

THE STORY OF A MYSTERIOUS MANUSCRIPT: *THE CHAPTERS OF EVAGRIUS' DISCIPLES*

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Abstract The *Chapters of Evagrius' Disciples* found in a manuscript in the Benaki Museum of Athens is one of the most important recent discoveries in the field of patristics. The present study, as the first contribution in English on the topic, traces the fascinating story that the text has traversed from the 5th century to its recent critical edition, unravelling the distorted and even biased interpretations to which the text has been subjected in contemporary scholarship.

Keywords Evagrius Ponticus' Disciples, Benaki manuscript history, Patristic tradition, Evagrian scholarship, critical approach, spirituality.

Introduction

Often things said or written in ancient times are less clear today than they once were, some of them seeming obstinately locked in their enigma. So it is with certain information from the old lives of the saints, which had, for those of that time, a kind of obviousness and clarity that often escapes us now, in spite of – or perhaps because of? – the multiplication and improvement of the scientific instruments of critical approach, with which the university has accustomed us, since the Reformation, to read any old text.

Among such information, resistant to critical methods, were also counted the hardly intelligible references to “Evagrius’ community,”¹ to “those around Evagrius,”² made in passing by Palladius when he speaks of the brotherhood of the one he calls “my teacher.”³ To these

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¹ Palladius, *The Lausiaca History* (henceforth *HL*) 35, in Palladio, *La Storia lausiaca* (ed.) G. J. M. Bartelink (Fondazione Lorenzo Valla/Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1974), 168.

² Palladius, *HL* 24, 132

³ Palladius, *HL* 23, 128.

references others were added, even more hermetic, referring to the existence of “teachings of Evagrius,” and even to “chapters of the disciples of Evagrius” mentioned in various later philokalical writings, but without any known work with these titles.

However, the veil that was considered to be definitively drawn over the mystery of these “disciples” of Evagrius and their writings began to lift with the discovery of a unique manuscript in the seventh decade of the last century. An inventory of the manuscript collection of the Benaki Museum in Athens by Euridice Lappa-Zizica⁴ led to the discovery of a late 13th-early 14th century codex by a copyist named Damianos, containing various writings, including a collection of 198 chapters or sentences attributed to the disciples of Evagrius. The title Κεφάλαια τῶν μαθητῶν τοῦ Εὐαγγρίου is at the chapter of the collection found between folios 193v-204r, preceded by a *Commentary on Matthew* by St John Chrysostom and followed by a selection from Aesop’s *Fables*. It is assumed that the manuscript arrived in Athens from the library of the Greek Gymnasium of Adrianopolis,⁵ following the exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey in July 1923, decided by the Treaty of Lausanne, since it belongs to the manuscript collection ‘Exchanges’ (Ἀνταλλαξιμῶν) of the Benaki Museum, and is recorded in its catalogue as number 72.

1. Current state of the research

Immediately after the discovery, the manuscript was researched by the Jesuit scholar Joseph Paramelle (1925-2011) and made known in an article published in 1978.⁶ The manuscript showed numerous and undeniable similarities with the famous *Chapters on Love* by St Maximus the Confessor.⁷ The observation soon attracted the attention of specialists to the collection, raising their hopes of finding the earliest evidence of the reception of the teaching of Evagrius and revealing one of the sources used by St Maximus for his *Chapters on Love*.

The preliminary edition of the text of this collection of chapters, prepared by J. Paramelle, could not be brought to printing by its author, but was passed on to Paul Géhin, who succeeded in presenting a preliminary version in 2000, and in 2007, to edit it critically, in the series Sources Chrétiennes. The French volume contains a substantial introductory section, which treats the history of the text in a way that is exhaustive for the state of research at the time and sets out the main points of the teaching of the text. The bilingual text, accompanied by explanatory notes, concludes with the usual appendices. These chapters have recently been

⁴ Paul Géhin, *Introduction*, in *Évagre le Pontique, Chapitres des disciples d’Évagre*, (ed.) Paul Géhin, SC 514 (Paris: Cerf, 2007), note 3, 21.

⁵ P. Géhin, *Introduction*, SC 514, note 1, 21.

⁶ Joseph Paramelle, “Chapitres des disciples d’Évagre dans un manuscrit grec du Musée Bénaki d’Athènes,” *Parole de l’Orient* 6-7 (1978): 101-113.

⁷ See *The Philokalia. The Complete Text compiled by St Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St Makarios of Corinth*, vol. 2, translated from the Greek and edited by G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1981), 52-113.

translated and published in Romanian, in a bilingual edition that reproduces the Greek text of the critical edition.⁸

A recent comprehensive monograph by Father Gabriel Bunge analyzes in detail the theology of the teachings contained in the *Chapters*, clarifying their relationship with the writings and theology of Evagrius. This work can be said to be the culmination of all previous studies on the topic, which not only reviews but also critically analyses them, while giving a fair interpretation of the text in the broader context of the Origenist controversies.

2. One manuscript, many problems⁹

The history of the text discovered in Athens and its transmission, although announced by J. Paramelle in his 1978 article, was only established with the edition by P. Géhin in the collection Sources Chrétiennes. In spite of the exhaustive inventory that the French scholar has made of the manuscript tradition, which contains longer or shorter fragments of this writing, the problems that have been fully clarified and meet with the agreement of specialists are not very numerous.

First of all, who are these so-called ‘disciples of Evagrius’, to whom the collection in the Benaki manuscript is attributed, and how faithfully does their text express the teaching of the Pontic monk? Where, when and, above all, who redacted these chapters and what was the size of the original? To what extent does the Athenian collection reflect the primary text and, ultimately, what is its authentic title? How well known and, more importantly, how widely used was this writing by later Fathers?

In order to answer such questions, as well as others that will arise, we will have to follow an old tradition, and begin with a section devoted to the history of the edited text, the sources used, its subsequent spread, and the conclusions scholars have reached about the form of the original.

We should begin, of course, with an explanation of the title of the writing, but as it appears in the Athenian collection, it is nowhere else attested. So, in searching for the title of this writing, we are compelled to begin with a detour, investigating questions of the author of the collection, the date and place of its writing and, crucially, the interpretation of the patristic tradition’s testimony to this wonderful but enigmatic text.

3. A single author or a collective of authors?

The only thing that can be said with certainty about the series of chapters is that it does not belong to Evagrius Ponticus. It is also difficult to argue that it was written by his immediate disciples, since the contents of the text do not state anything along these lines, and, in addition, there are some teachings that are markedly different from those of the Pontic

⁸ Ucenicii lui Evagrie, *Capete filocalice*, bilingual edition, Greek text chosen by Paul Géhin, translation, introduction, notes, and commentary by Hieromonk Agapie Corbu (Arad: Sfântul Nectarie, 2020).

⁹ The information used by us about this manuscript can also be found in a more analytical manner in P. Géhin, *Introduction*, SC 514, 21-41.

teacher. The most plausible variant is that the author(s) used Evagrius as the main source of inspiration and as a point of orientation for their own developments, not as a system taken in integrum and with maximum accuracy. Paul Géhin, moreover, warns his readers of this, saying that the authors of the text “sometimes misunderstood, sometimes distorted or forced Evagrius’ thinking.”¹⁰

Therefore, the *Chapters*, despite their strong Evagrian colouring, reflect, above all, the thinking of the “disciples” and even, in some cases, their speculations, which is why we cannot speak of direct disciples, much less of their “course” notes written according to the oral teaching of the teacher.

4. Date of writing

P. Géhin assumes that the original was written “in the early years of the 5th century,”¹¹ *i.e.* shortly after the death of the teacher in 399. The French editor’s proposal is based on the nature of the alleged relationship between the teacher and the disciples, but has no basis in internal or other contemporary or later writings. In fact, Guillaumont is the first to claim that these *Chapters* are the lecture notes of some of Evagrius’ disciples and auditors, and that they contain, in a direct way, the oral teaching of Evagrius.¹²

Therefore, in the absence of clear chronological elements, we can only approximate the date of the writing of the chapters, an aid to this being the analysis of their teaching, as Gabriel Bunge does in his extensive study. For him, this teaching is a precious witness to the posterity of Evagrius’ thought, both of the way it was received by some and of the transformations to which it was subjected in an environment and an era markedly different from his own.¹³ Such an analysis led the Orthodox hieromonk not to accept the dating of Evagrius’ teaching in the early years of the fifth century, as the critical edition postulates, but to fix it “rather towards the middle of the fifth century, about two or three generations after the death of the Pontic monk.”¹⁴ The dating corresponds, among other things, with Guillaumont’s observation that in Palestine, around 440 and in the following decades, a reopening of Origenist debates on the nature of resurrected bodies could be observed.¹⁵ In fact, Géhin also saw in the chapters of our collection “a stage of the dispute that would break out at the beginning of the 6th century,”¹⁶ and this is precisely one of the subjects on which the authors of the Athenian collection focus. The subject is, however, completely absent from the

¹⁰ P. Géhin, *Introduction*, SC 514, 47.

¹¹ P. Géhin, *Introduction*, SC 514, 37.

¹² Antoine Guillaumont, *Un philosophe au désert – Évagre le Pontique* (Paris: J. Vrin, 2009), 147 sq.

¹³ Gabriel Bunge, *Les enseignements d’Évagre (Chapitres des disciples d’Évagre): le missing link entre la première et la deuxième controverse origéniste* (Roma: EOS Verlag, 2021), 93.

¹⁴ Gabriel Bunge, *Les enseignements*, 93.

¹⁵ See A. Guillaumont, *Les Kephalaia Gnostica d’Évagre le Pontique et l’Histoire de l’Origénisme chez les Grecs et chez les Syriens*, Patristica Sorbonensia 5 (Paris: Seuil, 1962), note 1, 124.

¹⁶ P. Géhin, *Introduction*, SC 514, 69.

Evagrian corpus. Therefore, Father Gabriel believes that behind this unjustifiable dating lies a methodological and ideological choice, with profound and multiple implications for Evagrian studies. It was this view, once accepted, that led Guillaumont to consider this collection, anonymous after all, as having the same doctrinal relevance as the authentic works of Evagrius himself, and to have recourse to them in order to elucidate certain doctrinal points in the teaching of the Pontic monk, a line of study that has proved false.

5. Place of writing

The French editor suggests that this would be Palestine, and the proposal is the only one that meets with unanimous support, as there are a number of sound reasons for this location. Firstly, Jerusalem was home to the two monastic communities led by Melania the Elder and by Rufinus, who had also made Evagrius a monk at Easter 383. Even after his settlement in Egypt, Evagrius cultivated close relations with his friends in the Holy City, which he visited at least once, when he was hiding from Archbishop Theophilus of Alexandria, who wanted to ordain him Bishop of Thmuis.¹⁷ Secondly, these communities played an important role in the production of Evagrius' first collection of authentic writings, which he began to write precisely because of requests, some of which came from the "Holy Mountain," Zion.¹⁸ The Gnostic Chapters were also addressed to spiritually advanced monks, who were in all likelihood members of Rufin's monastic community.

Even this reliable information alone leads to the conclusion that a true "Evagrian school" was born in Palestine, whose disciples multiplied considerably after the persecution of Theophilus in the wilderness of Nitria in the year 400, when hundreds of "Origenist" monks left Egypt, many of them seeking refuge in the Holy Land. We know that after the calming of tensions, only the native Egyptians returned to Egypt, while the overwhelming majority of foreigners sought a new home in Palestine and Constantinople. In view of this historical situation, Bunge states that "it would not be surprising if these chapters were written in the same region where the *Gnostic Chapters* of Evagrius himself were sent."¹⁹ Such a geographical location also explains the rapidity with which both the *Gnostic Chapters* of Evagrius and those in our collection spread in Syriac and Armenian translations.²⁰

In conclusion, we must note that "these Chapters are not Evagrius' writings in the literal sense, even if they are closely related to his literary work in substance and sometimes in

¹⁷ *The Coptic Life of Evagrius* (henceforth VE) G, M, in G. Bunge, A. de Vogüé, *Quatre ermites égyptiens d'après les fragments coptes de l'Histoire Lausiaque*, SO 60 (Bellefontaine, 1994), 153-175; Socrates, *HE* IV, 23, 75-76.

¹⁸ Evagrius of Pontus, *Praktikos*, Prologue 1, in Évagre le Pontique, *Traité pratique ou Le Moine*, vol. I-II, (ed.) Antoine Guillaumont, Claire Guillaumont, SC 170-171, Cerf, Paris, 1970-1971.

¹⁹ G. Bunge, *Les enseignements*, 80.

²⁰ The earliest Syriac translation of Evagrius' *Gnostic Chapters*, S₁, dates from the mid-5th century, and is based on another translation, Armenian.

form.”²¹ They were most likely written in Palestine by an author who used mostly Evagrian writings, leaving to posterity a collection of *Capita* that reflects sufficient doctrinal, terminological and stylistic differences from the Pontic teacher to suggest its dating to the middle of the fifth century, about two or three generations after Evagrius’ dormition.²²

6. The text

The Athenian collection of *Chapters* have many deficiencies in terms of the correctness of the language, spelling and, in general, of the attention shown by Damianos, the copyist of the manuscript. From other transcripts he produced, it is clear that he was a rather mediocre copyist, whose knowledge was never quite equal to the texts he copied.²³ Thus, wrong abbreviations, words distorted by the addition or omission of letters or even syllables, metathesis, wrong accents, confusion between paronyms and even the confusion of the Greek numeral δ’ (= τεσσαράρων) with the adversative particle δὲ (c. 27), or the attribution, in c. 52, of a masculine article to the well-known female biblical character Ruth, occur very often. Often short words and particles had to be filled in by the critical edition or, at other times, obvious interpolations were reported. Despite the manuscript’s shortcomings, Paul Géhin confesses that he limited his interventions to what was strictly necessary, using parallel texts from the Greek or Syriac tradition to solve problems.

7. A work of significant dimensions

The text of the Athenian collection comprises 198 chapters and is certainly much smaller than the original collection. The study of indirect testimonies from later patristic works quoting chapters from this collection has proved both the selective character of the text in the Benaki manuscript and the existence of numerous additional chapters in the original version. This is confirmed either by explicit references (as in the case of the Syriac translations or chapter F4 of the Damascenian Florilegium), or by texts with elements common to the Athenian collection, or by the appearance of the same chapter in two indirect attestations of the collection. On the basis of these elements, it has been possible to recover 24 more chapters, numbered 199 to 222, to which is added a recensio longior of chapter 125, corresponding to F3 of the Damascenian Florilegium. However, the chapters recovered in this way represent only a small part of those still missing. Other external clues, such as the mention in the Damascenian Florilegium of chapter 315 of the ‘Lessons of Evagrius’, corresponding to chapter 109 of the Benaki collection, leave some room for the assumption that at least 206 chapters are missing from the Athenian manuscript.

²¹ P. Géhin, *Introduction*, SC 514, 37.

²² G. Bunge, *Les enseignements*, 93.

²³ P. Géhin, *Introduction*, SC 514, 95.

All these details lead to one certain conclusion: we are dealing with a collection of spiritual chapters that are part of a much more developed one and which, in its original form, without being organised in belts, could exceed 400 chapters. It is equally certain that St Maximus had a larger version at his disposal than the one we have today in the codex of the Benaki Museum.

8. The title of the collection

a) In the critical edition

As it appears at the front of the Athenian collection, the title is nowhere else attested, except, hardly explainable, for a few Syriac fragments edited by A. Guillaumont. The fact that the French publisher decided on the title of the Chapters of the Disciples of Evagrius, probably formulated by the copyist Damian himself, is justified only if we restrict ourselves exclusively to the Athenian manuscript, without considering its relationship with the original writing. However, such a limitation cannot constitute a sound editorial principle, and therefore was not assumed by the French editor, who widened the scope of his research beyond the text provided by the Damian copyist, trying to specify the dimensions of the original work, the author and the place of composition, and the patristic reception of the writing.

The cracks in the correspondence between the title *Chapitres des disciples d'Évagre* and the contents of the volume begin to emerge even from the hesitations of the French edition: on the cover of the book and on the dust jacket we read that the work, entitled *Chapitres des Disciples d'Évagre*, has "Évagre le Pontique" as its author, while the title page does not mention any other author, only to find the name "Évagre le Pontique" in brackets on the next page. What seemed to Augustine Casiday to be only "a shortcoming strangely compounded by the physical presentation of the book"²⁴ turned out, on closer examination, to hide other difficulties, this time pointed out by Father Gabriel Bunge. For the Swiss hieromonk and scholar, the title, as formulated in Damianos's manuscript, "suggests to the reader that the 198 chapters represent an original and complete work, although it is only an extract from a much larger work", or perhaps even an "artificial creation"²⁵ of the same copyist. Moreover, the very phrase "disciples of Evagrius" raises serious questions, since it gives the authority of the Pontic teacher to texts that also contain teachings foreign to his theology, as is evident from his authentic writings.

About a group of disciples of Evagrius we learn from the Coptic Life of Saint Evagrius, in which the author states that Evagrius "hid nothing from his disciples,"²⁶ who gathered with him on Saturdays and Sundays, to reveal their thoughts, receive personal guidance, but also to

²⁴ Augustine Casiday, *Reconstructing the Theology of Evagrius Ponticus* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), note 26, 41-42.

²⁵ G. Bunge, *Les enseignements*, 65.

²⁶ VE J, 164.

have spiritual conversations.²⁷ However, there is no evidence from any source that they wrote a letter in which they introduced themselves as ‘disciples of Evagrius’, nor do the Chapters of the Benaki manuscript mention such direct disciples. Moreover, it is well known that no one ever signed his work with the name of ‘disciple of a certain Father’, the name ‘disciple of someone’ always being given later by someone else, in a positive, neutral or pejorative sense, as was the case with the so-called ‘disciples of Origen’, so called, under duress, by Theophilus of Alexandria.²⁸ And if Palladius mentions in the *Lausiac History* “my teacher Evagrius,”²⁹ it is equally true that Socrates only calls him “disciple of Evagrius”³⁰. These last two mentions, however, are totally irrelevant to establish a link between the Benaki collection and the circle of direct disciples of Evagrius.

Father Gabriel Bunge’s conclusion is therefore clear: it does not seem at all advisable to take the phrase “Disciples of Evagrius” literally and to recognize in it the personal disciples of the Pontic monk, much less to go so far as to see in the *Chapters* of the Benaki collection the lecture notes of his auditors and disciples, as Antoine Guillaumont did.³¹

We must also add that the choice of one title or another is by no means neutral. According to an old Aristotelian principle, he who has pronounced on one thing has pronounced on many others, for from one sentence necessarily follow many consequences.³² Therefore, the acceptance, even implicitly, of the title which states that the text belongs with certainty to the disciples of Evagrius confirms the Evagrian line of interpretation represented by the so-called “heresiological school,”³³ whose founding ‘dogma’ is the view that Evagrius is the author of the heresies which appeared in the 6th century in Palestine and were condemned as Origenist by the Fifth Ecumenical Council. For this line of Evagrian exegesis, the Benaki collection would be precisely the missing link between the late 4th-century master and the 6th-

²⁷ VE E, 161.

²⁸ See Theophilus of Alexandria, *Paschal Letter* of 402.

²⁹ Palladius, *HL* 23, 128.

³⁰ Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History* (henceforth *HE*) IV, 23, 78, in Socrate de Constantinople, *Histoire Ecclésiastique*, Livres IV-VI, Greek text by G. C. Hansen (GCS), transl. by P. Périchon and P. Maraval, SC 505 (Paris: Cerf, 2006), 98.

³¹ See G. Bunge, *Les enseignements*, 323.

³² See Aristotle, *Topics*, II, 5, 112a, in Aristotle, Volume II, *Posterior Analytics. Topica*, Loeb Classical Library 391, transl. by E. S. Forster (London: Harvard University Press, 1960), 354-355.

³³ A group of scholars who, sharing the same methodological option and an exclusively scientific view of the Evagrian problem, were grouped by Augustin Casiday in the “heresiological school.” The most representative names are: W. Bousset, H. U. von Balthasar, I. Hausherr, A. Guillaumont, P. Géhin, M. O’Laughlin, M. Sheridan, E. Clark. Their methodological choices are constructed from an exclusively external and illicit perspective, applied to Evagrius’ writings in an attempt to reveal their content; see A. Casiday, “On Heresy in Modern Patristic Scholarship: the case of Evagrius Ponticus”, *Heythrop Journal* LIII (2012): 248. The spiritual theological alternative is supported in the writings of scholars such as Gabriel Bunge, Jeremy Driscoll, Columba Stewart, Luke Disynger, Andrew Louth, Kevin Corigan, A. Casiday, Julia Konstantinovskiy, Pr. Gregory Collins, Blossom Stefaniw and others.

century heretics who claimed to be his, and it is therefore important for the authors of this exegesis that the title of the Athenian manuscript be preserved and regarded as original. By the title adopted for his critical edition, the editor thus synthetically expresses the whole line of Evagriian interpretation from which he claims to derive, and is thus no longer obliged to reconstruct the network of landmarks that define his position and guide his interpretations, nor to justify his translation choices each time, it being sufficient to refer to earlier studies of this interpretative current. Problems arise, however, when the adoption of this interpretative paradigm and the title that sums it up becomes a criterion for censoring and excluding other attempts at interpretation, no less justified and scholarly, attempts that have already emerged precisely because the “official” title, without eliminating older confusions, generates new ones.

As a first conclusion, let us note that the title of the *Chapters of the Disciples of Evagrius*, although seductive, is historically inaccurate and biased, *a priori* rejecting any other possible interpretation regarding the collection in the front of which it stands.³⁴ Therefore, before formulating a conclusion, we must follow the testimonies of the patristic tradition and try to interpret its hesitations about the title of this enigmatic collection.

b) In the patristic tradition

We have seen that both the indirect Greek tradition and the Syriac and Armenian translations attest to the spread of the collection of *Chapters of the Disciples of Evagrius* between the 5th and 13th centuries. The Syriac tradition is important in so far as it bears witness to the penetration of the work and teaching of Evagrius into Eastern monastic circles, which, however, took it up selectively and often adapted it.

The earliest attestation of this writing seems to be in the collection of spiritual Letters that Saints Barsanuphius and John of Gaza sent in response to the questions of some of their disciples. One of them, probably Saint Dorotheus of Gaza himself, asked the Grand Elder if he would allow him to read from the “Gnostic Chapters of Evagrius and his Disciples”, after which he refers, specifically, to Chapters 64 and 69 of the second hundred.³⁵ Since the title, in the brother’s question, is formulated elliptically, Γνωστικά Εὐαγρίου καὶ τὰ τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ,³⁶ it lends itself to several interpretations. As the article τὰ refers to Γνωστικά, to the Κεφαλαία Γνωστικά, or to the Κεφαλαία alone, the full title of the work to which the brother refers, assuming it to be known to the Great Elder, may be: Κεφαλαία Γνωστικά τῶν μαθητῶν τοῦ

³⁴ For a detailed presentation in Romanian of the main currents of Evagriian exegesis, see the Introduction to *Evagrie Ponticul, Scolii la Pilde și Ecclesiast*, transl. by Hieromonk Agapie Corbu (Bucharest: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, 2017), especially chap. 2: “Receptarea operei evagriene de-a lungul timpului” (33-47).

³⁵ Barsanuphius and John of Gaza, *Question 600*, in Barsanuphe et Jean de Gaza, *Correspondance*, SC 451, Critical text, notes and index by François Neyt, o.s.b., and Paula de Angelis-Noah, transl. by Lucien Regnault, o.s.b. (Paris: Cerf, 2001), 804.

³⁶ See SC 451, 804.

Εὐαγρίου or Κεφαλαία τῶν μαθητῶν Εὐαγρίου. The situation, which Father Gabriel Bunge finds “extremely seductive”, runs into a banal but serious translation problem. Thus, the equivocal phrase τὰ τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ can just as well be translated “and [the writings] of his disciples” (*scill.* Evagrius), a translation for which, in fact, Lucien Regnault, the French translator of the correspondence of Elders Barsanuphius and John, also opts. The discussion, perhaps a bit technical for the reader less familiar with the arcana of translating patristic texts, is meant to highlight the fact that we cannot see in the Palestinian brother’s question the exact title of the original writing, if indeed the question would have referred to it, but only a mention of the existence of this work and the interest in it in some Palestinian monastic circles.

However, the most important and prestigious testimony to this collection remains the 400 *Chapters on Love* by St Maximus the Confessor. Despite the fact that no less than 80 of the chapters of St Maximus’ writings are taken from the text of the Benaki manuscript,³⁷ however, St. Maximus never specifies the title, summing it all up in the brief indication in the *Foreword to Elpidios the Presbyter*, where he notes that he wrote his chapters going “through the writings of the Holy Fathers and collecting from them passages relevant to my subject.”³⁸

In an effort to clarify the problem of the title, the French editor also turned to the several Syriac translations published by A. Guillaumont and J. Muyldermans. However, these texts have repeatedly suffered from the interventions of translators or copyists, who mention in a 6th-century manuscript “the disciples of Mar Evagrius,”³⁹ while another 9th-century manuscript omits this phrase.⁴⁰ Among the other changes to which the title of our writing has been subjected in the Syriac tradition, it is worth mentioning that of a manuscript of the year 876, which considers as a title precisely... the first chapter of the extract.⁴¹

The most relevant patristic testimony to the question of the title remains, to this day, the so-called Damascenian Florilegium, a massive compilation of biblical and patristic texts, compiled in 8th century Palestine and given the name of St. John Damascene. Structured in three parts, the first dedicated to God, the second to man, and the third to the virtues and the passions, these Florilegium use an alphabetical classification for the first two sections, and for the third, the parallelism whereby each virtue is associated with the opposite passion. This writing was summarised and transformed into a writing to which extracts from secular authors were later added, resulting in a Florilegium of the type *loci communes*.⁴² In the third section of the work, chapters 42, 109 and 125 from the Benaki collection appear, and an additional chapter is explicitly named as an extract from the same text (F4=206), while a fifth chapter is

³⁷ See P. Géhin, SC 514, Table de concordance 3, 301.

³⁸ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Four Hundred Texts on Love*, in *The Philokalia*, vol. 2, 52.

³⁹ The most plausible explanation is that, starting from a Greek manuscript in which μαθημάτων (*lectio difficilior*) was misread as μαθητῶν, the error passed into Syriac.

⁴⁰ See P. Géhin, *Introduction*, SC 514, 22.

⁴¹ This is the manuscript Lond. BL Add. 12167, ff. 131-132, where the title is: “The beginning of true knowledge in the soul is its movement by the Holy Spirit.” See P. Géhin, *Introduction*, SC 514, 25.

⁴² See M. Richard, *Florilèges spirituels grecs*, DS 5, 475-510.

attributed to Evagrius, but may also come from this collection (F5=212). The earliest witness of these florilegia is the 9th century uncial, Parisianus gr. 923, which, on f. 48, col. b, contains a very precise indication, referring to “chapter 315 of the teachings of Evagrius” (ἐκ τῶν Εὐαγρίου μαθημάτων τοῦ τιε’ κεφαλαίου), and on f. 148v, col. b, it states that F4 comes ‘from the teachings of Evagrius’ (ἐκ τῶν Εὐαγρίου μαθημάτων).

The importance of the testimony of these Florilegia for the title issue is manifold. First, they provide us with another title under which our work was known in eighth-century Palestine, the fact that the name ἐκ τῶν Εὐαγρίου μαθημάτων occurs twice in this form in the Florilegium eliminating the suspicion that μαθημάτων is an alteration of μαθητῶν. Secondly, the precise reference to “chapter 315 of the teachings of Evagrius” leads us to believe that the author of the Florilegium had before him not extracts from the original work, but precisely the whole work, and was therefore careful to quote the original title and primary number structure. Thirdly, the Florilegium gives us a valuable indication of the selective nature of the collection we have in the Benaki manuscript, and fourthly, the numbering shows that the writing was not organized in the form of a belt, as were the Gnostic Chapters of Evagrius. At the same time, chapter 315, quoted in the Florilegium, corresponds to chapter 109 in the Benaki manuscript, which means that the numbering of the Athenian collection is artificial, as the concordance in the critical edition shows.

In conclusion, although P. Géhin’s research has shown that we have patristic evidence for the existence and use of the *Capitulum* in texts of a very diverse nature (scholia, chapters, florilegia, exegetical chains) for every century, yet references to the original title are minimal and frustratingly divergent, one of the few certainties being that the Athenian manuscript contains an extract from a much larger writing, present in the patristic tradition under several titles, none of which can claim the status of original.

9. Dissemination of the collection and its translations

We have already mentioned that the most consistent testimony to this collection are the 400 *Chapters on Love* by St Maximus the Confessor, drawn up at the beginning of the 7th century, 80 of which are transcriptions, sometimes slightly modified, of chapters from the Athenian text.

In addition, many other chapters in the Benaki collection are attested, between the 5th and 13th centuries, both by Syriac and Armenian translations, unfortunately fragmentary, and by indirect Greek tradition.

Other indirect evidence appears in the Damascenian Florilegium (8th century), a series of patristic and secular definitions, which also include Evagrius with a number of extracts from the *Gnostic Chapters* and *Skemmata*. Christiane Furrer-Pilliod has proved the

existence of much larger collections, which transmit Evagrius' extracts to an even greater extent,⁴³ together with some chapters from the Benaki collection.

The scholia of the *Ladder* of St. John of Sinai, dated in their original form between the late 9th and early 10th century, also contain some chapters from our collection. Manuscript *Coisilianus* 262, in the National Library of France, contains a richer collection of scholia than that in *PG* 88, the quotations from Evagrius' writings are either expressly indicated or left anonymous. P. Géhin has indicated the following correspondences between the *Ladder* and the Chapters: *Ladder* chap. II, chap. 25 (in *PG* has no.18) = c. 74; *Ladder* chap. XIV, sc. 24 (absent in *PG*) = summary of chs. 72 and 64; *Ladder* ch. XV, sch. 50 (in *PG* it has no. 38) = ch. 74; *Ladder* ch. XV, sch. 60 (in *PG* has no. 45) = c. 139.

This material was taken up by a certain Elias the Cretan, author of a *Commentary on the Ladder*, compiled at the beginning of the 12th century, in which he explains not only the text of St. John, but also the marginal scrolls added over time. From him, then, comes a striking commentary on c. 72 in our collection.

The *Catena to the Gospel of Luke*, compiled towards the end of the 11th century in Constantinople by Nicetas, the future Metropolitan of Herakleia, uses eight texts attributed to Evagrius. Their analysis enabled Géhin to discover the use of several passages from the Chapters: c. 50 and 130 of the Benaki collection, a chapter attested in Syriac and an additional one attributed in the *Damascenian Florilegium* (F4) to "the teachings of Evagrius". All these show that Nichita knew and used the writings of Evagrius' 'disciples'. The manuscripts that preserve the complete text of the Chain of Nichita come from the 12th (*Vaticanus gr* 1611), 13th, 14th and 15th centuries (*Parisinus Coislinianus* 201) and from 1576 (*Iviron* 371).

The end of the 13th and beginning of the 14th century is the period in which Damianos copied the manuscript we have today, which contains the most substantial collection of chapters of the original text, but without preserving either the order of the numeration or the order of the extracts, which were made in bulk.

There are therefore testimonies for almost every century from the 5th to the 15th centuries. Some of these attestations are quite substantial and allow us to reconstruct, in general terms, the circulation, use and translation of what we could call, for the moment, the *Chapters* of some remote disciples of Evagrius.

Conclusion

A few lines can summarise the scientific analyses so far: the Benaki collection contains teachings that are not found among those of the Pontic monk; Evagrius is neither mentioned by name nor quoted verbatim, and some teachings in the chapters are simplifications and distortions of the Evagrius' ones; the date of writing is, according to

⁴³ Christiane Furrer-Pilliod, *ΟΡΟΙ ΚΑΙ ΥΠΟΓΡΑΦΑΙ – Collections alphabétiques des définitions profanes et sacrées*, Studi e Testi 395 (Roma: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 2000), 29-30.

all indications, towards the middle of the 5th century, at least two generations after the death of Evagrius; the text is mentioned under different titles in patristic writings and translations between the 5th and 13th centuries.

All these observations lead us to the conclusion that we are in front of a text originating from some indirect and remote disciples of the Pontic teacher, a text both understood and misunderstood, indebted to the predecessors and original, faithful to them and innovative.