowing and the connection between the two texts must be understood as arising from similar concerns over homosexual acts.

¹⁴ PK I:281, n. 2 for SBo 88.

¹⁵ *Life of Pachomius* SBo 88; trans. Veilleux, PK 1: 115.

¹⁶ *Apocalypse of Paul* 39; trans. Elliott, 636. Present in L1 (P, St, G, Arn; Esc is not extant); lacking in C1, L2, G2, and S1.

¹⁷ There is considerable evidence that the original "sin of Sodom and Gomorrah" was actually a lack of hospitality. The ancient Rabbis interpret the Genesis passages in this way. In the Christian tradition, however, Sodom and Gomorrah always refers to homosexual acts. The *Apocalypse of Paul* is crystal clear here, adding the words "the male with the male."

In the same way, both texts stress another sexual sin, namely the loss of one's virginity without the permission of one's parents through the arrangement of a suitable marriage. Although the "crime" is the same, the sentence is not. Furthermore, the category of girls who gave up their virginity before marriage appears not only in these texts, but in two of the earliest known Christian tours of hell: namely the *Apocalypse of Peter* 11 (2nd c. CE) and its poetic reworking found in the *2 Sibylline Oracles* (2nd c. CE). Thus although both the *Apocalypse of Paul* and the *Life of Pachomius* chose to stress virginity, it was hardly new to the tradition of tours of hell to which these two texts belong. The same is true of the attacks against homosexual acts; these also are found in the earlier texts. There is, however, a category in hell that is new and unique and shared by the *Apocalypse of Paul* and the *Life of Pachomius*, namely errant monks.

In hell of the *Apocalypse of Paul*, Paul sees those monks who were made wretched by the "impediments of the world." They are "clothed with rags full of pitch and fiery sulfur, and dragons [are] coiled about their necks and shoulders and feet."¹⁸ The *Apocalypse of Paul* places these monks in hell for a combination of the way they treated others, without pity, hospitality and mercy, and insufficient ritual observance, since the neither "maintain[ed] a single Agape" nor offered a proper oblation. Meanwhile, the *Life of Pachomius* places monks in hell for slandering one another. Both texts are concerned with proper behavior for monks, but their emphasis differs slightly. The *Apocalypse of Paul* is more concerned with the fact that the monks appeared to be righteous in the world, whereas the vision in the *Life of Pachomius* of monks in hell is more concerned with how they operate within the community. Nonetheless, these two texts are among the first tours of hell to be concerned about the behavior of monks and they do so independently of one another, raising the possibility that they are the product of similar environments.

Two other categories in hell which appear to be original to the *Apocalypse of Paul* may both be directed at fourth century Origenists, a group very much out of favor in the Pachomian monasteries. In an area of hell especially noted for "surpass[ing] all punishments," Paul encounters "those who say that the bread and cup of the Eucharist of blessing are not the body and blood of Christ,"¹⁹ a position associated with Evagrius, the arch-Origenist of the fourth century.²⁰ The *Apocalypse of Paul* places the potential Origenists who do not believe in the reality of the eucharist in "the well of the abyss" from which comes "a disagreeable and evil stench."²¹ Notably, the *Paralipomena from the Life of Pachomius* includes a story in which Pachomius detects a strong stench from a number of visiting monks. He is told by an angel of the Lord that, "It was some doctrines of impiety from Origen that, in their souls, produced such a stench."²² Directly after the punishment of those who do not believe that the bread and cup are truly the body and blood of Christ comes a description of damned souls "gnashing their teeth" in a cold

¹⁸ *Apocalypse of Paul* 40; trans. Elliott.

¹⁹ *Apocalypse of Paul* 41; trans. Elliott, 637. L1 (P, StG, Arn; Esc not extant), C1, G2; L2, S1 similar.

²⁰ Elizabeth Clark, *The Origenist Controversy*, 156-7. See also the vivid story in the *ApocPatrum* (Daniel 7; PG 65, 156-7) in which the eucharist actually becomes the bread and blood of Christ in order to convince an unbelieving (no doubt Evagrian) monk.

²¹ *Apocalypse of Paul* 41; trans. Elliott, 637. L1 (P, StG, Arn; Esc not extant), C1, G2, S1, L2.

²² *Paralipomena* 4.7; trans. Armand Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia: Pachomian Chronicles and Rules*, 3 vols., vol. 2, Cistercian Studies Series: Number Forty-Six (Kalamazoo: MI, 1981), 29.

place. These unfortunate beings are those who do not believe the flesh²³ will rise, another heresy associated with the Origenists. Once again we find a similar description in the *Paralipomena* in which Pachomius tells the visiting monks that “every man reading Origen and accepting his writings is going to reach the bottom of hell, and his inheritance shall be the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth.”²⁴ The fact that the parallels concerning the future of the Origenists are so strong between the Pachomian literature and the *Apocalypse of Paul* is significant since some Egyptian monasteries, particularly the hermitages at Scetis in the vicinity of Alexandria, were in favor of the Origenist doctrine. Thus, placing our author in a Pachomian monastery agrees with his theological stance on Origen, one of the few theological positions that he deems important enough to be made explicit through the fires of hell.

Furthermore, as a social setting for the composition of an apocalypse, the Pachomian monastery has more than shared values and a violent opposition to Origen’s theological views to recommend it. Visions are part and parcel of the Pachomian world view and are woven throughout the Pachomian literature. According to the *Life of Pachomius* SBo 88 after receiving the vision of hell discussed at the beginning of the chapter, Pachomius always spoke to gatherings of monks first on the scripture and then on the torments and pains that he had seen in his vision of hell. Thus, second only to scripture in instilling good behavior was the fear of hell. Whether or not this setting in the *Life of Pachomius* can be seen as historically accurate, the image of a social order thoroughly immersed in images of hell seems an overly appropriate social location for the creation of a full length apocalypse.

I have presented arguments for a social setting which produces both apocalyptic literature and reflections on wisdom that is temporally and culturally removed from the early Jews and Christians who were responsible for the development of apocalyptic out of wisdom. Thus, the paradigm developed by this session that apocalypticism and the pursuit of wisdom are deeply interconnected proves to be remarkably resilient over time. Revelation and exploration are very different activities that share a single goal in this late antique context – understanding God’s will so that one may be spared the fires of hell. Nonetheless, apocalyptic can abandon wisdom more easily than the reverse. The *Apocalypse of Paul*, after all, seems little indebted to wisdom. But even in the most wisdom entrenched passages of the *Letters of Saint Pachomius*, Cornelius, the recipient of the letter, is instructed, “do not look to visible things.”²⁵

²³ *Apocalypse of Paul* 42; C1: sarks; L1: caro; G2: anastasis nekron.

²⁴ *Paral.* 4.7; trans. Veilleux, *PK*, 2:29.

²⁵ *Letters of Saint Pachomius* 3:4; trans. Veilleux, *PK*, 3:54.