

The economical management in the first great coenobia in Egypt (Dr. Nikolaos Koios, Content Coach of Pemptousia)

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With the appearance of coenobitic monasticism and the foundation of the first great coenobia in Egypt by Saint Pakhomios, things became increasingly organized. The first coenobium- and this is of great symbolic importance- took the Greek name of “Κοινωνία”, i.e. “Community”. Everything was common: common work, common financial management, common liturgical life, common refectory, common instruction. Work was divided and specialized, with overseers responsible for its coordination. At the end of every year, there was a financial report and the monasteries with a surplus met the financial shortfalls of the monasteries with a deficit[7]. The fundamental element however, was that the founder of this “Community”, Saint Pakhomios the Great, conceived and understood it with spiritual characteristics, as a visible expression of the Church, with certain basic features for the morals of the monks: quietude, prayer and the continuous reading of Holy Scripture.



The number of monasteries and monks which Pakhomios the Great had under his supervision was large and, as a result, financial management was commensurate with this. And yet he himself never failed to stress to one and all the essence of the monastic vocation, so that there would be no departures from the Gospel spirit of poverty and rejection of property, which he saw as being realized in the coenobitic ideal of property held in common and a life lived in common. It's worth noting that, after the death of Saint Pakhomios, an attempt was made to depart from his spiritual legacy, through undue engagement in business activities. But then his successor, Saint Theodoros the Sanctified, reacted and brought the coenobia back to their original, Pakhomian order[8].

It was this order that more or less transposed its basic fundamental features to the whole of the monastic tradition of the Church and which evolved dynamically. It might be added that an extensive charitable network developed through the coenobia, which addressed the needs of both monastics and laity. Moreover, the coenobite way of life, in certain instances, became a model of social and political organization. There are examples of towns, such as Oxyrhynchus, which were organized on the basis of the coenobitic way of life, on the principles of self-sufficiency, frugality, common ownership and charity, and they are regarded as the epitome of a Christian town[9]. Care and discretion in financial transactions, to prevent them becoming an impediment to the initial aim and therefore an occasion

for offence, can be seen as fundamental features of coenobitic life.

As time passed, monasteries attracted the attention of civil authorities and wealthy citizens. They were thought to be not only centres of the spiritual life, but also agents of sound financial management. They were entrusted with large sums of money destined for distribution, in the knowledge that they would disburse it in the best manner possible. They were granted large tracts of land for cultivation, which led to improvements in the working conditions of the labourers compared with those provided by other land-owners, while at the same time providing income for the state[10]. The contribution of monasticism to socio-economic development in both East and West was very considerable. Many desolate areas became inhabited, jobs were created, public income increased and many public functions were performed by the monasteries[11].

(To be continued)

[7] Moskhos, 131.

[8] Ibid, 133-4.

[9] Ibid, 137.

[10] It should be stated here that many of the monasteries, especially at the beginning, were inscribed in the tax rolls, although others were exempt taxation.

[11] Moskhos, 142.