

GRAPTA POIKILA II

Saints and Heroes



Edited by Leena Pietilä-Castrén and Vesa Vahtikari

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Preface

The current volume of the *PMFIA* contains two sets of articles, presenting some of the results of two directors' projects at the Finnish Institute. Dionysius the Areopagite, the patron saint of Athens, was studied between 1993 and 1995, and the Late Classical and Early Hellenistic hero monuments, for their part, were studied from 2000 to 2004. A number of years passed before the final publication was compiled, and some of the writers had to wait for quite a time with their finished articles, until all the pieces were put together.

Both undertakings were carried out as library projects, but a considerable amount of insight was gained from the many visits to the sites connected to our respective questions. Besides the subject itself, and the geographical places of interest, the third essential element of a project is its participants. The number of individuals involved in the projects fluctuated throughout the years. Those who did not participate in the final publication nevertheless provided important contributions to the many constructive discussions also now reflected in the written articles.

A Herculean effort was undertaken by Vesa Vahtikari, assisted by the Institute's two trainees, Markus Suuronen and Aapo Laaksonen, who combined manuscripts delivered to the editorial board in most heterogeneous states. Our very special thanks go to them. We are also grateful to the Ephoreias for their much-needed practical help, and to the many anonymous referees, who objectively and painstakingly contributed to the outcome. Furthermore, we are greatly indebted to our language reviser, Dr Jonathan E. Tomlinson, who showed considerable understanding in adapting to our many irregularities, both linguistically and schedule-wise. Our final thanks go to the editorial board of the *PMFIA* for its continuous support.

We dedicate this fourteenth volume of the *PMFIA* to the memory of Professor Emeritus Fredric Cleve, who passed away when the book's layout had already been finalised and was just awaiting printing. We remember him as a good friend who never failed to encourage his junior researchers and shared generously his profound knowledge.

Helsinki and Turku, September 2, 2008

Leena Pietilä-Castrén and Gunnar af Hällström

Heroa as Described in the Ancient Written Sources

Mari Mikkola

Introduction

The focus of this research is to get an impression of the *heroa* (plural of ἥρωον) of the late Classical and Hellenistic periods as they are described in the written sources from mainland Greece and the islands, completing the material with some examples from Magna Graecia. The term *heroon* basically means a shrine of a hero, a tomb,¹ where the cult of a hero was perpetuated. *Heroon* is a general term for a cult place, not a specific architectural term for a certain type of building.² The meaning of the word *heroon* seems to be twofold. On one hand, it is derived from and develops in parallel with the word ἥρωες, hero, although a *heroon* is naturally a more concrete expression. On the other hand, this word with a very mobile nature had some obvious synonyms. In the following they are taken into consideration if the same sources use them as alternatives to those monuments they elsewhere call *heroon*, thus perhaps shedding more light on a certain *heroon*, or the nature of the cult practised in it.

None of the ancient authors provide us with a systematic study of hero-worship, or of a *heroon* as an architectural construction, and the information must be gathered from those writers who touch on a hero-cult in some way. The authors usually referred to *heroa* only incidentally and in passing, having very little, if any, interest at all in the *heroa* as constructions, even though the cults themselves might have been described in more detail.³ Plutarch named a certain Diocles, who wrote περὶ ἡρώων συντάγματι, now unfortunately lost. He was a Greek historian, one of the many of the same name.⁴

The sources for this study are the relevant passages by ancient authors and some epigraphical documents. The material was gathered by means of a CD-Rom search made on *PHI 7* and *TLG* for the word *heroon*.⁵ Unsurprisingly the most valuable and useful ancient authors were Strabo, Plutarch, Pausanias and Athenaeus, whose information is indispensable, though mostly of scattered nature. Several others also referred to *heroa*, but very little or no practical information was gained from their passages.

The information gathered from the ancient authors is presented in the next chapter as a catalogue, with concluding notes as to the object of each *heroon*, the site, the surroundings, the rites, or any other information, if such is given, at the end of each author. The third chapter covers the epigraphical material, coming from Delphi, Athens and Attica, Kos and Thera. Some remarks are first made on the information gathered from

¹ H.G. Liddell, R. Scott, H.S. Jones and R. McKenzie (eds.), *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th rev. ed., Oxford 1996, s.v. ἥρωον.

² Hence, in the following, the word is not translated. Rather, the transliterated word *heroon* and its plural *heroa* are used.

³ Abramson 1978, 5; Ekroth 1999, 1–9.

⁴ Plut. *Quaest. Graec.* 301A. Possibly Diocles of Peparethus, who lived in the third century BC, K. Meister, *NP* 3, 613, s.v. Diokles 7.

⁵ In February 2002, by limiting the result by date to between the years 400–150 BC, as the main focus of this research is the late Classical and Early Hellenistic *heroa*.

the inscriptions, and then the final conclusions as to the development of the late Classical and Hellenistic *heroa* are reached from the material as a whole.

Ancient authors

Strabo

Only one of the six *heroa*, mentioned by Strabo,⁶ was located in mainland Greece. Tityus, the son of Zeus and Elara, had a *heroon* in Euboea, even though the scene of the events depicted in his myth took place elsewhere, in Panopeus. This was a city in eastern Phocis, near the boundary between Boeotia and Chaeronea, which was along the sacred road from Athens to Delphi. According to the myth, Tityus tried to rape Leto on her way to Delphi,⁷ but was shot to death by her children Apollo and Artemis, and suffered in Hades for his audacity.⁸ Strabo, referring to Homer (*Od.* 7,324), informs us that the Phaiakians led Rhadamantys into Euboea to visit Tityus, the son of the Earth.⁹ Furthermore, that somewhere in Euboea there was a cave, named Elarion after Tityus' mother, and also his *heroon*, where he received certain honours. Unfortunately Strabo does not describe them: καὶ Ἐλάριον τι σπήλαιον ἀπὸ τῆς Τιτυοῦ μητρὸς Ἐλάρας δείκνυται κατὰ τὴν νῆσον καὶ ἡρώον τοῦ Τιτυοῦ καὶ τιμαί τινες.¹⁰ Thus, Tityus was worshipped as a hero in Euboea, but Pausanias, for his part, saw his vast grave-mound, μνημα, at Panopeus,¹¹ probably at or near the spot where he was believed to have died.

The remaining five *heroa* mentioned by Strabo were situated in Magna Graecia. They are taken into consideration here as monuments to Greek heroes from areas inhabited by the Greeks, and also because Pausanias considered one of them in his *Periegesis*. The *heroa* of Odysseus' companions, Dracon and Polites, existed in Lucania and in Bruttium, not far from each other. That of Dracon lay near the city of Laos, which was the last of the cities of Lucania, near the sea.¹² A prophecy was given, that many people would perish about Dracon of Laos: πλησίον δὲ τὸ τοῦ Δράκοντος ἡρώον ἐνὸς τῶν Ὀδυσσεῶς ἐταίρων, ἐφ' οὗ ὁ χρησμὸς τοῖς Ἰταλιώταις ἐγένετο, Λάιον ἀμφὶ Δράκοντα πολὺν ποτε λαὸν ὀλεῖσθαι. This proved indeed to be the case, when the Greek inhabitants of Italy met disaster at the hands of the Lucanians in 389.¹³ The expression πλησίον, near the city, indicates that the *heroon* of Dracon was outside the city. Other than this location no other information is given.

⁶ Strabo of Amasia in Pontus (ca. 64 BC–21 AD) wrote his *Geography* during the reign of Augustus, around 7 BC. His work is far more than a mere geography; it is rather an encyclopaedia of the various countries of the inhabited world as known at the beginning of the Christian era. He is criticized, however, for having little firsthand knowledge of Greece, even though he visited Corinth, Argos, Athens and Megara, Barrow 1967, 9.

⁷ Pind. *Pyth.* 4.90–92; Strabo 9.3.14; Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.4.1; Ap. Rhod. 1.759–762.

⁸ Hom. *Od.* 11.576–581; P. Dräger, *NP* 12 (2002), 634–635, s.v. Tityus.

⁹ The visit of Rhadamantys to Euboea belongs to an otherwise unknown myth, according to several commentaries on Hom. *Od.* 7.324.

¹⁰ Strabo 9.3.14.

¹¹ Pausanias' choice of word (10.4.5–6) has led Baladié 1996, 132, n. 1, to suggest that the tomb may have dated to the Mycenaean period, interpreting it as a probable beehive-tomb. See also F. Graf, *NP* 5 (1998), 478, s.v. Heroenkult.

¹² Biffi 1988, 303, n. 15.

¹³ Strabo 6.1.1; Lasserre 1967, 126, n. 5, 219.

Polites, one of Odysseus' sailors, was a much more colourful figure. He was one of the unfortunate ones turned into pigs by Kirke (*Od.* 10,224–240), and was later treacherously killed by the barbarians, that is by the native Italiotes. Consequently, a *heroon* was set up for him near the city of Temesa,¹⁴ the first city of Bruttium after Laos. Now we have an elementary description of the surroundings, as we are told that they were thickly shaded by wild olive trees: ἔστι δὲ πλησίον τῆς Τεμέσης ἡρῶν ἀγριελαιοῖς συνηρεφές Πολίτου τῶν Ὀδυσσέως ἐταίρων. Eventually Polites became exceedingly wrathful, and the neighbouring people, guided by an oracle, started to collect a tribute to him. The reason for the wrath of the hero might lie in the mercilessness of the people: τὸν ἥρωα τὸν ἐν Τεμέσῃ λεγόντων ἐπικεῖσθαι αὐτοῖς, and the myth might reflect the troubled times between the indigenous people of the area and the Greeks. Here we have an example of an angry hero capable of evil, from whose tyranny the city needed to be liberated.¹⁵ And indeed, when the Locrians later captured Temesa, a boxer called Euthymus fought against Polites and forced him to release the inhabitants from the tribute.¹⁶

Through Euthymus, a three-time winner at the Olympic games of 484, 476 and 472 BC,¹⁷ we obtain some chronological fixed points for Polites' *heroon*. It existed in the Early Classical period, may have been founded even earlier, and was still well-known in the days of Strabo. The tribute may have been used for its upkeep. Euthymus, for his part, became a hero himself. According to Callimachus, as paraphrased by Pliny, the Delphic oracle ordained a cult of Euthymus during his lifetime.¹⁸ Athletes could in fact claim parity with heroes by clashing with them physically. How the fight was carried out in reality is puzzling, but it was presumably conceived as a communal drama followed by the elevating of Euthymus to heroic status.¹⁹ This is Strabo's version of the story of Polites. More information is given by Pausanias.²⁰ The two authors vary somewhat in their terminology, as Strabo calls Polites' monument unhesitatingly a *heroon*, whereas Pausanias names it first a *ναὸς*, but later a *heroon*.

Besides the *heroon* of Dracon, Strabo also refers to another *heroon*, for Metabus, in Lucania, in the city of Metapontium by the gulf of Taranto. In the *Aeneis*, Metabus was a king of the Volsci, and ruler of the city of Privernum, who had to leave his domicile in the Central Apennines because of his cruelty.²¹ Strabo, for his part, says that according to Antiochus²² the city of Metapontium was first called Metabus, and the name was later slightly altered. Some distant mythological twists were proved by the existence of the *heroon*: κομισθῆναι ἐλέγχειν ἡρῶν τοῦ Μετάβου.²³ The existence of the *heroon* inside the city classifies it as one of the *heroa* of the eponymic founders.

¹⁴ Regarding the history and mythology of Laos and Temesa, see Greco 1992, 39, 86–96.

¹⁵ Like gods, heroes could use their powers for good or ill, although they showed this double aspect far less obviously than most gods, Kearns 1989, 10.

¹⁶ Strabo 6.1.5.

¹⁷ Lasserre 1967, 221, n. 5.

¹⁸ Callim. *Aet.* fr. 99. Plin. *HN* 7.152. For Euthymus and the heroization of athletes, see Currie 2005, 120–157, and 166. About the role of the Delphic oracle, see Abramson 1978, 49. Euthymus is recognized as the earliest historical person for whom a cult in his lifetime is recorded, in ca. 450 BC, see Currie 2002, 43.

¹⁹ Currie 2002, 39–40; Currie 2005, 134.

²⁰ See this article, 13.

²¹ Verg. *Aen.* 7.803–817, 11.432–433, 11.498–868.

²² Antiochus was a Greek historian of the fifth century BC. His work on Italy (Jacoby, *FGH* 555, F 2–13) accounts for the foundations of several Greek cities in southern Italy. See also Musti 1988, 35–37, 40–42.

²³ Strabo 6.1.15; Noe 1931, 44; Lasserre 1967, 227, nts. 3–4. See also Greco 1999, 344.

Heroa for two more Greeks were to be found in Magna Graecia. In the area of Daunia in Apulia, on a hill called Drion.²⁴ The first was dedicated to Calchas, the seer who accompanied the Greek army to the Trojan War.²⁵ It was on top of the hill, was oracular, and was consulted by sacrificing a black ram and then sleeping in its hide. Δείκνυται δὲ τῆς Δαυνίας περὶ λόφον ᾧ ὄνομα Δρίον ἡρῶα, τὸ μὲν Κάλχαντος ἐπ' ἄκρα τῇ κορυφῇ (ἐναγίζουσι δ' αὐτῷ μέλανα κριὸν οἱ μαντευόμενοι, ἐγκοιμώμενοι ἐν τῷ δέρματι).²⁶ The *Scholia* to Lycophron's *Alexandra*,²⁷ tell us that Calchas, whose body was carried from Daunia by Heracles to be buried elsewhere, in a place called Argos,²⁸ still had his cenotaph in Italy: τέθαπται οὖν ὁ Κάλχας ἐν Ἀργεῖ, κενοτάφιον δὲ αὐτοῦ ἐστὶν ἐν Ἰταλίᾳ.²⁹ Thus he was not buried in his *heroon*, which was a cenotaph and probably erected at the place of his death.³⁰ Calchas' *heroon* was of exceptional power, with oracular activity, and related in this way to his profession.

The other *heroon* in Daunia belonged to Podalirius. It was near the foot of the hill of Drion, about one hundred *stadia* from the sea. A stream, which cured all animal diseases, flowed from it: τὸ δὲ Ποδαλειρίου κάτω πρὸς τῇ ῥίζῃ διέχον τῆς θαλάττης ὅσον σταδίου ἐκατόν· ῥεῖ δ' ἐξ αὐτοῦ ποτάμιον πάντα κες πρὸς τὰς τῶν θρεμμάτων νόσους.³¹ Podalirius was the son of Asclepius and brother of Machaon, and participated in the Trojan War as a warrior and army physician.³² According to Lycophron's *Scholia*, Podalirius later came to Italy, and died near the *heroon* of Calchas. Unlike Calchas, he was also buried there: περὶ Ποδαλειρίου τοῦ Ἀσκληπιάδου ὁ λόγος· φησὶν οὖν ὅτι τεθνήσκει ἐν Ἰταλίᾳ πλησίον τῶν κενοταφίων τοῦ Κάλχαντος τοῦ ὕφ' Ἡρακλέος ἐν Ἀργεῖ ἀναιρεθέντος κονδύλῳ. τέθαπται οὖν ὁ Κάλχας ἐν Ἀργεῖ, κενοτάφιον δὲ αὐτῷ ἐν Ἰταλίᾳ. ἐνταῦθα οὖν ὁ Ποδαλειρίου τέθαπται.³³

The same source tells us also that the Daunians used to sleep in the sheep hides actually in the *heroon* of Podalirius, in order to receive prophecies in dreams: εἰώθασιν οἱ Δαῦνιοι ἐν μῆλωταῖς καθεύδειν ἐν τῷ τάφῳ τοῦ Ποδαλειρίου καὶ κατ' ὕπνους λαμβάνειν χρησμούς ἐξ αὐτοῦ. This was precisely the custom described by Strabo of the *heroon* of Calchas. Either the practice was the same in the two *heroa* so close to each other, or the *Scholia* confused the information. If there were only one recipient of this distinction, my choice would be Podalirius, who must have inherited it from his father, Asclepius. The site seems to have been a rare, if not the only case in Italy associated with therapeutic incubation.³⁴ As people could sleep inside one or both of these *heroa*, there must have

²⁴ Monte Gargano in modern Apulia.

²⁵ Hom. *Il.* 2.300–30.

²⁶ Strabo 6.3.9.

²⁷ Lycophron was the author of the Hellenistic *Alexandra*, written in 197/6 BC, and the *Scholia* are dated to the eleventh century. For Lycophron and his work, see B. Zimmerman, *NP* 7 (1999), 4–5, 569–570, s.v. Lykophron.

²⁸ It remains unclear which one of the many Greek Argoi is meant here, perhaps the one in the Argolid as it is the most familiar in connection with Heracles. For the area of Daunia, see Greco 1992, 122–123.

²⁹ *Schol. Lycoph.* 1047b; Lasserre 1967, 186, nts. 2–3.

³⁰ Ricci 2006, 31, 39–40.

³¹ Strabo 6.3.9.

³² Hom. *Il.* 2.729–733, 11.832–5.

³³ *Schol. Lycoph.* 1047b. Podalirius seems to have appeared in the epigraphical material of Epidaurus in the fifth century BC. See M.E. Gorrini, 'Eroi salutari della Grecia continentale tra istanze politiche ed universali', *Annali di archeologia e storia antica* 9–10 (2002–2003), 182.

³⁴ Renberg 2006, 109–110, 140.

been at least an enclosure of some magnitude,³⁵ if not a sturdier construction. Strabo and the Scholia differ about the terminology also. Strabo uses the term *heroon*, but the Scholia *κενοτάφιον* for the *heroon* of Calchas, *τάφος* for the *heroon* of Podalirius. The choice of *κενοτάφιον* for Calchas' monument is quite natural, as he was buried elsewhere.

Strabo does not name the healing river in connection with the *heroon* of Podalirius. The Scholia know, however, that people used to bathe in the stream Althaenus, as did their sheep, and called on Podalirius in order to be cured. Therefore the stream got its name: *εἰώθασι δὲ καὶ ἐν τῷ πλησίον ποταμῷ Ἀλθαίνῳ ἀπολούεσθαι καὶ αὐτοὶ καὶ τὰ θρόγμματα αὐτῶν καὶ ἐπικαλεῖσθαι τὸν Ποδαλείριον καὶ ὑγιάζεσθαι, ὅθεν καὶ ὁ ποταμὸς ἔσχε τὴν ὀνομασίαν.*³⁶ This is an example of a *heroon*, in which oracular rites were practised, and people actually went to stay there to receive advice and prophecies. The healing river Althaenus, good for humans and animals alike, flowed from the *heroon* of Podalirius. I would like to interpret this as a sacred precinct with at least a stream, if not a river, flowing out. The *heroon* in its entirety cannot have been a very small place, as it had to cater for people sleeping and bathing.

Strabo's list of the six *heroa* and their heroes is quite disillusioning. Tityus was a rapist, though he was elevated somewhat through being killed by the divine twins. Dracon's *heroon* was used mostly as a reference to a battlefield, where Greeks fared badly, and Polites was killed by the indigenous people, towards whom he later bore ill will. Another hero was an indigenous ruler, famous for his cruelty. Most of the Strabonian heroes were connected to the Trojan expedition, perhaps reflecting the importance which the Trojan war had in Strabo's history.³⁷ These stories might reflect the troubled times of the fifth century BC, the growing restlessness of the indigenous people of the Apennines, and their disputes with the Greek inhabitants. Strabo also presented a heroized historical person. As topographical references for the Strabonian *heroa* we have "near a city, inside a city for an eponymous hero, on top of a hill, or at the foot of a hill". Of their immediate surroundings we are informed of wild olive trees and a healing stream. As the offering animal a black ram was used, and oracular visions were given in a dream.

Plutarch

Plutarch³⁸ records seven *heroa*, four in his *Vitae Parallelae* and three in the *Questiones Graecae*. The first two belong to Athenian mythology and the initial phases of Theseus' adventures on Crete. Sciros of Salamis, a local ruler and hero himself, gave Theseus experienced seamen to help him on his crossing to Crete. This favour was not totally altruistic, as one of the youths following Theseus was a grandchild of Sciros. Consequently, Nausithoos was a pilot and Faiax a lookout aboard Theseus' ship. How these two met their deaths is not known, but in due course Theseus built *heroa* for them at Phaleron, near

³⁵ Regarding the enclosures, see Abramson 1978, 111–113, 144.

³⁶ *Schol. Lycoph.* 1050.

³⁷ Clark 1999, 252–253, 300, 304.

³⁸ Plutarch's (47–120 AD) preserved works, *Vitae Parallelae* and *Moralia*, may not be very reliable historical sources, but they still include valuable information on Greek life and culture. Plutarch travelled widely, being well acquainted with Athens, and went to Delphi and Elis for religious festivals, Barrow 1967, 36. In those places he might have absorbed firsthand knowledge, though he is still considered only a secondary source, with useful information in the field of traditional Greek religion, especially in his two books of *Quaestiones*, Barrow 1967, 14–15; Babbitt 1927, xv.

the shrine of Sciros himself.³⁹ The Kybernesia, the Pilots' festival with games, was also celebrated in their honour, μαρτυρεῖν δὲ τούτοις ἡρώα Ναυσιδόου καὶ Φαίακος εἰσαμένους Θησέως Φαληροῖ πρὸς τῷ τοῦ Σκίρου [ἱερῷ], καὶ τὴν ἑορτὴν τὰ Κυβεργήσια φησιν ἐκείνοις τελεῖσθαι.⁴⁰ According to Plutarch all this information is proved by the *heroa*. Does this mean that the *heroa* themselves were already physical evidence enough of the matter, or that an inscription or perhaps a votive *pinakion* by the *heroa* told of the events? At its simplest, Plutarch's story reflects an ancient alliance between the Athenians and the Salaminians.

The *heroon* of Chalkodon was outside Athens, not far from the Piraeus Gate.⁴¹ The *heroon* is given only as a topographical reference to the graves of those who fell in the battle against the Amazons, καὶ τάφους τῶν πεσόντων περὶ τὴν πλατεῖαν εἶναι τὴν φέρουσιν ἐπὶ τὰς πύλας παρὰ τὸ Χαλκώδοντος ἡρώον, ὥς νῦν Πειραιϊκὰς ὀνομάζουσι.⁴² Chalkodon came from Euboea and was said to have been one of the heroes who joined Heracles in his campaign against Elis. Pausanias furnishes us with more information pertaining to the monuments in honour of Chalkodon, but is somewhat perplexed by chronological problems. How had Chalkodon been able to help Heracles, as, according to another tradition, he had already been killed in an earlier fight between the Thebans and the Euboeans, by the hand of Amphitryon, king of Thebes? These two myths also give Chalkodon tombs in two places.⁴³ One was in Achaea near the temple of Apollo Pythius, the river Aroanios and the spring called Oinoe. There all the other companions of Heracles who had died in the battle had been buried.⁴⁴ The other tomb was by a road to Chalkis in Euboea, where he was buried after the battle between the Thebans and the Euboeans.⁴⁵ Thus, both mythological versions gave Chalkodon a tomb near the site of his surmised death. The reason for a *heroon* in Athens for an originally Euboean hero remains unclear.

The next *heroon* is mentioned in connection with Aristides, the renowned Athenian statesman and general. On the eve of the battle of Plataea in 479 BC, he was advised by the oracle at Delphi that if the Athenians made vows to certain gods and sacrificed to the Plataean founder heroes Androcrates, Leucon, Peisandrus, Damocrates, Hypsion, Actaeon, and Polyeidus they would be victorious.⁴⁶ The hero Androcrates, first on the list, had a *heroon* in Hysiae, in Boeotia, on the right side of the road from Plataea to Thebes.⁴⁷ It stood at the foot of Mount Kithaeron, near the temple of Demeter and Kore, and was surrounded by a grove of dense and shady trees, ὅτι τῶν Ὑσιῶν πλησίον ὑπὸ τὸν

³⁹ Phaleron, as the oldest port of Athens, was supposedly also the port from which Theseus set sail for Crete, Paus. 1.1.2. The epic heroes were usually installed by the sea, Abramson 1978, 75.

⁴⁰ Plut. *Thes.* 17.7.2. Deubner 1932, 225. For Kybernesia, possibly celebrated in the month of Boedromion and connected with Poseidon, Parker 2005, 389, n. 10, 393, 410, 475.

⁴¹ The remains of the gate probably lie at Erysichthonos Street 15, Travlos 1971, 20, 159.

⁴² Plut. *Thes.* 27.5.1.

⁴³ Paus. 8.15.6, 9.17.3, 9.19.3. Cf. the case of Calchas, this article, 4–5.

⁴⁴ ἔστι δὲ αὐτόθι καὶ ἡρώων μνήματα, ὅσοι σὺν Ἡρακλεῖ στρατείας ἐπὶ Ἡλείους μετασχόντες οὐκ ἀπεσώθησαν οἴκαδε ἐκ τῆς μάχης. τέθαιπται δὲ Τελαμῶν ἐγγύτατα τοῦ ποταμοῦ τοῦ Ἀροανίου, ἀπωτέρω μικρὸν ἢ ἔστι τὸ ἱερὸν τοῦ Ἀπόλλωνος, Χαλκῶδων δὲ οὐ πόρρω κρήνης καλουμένης Οἰνός. Paus. 8.15.6.

⁴⁵ καὶ ὁδὸν τὴν ἐς Χαλκίδα Χαλκώδοντος μνήμᾳ ἔστιν. Paus. 9.19.3.

⁴⁶ Hdt. 8.95, 8.79–82, 9.28; Plut. *Arist.* 11.3–4. The exact question posed for consultation is not known, Parker 2005, 106.

⁴⁷ Thuc. 3.24.1; Tümpel, *PW* 1 (1894), 2149, s.v. Androkrates.

Κιθαιριῶνα ναός ἐστὶν ἀρχαῖος πάνυ Δήμητρος Ἐλευσινίας καὶ Κόρης προσαγορευόμενος. [...] ταύτη δ' ἦν καὶ τὸ τοῦ Ἀνδροκράτους ἡρώων ἐγγύς, ἄλσει πυκνῶν καὶ συσκίων δένδρων περιεχόμενον.⁴⁸ Herodotus knew of Androcrates being worshipped at Plataea and of his precinct at Kithairon.⁴⁹ The origins of this *heroon* certainly date back to at least early Classical times, and, important as it was, it was still remembered centuries later by Plutarch.

In the *Questiones Graecae*, three questions were put forward about *heroa*. Firstly, why could a herald not enter the *heroon* of Ocridion on the island of Rhodes? Τί δήποτε παρὰ Ῥοδίοις εἰς τὸ τοῦ Ὀκριδίωνος ἡρώων οὐκ εἰσέρχεται κῆρυξ;⁵⁰ The story went that Ocridion's bride was assaulted by her uncle Cercaphus with the help of a herald. Because of this injustice a custom was established among the Rhodians that a herald should not approach the *heroon* of Ocridion,⁵¹ probably a local hero and otherwise not known.

Secondly, why could women not enter the grove of the hero Eunostus in Tanagra, a city in Boeotia? Τίς Εὐνόστος ἦρως ἐν Τανάγρα καὶ διὰ τίνα αἰτίαν τὸ ἄλσος αὐτοῦ γυναιξὶν ἀνέμβατόν ἐστιν;⁵² Eunostus, a son of Elieus and Scia, was brought up by the nymph Eunosta. He lost his life through a deceitful woman, and therefore his *heroon* and grove were strictly guarded against entry by, or even approach of women, τοῦ δ' Εὐνόστου τὸ ἡρώων καὶ τὸ ἄλσος οὕτως ἀνέμβατον ἐτηρεῖτο καὶ ἀπροσπέλαστον γυναιξίν. For this episode Plutarch had two sources. The first, Cleidamus, related how people were informed if any woman had set foot within the τέμενος of Eunostus. He appeared to the people on his way to bathe in the sea, ἀπηντηκέναι αὐτοῖς τὸν Εὐνόστον ἐπὶ θάλατταν βαδίζοντα λουσόμενον, ὥς γυναικὸς ἐμβεβηκυίας εἰς τὸ τέμενος. Eunostus thus used sea water in his purification instead of a spring.⁵³ This decree of the Tanagrans was also related by Plutarch's other source, Diocles, in his treatise on the shrines of heroes: ἀναφέρει δὲ καὶ Διοκλῆς ἐν τῇ περὶ ἡρώων συντάγματι δόγμα Ταναγραίων, περὶ ὧν ὁ Κλείδαμος ἀπήγγειλεν. Distinctive to Eunostus' *heroon* was the grove, the precinct and the restriction of entrance to the male sex only.

The third question went, why was there a *heroon* near the shrine of the daughters of Leucippus? Διὰ τί ἐν Λακεδαιμόνι παρὰ τὸ τῶν Λευκιππίδων ἱερὸν ἵδρυνται τοῦ Ὀδυσσεύος ἡρώων; Temenus and Leagrus had together stolen the Palladium from Argos, but later, after a split between them, Leagrus carried the Palladium to Sparta. The local kings were delighted and set it near the shrine of the Leucippides. To ensure its safety and preservation they consulted the oracle of Delphi. The answer was that one of those who had stolen it should be made its guardian. That is why the Spartans constructed a *heroon* to Odysseus, who had a connection with the city through his marriage with a local girl, Penelope.⁵⁴

The obvious link between Plutarch's *heroa* is that they were all for mythological figures. The first four, Nausithoos, Phaeax, Chalkodon and Androcrates, had been essentially helpful heroes, who had offered their support as skilful sailors, active

⁴⁸ Plut. *Arist.* 11.6–8.

⁴⁹ καὶ τοῦ τεμένους τοῦ Ἀνδροκράτους τοῦ ἥρωος. Hdt. 9.25.

⁵⁰ Plut. *Quaest. Graec.* 297 C.

⁵¹ Rhodes seems to be the only city in which a herald rather than a parent or friend accompanied the bride to her new home, Boulogne 2002, 410, nts. 144–145.

⁵² Plut. *Quaest. Graec.* 300 F.

⁵³ In Eur. *Iph. T.* 1193 purification either in a spring or the sea are presented as alternatives.

⁵⁴ Plut. *Quaest. Graec.* 302 D; Boulogne 2002, 422–423, n. 266. For Penelope as the daughter of the Spartan Icarius, see Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.10.6; F. Graf, *NP* 5 (1998) 928, s.v. Ikarios 2.

warriors, or in Androcrates' case, even of the military opponent. Special regulations could be connected with the *heroa* of heroes with traumatic backgrounds, such as Ocriidion and Eunostus, whose myths both consisted of unhappy love stories. To understand the elaborate background of Odysseus' *heroon* in Sparta, a considerable amount of knowledge of mythological genealogies was surely needed. Plutarch's topographical references were "outside a city, along a road, by the foot of a mountain, or near a temple". The shady trees were once specifically mentioned. In one case festivities including games were organized, or restrictions to a sex or profession were given.

Pausanias

Attica

When visiting the Acropolis of Athens, Pausanias⁵⁵ reported that from the temple of Athena Nike the sea was visible, and that it was from there that Aegeus threw himself to his death, believing his son Theseus had perished. Pausanias further says that Aegeus had a *heroon* in Athens, without, however, specifying exactly where.⁵⁶ The Aegeion, the *heroon* of Aegeus, might thus have been quite near the temple of Athena Nike, but Pausanias' expression, οἱ παρὰ Ἀθηναίοις ἐστὶ καλούμενον ἡρώων Αἰγέως, leads to the hypothesis that it may not necessarily have been at the exact location of his suicide. It may rather have been in the region of the Ilissus and Olympieion, where Aegeus once had his residence.⁵⁷ Perhaps Pausanias did not see the *heroon*, or it no longer existed.

The next three *heroa* were outside Athens in the northwestern part of Attica. Near the Academy, in the area of Kolonos Hippios, there was a *heroon* exceptionally dedicated to several heroes: Besides the altar of Poseidon and Athena, both worshipped here as protectors of horses, there was a *heroon* of Pirithous, Theseus, Oedipus and Adrastus, καὶ βωμὸς Ποσειδῶνος Ἰππίου καὶ Ἀθηνᾶς Ἰππίας, ἡρώων δὲ Πειρίδου καὶ Θησέως Οἰδίποδός τε καὶ Ἀδράστου.⁵⁸ Theseus, the Attic hero proper, was the connecting link between all these heroes. He had helped Adrastus to flee from Argos to Athens, he had sworn an oath

⁵⁵ Pausanias is the constant companion of the researcher of hero-cults and *heroa*. As is well known, being a Greek from Asia Minor he aimed at describing the most notable monuments of all mainland Greece, and wrote probably between the years 155–175 AD. He made comments on religion, recording a large number of cult places, monuments, rituals and beliefs. His work includes more than a hundred heroes with a monument or remains, which he saw himself or was informed about, see K. Stratiki, 'Les héros grecs comme personnification de la liberté dans la Périégèse de Pausanias', *Bulletin de l'Association Guillaume Budé* (2003), 92–112. Unfortunately, most of these monuments are mentioned just in passing, with the simple statement that a hero or heroine has a *heroon*, a grave, or an altar, Habicht 1985, 4–5, 11; Ekroth 1999, 145; Cohen 2001, 93–94. Thus he very often limited himself to a simple mention of the existence of a *heroon*, and does not usually pay any attention to what the *heroa* actually looked like, whether there was an enclosure, a tumulus, a pit for sacrifices, or an altar, Frazer 1913, 60. Pausanias described the monuments he saw, constructed earlier and preserved to his time. He clearly valued the ancient more than the recent, hardly mentioning any building or work of art later than the third century BC, Habicht 1985, 23, 134; Ekroth 1999, 157–158. Pausanias is considered a valuable source for the Classical and Late Classical periods – both Larson 1995 and Ekroth 1999 – but he included also a large amount of Hellenistic history in his work. Even though his historical accuracy has frequently been attacked, the archaeological and topographical information is still considered important, Habicht 1985, 134; Elsner 1992, 3–4; Pretzler 2005, 236–237.

⁵⁶ Paus. 1.22.4–5.

⁵⁷ Casevitz, Pouilloux and Chamoux 1992, 199; Papakhatzis 1974, 321, n. 1.

⁵⁸ Paus. 1.30.4. *Heroa* were often situated in groups, Abramson 1978, 85.

of life-long friendship with Pirithous, and he was the one who had welcomed Oedipus to Athens. Kearns suggests that this *heroon* seems to have underworld associations.⁵⁹ The *heroon* could have been a simple enclosure, raised to protect statues and/or altars of all the four heroes, who may have represented the urban *nuclei*.⁶⁰

On the Sacred Way between Athens and Eleusis, by the river Cephissus,⁶¹ Pausanias saw a *heroon* for Hippothoon, after whom an Athenian tribe had been named. Hippothoon was the son of Poseidon and Alope, who was also granted the rulership of Eleusis. The *heroon* of Hippothoon along with the other eponymous heroes in this area was of great significance ever since the reforms of Cleisthenes,⁶² and he had been of old an essential part of the Eleusinian mysteries.⁶³ It was the only sacred place dedicated to an Athenian phyle which was outside the city.⁶⁴

Near the *heroon* of Hippothoon there was also one for Zarex, who was believed to have been instructed in music by Apollo himself. Pausanias, being unaware of a native Athenian hero called Zarex, thought that he was a Lacedaemonian who had arrived in Attica as a foreigner. Indeed, in the Laconian territory and near the sea, there was a town named after him.⁶⁵ Zarex might, however, have been a local hero with considerable musical skills, rather than an assimilation of the Lacedaemonian.⁶⁶ The roadsides were indeed propitious and common locations for *heroa*, and the sacred ways were especially suitable for the purpose.⁶⁷ Thus the Sacred Way to Eleusis with the famous religious processions must have been superior to any other roadside as a location for a *heroon*.

Pausanias saw a total of five *heroa* in Megara, or nearby. The *heroon* of Pandion was in the city, near the temple of Artemis and Apollo, and the tomb of Hippolyte, the Queen of the Amazons. His tomb, *τάφος*, however, was elsewhere, on a rock called Athena Aethyia.⁶⁸ When Pandion, the son of Cecrops and the ninth king of Athens, was overthrown, he fled to Megara, where he married the daughter of the local king.⁶⁹ The site of Pandion's *heroon* inside the city was very important, and an honour usually reserved for eponymous heroes or city founders. Perhaps in accordance with many other *heroa*, that in Megara was rather a cenotaph, as he seems to have been buried elsewhere,⁷⁰ possibly on the Athenian Acropolis. According to Pausanias, there was at least a statue of Pandion worth seeing; another statue was in the Agora.⁷¹

Two heroines, Ino and Iphigenia, also had *heroa* in Megara. That of Ino, daughter of Cadmus, was on the road to the Prytaneion, and it was surrounded by a fence of stones

⁵⁹ Kearns 1989, 193. Pirithous accompanied Theseus to the underworld.

⁶⁰ Musti and Breschi 1982, 380; Casevitz, Pouilloux and Chamoux 1992, 233. Innumerable altars and shrines were attracted to this area, Travlos 1971, 42.

⁶¹ Paus. 1.5.2, 1.38.4; Hsch. *Phot.*, s.v. Hippothoonteion.

⁶² Musti and Beschi 1982, 411. See also Kearns 1989, 193.

⁶³ Kron 1976, 180–182.

⁶⁴ U. Kron, *LIMC* 5 (1990), 468, s.v. Hippothoon.

⁶⁵ Paus. 1.38.4.

⁶⁶ Frazer 1913, 501; Musti and Beschi 1982, 411; Casevitz, Pouilloux and Chamoux 1992, 250.

⁶⁷ In addition to the *heroa* of Hippothoon and Zarex, Pausanias mentions a *τέμενος* of the hero Lakios and *τάφος* of Phylal by the Sacred Way, Paus. 1.37.2.

⁶⁸ Paus. 1.41.6.

⁶⁹ Paus. 1.5.3–4.

⁷⁰ Casevitz, Pouilloux and Chamoux 1992, 259. See also Papakhatzis 1974, 498, n. 4.

⁷¹ Paus. 1.5.2; Wycherley 1957, 86, no. 232, 89, no. 245; Kron 1976, 107–110.

and olive trees growing beside it: *κατὰ δὲ τὴν ἐς τὸ πρυτανεῖον ὁδὸν Ἴνοῦς ἐστὶν ἡρῶον, περὶ δὲ αὐτὸ θριγκὸς λίθων· πεφύκασι δὲ ἐπ' αὐτῷ καὶ ἐλαῖαι*.⁷² In Megara, Ino was offered an annual sacrifice, the nature of which is not mentioned. The fence of stones, *θριγκὸς*, could here signify an enclosure, even though the word more often designated a wall. It has been suggested that the shape of the *heroon* was primitive, and probably constructed over an older phase belonging perhaps to the mythical time of Lelex. The adjacent olive trees, obviously a small grove, is an interesting image in the middle of the city.⁷³

The topographical references for the *heroon* of Iphigenia seem to be the vicinity to the *heroon* of Ino, the Prytaneion, and the sanctuary of Artemis.⁷⁴ She was said to have died in Megara, though her complex mythology transmits many different versions. A *heroon* of Iphigenia near a temple of Artemis was a natural solution, however, since the characters were mythologically strongly bound together.⁷⁵

In Megara there is evidence of a sort of recycled use of a *heroon*: Near the *βουλευτήριον*, in the upper part of the agora, there was a *heroon* of Alcathous, son of Pelops, who had won the throne of Megara by his valour. In the days of Pausanias this *heroon* was used as an archive, which suggests that the *heroon* must have been a relatively large and covered building offering an interior suitable for storing documents.⁷⁶

The last *heroon* Pausanias saw in Megaris, was in the harbour town of Pagae. It was the *heroon* of Aegialeus, son of Adrastus, who died on the battlefield at Glisas. His relatives carried him to be buried in Pagae and the *heroon* was still called *Aigialeion* in Pausanias' days.⁷⁷ Aegialeus was the only Argive epigon to die on the battlefield against the Thebans, and his tomb is another example of a real or mythical tomb inside a city.

Corinthia

In the area of Corinth Pausanias reported three *heroa*. The first was that of Aratus in the agora of Sicyon by the sanctuary of Πειθῶ, Persuasion, and in front of the former house of the tyrant Cleon. Aratus, a remarkable Sicyonian politician and general (271–213 BC) restored equality of political rights to the Sicyonians and induced them to join the Achaean League. He was poisoned by Philip V in Aegium, but was carried to Sicyon to be buried there. In Pausanias' time his *heroon* was still visible; he praised Aratus as the man of the greatest achievements of all contemporary Greeks.⁷⁸ Plutarch in his *Life of Aratus* continues that the Sicyonians wanted to bury Aratus inside their city walls, which according the laws was forbidden. They asked advice from the Delphic oracle, who granted permission.⁷⁹ With great joy they buried him in the city, in a visible place, calling him their founder and saviour. In the time of Plutarch the place was still called the *Arateion*, and twice a year, on the day Aratus had freed the city from its tyranny and on the

⁷² Paus. 1.42.7.

⁷³ Musti and Beschi 1982, 431; Casevitz, Pouilloux and Chamoux 1992, 263.

⁷⁴ Paus. 1.43.1. The *πρυτανεῖον* was in the agora of Megara, Papakhatsis 1974, 505.

⁷⁵ See also Musti and Beschi 1982, 264, and Hollinshead 1985, 428.

⁷⁶ Paus. 1.43.4; Musti and Beschi 1982, 433–434; Casevitz, Pouilloux and Chamoux 1992, 266.

⁷⁷ Paus. 1.44.4.

⁷⁸ Paus. 2.8.1, 2.9.4.

⁷⁹ Alcock 1991, 458, n. 44.

day he was born, sacrifices were made to him. The ceremonial rites were quite remarkable, as Aratus had a priest of his own, hymns were sung by the *kitharodoi*, and the gymnasiarch, boys, ephebes, members of the boule, and whoever so desired, took part in the festive procession. Plutarch observed that slight traces of some of the honours were still preserved.⁸⁰ On the reverse of a Sicyonian coin (Fig. 1.) from the reign of Caracalla as co-ruler (202–205) an interesting monument is depicted. It is a roofed construction supported by four pillars on a rounded pedestal. In the midst there seems to be a statue. This may be an illustration of the *heroon* of Aratus,⁸¹ which in that case had survived even after the time of Pausanias.⁸²



Fig. 1.

On the left side of the road from Mycenae to Argos there was a *heroon* of Perseus, ἐκ Μυκηνῶν δὲ ἐς Ἄργος ἐρχομένοις ἐν ἀριστερᾷ Περσέως παρὰ τὴν ὁδὸν ἔστιν ἡρώων, where the neighbouring people paid him honours.⁸³ Perseus, son of Zeus, was the hero of Argos, and also the founder of Mycenae.⁸⁴ In this case the city founder had not been granted a *heroon* inside the city, but by the road leading to it.

Descending to the city of the Epidaurians there was a place called Hymethion, where wild olive trees grew, and Hymetho, the daughter of Temenus, had her *heroon*. She had been killed in a rivalry between her brothers and her husband Deiphontes, who carried her dead body to the place where the *heroon* was later built, and various honours were granted her, καὶ οἱ ποιήσαντες ἡρώων τιμὰς καὶ ἄλλας δεδώκασιν. A custom was established that nobody should carry home or use for any purpose the twigs and brushwood that broke off the olive or other trees that grew there. These must be left at the spot instead, to be sacred to Hymetho: ἐπὶ τοῖς πεφυκόσιν ἐλαίοις, καὶ εἰ δὴ τι ἄλλο δένδρον ἔσω, καθέστηκε νόμος τὰ θραυόμενα μηδὲνα ἐς οἶκον φέρεσθαι μηδὲ χρᾶσθαι σφισιν ἐς μηδέν, κατὰ χώραν δ' αὐτοῦ λείπονσιν ἱερὰ εἶναι τῆς Ὑρνηθοῦς.⁸⁵ Pausanias dedicates an unusually long passage to the myth of Hymetho, basing his information clearly on oral tradition. We get the impression that the *heroon* was outside the city, probably by the road leading to Epidaurus. The story perhaps reflects the fifth- and fourth-century tribal structure of Argos, and Hymethia as eponym of the phyle Hymethioi.⁸⁶ She was also worshipped in Argos, where she had a cenotaph.⁸⁷

⁸⁰ Plut. *Arat.* 53.

⁸¹ Musti and Torelli 1986, 245 and Imhoof, Blumer and Gardner 1964, 28, pl. H, I–II.

⁸² I am indebted to Dr. Tuukka Talvio, The Coin Cabinet of The National Museum of Finland, Dr. Michel Amandry, Bibliothèque nationale de France, and Dr. Alan Walker, LHS Numismatics Ltd, Zürich, for the information and help in tracing the coin.

⁸³ Paus. 2.18.1

⁸⁴ Epigraphical evidence of the magistrates and the cult of Perseus, see *IG* IV 493; *SEG* 11, 298; *SEG* 22, 260. Musti and Torelli 1986, 270; Papakhatzis 1989, 149, n. 4.

⁸⁵ Paus. 2.28.3–7; Musti and Torelli 1986, 306–307.

⁸⁶ Musti and Torelli 1986, 306–307; Larson 1995, 141–144.

⁸⁷ Paus. 2.23.3. For the non-Dorian aspect of Hymetho, E.Kearns, 'The nature of heroines', in S. Blundell and M. Williamson (eds.), *The Sacred and the Feminine in Ancient Greece*, London and New York 1998, 106–107.

Laconia

Laconia was the area where Pausanias met with the greatest number of *heroa*, dedicated both to mythological and historical individuals.⁸⁸ In Sparta along the Aphetais road, leading from the agora to the acropolis in a north-south direction, there were three *heroa*, two of which were dedicated to local heroes, Iops and Lelex, and one for the originally Argive seer Amphiaraus. Not far from them was the temenos of the chthonic deity Poseidon Tainarios.⁸⁹ Both the Aphetais road and the temenos of Poseidon are among the few locations mentioned in the ancient sources which have also been identified in modern Sparta. The *temenos* of Poseidon is, according to present knowledge, immediately on the eastern side of the Apetais road.⁹⁰ The ruins of the three *heroa*, however, have not been located.

More *heroa* to the mythical figures Hippolytus, son of Theseus, and Pleuron, who was remarkable for Aetolian relations, and the Arcadian Aulon, all reflecting ancient wars and alliances, were seen by Pausanias near the temples of Zeus Tropaeus, Dionysus Kolonatas, and Zeus Euanemus.⁹¹ None of them has been located, even though the whereabouts of the temples, such as that of Dionysus, is known to be just to the east of the city centre.⁹²

Beside the *leskhe* decorated with paintings, probably the construction for the funerary cult of the Aegeids,⁹³ was the *heroon* of Cadmus, son of Agenor, and the *heroon* of Oeolycus, son of Thera and Aegeus. The *heroa* were said to have been built by the descendants of Aegeus,⁹⁴ who also built a *heroon* for Amphilocheus, but Pausanias does not give its whereabouts. In the southwest corner of the agora, not far from the theatre, were the sanctuary of Poseidon Genethlios and the *heroa* of Cleodaeus, son of Hyllus, and of Oebalus, both mythical kings of Sparta. The Asclepieion, the most remarkable of the Spartan sanctuaries, had on its left side the *heroon* of Teleclus,⁹⁵ a historical personage and a Spartan king from the eighth century BC.⁹⁶

Alcon, son of Hippocoon, a king of Sparta, had a *heroon* at the start of the road called Dromos, situated further from the agora in the northwestern part of the city.⁹⁷ Beside it was the sanctuary of Poseidon Domatites, and the gymnasium called Platanistas, around which tall plane trees grew. It was surrounded by a strait, making it island-like and accessible only via two bridges. At Platanistas there was also a *heroon* to a historical individual, Cyniska, daughter of Archidamus II, a king of Sparta.⁹⁸ She was

⁸⁸ A good map with the buildings and a reconstruction of Pausanias' route in Sparta, in K.-W. Welwei, *NP* 11 (2001), sv. Sparta, 787–790. See also Kourinou 2000, ch. 2, and Abramson 1978, 32.

⁸⁹ Paus. 3.12.5; Musti and Torelli 1991, 201.

⁹⁰ In the northwest corner of the modern block number 36, Kourinou 2000, 238. Regarding the unclear ancient topography of Sparta in general, see M. Osanna, 'Il Peloponneso', in *Greco* 1999, 153–154.

⁹¹ Paus. 3.12.9, 3.13.7–8.

⁹² Musti and Torelli 1991, 209; Kourinou 2000, 239. See also K.-W. Welwei, *NP* 11 (2001), s.v. Sparta, 787–790, no. 10.

⁹³ Musti and Torelli 1991, 221.

⁹⁴ Paus. 3.15.8; Musti and Torelli 1991, 221.

⁹⁵ Paus. 3.15.10; Musti and Torelli 1991, 222. Cf. K.-W. Welwei, *NP* 11 (2001), s.v. Sparta, 787, no. 20.

⁹⁶ K.-W. Welwei, *NP* 12 (2002), 91, s.v. Teleklos. Spartan kings were more or less all heroes, Abramson 1978, 32.

⁹⁷ Musti and Torelli 1991, 214–215.

⁹⁸ Paus. 3.14.7–8; Musti and Torelli 1991, 218.

the first woman to breed horses and the first to win chariot races at Olympia, in 396 and 392.⁹⁹ More *heroa* were to be found in Platanistas, behind a portico, where other sons of Hippocoon were paid honours as heroes.¹⁰⁰

In northeastern Sparta, in an area called Limnae, in the direction of the gates, there was a *heroon* of Chilon, a Spartan statesman and ephor in 556 or 555 BC. He was said to be one of the Seven Sages,¹⁰¹ and was consequently honoured in Sparta as a hero. Another *heroon* nearby was dedicated to Athenodorus, one of those who had accompanied Dorieus to Sicily in a colonial expedition ca. 510.¹⁰² The only securely identified monument so far in the area of Limnae is the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia.¹⁰³

Along the river Eurotas, near the temenos of the conspicuous statesman Lycurgus,¹⁰⁴ there was a *heroon* of the local hero Astrabacus, son of Irbus.¹⁰⁵ Its remains lie a few metres south of the altar and sanctuary of Lycurgus.¹⁰⁶ In the Hellenistic tradition Astrabacus was connected with the rituals of Artemis Orthia.¹⁰⁷

The last *heroon* Pausanias saw in Sparta was that of Lacedaemon, a mythical ancestor, and son of Zeus and Taygete, who renamed the country after himself, and its principal city after his wife, Sparta.¹⁰⁸ The *heroon* of Lacedaemon was situated in a place called Alesiae, which is in the direction of the Taygetos from the sanctuary of Poseidon Gaeochus. In the vicinity there was also a river called Phellia, now named Riviotissa.¹⁰⁹ Of all the Spartan heroes the most eponymous had his *heroon* in the western part of the city, presumably by the roadside.

Elis, Arcadia, Boeotia and Phocis

Elis

Pausanias used the word *heroon* only once in his second book about Elis, the *heroon* being that of Polites, in Brettium,¹¹⁰ in Italy. Pausanias could not omit relating the victories and deeds of Polites, and his story differs to some extent from that of Strabo. Polites got drunk and raped a local maiden, for which the inhabitants stoned him to death. Odysseus, caring nothing for his friend, sailed away. The ghost of Polites started to kill people of Temesa, who after having consulted the Delphic oracle, erected a *temenos* dedicated solely to him, built a temple, *ναὸς*, and annually gave him the fairest maiden for his wife. Following these measures, the people of Temesa did not suffer any more terror from the hero. When the boxer Euthymus, a native of Locri Epizephyrii, came to Temesa and saw the sacrifice taking place, he saved the maiden. Then he fought Polites, and the hero was driven out of

⁹⁹ Paus. 3.15.1.

¹⁰⁰ Paus. 3.15.2.

¹⁰¹ K.-W. Welwei and W. D. Furley, *NP* 2 (1997), 1121–1122, s.v. Khilon; Wace 1937, 217–220; Stibbe 1991, 9–10; Stibbe 1996, 204–221, 224–225; Musti and Torelli 1991, 224; Kourinou 2000, 148.

¹⁰² Paus. 3.16.4; K.-W. Welwei, *NP* 3 (1997), 778, s.v. Dorieos.

¹⁰³ Kourinou 2000, 149.

¹⁰⁴ Around 650 BC, Hdt. 1.65–66; Plut. *Lyc.* 31.3.

¹⁰⁵ Paus. 3.16.6.

¹⁰⁶ Wide 1893, 279–280; Wace 1905–1906, 293; Kourinou 2000, 149–150; Musti and Torelli 1986, 225–226.

¹⁰⁷ F. Graf, *NP* 2 (1997), 120, s.v. Astrabakos.

¹⁰⁸ Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.10.3; Paus. 3.1.1–3.10.2, 9.35.1.

¹⁰⁹ Paus. 3.20.3; Musti and Torelli 1991, 254.

¹¹⁰ The Romans and Strabo used the form Bruttium.

the land and sank into the sea, and the people of Temesa were freed of the hero for good, but Euthymus married the maiden.¹¹¹ This story shows that heroes were capable of evil and needed to be conciliated. The human sacrifice and the subsequent liberation of it was perhaps used as an explanation why a *heroon* was not taken care of any longer.

In this first part of the story, which had reached Pausanias as oral tradition, *τόδε μεν ἤκουσα*,¹¹² he called the *heroon* a *ναὸς*.¹¹³ Later he elaborated that he himself saw a copy of the ancient painting, *γραφῆς μίμημα ἀρχαίας*, depicting the events. In the picture was the personification of Sybaris, a river called Calabrus, a spring called Lyca (or Calyca), a *heroon*,¹¹⁴ and the city of Temesa. In the centre was the unpleasant-looking demon of Polites, cast out by Euthymus, and in this instance called Lyca (or Alybas). Here we have a pictorial description of the hero, and probably also of the *heroon* itself with its essential elements, the construction, the river and a spring. The hero-demon was horribly black and wore a wolfskin around him: *χρόαν τε δεινῶς μέλας καὶ τὸ εἶδος ἅπαν ἐς τὰ μάλιστα φοβερός, λύκου δὲ ἀμπίσχετο δέρμα ἐσθῆτα· ἐτίθετο δὲ καὶ ὄνομα Λύκαν*.¹¹⁵

This appearance is comparable with Pausanias' description of the paintings of the Cnidian lesche in Delphi and the Demon Eurynomus,¹¹⁶ painted by Polygnotus of Thassos, of the same date as Euthymus the boxer. Another comparison comes from the Tarquinian tomb of the Blue Demons with their blue-grey incarnate and frightening appearance, dated somewhat later, to the end of the fifth century BC.¹¹⁷ The whole event must have been of importance in Temesa's history, and the tradition of some duration, as it had been transmitted to Pausanias' times as a copy of the original document. Originally the myth reflected the troubled times of the fifth century between Locri Epizephyrii, Croton, Syracuse and Temesa.¹¹⁸

Arcadia

In Arcadia Pausanias saw three *heroa*. In the agora of Mantinea was a *heroon* of Podares, who had been killed in the battle against the Thebans under Epaminondas in 362 BC. According to Pausanias, there was also an epitaph, *τοῦ τάφου τὸ ἐπίγραμμα*, changed three generations before his time in order to apply to a descendant of Podares of Roman citizenship and with the same name, from the latter half of the first century AD. In the time of Pausanias the elder Podares was still honoured by the Mantineans as the third bravest man in the battle,¹¹⁹ and his *heroon* had been erected to remind the citizens of Mantinea of his bravery and his heroic death in the battle. Some physical material

¹¹¹ Paus. 6.6.4–11.

¹¹² Paus. 6.6.11.

¹¹³ There is another case (3.15.7), where Pausanias uses the word *naos* of the shrine of a hero. It was the *ναὸς* of Hipposthenes, an athlete who had won many prizes in wrestling. He was worshipped in accordance with an oracle like Poseidon, possibly through their connections to horses.

¹¹⁴ The word *heroon* in this connection is an emendation, not generally accepted, and the corrupted passage is read as Hera. Considering, however, the importance of the *heroon* in the story I prefer the emendation *heroon*. More about the painting, which Pausanias may have seen in Olympia, and the text emendations, in Currie 2002, 28–29.

¹¹⁵ Paus. 6.6.11; Pretzler 2005, 235, 245–249.

¹¹⁶ Paus. 10.28.7.

¹¹⁷ See e.g. M. Cataldi Dini, 'Tomba dei Demoni Azzurri', in M.A. Rizzo (ed.), *Pittura etrusca al Museo di Villa Giulia*, Rome 1989, 150–153.

¹¹⁸ Maddoli, Nafissi and Saladino 1999, 221–222.

¹¹⁹ Paus. 8.9.10; Pretzler 2005, 240.

may be connected with this *heroon*. A rectangular shrine, oriented to the East, has been discovered in the local agora, immediately northeast of the skene of the theatre. Inside this shrine is a rectangular tomb covered by a plate and two urns containing ashes, indicating that two descendants were buried near Podares. The inscription mentioned by Pausanias could have been a stele in front of the monument. Furthermore, from a Byzantine church fragments of two recycled roof tiles with the inscriptions ΠΟΔΑΡΙ and ΠΟΔΑΡΕΟΣ have been discovered.¹²⁰ This points to the *heroon* having been a covered structure.

The Podares of the battle of 362 BC was a historical person, elevated to heroic status and worshipped in his *heroon*, in a prominent place, in the agora and by the theatre of the city. The cult had been preserved through the Hellenistic period until Roman times, his descendants having been willing to take their share of his past glory and exploit his resting place practically. This incident may have been an early reflection of the adapted ruler cult.¹²¹ The later Podares' wanted, as a Roman citizen, to underline his remarkable ancestry.

In the city of Psophis, near the sanctuary of Aphrodite Erycine, there had once been the *heroa* of Promachus and Echephron, sons of Psophis, and founders of the sanctuary. Pausanias saw only the ruins of the sanctuary, but the *heroa* were no longer visible.¹²² Promachus and Echephron go back to the dawn of mythology as the sons of the eponymous founder of the city, who for their part had founded the local cult of Eryx, with notable diffusion. It may be that no *heroon* ever existed for the two brothers, but that Pausanias invented it deducing the custom from other places.¹²³

Boeotia

In his chapters on Boeotia, Pausanias uses the word *heroon* three times. Inside the city of Plataea, near the altar and the image of Zeus Eleutherios was the *heroon* of Plataea, the daughter of King Asopus. The city was named after her, whereas the king had given his name to the local river.¹²⁴ In this case the eponymous heroine was customarily honoured in the city centre.

In Thebes, in front of the Proetidian gate, there was a gymnasium named after Iolaus, a native of Thebes and nephew of Heracles,¹²⁵ who had helped him in some of his deeds, and who had died at Sardis. By the gymnasium was the *heroon* of Iolaus and the local hippodrome.¹²⁶ Pausanias leaves us without any description of the *heroon* itself, or the possible cult, but in the area of the gymnasium a construction, probably belonging to the *heroon*, has been discovered.¹²⁷ This is one of the many examples where a *heroon* was attracted to the area by a gymnasium.

The third *heroon* in the territory of Boeotia was dedicated to Cecrops, son of Pandion, in the city of Haliartus,¹²⁸ west of Thebes. It may have been founded in 171 BC,

¹²⁰ Casevitz, Jost and Marcade 1998, 178–179; Moggi and Osanna 2003, 340–341. See also Papkhatzis 1989, 209, n. 5.

¹²¹ Alcock 1991, 457.

¹²² Paus. 8.24.6–7.

¹²³ Casevitz, Jost and Marcade 1998, 207; Moggi and Osanna 2003, 398–399.

¹²⁴ Paus. 9.1.1, 9.2.7.

¹²⁵ In many places Iolaos shares an altar with Heracles and is addressed as his *parastates*, Plut. *Mor.* 492 C.

¹²⁶ Paus. 9.23.1; Lefkowitz 1975, 181, n. 20.

¹²⁷ Papkhatzis 1981, 145–146, n. 1.

¹²⁸ Paus. 9.33.1.

after Haliartus had been given to the Athenians by the Romans in the Third Macedonian War. The Athenians would in that instance have erected the *heroon* in honour of the founder hero of their own city.¹²⁹

Phocis

Turning to the region of Phocis, Pausanias saw only one *heroon*, in the territory of Daulis, at a place called Tronis. It was dedicated to the local founder-hero, whose origin was of some ambiguity, as can be seen even by the name: Some claimed he was Xanthippus, a distinguished soldier, while others claimed that he was Phocus, son of Ornytion, and grandson of Sisyphus. He was worshipped daily: ἔχει δ' οὖν ἐπὶ ἡμέρῃ τε πάσῃ τιμὰς, with victims whose blood was poured into the grave through a hole, and their flesh was consumed on the spot.¹³⁰ This seems to have been an unusual way of honouring a hero, as customarily the offerings were burned *in toto*, but here the hero was given blood instead.¹³¹ Pausanias varied his terminology, initially using the word *heroon*, but when describing the ritual he called it a *τάφος*.

Summary

The heroes

The objects of *heroa* noted by Pausanias were for the most part mythological figures, such as kings or city founders, or their sons and daughters. Their origins often disappear into the distant dawn of myths, but for our purpose it is important to note that their cults lived through the late Classical and Hellenistic periods to be still remembered, at least by name, in the Roman period. Some of these heroes were of local nature, others of more general interest among the Greeks. A conciliatory *heroon* was also created for a rapist.¹³² Pausanias gives the names of six historical individuals who were honoured with *heroa*. From the Archaic period we have three individuals from Sparta, the king Teleclus from the eighth century, the statesman and ephor Chilon in 556 or 555 BC, and Athenodorus, one of the colonists to Sicily ca. 510. In their persons the foremost matters of a Greek society's concerns during those centuries, communal, social and colonial, were crystallized. From the late Classical period we have two individuals. The first is a Spartan king's daughter, Cyniska, a horse breeder and winner of the Olympic races in 396 and 392. The other was Podares of Mantinea, a warrior killed in the battle against the Thebans in 362. Cyniska's elevation to heroic status was surely partly due to her sex. The Sicyonian politician and general Aratus was the only historical person among the Pausanian heroes from the Hellenistic period, from 213 BC.

The heroa

While the ordinary dead had their final resting places in the cemeteries outside the city walls, the heroes could be worshipped either at their real tombs or at cenotaphs, in virtually any place of significance. The city-founders were entitled to be buried in the

¹²⁹ Papakhatzis 1981, 208, n.1.

¹³⁰ Paus. 10.4.10. According to Papakhatzis 1981, 283, n. 2 "daily" meant worshipping "any day".

¹³¹ Hitzig 1910, 636–637. For the possible identification of the hero and the topography of Daulis, see McInerney 1997, 196–201.

¹³² Cf. those of Tityus in Euboea, and Panopeus, and that of Drimacus in Chios, this article, 2, 5, 19.

agora, a tradition which continued down to the Hellenistic period.¹³³ Within the cities, common locations for *heroa* were in or by the gymnasia, by the city gates, and also near the important public buildings, such as the prytaneion, theatre or *lesche*; a *heroon* could also be converted to other uses. Pausanias described many *heroa* as connected to the shrines or temples of the Olympian gods, which are listed here according to their frequency: Poseidon, Zeus, Dionysus, Artemis and Apollo, Aphrodite and Asclepius. Persuasion, an abstract deity typical to Hellenistic religion, is also known to have had a topographical link to a *heroon*. Roads or crossroads within the city or between cities were also favoured locations for *heroa*.

For the immediate surroundings of the *heroa*, water, in the shape of a spring or river, played an important role. Also, a grove of olive, plane or some other not clearly specified trees seems to have been a usual element of the *heroa*. These elements were essential parts of the literary term known in Latin as *locus amoenus*¹³⁴, so much praised in the pastoral literature.¹³⁵ Enclosures made of stones are also noted, or can be understood from the context. In two cases we can deduce that the *heroon* was a covered construction, as Alcathous' domicile was later used as the archives, and in the case of Podares from the evidence of inscribed roof tiles.

The rituals by a *heroon* could take place at undefined intervals, from once or twice a year to daily, which could perhaps be interpreted as on any day.

The terminology

In the whole of his work Pausanias notes more than one hundred heroes with a physical monument or remains, of which he uses variously the words *τάφος*, *μνημα*, *ιερόν*, *τέμενος*, *ναός*, *βωμός* or *ἡρώων*.¹³⁶ The problem of Pausanias' religious terminology comes to light especially in his book on Messenia, in which the word *heroon* was not used at all. In the area there were, however, several tombs or shrines of heroes.¹³⁷ Pausanias' impression of Sparta, on the other hand, as being full of *heroa*, might have been due to the city's many two-storey tombs.¹³⁸ Essentially, it seems that Pausanias' *heroon* was not synonymous with the words *μνημα* and *τάφος*. He used the two latter words more often than the term *heroon*, also of regular burials. Thus, a *heroon* must have had a special meaning, being more than just a grave or tomb. (Perhaps the built construction was more monumental.) All three terms, *ἡρώων*, *τάφος* and *μνημα*, denoted, however, a place where cult activity for the hero could be practised.¹³⁹ Accordingly, the more suitable synonyms for a *ἡρώων* could be *ιερόν* and in some few cases also *ναός*.

¹³³ Schol. Pind. *Ol.* 1.149; Abramson 1978, 68–70.

¹³⁴ *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*, 1962–1963, sv. *amoenus* (*de locorum pulchritudine*).

¹³⁵ For the Greek *ἄλσος* also as synonymous to the shrine or temple, see U. Sinn, *ThesCRA* 4 (2005), 12–14, s.v. Representations of Cult Places.

¹³⁶ *τάφος*: 1.29.2, 1.42.4, 1.43.3, 2.15.3, 2.29.9, 7.20.5; *μνημα*: 1.43.3, 2.29.8, 2.33.3, 3.19.6, 8.4.9, 9.17.4, 9.33.1; *ἡρώων*: 1.11.2, 1.22.6, 1.30.4, 1.38.4, 1.41.6–7, 1.42.1, 1.43.1, 1.43.4, 1.44.4–5, 2.8.1, 2.9.4, 2.9.6, 2.18.1, 2.28.7, 3.12.5, 3.12.9, 3.13.8, 3.14.7, 3.15.1, 3.15.2, 3.15.8, 3.15.10, 3.16.4, 3.16.6, 3.20.3, 6.6.11, 8.9.9, 8.24.7, 9.23.1, 9.33.1, 10.4.10; *ιερόν*: 1.36.1, 3.19.6. *τέμενος*: 1.37.2, 2.18.1, 10.8.7; *ναός*: 1.37.4, 2.2.1, 3.19.8, 3.24.2; *βωμός*: 1.1.4, 1.26.5, 1.34.3, 1.35.3, 2.1.3, 2.15.3, 2.18.1, 2.26.8, 9.32.2, 10.33.6. The list is based, with some additions, on Abramson 1978, 168.

¹³⁷ The most recent study of the heroes of Messenia has been written by P. Themelis, *Ἡρώες και ἡρώα στη Μεσσήνη*, Athens 2000.

¹³⁸ Raftopoulou 1999, 134.

¹³⁹ Larson 1995, 12–13 shares the same opinion, Abramson 1978, 90–91 presents the opposite view.

Athenaeus

According to one of Athenaeus¹⁴⁰ sources, Demochares,¹⁴¹ who was a relative of Demosthenes, Demetrius Poliorcetes (336–283 BC) regarded the temples of Aphrodite Leaina and Aphrodite Lamia, and the altars, *heroa* and libations to Burichus,¹⁴² Adeimantus,¹⁴³ and Oxythemis¹⁴⁴ utterly shameful and humiliating.¹⁴⁵ The Athenians, it seems, had gone to some lengths to please Poliorcetes by constructing these monuments around 306 BC¹⁴⁶. The temples indicated his two mistresses, Lamia and Leaina,¹⁴⁷ and the *heroa* his three satellites, in whose honour even paeans were provisionally chanted. Here we have *heroa* that were dedicated to mortal people still living, and whose virtue was to be intimate with a ruler. Singing paeans, an honour originally reserved for the gods, was gradually introduced to other festive occasions, such as weddings and symposia. In the Hellenistic period the objects of paeans could also be the rulers,¹⁴⁸ and Demetrius himself had been spontaneously hailed as a divinity ca. 304.¹⁴⁹ In the late fourth century the time was, however, not really ripe to enlarge this custom to the friends of a ruler by heroization.¹⁵⁰

Athenaeus also told of a man who, after having had an awful bath in a bath-house supplying only cold water, saw a lavishly decorated *heroon* beside it and: οὐ θαυμάζω, ἔφη, ὅτι πολλοὶ ἀνέκεινται πίνακες· ἕκαστον γὰρ τῶν λουομένων ὡς σωθέντα ἀνατιθέναι. “No wonder”, he said, “that there are many votive tablets, because everybody dedicates them for surviving the bath”.¹⁵¹ Here we have the topographical reference to a bath-house as a building near the *heroon*. Perhaps this passage is also a criticism of the cult of heroes, in which the dead had it better than the living. For the time span, the story may refer to the fifth century BC and old fashioned bathing with cold water.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁰ Athenaeus (ca. 170–230 AD), a Greek from Naukratis in Egypt, lived in Rome where he wrote a historical work, *Deipnosophistae*. A minor part of the work is preserved only in summary, the rest is apparently complete. Athenaeus’ protagonists display considerable knowledge of Greek culture, and he cited about 1250 authors, favoured Hellenistic historians, and seems to have used literary sources not known from any other writer. Without Athenaeus we would have missed large parts of Hellenistic life and history, Gulick 1961, Introduction, passim; Bowie 1970, 3–4; Walbank 2000, 161–162. Athenaeus and Pausanias may discuss the same things, but focus on their objects in different ways. Pausanias does not attempt to impress his readers with his learning, but trusts his own observations and personal inspection, Arafat 2000, 191–202. Athenaeus, as a librarian, had access to many sources, which he energetically used to display the Greek past to Roman philhellenes.

¹⁴¹ He wrote a historical work ca. 322–288 BC, K. Meister, *NP* 3 (1997), 449–450, s.v. Demokhares 3.

¹⁴² He was one of Poliorcetes’ generals, Diod. Sic. 20.52.4; Wilcken, *PW* 3 (1899), 1067, s.v. Burikhos.

¹⁴³ He was from Lampsacus, Strab. 13.1.19; Ath. 6.253a, 6.255c.

¹⁴⁴ He was from Larissa, H. Beck, *NP* 9 (2000), 124, s.v. Oxythemis. Athen. 13.578b and 14.614f.

¹⁴⁵ Ath. 6.253a; Habicht 1956, 213–218.

¹⁴⁶ Price 1984, 34; Habicht 1994, 71.

¹⁴⁷ Ath. 13.577c–d; Canfora 2001, 609, n. 4.

¹⁴⁸ Canfora 2001, 609, n. 6; L. Käppel, *NP* 9 (2000), 149, s.v. Paian.

¹⁴⁹ E. Badian, *NP* 3 (1997), 428, s.v. Demetrios Poliorketes. Also when coming to Athens from Kerkyra in 291 BC. See Ath. 6.253 c–f, and A. Chaniotis, ‘The Divinity of Hellenistic Rulers’, in A. Erskine (ed.), *A Companion to the Hellenistic World*, Oxford 2003, 431–445.

¹⁵⁰ Comparing the divinization of a ruler with heroization, Sculler and Leschhorn 2004, 151, 154. For the exact years of the honours towards Demetrius, see Habicht 1956, 48–55.

¹⁵¹ Ath. 8.351c.

¹⁵² Canfora 2001, 869, n. 4.

Another of Athenaeus' sources, a certain Nymphodorus,¹⁵³ told of what had once happened on the island of Chios. There was a runaway slave, Drimachus, presumably a former soldier,¹⁵⁴ who founded a safe haven for runaway slaves, becoming their leader. He was an early example of an advocate of slaves, and made a pact with the unreliable Chians with certain conditions. After his death the Chians had further problems with their slaves, and they had to renew the pact with him by establishing a *heroon* in his honour. The *heroon* was named ἡρώος εὐμενοῦς, of the Kind-hearted Hero. Certainly up to the days of the narrator, the end of the third century BC, the runaway slaves still offered the hero the first fruits of everything they had stolen. Drimachus had also the ability to appear to the Chians in their sleep and warn them about the plots of their slaves. As thanks the people went to his *heroon* and made him offerings.¹⁵⁵ In this case the *heroon* was erected for permanent conciliation. The object of the cult was a person of low rank, perhaps a prisoner of war and possibly of Thracian or other non-Greek origin. The cult was purely local, and may have lasted for a rather long time. The prosperity of Chios as one of the oldest bases of the slave-trade certainly lay behind this story.

Athenaeus' *heroa* showed a communal aspect towards the matter. They could be tentatively dedicated by a community to the living friends of a living ruler, or to a low-ranking person with oracular powers as a conciliation. A *heroon* could also be located by a bath-house, meaning an easy distance from a street or a city gate.

Epigraphical sources

The number of inscriptions using the word *heroon* in the late Classical and Hellenistic epigraphical sources is not large, as we seem to have only nine¹⁵⁶ of them. There are leases granted by the State on behalf of the cult authorities, in which the *heroa* are primarily used as landmarks, the monuments of heroes are used as references to decrees of ritual or physical purity of the area, or the *heroon* is an object of a private individual's last will. In the following these inscriptions are complemented with two more inscriptions from the end of the fourth century with the same kind of contents, having an unambiguous activity connected to *heroa*, but without the implicit word *heroon*.

Landmarks and leases

From Athens originates a lease of the sacred properties of Athena Polias and other deities, dated to 343/2 BC (*SEG* 33, 167). The lease is primarily for the pond, τέλμα, which is identified by the *heroon* (restored reading) of Neanias. Frg. C. Col. III, lines 140–141: τέλμα τὸ παρὰ [τὸ ἡρώιον τοῦ] Νεανίου ἔξω τείχους. This very fragmentary inscription

¹⁵³ A Greek travel writer from Syracuse at the end of the third century BC. See H.A. Gärtner, *NP* 8 (2000), 1073, s.v. Nymphodors 1. See also Jacoby, *FGH* 572 F 4.

¹⁵⁴ Ath. 6.265d.

¹⁵⁵ Ath. 6.265e–266c. The first fruits were an elementary form of gift offering and characteristic to the peasant world. They were usually dedicated in small rural shrines to lesser gods and heroes, Burkert 1992, 66–68.

¹⁵⁶ In two cases, *SEG* 33, 167, and *FD* III:4 280 C, the word *heroon* has not been preserved but appears as the restored reading. However, in both cases the restoration seems highly reliable, so they are considered here as possible references of *heroa*.

leaves the exact context around the *heroon* unclear, but Neanias¹⁵⁷ was a hero of possibly north Attic origin and also known from other sources.¹⁵⁸ In this case the pond might have been part of the city's defensive moat, which would put the *heroon* immediately outside the city walls.¹⁵⁹ We are informed once more of water as an essential element and characteristic of the site of a *heroon*.

From the same period is another decree concerning a lease of landed property in the demos of Teithras,¹⁶⁰ some twenty kilometres east of Athens (*SEG* 24, 151). Here a *heroon* of Epigonus is given as a landmark and as an identification of the site. Lines. 9–12:

[τ]ὸ [χ]ωρίον τὸ Τε[ί]θραντι ὦι [γ]ε[ί]τ[ων] . .
 10 . . Ο . . 5 . . Α . . ΠΙΤ#ΑΠΞΩΣ καὶ τὸ ἡ[ρ]ῶιον τὸ Ἐ[π]-
 [ιγ]ό[νου] (?), νο[τ]όθ[ε]ν δὲ τὸ Ἡρά[κ]λειον καὶ τὸ χωρί[ι]ο-
 [ν] ἡ[ρ]ῶος Δα[τ]ύλ[ο] καὶ τὸ τῶ [Δ]ιό[ς] τέμενος.

To this Te[i]thrasian [la]nded property the [nei]gh[b]ours are and the
he[r]oon of E[pig]o[nos], in the sou[th] there are the Hera[k]leion and the plac[e] of
 he[ro Da]tyl[os a]nd the *temenos* [of Z]eu[s].

Discovered in Euripides Street in Athens was a *locatio horti* dated to 333/2 BC (*SEG* 24, 203).¹⁶¹ The *orgeones* of a *heroon* let a garden around the *heroon* to a private individual for a period of thirty years. Lines 2–6:

κατὰ τ[άδ]ε ἐμίσθωσεν
 Χάροψ [Φ]αληρεὺς καὶ ο-
 ἰ ὀργ[ε]ῶνες τοῦ ἡρώιο
 5 τὸν [κῆπ]ον Θρασυβούλ-
 ωι

According to t[hi]s Charops of [P]haleron and the *org[eo]nes* of the *heroon* let out
 the [gard]en to Thrasyboulos.¹⁶²

Orgeones were hereditary religious associations of heterogeneous nature,¹⁶³ enjoying considerable independence in choosing, for instance, their shrines and

¹⁵⁷ This name, or title (youth), seems to be quite commonly given to heroes. Kearns 1989, 188.

¹⁵⁸ *IG* II² 1358B, lines 21–22.

¹⁵⁹ Walbank 1983, 122–123 with n. 57 discusses the general information about Neanias and the significance of the pond as part of the city's defensive moat.

¹⁶⁰ Travlos 1971, 335.

¹⁶¹ Also in Vallinda and Pantazopoulou 1950, 13, no. 2.

¹⁶² Charops might have been the founder or a benefactor of the orgeonic association. Vallinda and Pantazopoulou 1950, 13.

¹⁶³ Etymologically *orgeones* are the celebrants of *orgia*, rites. See R. Parker, *Athenian Religion. A History*, Oxford 1996, 109 and N.I. Pantazopoulou, *ὀργεῶνες, Πολέμων Αρχαιολογικό Περιοδικό* 4 (1947), 7–23.

buildings.¹⁶⁴ Heroes connected to *orgeones* were like the nymphs and the gods on smaller scale, and might have been particularly numerous in Attica.¹⁶⁵

In this document the name of the hero is not given. In lines 11–21 the condition of the agreement is specified:

ἐνοι [κ]οδομεῖ-
 σθαι δὲ Θρασ[ύ]βουλον
 ἐάν τι βούληται τοῖς
 αὐτοῦ τέλ[ε]σιν ἐν τῷ
 15 χωρίῳ τῷ ἔξω τοῦ ὄχ-
 ετοῦ· ἐπειδὴν δὲ ἐξ<ή>κ-
 ει ὁ χρόνος τῆς μισθω-
 σεως ἀπιέναι Θρασύβ-
 ουλον λαβόντα τὸν κέ-
 20 <ρ>αμον καὶ τὰ ξύλα κ<α>ὶ
 τὰ θυρώματα.

The tenant Thras[y]boulos has to buil[d] outside (the place of) the water channel, if he so wishes. [This probably means that he was not allowed to disrupt the use of the water.] When the time of the rental expires, Thrasyboulos has to leave, taking with him the roof tiles, beams and the doorways.

These parts were valuable and usually considered as movable property that the tenant could bring along and take with him when moving out.¹⁶⁶ The inscription ends in a statement that the issue is not only of a garden, but of a proper structure in the garden, probably referring to the *heroon* itself. In lines 28–30: *χρησ<θ>αι δὲ τῷ ἱερῷ ν καθαρῶι*, “When using the shrine it should be kept clean”. The quality or quantity of use is not specified, but the tenant was supposed to keep the shrine in good condition. This regulation may point to the lengthy leasing period of thirty years, as this kind of a lease may have been an attempt to be able to regularly review the public property.¹⁶⁷ In this inscription the term *heroon* is used in the beginning on line 4, and the term *ἱερὸν* appears as synonymous at the end, on line 29.

Our next two cases are leases of the same nature, and about buildings related to hero-cults, but without the term *heroon*. They are both from Athens: In *IG* II/III² 2499 from the year 306/5 BC the *orgeones* of the hero Egretes leased an *ἱερὸν* to a private person Diognetus for ten years. The tenant should treat the *ἱερὸν* and the houses (*oikiai*) built there as a shrine. In lines 5–7: *χρησθαι τῷ ἱερῷ καὶ ταῖς οἰκίαι<ι>ς ταῖς ἐνωικοδομημέναις ὡς ἱερῷ*. Furthermore, when the *orgeones* make the sacrifice to the hero in the month of Boedromion, Diognetus should make the house, in which the hero shrine is located, open (available) for them, as well as the covered place, the kitchen, and the couches and the tables for the two dining-rooms. In lines 24–30:

¹⁶⁴ Ferguson 1944, 67–69; Walbank 1983, 101. See also Kearns 1989, 73–77.

¹⁶⁵ Nock 1972, 595–596.

¹⁶⁶ M.-C. Hellmann, *Recherches sur le vocabulaire de l'architecture grecque d'après les inscriptions de Délos* (Bibliothèque des Écoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome 278), Athens 1992, 160–161, 200–201.

¹⁶⁷ Walbank 1983, 100.

ὅταν δὲ

25 θύωσιν οἱ ὀρχεῶνες τῷ ἥρωι τοῦ Βο-
 ηδρομειῶνος, παρέχειν Διόγνητον τ-
 ῆν οἰκίαν, οὗ τὸ ἱερόν ἐστιν, ἀνειγι-
 μένην καὶ στέγην καὶ τὸ ὀπτάνιον ν
 30 καὶ κλίνας καὶ τραπέζας εἰς δύο τε-
 ίκλινα.

In practice, this means that Diognetus was the caretaker of this *heroon*. When the time expired, the tenant could take with him, as in *SEG* 24, 203, the roof-tiles, the beams and the doorways, but nothing else. The complex of the hero Egretes was thus a combination of various architectural elements with several houses and the hero shrine within one of them.

In the inscription *IG* II/III² 2501 from the end of the fourth century, the ὀρχεῶνες leased the shrine of the hero Hypodectes¹⁶⁸ permanently to a private individual Diopethes and his descendants, so that they could use the τέμενος and the shrine of Hypodectes as sacred. When the ὀρχεῶνες come for the ritual, the tenants should set the shrine open and garlanded, and the statue of the god oiled and unveiled, in lines 7–9:

ὅ]ταν ἱεροῖς ἀπαντ(ῶ)σιν παρέχει(ν) αὐτοῖς τοῖς ὀρχεῶ[σι τὸ ἱε]-
 [ρὸν ἀν]ειωιγμένον <καθ'> ἡμέρα(ν) καὶ ἐστεφανωμέν[ον, τὸ δὲ ἄγαλμα τοῦ]
 [θεοῦ ἀλ]ηλειμμένον καὶ [τὰ καλῦ]μματα ἀποδ(εδυ)μένο[ν . . . c.9 . . .]

The hero Hypodectes is called god, at the end of the document in lines 18–20:

ἄκυρ(ο)[ν αὐ]τοῖς εἶναι τ(ήν)
 [μίσ]θωσιν κα[ὶ] ἐξέστω τοῖς ὀρχεῶσι[ν ἀπ]α[ιτ]ε[ῖν?] παρ' αὐτῶν τὸ τέμ(εν)[ος]
 20 [τ]οῦ θεοῦ.

(If not done as agreed) the [le]ase shall be invalid and the *orgeones* should be allowed to demand the *temenos* of the god from them.

Applying oil to the god might point perhaps to a wooden cult statue and its upkeep for practical reasons, or else to a symbolic or ritual ointment.¹⁶⁹ A later source, but mirroring earlier customs in heroic cults, also mentions anointing of a statue.¹⁷⁰ Here it rather points to a ritual anointment. An οἰκία in the τέμενος is also mentioned, but the exact idea remains unclear, as the lines are fragmentary. The question could be of the place where the tenant lived and the ὀρχεῶνες were housed during their sacrificial ceremony.

¹⁶⁸ The background and mythology of the heroes Hypodectes and Egretes are not known, but for Hypodectes there are two suggestions: He was at least originally an underworld god, cf. Polydectes, *Hom. Hymn Dem.* 9; Polydegmon, id. 17, 31, 404, 430. Or he was the original recipient of the *hiera* of Eleusis in Athens. Kearns 1989, 202.

¹⁶⁹ Donohue 1988, 38–39. For the unfortunate term *xoanon*, see ead. 231, 235.

¹⁷⁰ Philostr. *Her.* 9.6; Jones 2001, 145.

An inscription from Delphi from the second century BC concerns the delimitation of the sacred land of Apollo (*FD* III:4 280 C). In the document the borders of the sacred land are defined using a *heroon* as one of the landmarks: Col C, lines 25–26 ἐ[πι] τῇ [ιεραῖ] χώραι τῶν Δελφῶν πρὸς πέτραν πρώτην ἣ καλεῖται Ὑπ[ο]φασαῶν οὗ ἐστίν] ἡρ[ω]ιον]. In the place called Hypophaon was a *heroon* (restored reading).

Purity and upkeep

The amount of money which could be used from public funds for the expenses of a *heroon* is presented in the invoices of the archon Archetimus of Delphi from 321/0 BC.¹⁷¹ Thirty staters were given for the upkeep of a *heroon* at Thermopylae in front of the sanctuary of Kore, ἄλλο ἐδώκα[με]ς ἱ τᾷς Κόρας κε[ί]μενον ἡ[ρ]ῶιον στατῆρα[ς] τε[ρ]ιά[κον]τα.¹⁷² This local sanctuary of Kore was near the temple of Demeter Amphichionis, and had a *peribolos* with doors, θυρώματα.¹⁷³ The *heroon* may have been inside this *peribolos*. The connection between Demeter, Kore and Heracles is well-known through the Eleusinian mysteries, and his being the first initiate.

From Cos there are two inscriptions from the first half of the third century BC about the ritual purity of the priestesses and priests.¹⁷⁴ The first decree (*LSCG* 154 A) concerns the priestesses of Demeter Olympia and Demeter Isthmia:

ἀγνεύεσθαι τὰν ἱέρην τῶνδε· ν μυσσῶνι μ[ὴ] συμμείγνυσθαι μηδὲ παρ' Ἐκάτας]
μηδὲ παρ' ἡρώνα ἐσθῆν μηδὲ ἐπιβαίνειν ἐ[φ'] ἡρῶιον μηδὲ ἐς οἰκίαν ἐσέρεπεν ἐν αἰ]
κα γυνὰ τέκηι.¹⁷⁵

In order to stay pure the priestess [should not have contact with anything impure], nor eat by a *heroon*, nor set foot [in a *heroon*, nor in the house where] a woman gives birth.

The expression παρ' ἡρώνα is odd, and it is unclear what the word ἡρώνα means. It has been interpreted as the tomb of a hero, but it is not a regular form of either ἡρῶν or ἡρώς.¹⁷⁶ In case the priestess contaminated herself, the required purification is presented in lines 28–30 and 42–45.¹⁷⁷

The second Coan inscription (*LSCG* 156 A) is about the cult of Zeus Polieus, the Twelve Gods and the Delian Apollo. It reads:

¹⁷¹ *CID* II 110.

¹⁷² *CID* II 110, 17–18, and *Études sur les Comptes de Delphes*, 76–79. The name of the *heroon* is not given, but it could be that of Heracles Amphiktyon, as an altar of Heracles has been discovered in the area.

¹⁷³ *CID* II, 79 A I, 46–47.

¹⁷⁴ *LSCG* 154 A; *LSCG* 156 A. See also Ekroth 1999, 131.

¹⁷⁵ *LSCG* 154 A, lines 22–24. The restored reading in line 23: μηδὲ ἐπιβαίνειν ἐ[φ'] ἡρῶιον is based on the similar wording in lines 37–38: μηδὲ ἐπιβαίνειν ἐφ' ἡρῶιον.

¹⁷⁶ Nock 1972, 577.

¹⁷⁷ Unfortunately these lines are not very well preserved, and what the priestess had to do remains unclear according to the restored reading in lines 28–29: [circumcise / enrich ? herself with female pig] and [clean and sprinkle herself] with cold and seed. It is not known on which parallel this restoration is based. In *LSCG* 156 A there are the same kind of phrases in lines 14–16, but these are also mostly restored readings.

ἀγνέουσθαι δὲ τῶνδε τὸν ἱερῇ· μυσσας-
 [ὦι μὴ συμμείγνυσθαι μὴδὲ παρ' ἥρωνα ἔσθ]εν μὴδὲ παρ' Ἐκάτας Μεγάλ-
 [ας μὴδὲ ὅσσα τοῖς θεοῖς τοῖς χθονί]οις θύεται μὴδὲ ὅσσα τοῖς ἐνε-
 10 [ρτέροις ἥρωσιν ἐντάμνεται, μὴδὲ ἐμ]πατεῖν ἥρωιον.¹⁷⁸

In order [to stay pure] the priestess [should not have contact with the impure, nor eat by a *heroon* (?), nor can] she sacrifice to the Great Hecate [or to the chthonian go]ds, nor [eat] what is [sacrificed to the heroes of the] net[her world, nor] set a foot in a *heroon*.

The sacred laws showed how sanctuaries of heroes and offerings made to them could involve ceremonial uncleanness. On the other hand, the heroes and their tombs do not seem to have caused much pollution after all, since they could be located in sanctuaries. It was mainly those persons who were particularly sensitive to pollution who might also have been affected by the *heroa*.¹⁷⁹

The inscription from Delphi dated to 178 BC is about sacred oxen and horses, and also includes some regulations about a *heroon* (LSCG 79). No domestic animals were allowed to be brought to the well in front of the *heroon* of a certain Hellanicus. In lines 25–29:

μὴ ἐξέστω]
 ποτάγειν τὰ ἰδιωτικὰ θρέμματα [ἐνταῦθα μὴδὲ ἐν τὰν κράναν]
 τὰν ποτὶ τᾷ Κεραμείαι οὔσαν τό [τε φρέαρ τὸ πρὸ τοῦ]
 Ἑλλανίκου ἥρώϊου.

This regulation pertains to the upkeep of the *heroon* and was obviously given to protect and keep clean the water and the sacred surroundings.

Heroization of family members

From the island of Thera comes the testament of a wealthy lady, Epicteta, from ca. 200 BC (IG XII 3, 330).¹⁸⁰ It is a good example of the changing nature of the term hero as well as *heroon* in the Hellenistic period, as Epicteta was a private individual, not politically significant; she might have been an important benefactor of the community.¹⁸¹ She provided a remarkable memorial cult for her already deceased family members, her husband and two sons, and finally also for herself. The whole project was verified in accordance with the instructions given to Epicteta by her late husband.

The document is of considerable length, having 288 lines in all. The elements of which the sacred area consisted are expressed in lines 7–15:

¹⁷⁸ LSCG 156 A, lines 7–10. The restoration of lines 9–10 is regarded as conjectural, Ekroth 1999, 227 n. 1058.

¹⁷⁹ Nock 1972, 577; Ekroth 1999, 227.

¹⁸⁰ Published also in Wittenburg 1990.

¹⁸¹ Potter 2003, 417–418.

ἀπολείπω
κατὰ τὰν γεγεννημέναν μοι ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς
Φοίνικος ἐντολὰν τοῦ καὶ κατασκευαζαμένου
10 τὸ Μουσεῖον ὑπὲρ τοῦ μεταλλαχότος ἀμῶν
υἱοῦ Κρατησιλόχου καὶ ἀγαρόντος τὰ ζῶια
καὶ τὸς ἀνδριάντας ἑαυτοῦ τε καὶ Κρατησι-
λόχου καὶ τὰ ἡρώια καὶ ἐνευξαμένου ὥστε
κατασκευάζει με τὸ Μουσεῖον καὶ θέμεν τάς
15 τε Μούσας καὶ τὸς ἀνδριάντας καὶ τὰ ἡρώια.

There was a construction called Mouseion, the statues of the deceased, obviously also of the Muses, and the *heroa*.¹⁸² In lines 122–126 the document explicitly describes the dead couple and their sons as heroes, and their resting places as *heroa*.

The appearance of this seemingly complicated monument is far from clear. Besides the Mouseion, there was the temenos in or by which the statues of the deceased stood.¹⁸³ Epicteta also left an option for a stoa to be built in the area, line 49.¹⁸⁴ It seems that the *heroa* were not very large constructions, as the expression “had brought the *heroa*”, ἀγαρόντος ... καὶ τὰ ἡρώια, line 13, suggests.

A priesthood was to be established to take care of the cult of the Muses and the family members, lines 57–59. Furthermore, an association of the men’s club of the relatives with an annual assembly was to be created, line 22. Very specific regulations were also given about the offerings to the heroized dead, lines 185–194. The offerings consisted of a sacrificial animal, cakes and dried cheese worth one stater, and three small fish.¹⁸⁵

Epicteta’s decrees were numerous and very detailed, one could say almost *ad absurdum*, and the taking care of the family monument and cult was extended infinitely to the care of the relatives. Her energetic testament clearly shows the practice of extending heroization to family members,¹⁸⁶ and the minutiae may point to the custom still having been quite unusual in her time. To be on the safe side, she, with her husband, had combined the family cult with that of the Muses. These, as goddesses of memory, were in fact capable of preserving deeds and enterprises from oblivion, giving them order and organizing them into history.¹⁸⁷ The habit of worshipping ordinary mortals as heroes may have originated in the somewhat isolated societies, since besides Thera there are early examples from Cos and Cnidus, and later documents from Crete, Amorgos and Thera.¹⁸⁸ Then it spread to the mainland, where a famous example comes from Kalydon in Aitolia from the end of the second century BC.¹⁸⁹ A Ptolemaic naval base was installed at Thera

¹⁸² Cf. also the translation in Wittenburg 1990, 159–166. The term ἀνδριάντας is probably understood here as votive statues. The term could also be used of images of kings, as well as gods, Donohue 1988, 76–77, n. 184, 157, n. 384.

¹⁸³ Wittenburg 1990, 146–147.

¹⁸⁴ Fraser 1972, 312–313 describes the shrines of the Muses as comprising open porticoes with an altar, but without a regular temple. This would make Epicteta’s construction a relatively typical shrine of the Muses.

¹⁸⁵ Garland 1985, 110–112.

¹⁸⁶ Alcock 1991, 458.

¹⁸⁷ A. Glock, *NP* 8 (2000), 507, s.v. Museion; La Rocca 2006, 107, 127, n. 61. According to Diogenes Laertius (10.16), Epicurus, who died in 270 BC, set aside an annual income from the capital bequeathed to his heirs for an offering to himself and other family members.

from 275 to 146 BC and a Ptolemaic governor brought Egyptian cults to the island in the 260s.¹⁹⁰ Thus Epicteta's and her husband's last will may well have reflected Egyptian influence of the cult of the dead.

In the epigraphical sources the *heroa* were used most simply as landmarks. They seem to have been familiar enough to be used for defining other places, which also meant that they had to be easily recognizable in the landscape. Most heroes and heroines are, by their nature, tied to a place, and one place only, in a way that most deities cannot be.¹⁹¹ In the property decrees the *heroa* could also be used as reference to supernatural backing in the case of land squabbles.¹⁹² Just as in the ancient authors' notes, the water, here in the form of a pond, a water channel or a well, was a characteristic element of the site of a *heroon*. It could also comprise a garden, prominent enough to be leased, and in the area of a *heroon* rituals could be practised and the participants even housed. We thus get the impression that we are sometimes dealing with larger complexes, having more than one structure, and kitchen and dining-rooms are especially mentioned. Much attention was paid to the upkeep of the *heroa*. This was resolved primarily in two ways. Firstly, money could be issued from public funds, or secondly, the site with the *heroon* could be let out and the lessee was obliged to take care of the general cleanliness and upkeep. The lease could be from ten to thirty years, or even permanent, when the children of the lessee were also involved. Some priestesses were warned off the *heroa*, in order to keep their ritual cleanliness, and domestic animals, understandably, in order to keep the site clean.

Conclusions

The purpose of this article was to investigate the kind of information the ancient written sources would offer us of the late Classical and Hellenistic *heroa*. By combining the information of the two source groups, literary and epigraphical, we gather that the mythological emphasis changes into historical; the elevated and slightly mysterious to mostly practical matters. The mythical figures had their initial phases in the dawn of history, but their memory was strong and vivid enough to be remembered through the centuries, if only as a note by the later ancient authors. The younger *heroa*, founded in

¹⁸⁸ The Coan hero Charmylus ca 300 BC, see Kader 1995, 201–202, and a deceased called Antigonos about 275 BC, in W. Blümel, *Die Inschriften von Knidos I* (Inschriften von griechischen Städte 41), Bonn 1992, no. 301. A first-century epitaph from Itanos in Crete (W. Peek [ed.], *Griechische Vers-Inschriften I. Grab-Epigramme*, Berlin 1955, 1157; *SEG* 34, 918) celebrates three brothers worshipped as heroes and provided with a shrine and grove by their city. It bids the parents to bring offerings of honeycomb and incense, as if to Minos and the other heroes. Another Hellenistic epitaph established by a state, rather than a private person, is from second-century Amorgos (*IG* XII, 7.515). It prescribed the sacrifice of a ram by the image of the heroized Aleksimachos, allotting the offerings for prizes in commemorative games and for the priests, see D. Kurtz and J. Boardman, *Greek Burial Customs*, London 1971, 299. Artemidoros was after his death named a hero on an altar in Thera, ca 150 BC, see *IG* XII 3, Suppl. 1338, and F. Graf, 'Bemerkungen zur bürgerlichen Religiosität im Zeitalter des Hellenismus', in P. Zanker and M. Wörle (eds.), *Stadt und Bürgerbild im Hellenismus*, Munich 1995, 107–112.

¹⁸⁹ E.g. P. Bol, 'Die Marmorbüsten aus dem Heroon in Kalydon', *Antike Plastik* 19 (1988), 35–47; Craik 1980, 175–176; Schuller and Leschhorn 2004, 156–157, no. 175.

¹⁹⁰ Fraser 1972, 89, 101; A. Külzer and R. Jung, *NP* 12 (2002), 407, s.v. Thera.

¹⁹¹ Parker 2005, 447.

¹⁹² Alcock 1991, 454.

the late Classical or early Hellenistic periods were understandably smaller in number, but provided us with definite chronological fixed points in the development.

Let us first draw some general conclusions from our material. The sites have already been discussed in detail above, and suffice it to mention here that topographically the *heroa* could be situated almost anywhere. Also, the constructions varied from a simple enclosure or precinct to complex entities of more than one structure, of which the first example was explicitly mentioned in our sources for the first time in 306 BC (IG II/III² 2499) in Athens, and for the second time around 200 BC on the island of Thera. On two occasions we get some sort of description of the hero himself. The first instance being in the Brettian city of Temesa, where the unpleasant Polites was described as horribly black and wearing a wolfskin around him. The other sketchy case is that of the hero Hypodectes from Athens, if the possibly wooden cult statue, a *ξόανον*, is to be identified as depicting the hero himself.

The cult practices varied, and there was no uniform custom of how many times sacrifices were made; on average, however, once a year. The rituals were also manifold, from burning the offered victim as holocaust to sharing different kind of foodstuffs with the hero. Splendid activities, such as games, were first mentioned in connection with the two mythological seamen in whose honour the Kybernesia festival was organized in Phaleron. In 213 Aratus' procession was open to the whole community as an essential part of the Sicyonian rituals. The heroized Aratus was also assigned a priest of his own, as was the wealthy Epicteta in Thera some years later. Singing paeans for a ruler's friends is mentioned as an inappropriate activity in Athens in the last years of the fourth century BC, but accepted for Aratus, the renowned statesman, some eighty years later.

Oracular intervention is noted as part of the creation process of a *heroon*, or as a definite feature of a hero's power. On four occasions there was a need to consult the Delphic oracle; the inhabitants of Temesa, at an indefinite date, about the malevolent Polites, and later, around 470 BC, about the benevolent three-time Olympic victor, Euthymus. The sources could, of course, have mixed these two intimately connected heroes as the objects of consultation. The Spartans, for their part, asked about the suitable custodian of Palladion at an unknown date, and the Sicyonians in 213, when they wished to bury the statesman Aratus within their city. The few heroes who themselves acted as oracular consultants gave their advice through dreams. Podalirius and the seer Calchas, who were topographically intimate, might have been confused by the sources, but Podalirius was able to heal people as well as sheep when they bathed in the stream of his *heroon*. Drimacus, the leader of the Chian slaves, also appeared in dreams.

Our short list of heroized historical persons show that they were either remarkable statesmen or soldiers, or Olympic victors from 484, the 470s and the 390s.

Keeping a *heroon* clean and maintaining it was a constant anxiety and conspicuous feature, which can also be read implicitly in our sources. From the year 321 BC we have a case of it being resolved by use of state funds. Alternatively a tenant could be made liable for the upkeep of a *heroon*. After the lease had expired he was compelled to leave the site clean by removing surplus building material instead of leaving it lying around. This could perhaps also mean that he should remove the structures erected by him. We have special information concerning Hyrnetho's *heroon*, where twigs and brushwood of the sacred grove were not to be removed from the site, obviously as an important element of the *heroon*. Domestic animals as (natural) producers of manure should be kept from the well of a *heroon* (LSCG 79), except in Podalirius' case, where the sheep could also

be immersed in the water for healing purposes. That the cleanliness of a *heroon* was not always successfully managed is shown by the decrees warning delicate persons, such as priestesses, off the premises.

Pausanias' terminology indicates that *heroa* could be more complicated constructions than mere tombs, *τάφος* or *μνῆμα*. He used these words sometimes synonymously, but the more immediate synonyms for *heroon* seem to have been *ἱερὸν* or *ναός*. This view is also supported by the inscriptions (*SEG* 24, 203, probably also *IG* II/III² 2499).

As to the chronological development of the *heroa*, the inscriptions offer us very useful information, which is also supported by the authors' notes. We get the impression that the essential development took place during the third century, and especially towards its final years. In the beginning of this period we have Demetrius Poliorcetes, the ruler and king of Macedonia, who was honoured in Athens as a divinity around the year 300 BC. He considered, however, the appointing of *heroa* to his friends excessive and shameful. Decades later in 213 we have Aratus' case, in which the authorization for building the hero's tomb inside the city had still to be sought from the Delphic oracle, even if the object of the cult was a worthy soldier and statesman. It is interesting that the Macedonian aspect figures in some way in all these cases, from the Macedonian ruler to a person killed by another Macedonian ruler. The latter, of course, had nothing to do with Aratus' heroization, even if he was the unintentional initiator of the process.

Around the year 200 BC we have a private individual, a wealthy lady, Epicteta, who, possibly under Egyptian influence, organized her deceased family members' cult as heroes. The practice now began to get out of hand. It seems that she could do this without the authorization of a polis or other official institution. She still had to take serious measures, since the society of the time was not quite ready for ordinary mortals being heroized. This is proved by Epicteta's procedure of including the family cult in that of the Muses, and creating a priesthood and an assembly of relatives to take care of the cult. We are here in the concrete initial phases of the development which led, in the late Roman period, to any ordinary person's tomb being called a *heroon*,¹⁹³ no matter how modest.

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¹⁹³ The word *ἱερῶν* had now become completely synonymous with *βωμός*, *δήκη*, *μνῆμα*, *στῆλη*, *ταφή*, *τάφος* and *τύμβος*, see *SEG* 28, 523; *SEG* 45, 795 A5; *SEG* 45, 815; E. Sironen, *The Late Roman and Early Byzantine inscriptions of Athens and Attica*, (Diss.), Helsinki 1997, 122. See also Kader 1995, 220–223.

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A Methodological Note on “Rectangular *heroa*”

Leena Pietilä-Castrén

Introduction

In 1991 Susan E. Alcock published the article “Tomb Cult and the Post-Classical Polis”,¹ in which she wrote that “a comprehensive study is still needed of the geographical and temporal distribution (of the monumental *heroa*)”, and that “much basic work remains to be done on the role of the funerary *heroa*, mortuary practices...in late Classical and Hellenistic society”.² In 2007 Gunnel Ekroth wrote “There is no really comprehensive overview of the Archaic, Classical and Hellenistic cult-places of heroes, partly owing to the complexity of the evidence”.³ Whoever happens to be studying ancient topography cannot fail to notice *heroa* appearing every so often in innumerable Greek districts, often cities, from Sicily to the Dodecanese, from Macedonia to Cyrenaica.⁴ Besides the urban hero monuments, numerous, less-known structures, often in rural contexts, have also been ascribed to heroes.

The purpose of this article is to make an attempt at assessing as sites of hero worship a selection of constructions called *heroa* and dated to the Late Classical or Hellenistic period. A list of these places was begun during some lectures on topography at the University of Helsinki in the 1990s. The information was assembled from modern research literature, using the word *heroon* as the only guideline.⁵ Only published material and extant data were to be consulted in evaluating the motives of an excavator or other scholar in naming a construction *heroon*. The focus was to be especially on pottery, as this should form the majority of the finds. Occasionally figurines and votive plaques could point to ritual practice, and coarser pottery and cooking wares, as evidence of banqueting activity, could appear. Further, ash levels and skeletal remains would indicate animal sacrificing and feasting. The cult environment could include small shrines, enclosures, and altars, but the activity would be focused on the tomb itself.⁶

The chronology was the most important criterion for a *heroon* to be accepted on our list. In the development of *heroa* from age-old monuments of mythological heroes⁷

¹ Alcock 1991.

² *Ibid.*, 457, n. 41, and 459.

³ Ekroth 2007, 114.

⁴ Regarding the local differences in cultivating hero cults, see Hughes 1999, 170–171.

⁵ The basic list was that of J. Fedak, *Monumental Tombs of the Hellenistic Age*, Toronto 1990. It was complemented by the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Classical Sites*, information from NP, files of the Nordic Library in Athens, and finally consulting directly the indexes of any book which might refer to a *heroon*. The work was started in the Helsinki University Library, carried out periodically in the Nordic Library in Athens, and followed by on-site visits in 2000–2002. It was a pleasure to work with devoted and cheerful postgraduate students, philologists Mari Mikkola and Mikko Suoninen, and art historians Hanne Selkokari and Tiina Tuukkanen. The final writing was carried out in Helsinki. Suffice it to say that only a small part of the material is used in this connection.

⁶ These are the criteria presented by Alcock 1991, 451–453. See also the definition by D. Damaskos in *ThesCRA* II (2004), 142, s.v. Heroisierung und Apotheose.

⁷ An in-depth study of the earlier heroes is D. Boehringer, *Heroenkulte in Griechenland von der geometrischen bis zur klassischen Zeit*, Berlin 2001.

to the Roman tombs of the ordinary person, a crucial period was the Late Classical through Hellenistic, when this change from public to private seems to have taken place. The second criterion was the geographical location, when e.g. Asia Minor, North Africa, and Sicily were excluded, and the search was concentrated on mainland Greece and the islands. Self-evident categories for classifying the *heroa* were offered by the architectural shape of the monuments, mostly rectangular, triangular, or circular. This was also the method of *ThesCRA* in 2004 for classifying *heroa*; the articles of *ThesCRA*⁸ are, in fact, to a certain extent an answer to Alcock's and Ekroth's unspoken requests.

Four similar-looking "*heroa*" with rectangular enclosures were chosen from Laconia, Rhodes, Phocis, and Epirus in the hope of finding some common features, and justifying hero worship. In the following discussion the monuments will be introduced in order of their publication, starting with that published in the early 1960s and ending with the one published some thirty years later. The description of each is given, based on the publisher's preliminary information, which in some cases remains the sole publication. Features such as orientation, measurements, roofing, doorway, and building phases are presented, where given. Pottery, statuary fragments, and other objects are described with more detailed comments, wherever possible, than those given by the excavator; this has been done using the published photos. Concluding remarks are then made, and an assessment of the validity of this kind of methodological approach is given.

Ktirakia in Aphisou, Laconia

Excavation

Our first monument of interest (Fig. 2.) is ca. one kilometre south of Aphisou village, east of Sparta and the river Eurotas, on the sloping foothills of the western limit of the Parnon range.⁹ The site called Ktirakia was explored by Chrysanthos Christou, and the results were published in the early 1960s.¹⁰ The aim of the research was to understand the ancient monuments by the roads up to Therapne, as cults of Ares Theritas and Asclepius Kotyleus were reported in the area by Pausanias,¹¹ and some constructions were observed later also by the local inhabitants.¹² The excavator identified three building phases for the architectural remains: the first of *kalón chrónon*, i.e. the Classical period, when it was built and used as a *heroon*, its reuse as a Roman family tomb, when the interior of the walls was faced with bricks set in mortar, and a final Early Byzantine phase, when the whole was converted into a church with an apsis. The finds consisted of roof tiles of wide chronological range, starting from the Classical period, Hellenistic to Byzantine pottery, sarcophagi, fragments of sculpture in the round, reliefs, and fragments of columns, and other architectural fragments.

⁸ D. Damaskos, *ThesCRA* II (2004), 147–149, 155–159, s.v. Heroisierung und Apotheose; A. Seifert, *ThesCRA* IV (2004), 24–27, 30–38, s.v. Heroon.

⁹ On the contours and geology of the area, see Higgins 1996, 53–54; Cavanagh *et al.* 1996, 380.

¹⁰ *Ergon* (1963), 102–115; *PAE* (1963), 130–136; A.H.S. Megaw, *AR* (1963–1964), 8.

¹¹ Paus. 3.19.7–8.

¹² In the early 1900s an ancient monument was blown up with dynamite to obtain decent arable land, Christou, *Ergon* (1963), 103. According to the Laconia Survey our monument of interest is one of the few built structures or standing remains of the Hellenistic-Roman period in the area, Cavanagh *et al.* 2002, 273.

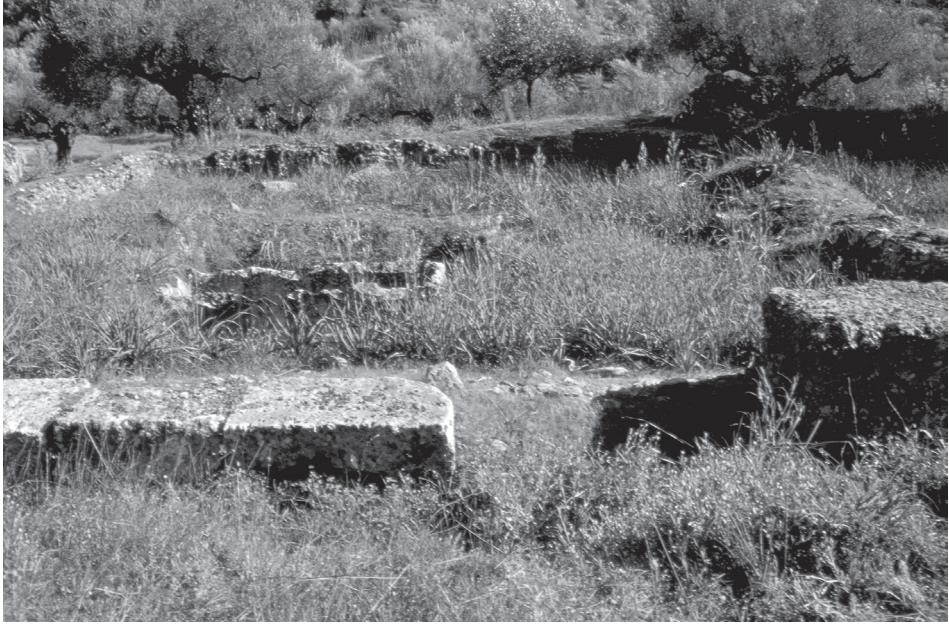


Fig. 2.

The nearly rectangular plan measured 10 x 12.20 m, with apsis and propylon 16.10 x 12.10 m. It was oriented according to the half-cardinal points, so that the apsis was towards the northeast, the propylon correspondingly to the southwest. Some blocks, both in the euthynteria and the walls, were quite large, measuring 2.00 x 0.80 x ca. 1.20 m.¹³ According to the excavator, they were of the same material, cut and technique as the Classical Round Building on the acropolis of Sparta, and the so-called Tomb of Leonidas.¹⁴ Above the euthynteria the wall rose in places to a height of 1.50 m, and in the western (technically northwestern) wall there was an opening of 1.95 m width. Outside the construction, foundations of Byzantine (enclosing?) wall were discovered perpendicular to the apsis.

From inside the structure in the southeastern corner a small amount of Hellenistic pottery was discovered, and four sarcophagi lay in the middle of the monument with only some bone left, made both of stone and terracotta slabs. Further, according to the excavator, they were Roman and had been robbed at a later date, as their locks were broken. Three sarcophagi were discovered at a depth of 0.90 m, the fourth at a depth of 2.10 m.¹⁵ One sarcophagus, the second from the left,¹⁶ had lion's paws at its lower corners and curved fluting on its side.¹⁷

¹³ The last figure is approximate, due to the later facing of the interior, Christou, *Ergon* (1963), 104.

¹⁴ Christou thought that the same quarry was used for all three buildings. The stone for the Round Building was quarried, however, from the west side of the Spartan acropolis itself, Waywell and Wilkes 1994, 416.

¹⁵ Christou, *Ergon* (1963), 105. I understand that these figures refer to the top level of the sarcophagi.

¹⁶ This must be the second sarcophagus from the west.

¹⁷ Cartledge and Spawforth 1989, 142.

Fragmentary statues and other sculptural pieces and reliefs were rescued from inside a pit or cache in the apsis. It was 2.00 m in circumference,¹⁸ and of considerable depth: 7.60 m; its opening was similar to a well-like structure. From top to bottom the following fragments of special interest, possibly made of Parian marble, were recovered: at a depth of 0.60 m the first relief fragments of small-sized hands and feet, and children's heads in the round; at a depth of 2.00 m fragments of a bearded male head, fragments of female torsos in dynamic movement, and two female heads of almost natural size. Still deeper, there were more fragments of children's feet and hands, the most numerous being those gathering grapes. Animal feet, a small head of a leopard, and a horse's head were also unearthed. As to the architectural pieces, remains of four columns made of limestone, and undecorated fragments of marble of different sizes were discovered in the pit, and a Doric capital of local marble was found in the propylon.¹⁹

Except for the male head in the round, Christou considered that the sculptural fragments belonged to a decorative frieze, probably depicting a Dionysian theme. This idea was supported by the general nature of the whole, especially the leopard and the grape-harvesters; even the horse's head would fit into this sort of context. He interpreted the dynamic female torsos as maenads. Originally, all the material may have been attached to a wall of the monument; the large quantity and the large size of the sculptural fragments made Christou give up his original idea of their once having decorated the sarcophagi. The bearded male head he saw as Hercules, which is why he concluded that the monument was the *naós* of the Kotylean Asclepius, erected by Hercules. As the monument did not follow the traditional plan of a temple, and since Asclepius was predominantly a hero, Christou preferred to call the construction a *heroon*. At a later, Flavian date, the Classicising head of Hercules would have been added as a reminiscence.²⁰ The monument was possibly destroyed by the Heruli in AD 267, after which the destroyed sculptural elements were hidden in the pit, before converting the structure into an Early Christian church.

Comments

Christou's chronology of the building, starting from the Classical period, was based on the similarity of technique (large blocks without mortar) and local material (conglomerate) to the Leonidaion and the prominent Round Building in Sparta. This is a very vague criterion, however, as e.g. for the origin of the Round Building a large chronological range, from Archaic to Roman, is currently considered possible.²¹ So far, the sarcophagus with lion's paws has provided the prime chronological fixed point for the monument's use for Roman family-burials. This sarcophagus has been identified as belonging to the class of Attic sarcophagi which were in production and export in the first half of the third century AD.²²

Christou's idea of the monument as a *heroon* has not been contradicted *expressis verbis*.²³ The emphasis has, though, gradually moved from a "hero-shrine" to "built chamber-tomb",²⁴ "a Roman mausoleum", or "a *heroon* or mausoleum".²⁵ As to a possible

¹⁸ Christou, *Ergon* (1963), 108. For some reason the excavator gave the circumference, not the diameter.

¹⁹ The list of all the unearthed items, *id.* 107–110.

²⁰ *Id.* 107–108, 112.

²¹ Waywell and Wilkes 1994, 414, 416–419.

²² A.Sp. Delivorrias, *AD* 23 (1968), 150; Cartledge and Spawforth 1989, 132–133, 169. For the Attic export of sarcophagi to Sparta, see G. Koch and H. Sichtermann, *Römische Sarkophage*, Munich 1982, 359, 361–362, 464.

earlier life of the Ktirakia monument as a *heroon*, the small amount of Hellenistic pottery collected during the excavation inside the southeastern corner, may perhaps have been of crucial importance. It has, alas, been lost without a detailed analysis.²⁶ In general, the site did not produce much pottery, either in Christou’s excavation, or later, during the Laconia Survey, thus indicating its non-settlement nature.²⁷

In the following, the sculptural fragments depicted in Christou’s publication will be considered, in order to see what kind of conclusions, if any, can be reached about their identity or chronology. We shall start with the bearded male head,²⁸ wishfully called Hercules by Christou. Both the iconographical and technical features seem to point to the Severan tradition and the first half of the third century AD; an evocation of the troubled period is reflected in the man’s countenance with his prominently lined forehead, and faraway glance. Short-cropped hair that recedes at the temples adds to the signs of age. The circle of the iris of the only preserved eye is deeply incised, with the pupil indicated by a hollow, and the running drill has been used only sparingly in the beard with corkscrew locks.²⁹ To my mind, this male head gives the impression of an individual portrait, which follows in general outline its Imperial counterparts.

The abundance of Erotes³⁰ in the pictorial decoration is another feature that helps us in fixing the period of the monument’s use as a Roman tomb. The Erotes as small (winged) children connected to the Dionysian circle appear in the fourth century BC, but their real floruit in funerary symbolism comes only in the Imperial period;³¹ from the second century AD onwards the Erotes were a favoured subject in all funerary art, not only in Italy but also in the provinces. Eros had already been recognised earlier as an Olympian factotum, such as a charioteer, a grape harvester,³² a participant in the thiasos, a musician, a torch-bearer, and in the Roman context he became a useful household god. In funerary art he was considered the servant and helper of the dead.³³

As to the whirling maenad, the most famous model is the one ascribed to Lysippus and sometimes identified as the Sicyonian lyric poet Praxilla, known from some first and second century AD copies. She wears a highly girdled transparent chiton, revealing the

²³ G. Daux, ‘Chronique des fouilles 1964: Péloponnèse’, *BCH* 88 (1964), 730–731; *AR* 10 (1963–64), 8; H.W. Catling, *AR* 32 (1985–86), 30. Cartledge and Spawforth 1989, 142, were somewhat dubious.

²⁴ Cartledge and Spawforth 1989, 142, actually “a built chamber-tomb with a colonnaded façade and sculpted marble frieze”.

²⁵ H.W. Catling, *AR* 32 (1985–1986), 30; Cavanagh *et al.* 1996, 288, 381, 386. Also Cavanagh *et al.* 2002, 334, n. 201.

²⁶ I am grateful to archaeologist Stella Raftopoulou at the 5th Ephorate on Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities, Sparta, for her painstaking help in spring 2001 and later.

²⁷ For the sherds collected during the Laconia Survey outside the monument, Cavanagh *et al.* 1996, 386, and about the problem in general, Cavanagh *et al.* 2002, 261. Christou reported no pottery at all in the cache.

²⁸ Christou, *Ergon* (1963), 109, fig. 114.

²⁹ The introduction of the beard and drilling the details of the eyes belong to the Hadrianic period, Kleiner 1992, 238, and Strong and Claridge 1976, 197–200, and for parallels in Severan portraiture, Kleiner 1992, 320–321, and somewhat later Imperial portraiture, *ead.* 361, 365. In the private sphere, e.g. a male portrait from about AD 230 in Copenhagen, J. Huskinson, ‘The Later Roman Period’, in J. Boardman (ed.), *The Oxford History of Classical Art*, Oxford 1993, 338–339, no. 345.

³⁰ Christou, *Ergon* (1963), 108, 111, figs. 113, 118.

³¹ A. Hermay, *LIMC* 3 (1986), 937–938, s.v. Eros.

³² The little hand in Christou, *Ergon*, 111, fig. 119 left, can be compared e.g. with another little hand in J. Fejfer and T. Melander, *Thorvaldsen’s Ancient Sculptures. A Catalogue of the Ancient Sculpture in the Collection of Bertel Thorvaldsen, Thorvaldsens Museum*, Copenhagen 2003, 115, H 1455.

³³ N. Blanc and F. Gurly, *LIMC* 3, 1986, 1045, 1047, s.v. Eros/ Amor, Cupido.

right breast and the upper body in strong torsion.³⁴ Perhaps Christou had this maenad in mind when seeking for parallels for the Ktirakian female torso. A closer examination of the torso³⁵ shows, however, that the garment and the posture are somewhat different to the Lysippean prototype. The body is not in strong torsion, the right hip is instead pushed slightly forward, as the weight is on the right leg. The transparent garment is rolled under the right breast without a girdle, showing the navel, and falling in deep folds. This kind of garment is characteristic of the type of Aphrodite with the mantle bound under the breast, the prototype being datable in general lines to the Hellenistic period, and known from later copies.³⁶ The other sculptural fragment³⁷ ascribed by Christou to a female figure, presents undulating drapery, perhaps part of a himation resting on the forearm, a detail also recognisable from many naked statues, female and male alike.

Christou did not provide any explanation for the female heads of natural size.³⁸ My remarks here concern their hairstyle and general facial features. The better preserved head has wavy hair parted in the middle, covering the ears, and drawn back, with two locks of hair forming a bow knot on top of the head. All the locks of hair are given detailed wavy treatment, and some of them are separated from each other by narrow grooves cut, it appears, with a fine drill. The other head is badly broken on top, but the hair is seemingly drawn back. Both heads seem to tilt right. The faces are oblong with strong chins, and small mouths; the better preserved has a long flattish (or broken?) nose, giving her individual distinction; there is no visible plastic rendering of the irises and pupils of the eyes. Except for the nose, these heads can hardly be considered to be individual portraits. In general lines the hairstyle with the top knot was characteristic of Aphrodite, – also of Apollo –,³⁹ from the Hellenistic period.⁴⁰ As to the chronology of these heads, the limited use of the drill points to a date no later than the first century AD.

A detailed study of scale,⁴¹ marble,⁴² and technique, and division into clear entities, such as reliefs, and fragments in the round, should facilitate the creation of a proper catalogue of all the sculpted finds, and understanding which fragments made part of the alleged frieze on the wall of the monument, and which, if any, belonged to the sarcophagi. The fragments in the round could shed light on the decorative programme of the monument as a whole. At the present state of the study we may surmise that the bearded male head indeed portrayed the person buried in the sarcophagus with the lion's

³⁴ R. Cittadini, 'Prassilla a Sicione', in P. Moreno (ed.), *Lisippo, l'arte e la fortuna*, Milan 1995, 208–215.

³⁵ Christou, *Ergon* (1963), 109, fig. 115, left.

³⁶ A. Delivorrias *et al.*, *LIMC* 2, 1984, 75, s.v. Aphrodite no. 661–664. This type of Aphrodite is a derivative of the Capuan Venus. Other types of standing Aphrodite also have considerable similarities with the Ktirakian torso, such as the one "with the folded mantle over the arm", *id.* 25–26, nos. 160–165, and the sc. "Charis", *id.* 36–38, no. 246.

³⁷ Christou, *Ergon* (1963), 109, fig. 115, right.

³⁸ Christou, *Ergon* (1963), 110, fig. 116.

³⁹ E. Simon, *LIMC* 2, 1984, 380, s.v. Apollon/ Apollo, no. 56.

⁴⁰ A. Delivorrias *et al.*, *LIMC* 2 (1984), 38–39, 52, s.v. Aphrodite, nos. 409–410. For the coiffure, see also Nielsen and Stubbe Østergaard 1997, 127, no. 111, and Tomei 2006, 399, II.805, where the female head with hair covering the ears is called "testa ideale femminile", and dated to the second century AD, and Burn and Higgins 2001, 131–132, nr. 2310 even to the end of the second century AD.

⁴¹ Unfortunately no measurements of the objects are given in Christou's article.

⁴² Cartledge and Spawforth 1989, 170–171, about the Spartan marble, which varies in colour and quality. About the difficulties in identifying white crystalline marble, M.C. Marchei, 'Marmo Pario', in G. Borghini (ed.), *Marmi antichi*, Rome 1992, 250, n. 137, 299, n. 133.

paws, as the two match chronologically. It should also be considered whether all the material from the pit originated from one and the same monument. Perhaps Amboula, or Plaisia, for instance, with its undated grave,⁴³ should be considered as possibly having once had their shares of the decoration. The material pertaining to Aphrodite might have had some connection with the sanctuary of Ares,⁴⁴ known to have existed in the area. A strict reconstruction of the “stratigraphy” of the sculpted material from the pit could perhaps shed light on the ancient filling-in of the cache. Our discussion of the sculptural material does not promote knowledge of the alleged Classical-Hellenistic *heroon*, which Christou established relying on technique and the roof tiles discovered at the site. One has to think seriously about whether such a phase ever existed. Perhaps the monument had only two phases, an early third century AD monumental structure for burial of the members of a wealthy family,⁴⁵ decorated with a male portrait and a flock of diligent Erotes, and followed later by an Early Christian church.

P 10-Street in the City of Rhodes

Above the southwestern corner of the great commercial harbour of the city of Rhodes, there is a set of constructions on the ancient Hippodamean P10-street. They are in the street’s easternmost part, now recognisable within the modern Euripidou, Platonos and Apellou Streets.⁴⁶ The excavation of the site was undertaken during several years in the mid 1960s and published initially in 1970.⁴⁷ A π -shaped structure and a smaller rectangular construction, made with isodomic technique and measuring 6 x 6 m, were unearthed (Fig. 3.); the latter was oriented according to the half-cardinal points.⁴⁸

While the final publication of the area was in preparation, attention was paid to this construction, whose orientation diverged considerably from the Hippodamian plan with its streets following the main cardinal points.⁴⁹ This anomaly was all the more striking as the regular axial layout was otherwise employed in the city of Rhodes so successfully that it influenced even the outlying cemeteries.⁵⁰ The exceptional orientation, it appeared, meant significant use of the building, very likely of a public nature,⁵¹ perhaps as a *heroon*.⁵² The pottery from the area covered the period from the fourth to the first century BC. The idea of a *heroon* arose probably from the custom of erecting a monument, a tomb or a cenotaph, in a prominent place for the city founder, or the inventor of synoikism.⁵³ When

⁴³ Cavanagh *et al.* 1996, 381, 387.

⁴⁴ Paus. 3.19.7–8. About the cult, D. Musti and M. Torelli, (eds. and transl.), *Pausania. Guida della Grecia, libro III. La Laconia*, Milan 1992, 248; Cavanagh *et al.* 2002, 221.

⁴⁵ As already hinted by Cartledge and Spawforth 1989, 142. See also Cavanagh *et al.* 2002, 273, 334.

⁴⁶ Marked as “Monumente” in Hoepfner and Schwandner 1986, 22–23, fig. 16.

⁴⁷ E. Zervoudaki, *AD* 25 (1970) 507–511. For the following publications Filimonos-Tsopotou 2004, 134.

⁴⁸ Plan of the construction in *AD* 25 (1970), 509, and in Filimonos-Tsopotou 2004, 37.

⁴⁹ Kontorini 1983, 24.

⁵⁰ Konstantinoupolos 1968, 117.

⁵¹ M. Filimonos, *AD* 42 (1987), 584.

⁵² Hoepfner and Schwandner 1986, 25. Here some confusion has arisen of the orientation of the two buildings.

⁵³ Such as e.g. in Kassope around 350 BC, though outside the immediate city area, Hoepfner and Schwandner 1986, 103–106.



Fig. 3.

the conjectural *heroon* was created, the study of the Rhodian topography was in its initial phases. Lately it has become clear, however, that the constructions near the commercial harbour formed a part of the Classical to Early Hellenistic fortification system.⁵⁴

Komoula in Elatea, Phocis

In the necropolis of Elatea, northeast of the modern village, a burial monument (Fig. 4.) was unearthed in the mid 1980s. The site is called Komoula, (also Kalogerou) in accord with the barrow discovered in an olive grove, in the middle of open fields. The barrow concealed a prominent rectangular structure, measuring 11.10 x 11 m. Eight layers of rectangular blocks of limestone (porolithos) and of equal length, arranged alternately edgewise and lengthwise, reached a height of 3.80 m. The monument was probably covered by earth and gravel up to the two uppermost layers of blocks, probably leaving an enclosure-like structure visible in ancient times.

The archaeological report of the monument⁵⁵ induces one to believe that the structure goes back to the Hellenistic period, as pottery typical of that time is especially mentioned. The finds were discovered in the eastern side of the barrow and also included fragments of bronze objects, gilded terracotta beads, and animal bones.⁵⁶ Originally there may have been more material from the tomb, but it had been plundered before proper excavation. The robbers had disturbed the structure itself on its southern side by

⁵⁴ Filimonos-Tsopotou 2004, 35–37, 41, 134.

⁵⁵ F. Dakoronia, *AD* 41 (1986), 65.

⁵⁶ From a depth of 1.30 m; it appears this is an undisturbed entity.



Fig. 4.

widening an ancient opening, which interestingly continued as an underground passage through the whole monument. Lacking the detailed knowledge of the finds, their exact use as funerary gifts (e.g. bronze objects, beads, pottery), or for a banquet (e.g. animal bones, pottery) remains unclear. They were discovered, however, in a layer with traces of burning, pertaining perhaps to cultic activity by the monument.

It may be worthwhile, however, to discuss the gilded terracotta beads on a general level, in order to get in idea of their use in the period in question. Different kinds of beads are often shown as ornaments around the necks of female terracotta figurines made in the workshops producing the *Tanagrians*. Suffice it to mention here a somewhat earlier example in the shape of a figurine from the early fourth century BC, where a string of rather large round beads are combined with a simple chain.⁵⁷ These were used as personal ornaments, possibly imitating those that decorated the cult statue in the Theban Kabeirion.⁵⁸ Another model from the first half of the second century BC shows a female terracotta bust from Priene, wearing a double necklace, with one string of round beads, the other of pear- or amphora-shaped pendants.⁵⁹ The gilded terracotta beads were often made for funerary purposes, to meet the requirements of persons of limited means.⁶⁰

Due to the activity of the robbers we have lost knowledge of the complete assemblage of material connected with the Komoula site, but the monumentality of the

⁵⁷ Pietilä-Castrén 2007, 10, fig. 7.

⁵⁸ Mollard-Besques 1954, 86, pl. 60, c. 22–23.

⁵⁹ G. Zimmer, *Die Antikensammlung Berlin*, Mainz 1992, 289–290, no. 157. See also Marshall 1911, 249, nos. 2190–2192, pl. XLII, dated from the fourth to the second century BC.

⁶⁰ Marshall 1911, xxxix; Higgins 1961, 45, 127. Gilded terracotta was especially favoured in the fourth and third centuries BC.

structure seems to speak for a wealthy burial. The excavator thought that the monument was a *heroon*, not known from the ancient literary sources. Elatea was the prosperous main city of Phocis, controlling the natural route from north into the fertile Cephissus valley. The area of Elatea was submitted in the Hellenistic period to repeated military conflicts and invasions, but the Roman general M.' Acilius Glabrio gave Elatea back its landed property and slaves, after spending the winter of 191-190 BC there with his troops.⁶¹ The decades following these concessions could perhaps be considered an apt time for erection of this kind of monument. It is very much to be hoped that the final publication of the monument and its finds will show whether it really was an object of heroic cult.

Marmara in Zervochori, Thesprotia

Excavation

It was in the early 1990s that Georgios Riginos carried out a rescue excavation in the Kokytos valley at a site called Marmara, in the village of Zervochori.⁶² The monument (Fig. 5.) consisted of a large rectangular enclosure (15.36 x 15.47 m) orientated along the half-cardinal points. It was hypaethral,⁶³ and its isodomic walls may have risen to the height of over two metres; no entrance was verified, but the excavator considered the northeastern wall to be the façade.⁶⁴ From the other three sides, southeastern, southwestern and northwestern, short partition walls projected towards the centre of the enclosure. They were ca. 1.6 m long and ca. 3 m from each other, forming small rectangular alcoves or niches within. At an unknown date the monument had been plundered,⁶⁵ but fragmentary terracotta figurines, which comprised a part of the finds left behind, and the monumentality of the structure itself were reasons enough to name it *tafiko hero*.⁶⁶

Inside the enclosing wall on the northwestern side there was a tomb, measuring 3 x 2.1 m and approximately one metre deep. The earth-cut grave was lined with slabs⁶⁷ of white limestone, fastened with π -shaped clamps. It is exceptionally large and could easily have accommodated more than one deceased. The bone analysis of one of the two⁶⁸ reported human remains, showed that it most likely belonged to a female about 35–50 years of age, who had suffered from anaemia.⁶⁹ The deceased had evidently been furnished with a rich set of grave goods, but what was left of them consisted of a golden chain and a few golden leaves from a wreath, two lamps, small black glazed pyxides, both

⁶¹ Lauffer 1989, 208–209, s.v. Elatea.

⁶² Subsequent publications by G. Riginos, *AD* 47 (1992), 349–354, and G. Riginos, *Ausgrabungen in antiker Eleatis und ihrer Umgebung*, in P. Cabanes (ed.), *L'Illyrie méridionale et l'Épire dans l'Antiquité* III, Paris 1999, 173–174. Previous comments on the site by S.I. Dakaris, *Thesprotia* (Ancient Greek Cities 15), Athens 1972, 139 and by Σ.Γ. Μουσελίμης, *Αρχαιότητες της Θεσπρωτίας*, Ioannina 1980, 138.

⁶³ No roof tiles were found during the excavation.

⁶⁴ Riginos 1992, 352; Riginos 1996, 173–174.

⁶⁵ Riginos 1996, 349, n. 65.

⁶⁶ Riginos 1992, 350; Riginos 1996, 173–174.

⁶⁷ This was a very usual type of grave, either with or without slabs covering the walls of the *fossa*, both in Greek and Italian cemeteries. See Steingraber 2000, 94. See also Lepore 2004, 366–367.

⁶⁸ The excavator reported two crania, Riginos 1992, 351.

⁶⁹ I. Tsinas, this volume, 53–54.



Fig. 5.

intact and fragmentary, two miniature vases inside a plain unpainted jar, as well as some nails of bronze and iron, and a bronze lock.⁷⁰

Opposite the tomb and inside two projecting walls, there was a floor-like surface, made of three slabs of white limestone, measuring 3.1 x 2.4 m and, according to the excavator, supporting what was left of a table-like structure.⁷¹ The fragments are now too few and broken to allow a definite opinion of a table. Such an element would, though, accord with the depictions of the popular Hellenistic funerary-meal reliefs, in which a table laden with food and crockery is shown in front of the deceased.⁷² The three limestone slabs may have indicated a paved floor inside the whole enclosure.⁷³ On the other hand, it is obvious that the tomb and the three slabs cannot by chance have the same orientation, and almost equal dimensions, forming in a sense a mirror image of each other. Perhaps the two were positioned in this way to allow a visual contact between them. Whether the other alcoves inside the enclosure were meant for, or actually once held burials, possibly of more modest nature, remains unclear due to the exploited and plundered state of the monument.

⁷⁰ Riginos 1996, 173, suggested that nails had belonged to a wooden coffin.

⁷¹ Riginos 1996, 173. Riginos first suspected another burial below the slabs supporting the table, but further research showed no such thing, Riginos 1992, 351.

⁷² To name just a few, see A. Klöckner, ‘Habitat und Status. Geschlechtsspezifisches Rollenverhalten auf griechischen Weihreliefs’, in *Die griechische Klassik. Idee oder Wirklichkeit*, Mainz 2002, 325, 329–330, Kat.-Nr. 221, and K.M.D. Dunbabin, especially chapter 4 ‘Drinking in the Tomb’, in *The Roman Banquet: Images of Conviviality*, Cambridge 2003, 104–106, figs. 55–56. For the cult tables in general, D.H. Gill, *Greek Cult Tables*, New York 1991, 23, 29, and I. Krauskopf, *ThesCRA V* (2005), 230–232, 235–236, s.v. Kulttische und tragbare Altäre.

⁷³ Riginos 1992, 351.



Fig. 6.

Finds and Comments

Even from the fragmentary remains we could venture some reflections on the grave goods, without unfortunately being aware of their precise original whereabouts. The following items were, however, discovered inside the enclosure. The remaining tiny leaves made of gold foil are identified as oak leaves.⁷⁴ Customarily the deceased was adorned with a wreath through all the phases of burial rituals, from prothesis and ekphora to the final resting place

on the kline or wooden coffin. It seems that there was no one leaf or flower especially singled out for crowning the deceased, but olive, laurel, myrtle, celery, oak leaf and ivy are most often mentioned by the ancient authors. It was in the course of the fifth century BC, that the custom of furnishing the dead with a golden crown was introduced in Greek tombs, starting from Magna Graecia, Macedonia, the Bosphorus and the coast of Asia Minor.⁷⁵ Furthermore, it seems that the golden wreath, first conceded to those venerated as heroes, was especially popular from the fourth to the second century, but the custom lasted locally even to the first century BC.⁷⁶ In their heyday the Tarentine golden wreaths, which surely reflected the Greek traditions of the other areas, cover the species already



Fig. 7.

⁷⁴ ΘΕ 5376. I am most grateful to archaeologist Georgios Riginos for all his support, and for furnishing me with information, also of the unpublished material (cf. n. 87), and also for the possibility of publishing the fragments of the terracotta figurines (ΘΕ 2700A and B, 2701, 2706, and 2707).

⁷⁵ Blech 1982, 89–90, 93–95, sets the start of the custom to the fifth century BC, but earlier evidence comes from Tarentum, Masiello 1984, 74.

⁷⁶ Masiello 1984, 73, 84.

verified by ancient authors, with the exception of rose and rosaceae, with numerous variants replacing celery. Epirus was one of the areas, where wreaths made of oak leaves were much favoured,⁷⁷ possibly due to the influence of Dodona.

Lamps occasionally appear in Hellenistic tombs.⁷⁸ The two⁷⁹ from Marmara represent the common wheel-made type with flattened globular body, thick base, comparatively small filling-hole, and long and narrow nozzle with flat top and small wick-hole at the rounded end. The smaller of the two lamps has a strap handle, which is seldom discovered intact due to it being inadequate for supporting the heavy bulk of the lamp.⁸⁰ The examples of this type, closest to Howland 25A, cover approximately one hundred years from around the middle of the fourth to ca. 275 BC,⁸¹ with parallels from wide areas.

The pyxides,⁸² covered toilet vessels, were characteristically the luxury items from the woman's world and common grave gifts, and sometimes used as incense-holders.⁸³ Those recovered in Marmara were deep cylindrical vessels with small conical foot,⁸⁴ and slip-over lid with horizontal ungrooved flange.⁸⁵ The top of the lid varied from a simple flat dome, with a small concave centre surrounded by a groove,⁸⁶ to a more elaborate one tapering from the flange to a strongly raised concave centre.

Besides, two miniature bowls of black glaze production were discovered inside a larger unpainted vessel, thus making up a three-piece set, which could point to a meal prepared at the tomb. The reported dark traces of fire on the southwestern side of the grave itself could also point to the same.⁸⁷

The five fragments of probably two terracotta figurines⁸⁸ were all made of the same very pale brown clay.⁸⁹ Two of them are here identified as belonging to clothed figurines. The first fragment (ΘΕ 2700B) presents the lower body and thighs of a standing female wearing a chiton and symmetrically draped himation. The parallels are dated from the end of the fourth century until the end of the third BC, and originate from Attica, Tanagra, and from Corfu.⁹⁰ The second fragment (ΘΕ 2701) is the right upper arm of a man, with a short

⁷⁷ Blech 1982, 96 with n. 72; Masiello 1984, 75, 83.

⁷⁸ Kurz and Boardman 1971, 165.

⁷⁹ Riginos 1992, pl. 105a; Riginos 1996, 175, pl. 12.

⁸⁰ Howland 1958, 68.

⁸¹ Rotroff 1997, 494, with the adjusted Athenian chronology to Howland. E.g. from Kassope, Gravani 1986, 125–126, fig. 128,7, dated in general lines to the third century. See also Vrekaj 2004, 274, 287, pl. XI, dated to 300–275.

⁸² Riginos 1992, pl. 105b; Riginos 1996, 175, pl. 11: ΘΕ 2669 and ΘΕ 2671A.

⁸³ Sparkes and Talcot 1970, 173.

⁸⁴ Sparkes and Talcot 1970, 174–175, 177–178; Drougou 1991, 166. For the pyxides in general, Rotroff 1997, 188–189, nos. 1 and 5.

⁸⁵ Rotroff 1997, 189, also 360–361, no 1220, fig. 75, dated to ca. 275 BC.

⁸⁶ ΘΕ 2669 with its body preserved, and ΘΕ 2671A. Good parallel from Kassope, in Gravani 1986, 126–127, fig. 129,7, from the third century BC, and from Veroia, in Drougou 1991, II 2668–2669, 73, 77, dated to the third century, and a red glazed pyxis, II 5193, 86–87, to the early second century BC.

⁸⁷ For the ceremonies at the graveside, Garland 1985, 39–40, and for the burnt deposits in and around the grave, 110–112.

⁸⁸ ΘΕ 2700A = Fig. 8; ΘΕ 2700B = Fig. 7; ΘΕ 2701 = Fig. 6; ΘΕ 2706 = Fig. 9; ΘΕ 2707 = Fig. 10.

⁸⁹ 10 YR 7/3–7/4, Munsell Soil Color Charts, Year 2000 revised washable edition.

⁹⁰ Dimensions of the fragment: ht. 10.6 cm and b. 6.2 cm. For the whole figurines, Pasquier 2003, 215, fig. 150 from Attica, and 252, fig. 191 from Tanagra, and presumably from Corfu, Burn and Higgins 2001, 98, no. 2218, with matching clay.



Fig. 8.



Fig. 9.

sleeve enfolded in a curving *chlamys*.

This sort of rendering usually belongs

to a standing draped man known as epebe or young soldier. The parallels seem to have been manufactured in Tanagra and its surroundings, and Athens, and are datable from the end of the fourth until the end of the third century BC.⁹¹ Many of the epebe figurines have been found in tombs, which may reflect the desire to bind the young generation to the world of the dead and to the obligations it required.⁹² Two of the other Marmarian figurine fragments,⁹³ only slightly modelled, may come from the backs of these figurines, and the fifth from the leg of the male figurine.⁹⁴

The still extant objects from the Marmara monument present the following picture: The builders were wealthy people with contacts beyond their immediate surroundings, and the means and opportunity to erect a great tomb. The pyxides, datable to the third century, seem to point to Macedonia, and the lamps and the figurines to Athenian influence, with their common chronological parameter being the first half of the third century. The narrowest date we obtain from the material from inside the enclosure is

⁹¹ Dimensions of the fragment: ht. 4.8 and b. 4.1 cm. For the intact epebes from Tanagra and Athens, Pasquier 2003, 206–207, figs. 139–141; fig. 141 was discovered in a tomb along with miniature vases. Also Burn and Higgins 2001, 64, and nos. 2117–2120. It is not always possible to decide whether they reflect real-life youths undergoing military training, or even characters of New Comedy. *Chlamys* as a distinctive robe of epebe, Schmidt 1991, 131. Examples of young men wrapped in similar fashion in himation, see Vafopoulou-Richardson 1991, 25, nr. 26, from the fourth century, and 49, nr. 57, from the second century.

⁹² Burkert 2001, 208.

⁹³ Figs. 8–9.

⁹⁴ Fig. 10. We have identified here one male, and one female figurine. The number of the figurines corresponds to the two crania, reported by Mr. Riginos at the excavation, even though only one skeleton was studied by I. Tsinas, this volume, 55–56.

the first decades of the third century until ca. 275 BC. Outside the enclosure an Ambrakian coin from 238–168 was discovered. If it once formed an integral part of the activities by the tomb, we must lower the chronology, and accept that presented by the excavator, to the latter half of the third century.⁹⁵ The higher chronology would point to the reign of Pyrrhus, a sufficiently stable time for large-scale building. As to the status of the tomb, in this case also we have lost the intact monument with all its finds, and cannot draw our conclusions from a sound whole. Thus, we would be safer to call the tomb at Marmara a monumental tomb rather than a *heroon*.

Conclusions

In the long development of *heroa* from cult places of mythological heroes to the tombs of almost anyone, the period of major change is generally considered to be from Late Classical through Hellenistic. The vagueness of the development has led to tombs and monuments of this period often being called *heroa* without really good grounds. The problem arises especially with less-known, often rural candidates, not known from the ancient written sources. Our search through past investigations was intended to shed some light on the credibility of four monuments as *heroa*. At first glance there seemed to be some similarities, such as a certain monumentality and the rectangular enclosures: In Ktirakia 10 x 12.20 m, in Koumoula 11.10 x 11 m, in Rhodes 6 x 6 m, and in Marmara 15.36 x 15.45 m. None of the publications showed, however, a section drawing, even though the building technique was tentatively described and parallels referred to. In Ktirakia and Marmara the structures had the same orientation,⁹⁶ Koumoula and Marmara were probably originally hypaethral; some information was also given about doors and entrances.⁹⁷ Hellenistic pottery was discovered at all four sites, but it has rarely been analysed in full. Other finds also partly lack full attention, although our reflections on them demonstrate their potential. In the end, the chronology of the Ktirakia monument turned out to be problematic, and the Rhodes monument a public building of another kind. Thus, on reflection, our monuments’ attributions as *heroa* have tended to crumble.

The nature of the publications, varying from a short text to more detailed reports with photographs of the discovered finds, affected our chances of evaluating the nature of the constructions. Even in the present state of all the material as yet unpublished, two of the candidates, Komoula and Marmara, stand atop our short list. Some of the signs



Fig. 10.

⁹⁵ Initially he dated the monument generally to the third century, Riginos 1992, 353, but lowered the chronology later, Riginos 1996, 174.

⁹⁶ None was given for Koumoula.

⁹⁷ For Ktirakia and Koumoula.

presented above in our introduction as belonging to cultic activity by the graveside were certainly met, but its obvious short term may have been rather for the benefit of the newly dead. On general level, when studying any Hellenistic *heroon*, one should be able to evaluate not only the construction itself, but also the most modest looking finds connected with it, as the monumentality alone does not make a tomb a *heroon*.⁹⁸ A detailed re-examination of the monuments themselves and all their connected finds would seem to be a prerequisite for almost any monument to earn the rank in this period of transition. Research in a relatively well-defined area offering tombs, pottery finds and epigraphical material⁹⁹ might be of great interest.

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⁹⁸ I. Kader has already earlier suggested neutral terms “Memorialarchitekturen oder –Bauten”, Kader 1995, 200–201, n. 13.

⁹⁹ The information provided by Epikteta’s famous testament, for which see M. Mikkola, this volume, 24–26, could be combined with a study of epigraphical sources and the Hellenistic tombs on Thera and Rheneia, e.g. Evangelismos (Sellada), and Ekhendra in H. Dragendorff (ed.), *Thera II. Theraeische Gräber. Hellenistische Gräber*, Berlin 1903, 236–256, and Khairopoleion in *AD 26* (1971), 194–200, and *BCH* 71–72 (1947–1948), 419, and P. Bruneau and J. Ducat, *Guide de Délos*, Paris 1983, 268.

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Appendix.

Analysis of the Skeletal Remains of the Monument of Marmara, Zervochori*

Ioannis Tsinas

The overall condition of preservation and representation of the skeletal material is, generally speaking, exceptionally bad. The poor storage conditions, the composition of the earth in the specific burial location, but also the microclimate of the grave, are perhaps those factors that led to the characteristic fragmentation of the bones. For this reason it was judged necessary to conserve the material, in order to prevent as much further deterioration as possible. This was followed by the restoration of as many of the bones as proved feasible.

The conservation procedures were founded on the principle of the reversibility of every operation. The materials used, such as saturation with a water-based solution or a polyvinyl acetate emulsion, allow the possibility of removal with an inert solvent (water or acetone). Also, the bones were reset using a glue soluble in acetone, in order for the process to be reversible.

As can be seen in the attached photographs, from the total bone assemblage it proved possible to reset in place some groups from the upper and the lower limbs (2 femurs, 1 tibia, 1 fibula, 1 humerus, 1 ulna, 1 section of the ankle bone, 1 section of the heel) and the greater part of the lower jaw together with the teeth. For the cranial bone and section of the pelvis, it was only possible to attempt consolidation, in order to avoid further deterioration.

The fragmentation of the material greatly hindered attempts at its initial study, and limited it to the level of macroscopic observation. The determination of gender, as well as the assessment of the biological age of the particular individual, relied essentially on the observation of the skeleton's morphological characteristics.

More specifically, the determination of gender was based largely on the most general impression of the bones being slightly built, but also on the observation of the sexual dimorphism characteristics which are preserved here, i.e. the morphology of the lower jaw and of one mastoid process. We can thus cautiously state that the individual concerned was most likely female.

On the other hand, the assessment of biological age essentially relies on the observation of the degree of wear of the teeth. The teeth preserved from this skeleton show a total destruction of the enamel and the appearance of the pulp, a fact that leads to the conclusion that the individual was probably an adult of the broadest middle age category (35-50). This is also supported by the presence of arthritic deterioration, in the form of osteophytes, which were observed in a preserved part of the sacrum (upper articular surface).

* Translated from Greek by Jonathan E. Thomlinson.

Finally, despite much effort, it did not prove possible to come to any secure conclusions regarding the diagnosis of possible pathological conditions. Here also, the fragmentation of the skeletal material proved the limiting factor. Despite this, however, it is worth noting that traces of enamel hypoplasia were observed on the teeth. This pathological condition relates to the particular individual having suffered dietary constraints during development, while for many it is also linked to some form of anemia, such as iron deficiency. Furthermore, the osteophytes observed on the upper articular surface of the sacrum (see above) are relevant not only in age considerations, but also relate to strain, probably due to mechanical stress.

Perhaps in the future, with the study in a laboratory of the preserved material not yet conserved, and with the application of methods such as chemical analysis or the examination of genetic material (ancient DNA), hitherto unknown aspects of the life of this woman will come to light.

The Intellectual and Geographical Background of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*

Jeanette Lindblom

Introduction

The texts of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* (*CD*) are in many ways enigmatic. Finding an answer to the most basic questions, such as the date of their composition, their place of origin and their author, have so far escaped all attempts by modern researchers. What seems to be more or less agreed upon is that, due to their dependence on and relationship to Neo-Platonic philosophy and especially to Proclus, the texts were probably written in the fifth century.¹ More precisely, the *CD* is usually assigned to the period after the 440s, when it seems that Proclus had already published the works influencing the *CD*. Another *terminus post quem* often suggested is the Council of Chalcedon in 451, seemingly influential on some aspects of the texts. Similarly, additions introduced to the *Trisagion* sung in the liturgy around 476, as well as the attempt by the emperor Zeno at a conciliation between conflicting theological opinions on the nature of Christ with the *Henotikon* in 482, have been seen as influential.² The last three dates are not based on decisive evidence and are therefore not conclusive. A *terminus ante quem*, on the other hand, is provided by the theological discussions between Orthodox and Monophysite bishops in Constantinople in 532, where some texts by Dionysius the Areopagite were referred to.³ We are thus dealing with the period between 440 and 532.

The early users of the texts compiled in the *CD* seem to belong to a network of Syrian Monophysite activists and be connected to the circle around Severus of Antioch. It is no wonder that many of the suggestions put forward by scholars for the identity of the author of the *CD* come from these circles, including Severus himself. It is still only in the sources related to these individuals that the *CD* emerges into known history, and this is therefore their earliest documented use. The texts themselves must stem from somewhere beyond that, in the dim area of unrecorded history. An examination of the circle of individuals already acquainted with the *CD* at an early stage, disentangling personal relationships, and tracing their physical, historical and intellectual surroundings, could be a fruitful approach to finding the circles within which the *CD* itself came into existence. In this way a versatile picture for the composition of the texts might be drawn up.

¹ A pioneering work was carried out by Koch and Stiglmayr in 1895, when they both, in separate articles, concluded that the *CD* depended heavily on Proclus' texts and therefore could with difficulty have been written in the first century AD.

² Roques 1954b, 70. The Monophysite side came to insert an addition into the text of the *Trisagion*, which is usually attributed to the Bishop of Antioch, Peter the Fuller, around the year 476. E.g. Rorem 1993, 106 with n. 6; Riedinger 1959, 286–7; Riedinger 1964, 151. See also this article, 68.

³ Engberding 1956, 218–9; Krüger 1899, 302–3; Wilson 1983, 54–5, who goes with the dating, established among some scholars, of around 500 for the *CD*. Rorem 1993, 170 considers the author as contemporary with Boethius (c. 480–524).



The foundations of the basilica of Dionysius the Areopagite from the mid sixteenth century at the northeastern rock face of the Areopagus.

The corpus itself consists of four books and ten letters. The books are *De caelesti hierarchia* (CH), *De ecclesiastica hierarchia* (EH), *De divinis nominibus* (DN) and *De mystica theologia* (Mth), which with its five chapters is no longer than the longest letters.⁴ As for the letters (*Ep.*), they differ in length from short remarks on half a page to long discussions; some scholars have discarded a few of the letters as later additions.⁵ The texts are written in an archaic language avoiding naturalised ecclesiastical expressions of the time and instead employing unusual terminology and classicising words for different offices and functions. This makes both interpretation and translation problematic, as it is not always conclusive and clear exactly what is intended.⁶ Relatively early, in the mid sixth and early seventh century, the preserved corpus started to live a life of its own, generating both an abundance of myths and traditions about the alleged author, Dionysius the Areopagite, and his spiritual teacher Hierotheus, as well as some other pseudo writings and literary products, all connected to and based on the texts of the original corpus. Any knowledge of the real identity of the author of the *CD* seems to have been already lost, and the authorship fully accepted as that of St. Paul's disciple in Athens. This had still been doubted, at least by the Orthodox side, at the theological discussions in Constantinople in 532.

A monk from Edessa wrote the *Book of Hierotheus* as early as the sixth century; this is a text attempting to be by the revered teacher mentioned in the *CD*. The author has been

⁴ Rorem 1993, 183 also notes the brevity of the *Mth*.

⁵ E.g. Brons 1975, 119–140 sees all letters from number six onwards as not original. Cf. this article, 59, 70.

⁶ Rorem 1987, 2–3. The translation used here is by Luijbeid 1987. Regarding the editions that have been consulted, see *CD* 1 and *CD* 2 in the bibliography.

identified as Stephen bar Sudhali of Edessa, a monk contemporary with the influential Monophysite bishop Philoxenus of Mabbug, who wrote some warnings about Stephen's teachings.⁷ *The Book of Hierotheus* contains many Dionysian traits, but these are mainly to give a feel of authenticity to a work otherwise deeply and uncompromisingly Evagrian in character.⁸ The celestial spheres and the angelic hierarchies, presented in *The Book of Hierotheus*, seem to be borrowed more or less directly from the *CD*, as also some other elements.⁹ On both a theological and a literary level *The Book of Hierotheus* is, however, much more naive, simple and unsystematic than the texts of the *CD* itself.

By the course of the seventh century, the tradition around the author of the *CD* was firmly established and accepted. He was asserted as the first-century Athenian Dionysius the Areopagite, and also as the author of some astronomical texts and a supposed autobiography. The tradition also confirmed him as having a teacher, Hierotheus, and consequently this person was also placed in the first century as one of the first bishops of Athens.¹⁰ Soon, hagiographies were written about both of them, combining elements from the texts related to the evolved tradition. The knowledge of the original author of the *CD* had long ago been lost behind and interwoven with the flourishing narrative around Dionysius the Areopagite.

Biographical allusions and original aim

There is not much in the *CD* to tell us about the author himself, besides some indications of his educational background, literary influences, and remarks on other books by him. One typical aspect of the *CD* is the underlining of relationships between spiritual teachers and their pupils. The author frequently refers to teachers in general, but a special place is taken up by his great teacher and initiator Hierotheus.¹¹ It appears from the letters and texts that the author had some authority and rank in a network of initiated monks, priests and hierarchs, to whom he sends his teaching, guidance and instructions. The author also mentions being part of a handed-down tradition.¹²

The introduction of Hierotheus creates a certain dilemma. One of the problems, assuming the *CD* to be original pseudo writing, is the double set of close spiritual teachers of the author. If he tries to present himself as a direct disciple of St. Paul, why then, in the first place, introduce an otherwise unknown Hierotheus as initiator and teacher?¹³ The

⁷ See this article, 68.

⁸ Louth 1989, 113. See also Pelikan 1987, 15; *ODB*, s.v. Stephen bar Sudhali of Edessa.

⁹ The text has been edited and translated, see F. S. Marsh (ed. and transl.), *The Book Which is Called The Book of the Holy Hierotheus*, London 1927.

¹⁰ This actually created a small dilemma, as, according to the New Testament, Dionysius the Areopagite was St. Paul's first disciple in Athens. According to the *CD*, on the other hand, the author's spiritual teacher was Hierotheus, who therefore should have preceded him as a Christian, though he is not mentioned in the *Acts of the Apostles* or in any connection with St. Paul.

¹¹ E.g. *DN* 1.4, *PG* 3.592b; *DN* 2.4, *PG* 3.640d–641a; *DN* 3.2, *PG* 3.681d–684a; *DN* 11.6, *PG* 3.956a.

¹² Esp. *DN* 13.4, *PG* 3.984a; but also e.g. *DN* 1.4, *PG* 3.592b; *DN* 2.4, *PG* 3.640d; *CH* 13.4, *PG* 3.308a, *EH* 1.1, *PG* 3.372a; *EH* 1.5, *PG* 3.376d–377b; *EH* 7.11, *PG* 3.568a.

¹³ It has to be noted that it is only in the *DN* that Hierotheus is mentioned by name. In other parts, especially the *CH* and *EH*, there are some references to a teacher, but one cannot infer conclusively that it is Hierotheus who is alluded to in these contexts, though such remarks have naturally been interpreted as referring to him, so e.g. Rorem 1987, 105, n. 197, 160, n. 68, 200, n. 20; and Brons 1975, 116.

person of Hierotheus does not add any credibility to a first-century pretence, as no such person is mentioned in an apostolic context. The purely theological or philosophical side of the discussion does not require the presence of Hierotheus.¹⁴ Nor can Hierotheus be seen as a symbol for St. Paul, who is mentioned in the text of his own accord and with his real name. The only reason for launching such an individual must be that he, either really or in a symbolic way, represents the author's spiritual teacher and initiator. He might symbolise a pagan teacher, who could not be mentioned by a Christian author.

Not many attempts have been made to identify Hierotheus, whose name had no connection to the apostolic era. Suggestions have mostly come as by-products of attempts to identify a historical teacher-disciple relationship that could match that presented in the *CD*.¹⁵ The foremost contestant in the scholarly discussions for the part of Hierotheus has been the pagan Neo-Platonic philosopher and teacher Proclus,¹⁶ besides whom other Neo-Platonic teachers, such as those of Alexandria, have been suggested. Others have proposed that Hierotheus is a symbolic presentation of a group of teachers. Be it as it may, Hierotheus is clearly presented as a Christian of high ecclesiastical rank and referred to also in connection with the somewhat obscure description of the Dormition of the Virgin Mary,¹⁷ which all fits rather badly with the *persona* of the pagan Proclus.

The pseudonymity of the author in itself has also been seen as another reason for the disguise of an influential teacher behind the name of Hierotheus. If the original intent was to create pseudo writing as the work of a first century individual,¹⁸ the author could hardly present a fifth-century individual as his teacher. One of the problems with the *CD* is actually the original aim of the text.

The names of the different recipients occurring mostly in the titles of the texts, and other individual names, are often interpreted as an intent to put the *CD* in a first-century environment. Some scholars have noted that the headings of the books and letters could well be later additions or objects of major editing through time.¹⁹ The collection of names, however, does not necessarily have to be interpreted as an attempt to create an illusion of an Apostolic context, as I have shown elsewhere; most of these names are both possible and even quite common in a fifth- or early sixth-century context.²⁰ Thus, seeing the whole *CD* as originally intended pseudo writing actually creates more problems than it solves.

¹⁴ Hierotheus is introduced in the *DN*, as the author wants to give him credit for the theological work he has done, and explains that he only wants to supplement the writings of this his great teacher, not try to surpass him.

¹⁵ E.g. Honigmann tried to identify the pair Dionysius – Hierotheus with the historical fifth-century individuals Peter the Iberian and his companion John the Eunuch, but both Roques and Engberding argue against such an identification, Roques 1954b, 69–98; Engberding 1956, 220–227.

¹⁶ Riedinger 1959, 291–3; Riedinger 1964, 152, who wants to identify Pseudo-Dionysius with Peter the Fuller and Hierotheus as a symbol for Proclus.

¹⁷ *DN* 3.2, *PG* 3.681c–684d; Luiibheid 1987, 70. It can be noted that in Luiibheid's translation this is rendered as a vision, not the actual event.

¹⁸ Sint 1960, 157–163 discusses different types of pseudo-texts from antiquity and their process of creation, not all having originated in intentional falsifications, but some only later having been identified with a famous personality, when the identity of the original author had been lost or there was a need to secure the preservation of the texts. Rorem 1993, 118–120 discusses pseudonymity in relation to the *CD*.

¹⁹ E.g. Rorem 1993, 97.

²⁰ Lindblom 1995–96, 54–58.

All the references to St. Paul are of a literary nature, based on a textual tradition, either as directly quoting or otherwise referring to preserved texts by him.²¹ No part of the *CD* actually speaks of a personal contact or direct relationship between the author and St. Paul. When the author speaks of St. Paul as his own and the recipient Timothy's foremost spiritual guide, he does not actually have to mean it in a personal way; he could rather refer to the important influence of St. Paul's writings and teaching. This would leave Hierotheus as the instructor with personal influence on and contact with the author. If one discharges the idea of original intentions of pseudo writing, the problem with the introduction of Hierotheus as teacher might disappear. St. Paul would be a teacher and inspiration through his writings and his strong traditional authority in Christian theology, while Hierotheus, either as a real person or a pseudonym, would represent the contemporary teacher.²² This would also explain the introduction of Hierotheus into the narrative. Though Hierotheus is a very unusual name, it is not a creation by the author of the *CD*. There is some evidence for this name from as early as the Classical period, and of its use in the early Byzantine period.²³

Other biographical references are offered in *Ep.* 7, if we accept it as part of the original corpus. At the beginning of the letter the author remarks that he has "never spoken out against Greeks or any others" and claims that truth should speak for itself.²⁴ He continues further on that he has "never wished to embark on controversies with Greeks or with any others".²⁵ The reason for these declarations is his willingness to comment on the sophist Apollophanes, through the mediation of the hierarch Polycarp, to whom the letter is addressed; the question is about accusations, which the said Apollophanes seems to have made against him. The text seems to indicate a dispute between Christians and pagans about the use of philosophical and theological material in their argumentation against each other. Apollophanes is said to have accused him of "making unholy use of things Greek to attack the Greeks".²⁶

Ep. 7 is the only place in the whole *CD* where the author actually calls himself by the name of Dionysius.²⁷ The author claims that he and Apollophanes were together in Heliopolis many years earlier during a solar eclipse, "when the Saviour was put to the cross".²⁸ Heliopolis could either be the ancient Egyptian city, or the Syrian city nowadays known as Baalbek. The Egyptian Heliopolis was described by Strabo in the first century BC to be almost uninhabited and its temples much deserted. That is why the Syrian city of Baalbek is probably meant, as it was thriving in the fifth century AD, and was still a rich

²¹ Lindblom 1995–96, 58–60. E.g. *DN* 2.11, *PG* 3.649d; *DN* 7.1, *PG* 3.865b. Compare Brons 1975, 116–8, who discusses St. Paul in relationship to Hierotheus in the *CD*, but does not seem to doubt the attempts at creating an apostolic context for the author and his teacher.

²² Compare Louth 1989, 103, who insists on St. Paul being presented as the common master of Denys and Hierotheus (and Timothy) in *DN* 7.1. Of course St. Paul could be seen as the literary inspiration of Hierotheus also, but reading the text without presumptions about its pseudo character does not give any reason to absolutely conclude that St. Paul is presented as a real life and personal teacher of the author and the other individuals in the circle of his close personal relationships.

²³ For further discussion on this and the other names used in the *CD*, see Lindblom 1995–96, 54–8.

²⁴ *Ep.* 7.1, *PG* 3.1077b; Luibheid 1987, 266.

²⁵ *Ep.* 7.1, *PG* 3.1080b; Luibheid 1987, 267.

²⁶ *Ep.* 7.2, *PG* 3.1080b; Luibheid 1987, 267.

²⁷ *Ep.* 7.3, *PG* 3.1081c; Luibheid 1987, 269.

²⁸ *Ep.* 7.2, *PG* 3.1081a; Luibheid 1987, 268.

city in the seventh century when the Arabs captured it.²⁹ This, with the educational and intellectual background of the author, and some theological and liturgical background of the texts, seems to connect the author to the Near East, along the Syrian, Palestinian and Egyptian axis. A further consideration is that the individuals among the early users of the *CD* also were connected to this region.

De ecclesiastica hierarchia is probably best suited to provide some hints on the context in which the *CD* might have been produced, as it is the only text referring to more tangible and practical matters. There are several peculiarities in this text on Church hierarchy. What first strikes the eye of a female reader is the more or less total lack of women in the narrative.³⁰ Even if the text is concerned with liturgy, women are not even mentioned as part of the congregation. If this text was about an ordinary congregational Church hierarchy, no matter what its chronological fixed point, some sign of female presence should occur.³¹ The only time women are included in the text is in the reference to parents bringing their child for baptism, therefore presumably including both fathers and mothers. Oddly enough, this discussion also comes in the end of the whole text, as the last paragraph of the last chapter, long after the rite of initiation and the rites for burials had been treated; perhaps this passage was a later addition.³² Even in the baptism of adults in a normal congregational situation some special arrangements for female proselytes would be required. This was one of the places where the order of the deaconesses came in, as their participation took into consideration decency and the moral requirements of the society.³³ Nothing of the kind is, however, suggested in the text. Besides, there is a lengthy discussion of death and the proper burial rights, where the presentation in the *CD* especially emphasises that holy men should be buried according to their place in the hierarchy, laying “the body in an honoured place along with the bodies of others of his order”.³⁴

The very male point of view in the *EH* also comes forth in the part Contemplation in relation to the Communion; the text reads “when these sacred hymns, /—/, have prepared our spirits to be one with what we shall shortly celebrate, /—/ we make up a homogeneous choir of sacred men”.³⁵ The interesting question here is of course, whether this refers to the whole congregation, or only to the consecrated orders, which naturally would consist only of men. In general, one notes that the rules presented in the *EH* are for the most part

²⁹ The pagan temples probably no longer functioned in the fifth century AD. During the fourth century, emperor Constantine I had built a basilica in the area, and emperor Theodosius I had built another basilica in the main court of the Jupiter temple using building material from that temple, but paganism and pagan cults still had some strong foothold there in the early fifth century, and even continued to exist in some form for most of the sixth century. E.g. Hajjar 1985, 379–383; Downey 1963, 14–32.

³⁰ Louth and Rorem have also noted that women are almost completely absent from representation in the *CD*, Louth 1989, 55; Rorem 1993, 98, n. 4.

³¹ Another interesting related point is that neither the *EH* nor the *CH* make any real attempt to put the author or the texts into an early apostolic context. On the contrary, the author frequently speaks about a tradition he is partaking of and which he in his turn passes on to a younger generation.

³² That this is the only place where child baptism is mentioned is also noted by Rorem 1993, 116. This particular part of the text is also in its content very apologetic towards baptism of children, explaining why such a practice could theologically be supported.

³³ E.g. Connor 2004, 170.

³⁴ *EH* 7, PG 3.556d; Luiheid 1987, 252. Compare Daley 2001, 77–8. Daley puts the passage on death and burial into a perspective of theological texts dealing with death and the type of discussion typical for the later fifth and early sixth century.

³⁵ *EH* 3.5, PG 3.432a–b; Luiheid 1987, 214.

very strict, almost ascetic, in their character.³⁶ René Roques has also noted some oddities in the *EH*, such as the meagre discussion of the order of monks; it seems to be incomplete, as no inner hierarchy of the monastic organisation or its consecration is discussed. He also notes that several other categories of the Christian congregation are lacking, even though it may reflect the reality of the Church in the fifth and sixth centuries.³⁷

Perhaps there is another solution to these problems. What if the so called *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* originally *de facto* is not a description of the general Church hierarchy or an ordinary ecclesiastical congregation, but actually depicts something similar to a monastic community or religious brotherhood? What if the lack of description of any internal monastic organisation is due to the fact that it is not only the so-called monks, or those who have been translated with this term in the *EH*, that represent asceticism, and that the whole *EH* was originally intended to represent a stricter type of Christian hierarchy? The category translated as monks would then actually represent only the ordinary recluses of the community or some special category of monastics, for instance hermits. This would explain many of the oddities, such as the lack of women, the underlining of the relationship between spiritual teacher and pupil, not only in *EH* but notable in the other texts as well, the relatively simple structure of the hierarchy, and the lack of details of a separate hierarchy for monasteries. In fact, the last category discussed in the hierarchy is that usually interpreted and translated as monks. The only time that one gets some impression of any sort of a congregation is when the different categories of individuals who should be excluded from communion are mentioned.

Not directly related, but still an interesting point, is that five of the ten letters preserved in the *CD* are directed to monks, the first four to a monk named Gaius, and *Ep.* 8 to one called Demophilus. Furthermore, the letter to Demophilus reproaches a monk who wants to discard an ordained cleric and who takes charge of the Eucharist vessels. There were, in fact, many revolting monks in the sources of the fourth and fifth centuries, who themselves took liberties towards ordinary churches, but this letter could still refer to a real dispute within a religious community. Again there is no conclusive answer, but only different clues which have to be interpreted together, in order to make sense of the different texts and the corpus as a whole.

There are many types of brotherhoods and monastic milieus in the fifth century, from which the *EH* originally might have evolved, and it could be rewarding to further consider this point with hypothetical thoughts. It is still another issue how the *EH*, later on and perhaps with additions to the text, in such a case then came to be interpreted as a symbolic model for the ideal ecclesiastical hierarchy.

Centres of philosophical education, ideas and theological topics

Let us now try to place the *CD* within the fifth-century context from which an educated person with good knowledge of both Christian theology and Neo-Platonic philosophy might have grown to write these texts. Alexandria was the most important centre for philosophy and education from the fourth to the sixth century, though Athens had grown

³⁶ Regarding the *CH* and Pseudo-Dionysius' writings in general, Goltzing has noted on their relationship to ascetic tradition, especially Syrian, Goltzing, 2001, 139–40, esp. n. 50; Goltzing 1994, 131–79.

³⁷ Roques 1954a, 287, 334.

back to importance in the latter half of the fourth century after Plutarch had created his Neo-Platonic school there. Most men of schooling spent at least some time in Alexandria's institutions; Hierocles became a well-known lecturer on Plato, Proclus studied there, and some of his pupils also later worked and taught there. Ammonius, for example, studied for a while in Athens under Proclus, before returning to his home town, Alexandria, and becoming a teacher of philosophy.³⁸

The school of Athens remained relatively pagan, whereas Alexandria became more Christian in nature. Some pagan pupils of Ammonius, such as Damascius and Simplicius, later made their careers in Athens. On the other hand, his pupil John Philoponus later functioned as a Christian philosopher and teacher in Alexandria, though several pagan philosophers worked in Alexandria at the same time.³⁹ This shows that there was a large variety of both teachers and students, and as long as non-religious subjects were concerned, Christians could be taught by pagan teachers and Christian teachers could have pagan pupils.⁴⁰ Gaza was another centre for especially Christian philosophy during the second half of the fifth and the early sixth century. Several literary active learned Christian men are connected to this city during that period; suffice it to mention the philosopher and rhetorician Aeneas of Gaza, the theologian Procopius of Gaza and the grammarian John of Gaza. The first two were also teachers.⁴¹

There seems to have been a continuous contact and flow of both individuals and ideas between Alexandria, Athens, and Gaza, and certainly some rivalry and polemic writing, too.⁴²

The Christian writers were capable of arguing against pagan philosophy by using its own rhetoric, argumentation techniques and terminology. This reminds us of the passage in *Ep. 7* of the *CD*, in which the author defends himself against accusations of "making unholy use of things Greek to attack the Greeks"; in this period Greeks naturally means pagans. This fits well in a fifth- and early sixth-century context, when both Christian and pagan philosophers existed side by side.

Ideas that had influenced both Neo-Platonic and Christian thinkers were in the spirit of the time. One of them was the transmission of mystical wisdom from teacher to pupil. In the tradition of Hermetic texts, a common theme was how divine wisdom was transmitted from father to son.⁴³ The author of the *CD* talks warmly about his sacred initiator or teacher, and, especially in the two treaties on the hierarchies, turns over sacred information in a fatherly way to the "most sacred of sacred sons".⁴⁴

³⁸ Böhm 1967, 25; Aujoulat 1986, 1–2, 6–9; Downey 1963, 106–108.

³⁹ Böhm 1967, 24–26. Also Sorabji 1987, 1–3; Lang 2001, 4–5; Aujoulat 1986, 9; Downey 1963, 14–32, 114–116.

⁴⁰ Böhm 1967, 27; Sorabji 1987, 2–3; Wilson 1983, 46.

⁴¹ Downey 1963, 108–116; Wilson 1983, 30. The circle in Gaza consisted of both pagan and Christian intellectuals of different genres, but Christian theological writing also sprang from these circles, Legier 1907, 350–1, 359–60; Downey 1963, 14–32; Wilson 1983, 30; Krüger 1899, 304. Besides these there were others from which knowledge is meagre, such as that of Nisibe on the border between Byzantium and the Persian Empire, Munier 1990, 120–2.

⁴² Krüger 1899, 304; Aujoulat 1986, 2; Böhm 1967, 24–27, 461–2; Chadwick 1987, 51; Sorabji 1987, 2–4, 6–7; Lang 2001, 4–7; MacCoull 1995, 388–9, 393; Wilson 1983, 44–5.

⁴³ Sint 1960, 59–61.

⁴⁴ *EH* 1.1, *PG* 3.369. In a similar fashion *EH* 7.1, *PG* 3.568d ("my son"); *CH* 2.5, *PG* 3.145c ("you, my child"), *CH* 13.4, *PG* 3.308a ("This is what I learned from him [my teacher], and I pass them on to you"). Also *EH* 3.1, *PG* 3.428a ("my fine young man").

Other ideas, e.g. of purification, illumination and perfection, used by the author of the *CD*, are found already in Origen and Gregory of Nyssa.⁴⁵ In his theological thought, Origen, an early third-century theological teacher and writer in Alexandria, divided the life of a man into body, soul and spirit, having a corresponding material, moral and enlightened level. According to Williams, Origen thought that “contemplation and asceticism, the spiritual life, were a necessary condition for grasping the hidden meaning of scripture; not all rose to these heights, but even the simplest would gain some benefit from the surface meanings”. He continues that the Biblical text “offers God’s wisdom to all – to the simple, who read and are touched by the stories, to those advancing in maturity who see the moral lessons to be learned, and to the truly spiritual, who learn the mysteries of the divine nature from these symbols”.⁴⁶

Some themes which appear in the *CD* were part of the theological discourse of the time. Questions like how to comprehend God, discussions on the nature of evil, and the orders of angels are topics that occur in the *CD*. The most important subject of the time, though, was the debate on the human and divine nature of Christ. To begin with there were no clear divisions into factions, and it was only in the mid fifth century that the positions hardened, and the different factions started to become more distinct. This was a long process, where opinions fluctuated between the opposite poles, Nestorianism and Monophysitism, while theologians tried to delineate the questions and clarify definitions.⁴⁷ After the sharpened conflicts in the mid fifth century, there were several attempts, including involvement of the emperor in 482, to reconcile the factions of the controversy and to harmonise the views in a way acceptable to each side. Things settled down, however, only after the mid sixth century, when the Monophysite faction separated from the Orthodox into a Church of their own.⁴⁸

It seems sensible to think that at least the main parts of the *CD* were written before the dispute between the Monophysite and Orthodox sides had become really inflamed in the late fifth and early sixth centuries, and perhaps even before the Monophysite side had become clearly defined. Even if the question would have been of deliberate pseudo writing, the author would surely have wanted his texts to support the opinion of his own theological circle. Now the texts, as they are, do not clearly support either the Monophysite or the Orthodox Christological view; both parties were in fact later willing to use them.⁴⁹ It seems therefore likely that the texts had been written before a clear division had taken place.

Another prevalent topic of the time was the Dormition of the Virgin Mary. The earliest preserved literary versions seem to come from Syria in the latter half of the fifth century. One is a verse homily by Jacob of Serug presented at a synod of anti-Chalcedonian bishops at Nisibis in 489. The other is a narrative of her death and ascension to heaven in a group of fragmentary Syriac texts now in the British Museum and usually

⁴⁵ Rorem 1993, 59; Rorem 1980, 90. On purification, illumination and perfection in the *CD* e.g. *CH* 3.2, *PG* 3.165b; *CH* 7.3, *PG* 3.209c–d; *CH* 10.1, *PG* 3.272d. Also the whole treatment in the *EH* on the sacraments, initiators and initiated is based on this tripartition.

⁴⁶ Williams 1991, 88–9.

⁴⁷ Frend 1973, 261–275; Goossens, 1943, 159–162, 174–180.

⁴⁸ E.g. Harvey 1988, 295–7; Frend 1973, 261–275. Goossens 1943, 176–9 provides a good summary on parts of the Monophysite controversy. Also Meyendorff 1993, 71–75 gives an overview of the main theological aspects of this dispute.

⁴⁹ Compare e.g. Roques 1954b, 81–3.

dated to the latter half of the fifth century. To these two, Brian E. Daley adds the short passage at the beginning of the *DN*,⁵⁰ which he similarly dates to around the year 500, estimating its stemming from a west Syrian community.⁵¹ Since the passage of the *DN* is less elaborative than the two other early versions of the event, one is inclined to consider that it actually belongs to an earlier phase of the development of this narrative, predating Jacob of Serug's and the anonymous Syrian manuscripts.

Christian brotherhoods and monastic communities

For the transmission of Christian tradition, theology and knowledge there existed many types of theological schools, brotherhoods and monastic organisations, besides the normal church congregations under the bishopric in the fifth century. One of them was the *Philoponoï*, i.e. Lovers of Labour, which was engaged at least in charity,⁵² and was active in Alexandria, but may have had connections in Gaza and Beirut. The association consisted of Alexandrian laymen, many of them professors and students, who formed a zealous brotherhood living in the profane world, but practising a more austere life than the general congregation of Christian believers. The surname of the Christian Neo-Platonist teacher, John Philoponus, in fifth-century Alexandria may indicate a connection to this particular brotherhood. Encyclopaedic information usually claims, however, that his surname comes from his diligence as a writer, as *Philoponos* means Lover of Toil;⁵³ it seems odd, though, that only he among many other productive scholars would be singled out with such a surname. Other groups of similar nature called the *Spoudai*, i.e. the Zealous, were found particularly in Jerusalem and Antioch, at least from the fourth to the seventh century; they undertook various church duties, took action against paganism and even nursed the sick. It also appears that many of these zealous people eventually became monks.⁵⁴

Later history writing as well as contemporary narrative of the time is often so focused on monasteries and ascetic life, that one easily forgets the large diversity of Christian organisations. They were organized in many ways and allowed various degrees of withdrawal from the physical world into a spiritual way of life. This could have meant anything from layman Christian brotherhoods to full-fledged monasteries, inside which there were also different categories and layers of withdrawal and asceticism. A common feature, though, to most of these, seems to have been the importance of tradition.

⁵⁰ "We and he [Hierotheus] and many of our holy brothers met together for a vision of that mortal body, that source of life, which bore God. James, the brother of God was there. So too was Peter, that summit, that chief of all those who speak of God. After the vision, all these hierarchs chose, each as he was able, to praise the omnipotent goodness of that divine frailty", *DN* 3.2, *PG* 3.681c–d; Luibheid 1987, 70. This rather obscure passage has usually been interpreted as an allusion to the Dormition of the Virgin Mary.

⁵¹ Daley 2001, 80–2. Also Rorem 1993, 18 deems that the author belongs to a late fifth-century Syrian Christianity.

⁵² E.g. Böhm 1967, 26–7; Lang 2001, 4. The main source for the activity of this brotherhood in Alexandria is the *Vita* of Severus of Antioch written by Zacharias of Mytilene, who himself belonged to the *Philoponoï* during his years in Alexandria.

⁵³ Böhm 1967, 26, 28; Sorabji 1987, 5; and Lang 2001, 3–4, who discuss both possibilities without giving a decisive answer to the question. See also Wilson 1983, 44; and this article, 69.

⁵⁴ Dawes and Baynes 1948, 267 (note to § 19, 229), and Petridès 1904, 341–8.

Transmission of knowledge and tradition was probably conveyed through a tutor-apprentice system or teacher-pupil relationship. This was indeed how knowledge, and particularly special insight, was generally transmitted in antiquity and the Late Antique world.

There also existed groups of Christians and other adherents of mysticism or spiritual philosophy, who saw themselves as more pure than other groups or than the common Christians practising their religion as normal churchgoers in the world. The Gnostics, for example, understood themselves as a chosen people and an elite in opposition to the worldly-minded.⁵⁵ In the churches of Syria and Mesopotamia the purifying power of chastity found expression in the creation of a special order, intermediate between the laity and the ordained clergy, and known to us from the Sixth Demonstration of Aphrahat the Persian, written in 337. They made a commitment to lifelong celibacy, but were not monks and nuns, as they could own property and practise only mild austerity.⁵⁶ According to Sebastian Brock in the apocryphal *Acts of Thomas*, the terms stranger and foreigner are used of a Christian in the world, which is a common feature in parts of Syriac-speaking Christianity.⁵⁷

Purely monastic communities also varied in their character and could include many types of monks; some lived in the actual monastery, while others lived as hermits and recluses outside the community, only visiting it for communion, special church services, or other particular occasions. The sources usually put a lot of focus on ascetics and hermits, even though *coinobiums* were probably more the rule as a monastic organisation, and the hermits were an exception or a speciality in connection with monastic living. In his *Church History*, Evagrius describes in the chapter praising Eudocia's monastic building activity two main types of monasteries: *phrontistaron* and *laurae*. In the first many individuals lived together in simple circumstances, while in the latter there were small cells for each recluse for meditation.⁵⁸ Brock notes for his part that, "whereas Egypt's forte was cenobitic monasticism, in Syria it was the solitary virtuoso who dominated the scene".⁵⁹

In early texts ascetic communities are often called philosophical wrestling schools. Correspondingly, Theodoret of Cyrrhus talks about retreats of philosophy with men in different degrees of spirituality, some of whom were honoured with priesthood.⁶⁰ A celibate could go through different phases and many types of ascetic living during his monastic career, including life in several consecutive monastic communities, transferring from one to another, perhaps later founding a monastery of his own. Monasteries also had their own clergy;⁶¹ an ascetic could rise in rank from ordinary monk, via the office of deacon, to priest, and even to bishop, as bishops often were chosen from among monastics during this period.

⁵⁵ Rudolph 1991, 188.

⁵⁶ Brock 1973, 13; Price 1985, xxi.

⁵⁷ Brock 1973, 8–10.

⁵⁸ Burman 1991, 58.

⁵⁹ Brock 1973, 13.

⁶⁰ *Theodoret of Cyrrhus*, 3.4 (38–9), 4.9 (53–4); Price 1985.

⁶¹ E.g. Moscus, *Prat.spir.* chs. 3, 46, 135, 136. The text is written in the early years of the seventh century, but depicts earlier events. *Vita St. Theodore of Sykeon*, chs. 21, 23, 24, 42, 62, 80, 81, 117, 130. The *vita* is probably from the early seventh century, depicting events of the late sixth century.

While the monastic movement experienced one of its peaks in the fifth century, it still showed a large diversity in different ways of organising ascetic and celibate Christian communities. The Christian monastic and ascetic tradition had by now developed only for some hundred years, and instead of a homogeneous tradition had many local ones. The terminology of ascetic establishments and celibates was, similarly, not yet determined, nor homogeneous.

One more feature characteristic to the fifth century was that it was still not uncommon to make a definite choice in religious matters only after reaching adulthood and having finished one's education. Child baptism was not yet a widespread practice, though it was on the increase and a shift in the balance in favour of child baptism appears in the sixth century. In the fifth century there could still be families divided among pagans and practising Christians,⁶² and a child was not necessarily automatically baptised. Even in Christian families baptism could be seen as a decision taken after reaching maturity of body and mind. In the fifth and maybe still in the early sixth century one could be a practising Christian long before actually being baptised. There also existed a tradition of baptism only at the point of entering a monastery or an ascetic life.⁶³ Especially in Syria some seemed to have gone so far as to consider only those who had denounced the world and embraced an ascetic life as pure Christians.⁶⁴

Individuals, relationships and networks

Though the early users of the *CD* had a strong connection with Syria, as it was one of the strongholds of the Monophysite movement, their education and spiritual training stemmed from scholarly or monastic surroundings in Egypt and Palestine. There were links to cities like Alexandria, Gaza and its harbour town Maiouma, Eleutheropolis, and Bethlehem, even Jerusalem. Severus of Antioch was later closely related to the use and spread of the Pseudo-Dionysian texts, and he in his persona connects many links in our story. He was one of the main actors in Monophysite circles, and seems indeed to be the spider in the web from which the texts dispersed mainly among Monophysites, but eventually also to the Orthodox side.

In Severus' writings predating the year 528 there are some indications of knowledge of the texts of the *CD*.⁶⁵ Besides, the chronicle of Zacharias of Mytilene⁶⁶ lists texts by Dionysius of Areopagite among the authors Severus had read. Zacharias is not aware of Pseudo-Dionysius' real identity, but seems to consider the texts as authentic from the apostolic era. On the other hand, we do not know if Severus himself knew the identity of

⁶² Chuvin 1990, 115.

⁶³ On baptism as part of going into a monastery, see Munier 1990, 119–20, and Murray 1974/75, *passim*.

⁶⁴ Brock 1973, 8.

⁶⁵ In 528, Paul of Callinice translated two of Severus of Antioch's texts (*Adversus Apologiam Iuliani* and *Contra Additiones*), which seem to contain some reference to texts in the *CD*, Roques 1954b, 70. Severus' original texts might have been written earlier, in the 520s or even the 510s.

⁶⁶ This is not to be confused with the biography of Severus of Antioch, also written by his friend Zacharias. The chronicle was probably written around the year 495, but has survived only as an epitome composed in a Syriac chronicle by an anonymous monk in 569, Grillmeier 1987, 36. As Zacharias of Mytilene's authorship is thus under doubt, the chronicle is nowadays often referred to as the Pseudo-Zacharian chronicle.

the author; a hypothesis is that he was the one responsible for the transferral of the texts to the apostolic period and consequently of their attribution to Dionysius the Areopagite.

Against this background a short biography of Severus of Antioch can be enlightening. He was born to a Christian family around 465 in Sozopolis, in Pisidia. He went to study in Alexandria, probably in the early 480s, and might have been in some way associated with the brotherhood of the *Philoponoï*. Around 485 he left in order to study law in Beirut, but was certainly already a practising Christian before being baptised in Maiouma in 488; this he did only after having quitted his educational path, and soon after entered a monastic life. His biographer, Zacharias of Mytilene, explains this late baptism as a tradition in the parts he came from, also illustrating the relatively rapid change in the balance between adult baptism and child baptism, as such an apology was felt necessary by the biographer. Severus may have become a monk only in 494. Later he joined an Eutychian brotherhood at Eleutheropolis near Jerusalem, even later he returned to Maiouma to found his own monastery.⁶⁷ In the early sixth century he was back in Egypt, and even in Alexandria, where he stirred up some conflicts among Christians, for which he fled to Constantinople for the years 508–511. He was consecrated bishop of Antioch in 512, as a representative of the Monophysite faction at the height of the religious controversies of the early sixth century.⁶⁸ After the shift in power and the new emperor Justin, who supported the Orthodox, he fled back to Alexandria in 518 and stayed in Egypt until at least 527.⁶⁹ In the 530s he was back in Constantinople, but died probably in Egypt after 538.⁷⁰ In relation to what has been mentioned above, we can clearly see that Severus' spiritual career illustrates several typical aspects of the time period.

All the Monophysite bishops present at the theological discussions in Constantinople in 532, where we find the earliest reference to some texts of the *CD*, had personal relations to Severus. Of these six bishops, two, Philoxenus of Dylichium and Sergius of Cyrrhus, had already been present at Severus' consecration as bishop of Antioch in 512.⁷¹ The other four were John of Constantia, Nonnus of Ceresina, Peter of Theodosioupolis and Thomas of Germaniceia. Several of the bishoprics of these Monophysite bishops, such as Germaniceia, Dulichium, and Cyrrhus, belonged to the district which, by tradition, geographically and administratively stood under the city of Mabbug (Hierapolis), in the province Euphratensis. To this district also belonged Samosata, where a companion of young Severus, Evagrius of Samosata, was bishop.⁷² The bishop in Hierapolis, Philoxenus of Mabbug, was another influential and important Monophysite, and also a personal friend of Severus. He presided over the synod in 512 that chose Severus as the bishop of Antioch, while six of the twelve bishops present at the occasion came from Euphratensis, thus belonging to Philoxenus' jurisdiction, so to speak.⁷³

⁶⁷ E.g. Grillmeier 1987, 273–274; Frend 1973, 265.

⁶⁸ Riedinger 1959, 290–296 puts the discovery of the *CD* by Severus to Antioch during his bishopry there in 512–518, but also considers the texts to have been written before 488, as, in his opinion, Peter the Fuller, who died that year, is the author.

⁶⁹ Harvey 1988, 296; Böhm 1967, 59–60; Frend 1973, 266, 270.

⁷⁰ Böhm 1967, 59–60; Frend 1973, 270.

⁷¹ See e.g. Kugener 1906, 319–321; and also Frend 1973, 266, 268, 271, who also mentions that Severus corresponded with Sergius in the years between.

⁷² Goossens 1943, 146, 176. Regarding Evagrius of Samosata, see e.g. McCail 1971, 258 n. 2.

⁷³ Goossens, 1943, 177. For the names of the bishops present, see Kugener 1906, 319–21. These bishoprics from Euphratensis were Hierapolist-Mabbug, Soura, Ourim, Cyrrhus, Europos, and Dulichium.

Philoxenus of Mabbug was born around 440 in Germaniceia, his original name being Xenias or Aksenaya in Syriac. He went to school in Edessa, and Peter the Fuller consecrated him bishop of Hierapolis, a position he held between 485–518/19.⁷⁴ He was supported by the emperors Zeno and Anastasius I, but lost his position under Justin and went into exile in 519. He then travelled to Philoppolis in Thracia and later to Gangra in Paphlagonia, where he was murdered in 523. Philoxenus wrote exclusively in Syriac; he also executed a new translation of the New Testament, made by his *chorepiscopus*, Polycarp, and finished in 508. He was against the worship of images;⁷⁵ a view that even later had its roots in these northern Syrian and old Persian areas, and was thus a forerunner to the later iconoclasts. It is interesting to compare this view to the rather apologetic last chapter (15) of the *CH*, which explains the physical imagery or descriptions used for angels. Among Philoxenus' extant writings there are several letters; in the *Letter to a Friend*, which may include references to Ammonius of Alexandria, the teacher of philosophy, he talks about spiritual teachers to young monks seeking solitary life. He explains how they first have to toil in the monastery, among spiritual fathers and brethren, before being ready to seek the higher level of seclusion as hermits. He was the Philoxenus who wrote the letter of warning to the monks in the area of Palestine against Stephen bar Sudhali,⁷⁶ the potential author of the *Book of Hierotheus*.

Peter the Fuller was originally a monk in the convent of *Akoimetoï* in Constantinople. There he came into conflict and went with the emperor Zeno to Syria, becoming the Monophysite bishop of Antioch, a position he seems to have held at least in 467–477 and 482–488. He fell out of favour for the intervening years, until he accepted the emperor's *Henotikon*, the attempted reconciliation between the disputing factions. He is attributed with adding the words "who was crucified for us" into the Trisagion around 476. According to some scholars his writings may have liturgical parallels to Pseudo-Dionysius' texts.⁷⁷

John Rufus was one of the priests under Peter the Fuller. His additional name might indicate an attachment to a monastery in Antioch, called Rufinus. Later, around 488, he transferred to the monastery of Peter the Iberian in Maiouma, and eventually became the successor of Peter the Iberian as the bishop of the Monophysite seat of Maiouma.⁷⁸ It is probable that John Rufus knew Severus of Antioch personally, as John's brother, Evagrius of Samosata,⁷⁹ was a companion of Severus.

Peter the Iberian, a member of the previous generation of contestants for a more Monophysitic theological view, was himself originally a Georgian prince born around

⁷⁴ Riedinger 1959, 295 n. 82; Frend 1973, 268; *ODB*, s.v. Philoxenus of Mabbug. Goossen 1943, 177, seems to think he originated from Edessa.

⁷⁵ Frend 1973, 268.

⁷⁶ Cf. this article, 57.

⁷⁷ E.g. Riedinger 1959, 281–2, 286–7, 295; and *ODB*, s.v. Peter the Fuller.

⁷⁸ A parallel name for Maiouma was Constantina, Roques 1954b, 71. It might be considered whether John Rufus could be identified with the Monophysite bishop John of Constantia (though this is spelled Constantia, not Constantina), who is mentioned as being present at the discussions between Monophysite and Orthodox representatives in Constantinople in 532, though that would make him of a rather high age at that point. As there were several cities with the name Constantina or Constantia it can not be determined which city is meant. Another possible identification is, for example, the city of Salaminas on Cyprus, which was also called Constantia (with this exact spelling) and which had some links with the Monophysite movement, as its bishop attended Severus' consecration in 512, see Kugener 1906, 319–321.

⁷⁹ Samosata, where Evagrius became bishop, belonged under Hierapolis-Mabbug, Goossens 1943, 146.

409. In his youth he had come to the court of Theodosius II and Eudocia. He later fled with his compatriot to Jerusalem, where both became monks under the names of Peter and John, and the latter was given the epithet the Eunuch. In 445 they were both consecrated to priesthood in Maiouma. In 452 Peter the Iberian was made Monophysite bishop of Maiouma, and in 457 he was in Alexandria to assist in consecrating Timotheus Aelurus as bishop there. After these events he returned to Palestine, to the monastery he had founded in the area between Maiouma and Gaza. He died on December first either in 488 or 491.⁸⁰ Severus became aware of Peter the Iberian and his teaching around 490, and it was then, under the influence of Evagrius of Samosata and in connection with a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, that in 494 Severus became a monk and entered the monastery in Maiouma.⁸¹ This brings us a full circle back to Severus of Antioch.

Gaza, or rather Maiouma, is in many ways an interesting connecting point. Zacharias of Mytilene, who studied together with Severus in Alexandria and later wrote his biography, was born in Maiouma. From Alexandria, Severus, together with Zacharias and a group of young fellow students, left for Beirut to study law. During this time Zacharias visited Maiouma at least a couple of times with the intention and hope of being admitted into the Monophysite monastery, but was rejected by Peter the Iberian because of his youth.⁸² Zacharias clearly belonged to the *Philoponoï*.⁸³ It is a possibility that this brotherhood brought the group of young students together in the first place.

John Philoponus is another person who may have belonged to the *Philoponoï*. He was born in Caesarea, was younger than Severus and his companions, but might have already begun his education in Alexandria in the late 480s. John Philoponus later became a supporter of the Monophysite side,⁸⁴ he came to criticise Proclus in his writings, and there are references to the Pseudo-Dionysian writings in at least one of his texts.⁸⁵ Furthermore, Sergius of Reshaina, who later translated at least part of the *CD* into Syriac, was John Philoponus' pupil in Alexandria in the 520s. Sergius of Reshaina, came from one of these Monophysite bishoprics, that of Peter of Theodosiopolis⁸⁶. Sergius later came into conflict with circles in Theodosiopolis and sought refuge with the Orthodox patriarch of Antioch, Ephraem, in 535. Ephraem of Antioch for his part, then, is, as far as we know, one of the earliest among the supporters of the Chalcedonian faction who came to quote the *CD*.

The intellectual background of the *CD* and the deep acquaintance with Neo-Platonic philosophy it displays seem to hint at an author with an educational background in Alexandria. If *Ep.* 7 is accepted as authentic, the reference to Heliopolis (Baalbek)

⁸⁰ Engberding 1956, 221–2; *ODB*, s.v. Peter the Iberian.

⁸¹ Grillmeier 1987, 273–4; Frend 1973, 265.

⁸² McCail 1971, 258.

⁸³ Petridès 1904, 341–8. Though, regarding Severus of Antioch, Frend 1973, 265 claims that Severus was not particularly engaged in religious matters before he became under the influence of Peter the Iberian around the year 489 or 490.

⁸⁴ Böhm 1967, 59–60. John Philoponus (who probably lived from around 490 to the 570s, Sorabji 1987, 1) being younger than Severus of Antioch could not have been acquainted with him during the latter's educational periods in Alexandria, but they might have been acquainted during Severus' later stays in Egypt in the early years of the sixth century and after 518.

⁸⁵ Böhm 1967, 462. Regarding the writings against Proclus, see also Lang 2001, 4–7.

⁸⁶ Reshaina is another name for Theodosiopolis. Peter of Theodosiopolis was among the bishops consecrating Severus to his bishopric in Antioch. See this article, 67.

also indicates a Near Eastern connection. Similarly, if we accept Severus of Antioch as having had a role in the dispersion of the texts after perhaps becoming acquainted with them in his early years, then they must already have been written in the 480s or the early years of the 490s at the latest. Severus' early movements and ecclesiastical and monastic involvements point to places like Alexandria, Maiouma or Eleutheropolis. In any case, southern Palestine is a strong candidate for the location of the emergence of the *CD*.

Conclusions

When considering Pseudo-Dionysius and the *CD*, even good theories have to be based on much speculation. The hard evidence is elusive, and there always remain some uncertainties and alternative interpretations. Knowledge of the original circumstances of its creation is especially evasive and it seems that all paths of approach break off before reaching the ground of historically provable evidence. The most one can do is to put forth speculative theories and circumstantial evidence, based on historical knowledge when available.

The pseudonymity and the identity of the author are naturally the central questions. It is mainly the titles of the books and letters that indicate an attempt to put the texts in the apostolic era, and these may well have been modified later; my personal view is that the main part of the texts were not originally created as pseudo writing. Only a few parts in the texts themselves could be interpreted in this manner, and other explanations could be given. It is only *Ep. 7* that presents some true problems in this regard, but it is a loose part of the whole *CD* and its authenticity is indeed questionable.

The author clearly belongs to a circle of individuals discussing and teaching theological matters. He talks about his spiritual teacher, Hierotheus, and also about other teachers and hierarchs. He addresses his co-disciple Timothy, who along with the recipient Titus, seems to have been in a disciple relationship to the author, due to the texts' nature of instructions and spiritual guidance. If *Ep. 7* is credited with authenticity, it indicates that the author had visited Heliopolis, also that his name was Dionysius. He must have lived in the fifth century, but was dead by 532, when the texts by the name of Dionysius the Areopagite were referred to at the theological discussions in Constantinople. The name of the real author had escaped by now, but his texts had spread already in the Orient, at least among Monophysites and individuals with contacts to Alexandria, Antioch, Maiouma and Gaza, as well as to the Syrian areas of the empire.

It is plausible that essential parts of the texts had been written before the clear division between the Orthodox and the Monophysite views. Accepting Severus of Antioch as the important factor in the diffusion of the texts after he became acquainted with them, perhaps in Alexandria or Maiouma, we would be in the 480s. The influential Monophysite of the previous generation, Philoxenus of Mabbug, who died in 523, does not quote or make any use of the texts that would have the authority of St. Paul's Athenian disciple, neither do others of his generation. For some scholars this has been one more reason to put the composition of the *CD* relatively late, to the last decades of the fifth or the first decades of the sixth century.⁸⁷ I would like to put the author's life earlier in

⁸⁷ E.g. Roques 1954b, 73 n. 2.

time, somewhere within 400–490, which would make him contemporary with Proclus of Athens.

As for the geographical location of emergence of the texts and their author, I have pointed out especially the area of Alexandria, Maiouma or Gaza. Severus of Antioch would thus have learned to know them at the site of their creation. Many key figures linked to the later history of the use of the texts had connections with this area; for Maioum-Gaza there is Severus himself, John Rufus, and Zacharias of Mytilene, for Alexandria there is John Philoponus, Sergius of Reshaina, and again Severus and Zacharias with their companions. As an intellectual context for the *CD* the fifth century fits quite well, as do these mentioned areas.

As for the social context of the writings, the *CD* describes a tradition of teachers and also gives a relatively strict picture of the ideal Christian community. The tradition of secret insight into holy matters is handed down from teachers to disciples. Even though the author speaks of the Christian Church and Christian beliefs in general, he himself may have had a background in a monastic community or an ascetic brotherhood.

As for the association of the texts with the name of Dionysius the Areopagite, it would have occurred in the late fifth or early sixth century, when the texts had spread beyond their original environment, in which the author was known. The motive for the identification of the author with Dionysius the Areopagite may have been the original author's name, Dionysius, and the strong reverence for St. Paul's teaching that appears in the *CD*. The later identification might have been intentional in order to give greater authority to the texts. In fact, G. Krüger made a similar suggestion in a short note in *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* as early as 1899, and presented an author for the *CD*: A Dionysius, a *scholastikos* from Gaza, who was a devoted Christian believer, befriended Peter the Iberian, whom he helped to settle in a village near Gaza.⁸⁸ This Dionysius appears both in Zacharias Retor's *Life of the Ascetic Isaiah*, a contemporary of Peter the Iberian, and in the Anonymous *Vita* of Peter the Iberian. Admittedly, several facts fit with the profile of an author of the *CD*: the period in the latter half of the fifth century, the geographical location in Gaza, the personal connection to Peter the Iberian, who was a forerunner in the early Monophysite movement and influential with Severus of Antioch and his circle, and finally the fact that this Dionysius was a devoted Christian and a highly educated man, implied by the designation *scholastikos*.

There might never be a conclusive answer to the question of who the real author of the *Corpus Dionysiaca* was, nor to the question of the identity of other persons referred to in the texts. Even so, I hope to have shown that there might be other ways than the accustomed ones to look at the texts in the *Corpus Dionysiaca*, and maybe other ways of interpreting the enigmatic texts and their authorship.

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⁸⁸ Krüger 1899, 302–305.

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The Doctrine of Creation according to Dionysius the Areopagite

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In this article I shall discuss Dionysius the Areopagite's doctrine of creation. This doctrine shows that the Areopagite's thought was deeply shaped by Neoplatonic philosophy. One might think this problematic from the point of view of orthodox Christianity. However, this is not necessarily the case, even though it could be so in relation to the topic of creation. The primary object of this investigation is to discuss Dionysian cosmology as it is found in the written *corpus*. I will, however, try to point out which adjustments could be made to adapt Dionysius' doctrine to an orthodox system of thought if such an adaptation is necessary. I do not follow this procedure for apologetic reasons, but because important representatives of orthodoxy in Late Antiquity accepted his teachings as sound. First and foremost St. Maximus the Confessor. Whether Dionysius himself would have accepted these adjustments, remains an open question.

If the Dionysian *corpus* belongs to the last decades of the fifth century, there are reasons to state that the author did not have an orthodox Christian doctrine of creation. Before we move on we should ask what would be required of a doctrine of creation in the fifth century to be understood as "orthodox". In the first instance one should expect it to be consistent with the teaching of the Creed. The Creed professes that the Father is the Creator of heaven and earth, of all things both seen and unseen (ποιητὴν οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς ὁρατῶν τε πάντων καὶ ἀοράτων), and, further, that all things came to be through the Son of God the Father (δι' οὗ τὰ πάντα ἐγένετο). In several texts Dionysius clearly states that God is the Creator of all things other than God. God, he says, "bestows being on the essences, and brings forth the totality of essences" (δωρεῖται δὲ τὸ εἶναι τοῖς οὐσίαι καὶ παράγει τὰς ὅλας οὐσίας).¹ The basic idea is clearly that God is the sole origin of all beings, and to this extent Dionysius is in agreement with the Creed. The same is true when he says that God "makes all things, perfects all things, holds all things together, converts all things" (πάντα ποιεῖ, πάντα τελειοῖ, πάντα συνέχει, πάντα ἐπιστρέφει).² Dionysius, clearly, remains on the safe side. In a third text it is said that the straight motion of God means both (i) the procession of His activities (energies) and (ii) "the coming-into-being of the whole encompass of things from Him" (τὴν ἐξ αὐτοῦ τῶν ὅλων γένεσιν).³ Dionysius is obviously in agreement with the conciliar definition if we cling to the rather weak interpretation given above that the whole world of intelligible and sensible beings have

¹ *De divinis nominibus* (= hereafter DN) 2.11, PG 3.649b. I have used the text from PG 3 and B.R. Suchla (ed.), *Corpus Dionysiacum I. De divinis nominibus* (Patristische Texte und Studien 33), Berlin 1990. I have consulted three translations: C.E. Rolt (transl.), *Dionysius the Areopagite: The Divine Names and The Mystical Theology*, London 1986 (first published 1920); B.R. Siechler (transl.), *Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita: Die Namen Gottes* (Bibliothek der Griechischen Literatur 26), Stuttgart 1988 and C. Luibheid (transl.), *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* (The Classics of Western Spirituality 54), New York 1987.

² DN 4.10, PG 3.708a–b.

³ DN 9.9, PG 3.916c.



The mosque of Fethiye Çami at the northwest corner of the Roman Agora was used as the Church of Dionysius the Areopagite during the short Venetian presence in Athens in 1687–1688.

their sole origin in God. On the other hand, the wording of the Creed is rather sparse, and it could be interpreted in a much stronger sense than as above.

In the fifth century a specifically Christian doctrine of creation would need to fulfil three further requirements to be in agreement with an orthodox interpretation of the Creed. These are: (i) God created out of His own free will; (ii) He did not create out of some eternally pre-existent substance, and (iii) He created the world (matter and form) in the way that it had a temporal beginning. The last requirement means that the world has existed for a limited span of time and that it began to exist, let us say, a definite number of years ago.

It is not easy to say when these requirements first originated. However, they were made explicit by some of the central figures of the orthodox tradition of the fourth to the fifth centuries: Athanasius, Basil the Great, Ambrose and Augustine.

St. Athanasius' doctrine of creation may be gathered from his treatises *Oratio contra gentes* (CG), *Oratio de incarnatione verbi* (*De incarn.*) and *Orationes contra Arianos* (CA). The first two treatises seem to be two parts of a single work. The CG contains refutations of pagan ideas on the divine and argues that monotheism is the only reasonable religion. Once St. Athanasius has established the existence of the one God, he moves on in the *De incarn.* to show that the world originated from this God. He criticises the view that God created the world from "pre-existent and ungenerated matter"

(ἐκ προϋποκειμένης καὶ ἀγενήτου ὕλης).⁴ God should not be likened to a human carpenter who, in his weakness, needs wood to be able to make something. Those who think that God was in need of pre-existent material in order to create, viz. the Platonists, impute weakness to God. According to St. Athanasius, the Christian doctrine of creation precludes the existence of pre-existent and uncreated matter. In the *CA* he completes the picture. The world is a divine work (ποίημα) and as such it was made when God willed it to be. It had not existed for all eternity, but was created out of non-being and obviously had a temporal beginning.⁵ Taken together, we see that according to Athanasius, the Christian doctrine of creation should meet the three requirements outlined above.

The same is seen, maybe even more clearly, in the *In hexameron* of St. Basil. The creative power of God was not bounded by just one world, but could extend infinitely, he asserts. As it is, however, God, by His will alone, brought this, our world, into being.⁶ It seems that God, according to St. Basil, *freely* imposed limits on Himself and in so doing made just one world. St. Basil explicitly denies that the world was created out of uncreated matter. The matter and the form of the world were created together.⁷ The world, furthermore, has not existed for eternity; it had a temporal beginning. This is brought forward in the following words:⁸

You may know the epoch when the formation of this world began, if, ascending into the past, you endeavour to discover the first day. You will thus find what was the first movement of time; then that the creation of the heavens and of the earth were like the foundation and the groundwork [...].

When it is said that “In the beginning God created”, it should be taken in the sense of “in this beginning according to time” (ἐν ἀρχῇ ταύτῃ τῇ κατὰ χρόνον).⁹ The world is perishable or transitory, because that which has a temporal beginning shall come to an end in time, St. Basil says.¹⁰

I shall not go into details of the doctrines of St. Ambrose and St. Augustine, because they teach essentially the same as St. Basil.¹¹

Dionysius does not do justice to all of these requirements. There is no clear notion of the divine will or freedom (the first requirement) in the Dionysian writings; rather the creation of the world seems to follow by some kind of necessity from the nature of God. Whether there is in fact some necessity involved will be discussed below. On the other

⁴ Cf. R.W. Thomson (ed. and transl.), *Athanasius: Contra Gentes and De Incarnatione*, Oxford 1971, 138.

⁵ *CA* 1.29, *PG* 26.72.

⁶ *In hex.* 1.2, *PG* 29.8c.

⁷ *In hex.* 2.2, *PG* 29.29c–32b.

⁸ *In hex.* 1.6, *PG* 29.16b. Translation in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* II.8, Edinburgh 1895.

⁹ *In hex.* 1.5, *PG* 29.13c.

¹⁰ *In hex.* 1.3, *PG* 29.106.

¹¹ For St. Ambrose, cf. the first books of his *Hexameron*. St. Augustine treats the creation of the world in several of his works. Cf. the *Confessions* book 11 and *De civitate Dei* books 11 and 12. It is often held that the distinctive mark of the Christian doctrine of creation in comparison with Neoplatonism is the teaching of *creatio ex nihilo*. This, I believe, is not strictly accurate. The Neoplatonists did not commit themselves to interpret the *Timaeus* of Plato in the sense that the world was created out of some pre-existent stuff. The most important differences between Christian and Neoplatonic doctrines are the first and third requirements listed above. Cf. Sorabji 1983, 193–199.

hand, according to Dionysius, there is no pre-existent material out of which God created (the second requirement).¹² However, this does not seem to mean that the world had a temporal beginning in the sense outlined above (the third requirement).

For the reasons just given, the Dionysian doctrine of creation seems to bear the strong imprint of Neoplatonic cosmology. I will now elaborate on this point.

According to Placid Spearritt, discussions of Dionysius' doctrine of creation have revolved around the question of emanationism *versus* Christian creationism.¹³ Here we encounter the problematic of emanationism, which has often been presented as an obscure doctrine. It seems that many scholars in the past have mistaken the metaphor of emanation for a philosophical concept. It should be asked, then, what the philosophical concept of causality behind the emanation metaphor in Neoplatonism really is. We shall turn to this problem below.

A basic idea in the Dionysian thought-world is the idea of union and differentiation (ἔνωσις καὶ διάκρισις). There is union and differentiation within the divine being, in the created world, and in the relation between God and the world.¹⁴ We shall keep this idea in mind as we proceed. Another idea, basic to the Dionysian doctrine of creation, is the triadic scheme of causality – of indwelling (abiding), procession and conversion (μονή, πρόοδος, ἐπιστροφή) – derived from Neoplatonism.¹⁵ According to Proclus, the effect remains in its cause (μένει ἐν τῇ αὐτοῦ αἰτίᾳ), proceeds from it (πρόεισιν ἀπ' αὐτῆς) and converts to it (ἐπιστρέφει πρὸς αὐτήν).¹⁶ The indwelling should be taken in the sense that the quality of the effect is perfectly present in the cause, and that cause and effect therefore have the same quality. The procession accounts for the difference between cause and effect, while the conversion means that the effect is constituted as an entity with the "reception" of the quality remaining in the cause.¹⁷ This doctrine occurs often in the Dionysian *corpus* and is clearly brought forward in the *Divinis nominibus* 4.10 (705d): "To put the matter briefly, all being derives from, exists in, and is converted towards the Beautiful and the Good". According to this scheme, creatures are made to be perfected within the provident arrangement of creation and salvation. Dionysius is, perhaps, the first Christian thinker to employ this triad of causality extensively, but after him a modified version of it was built into the system of St. Maximus the Confessor.¹⁸ Our modern labelling of this causal scheme as "Neoplatonic" would probably have met with the objection from the Fathers that it is a Biblical concept. In support they could have quoted at least two texts from St. Paul (*Rom.* 11:36 and *Col.* 1:16–17): "For from Him (ἐξ αὐτοῦ), and by Him (δι' αὐτοῦ), and to Him (εἰς αὐτόν), are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen". "For in Him (ἐν αὐτῷ) were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers – all things were created by Him (δι' αὐτοῦ), and to Him

¹² In *DN* 4.28, *PG* 3.729a he seems to deny that God created out of any pre-existent matter: "if it [i.e. matter] has some kind of being, then, since all beings derive from the Good, it too derives from the Good [...]" (Εἰ δὲ πως ὄν, τὰ δὲ ὄντα πάντα ἐκ ἀγαθοῦ, καὶ αὐτὴ ἐκ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἂν εἴη).

¹³ Spearritt 1968, 43.

¹⁴ Cf. *DN* ch. 2 where this topic is thematised.

¹⁵ Cf. Procl. *Inst. theol.* 35. Strangely enough, Spearritt does not discuss this scheme of causality.

¹⁶ Procl. *Inst. theol.* 35.

¹⁷ Procl. *Inst. theol.* 30–32.

¹⁸ Cf. *Ambigua* 7, *PG* 91.1081a–c.

(εἰς αὐτὸν). And He is before all things, and in Him (ἐν αὐτῷ) all things consist". These prepositional expressions suggest both that the created world somehow is contained *in* God, and that creatures, as they are created, are "moved" *from* God and that they further are designed to move *towards* God. Such a "metaphysics of prepositions", however, is known from Middle Platonism,¹⁹ and is developed in the Neoplatonic systems of triadic causation. I believe that this Neoplatonic doctrine was acceptable, at least in part, for Christian thinkers because they were acquainted with the rudimentary "metaphysics of prepositions" from the sacred books of their own Tradition. The triadic scheme could therefore be seen as a common sense idea of causality.

The triadic scheme was used by Dionysius to explain the generation of creatures from God. However, I would like to frame a hypothesis, with some probability, that the scheme has an even deeper significance in the Dionysian system. I shall begin this exposition of Dionysius' doctrine of creation, not with the relation between God and His creatures, but with the intra-trinitarian relations.

The generation of the divine persons

In the second chapter of the *De divinis nominibus* we read that "the Father is the originating source of the godhead (ὅτι μὲν ἐστὶ πηγαία θεότης ὁ πατήρ) and that the Son and the Spirit are, so to speak, divine offshoots (ξεόφυτοι), the flowering and transcendent lights of the divinity" (645b). The Father is the πηγαία of the trinity of persons. How, one may ask, is it possible for the Father to act as such a source and in what way do the other two persons emerge? Dionysius immediately says, however, that "we can neither say nor understand how this could be so". This remark is quite interesting, as we shall see below, but first we should note that Dionysius actually alludes to a way in which the divine causality might be understood.

Before we try to determine exactly how the divine causality functions, we should note that, according to Dionysius, the motive behind the general dialectic of union and differentiation is the divine Goodness. This is emphasised again and again by the Areopagite. I shall quote two important examples:²⁰

Now I must be clear about what it is that has to be defined: as I have already said, the term "divine differentiations" is given to the benevolent processions of the supreme Godhead. This Godhead is granted as a gift to all things. It flows over in shares of goodness to all. And it becomes differentiated in a unified way.

This essential Good, by the very fact of its existence, extends goodness into all things. Think of how it is with our sun. It exercises no rational process, no act of choice, and yet by the very act of its existence it gives light to whatever is able to partake of its light, in its own way. So it is with the Good.

We shall return to a problem contained in the second quotation later. What I would like to emphasise now is this principle of goodness: the good is by nature such that it gives

¹⁹ Cf. Dillon 1977, 138.

²⁰ DN 2.11, PG 3.649b; DN 4.1, PG 3.693b. Luiheid's translation.

itself to other things, it distributes itself. This idea may be traced to Plato's *Timaeus*, in which the cause of creation is the goodness of the Demiurge.²¹ Dionysius speaks about the differentiations that are befitting the goodness of the godhead (τὰς διακρίσεις δὲ τὰς ἀγαθοπρεπεῖς τῆς θεορχίας).²² The primary instance of union and differentiation is the divinity itself. The *union* of God is preserved in the one essential and good Godhead. Through the Father this Godhead is differentiated into a triad of hypostases. Within this unified triad each of the persons is preserved in an unmixed and unconfused way in its own hypostatic characteristics.²³ The reason behind the manifestation of the triad is probably that it befits the divinity *qua* good to communicate as internally related personal subsistences.

Against this background we may move to the doctrine of divine causality. Dionysius writes that those initiated into the theological tradition say that “the differentiations (τὰς διακρίσεις) within the godhead have to do with the benign processions and revelations (προόδους τε καὶ ἐκφάνσεις) of God”.²⁴ Although the meaning of this assertion is far from clear, I would suggest that the terms *προόδους* and *ἐκφάνσεις* indicate a two-fold perspective: (i) in this context, the *processions* refer to the ontology of the trinitarian generation of the Son and procession of the Spirit, while (ii) the *revelations* concern the possibility for intelligent creatures to know this inner-trinitarian life. In short, the first has to do with the mystery of the divine being itself, while the second concerns what is revealed in the economy.

The Father is the origin of the Trinity, the Son and the Spirit are processions from Him. If this is interpreted according to the triadic causal scheme the following picture emerges: the Father remains (μένει) in His essentially good nature. While remaining in a goodness that by nature is distributive of itself, He gives rise to two processions, viz. of the Son and the Spirit. As they proceed they are hypostatically differentiated from the hypostasis of the Father. The causal process is fulfilled, however, at the moment (not in the temporal sense, of course) when the two proceeding hypostases convert (ἐπιστρέφουσι) to their source and become filled with it. What happens in the conversion is that they are constituted in the same essentially good content as their source. They are hypostatically differentiated but essentially identical with the Father.

This description of the mystery of the Trinity is, of course, within the dimension of what is revealed. How is that? The answer is that it borrows both its terms and its causal scheme from the created world and applies them to the transcendent being of God. Such an explanation could never be adequate, since the theological mystery is described from the point of view of the economy.

Despite the philosophical scheme of causality involved, the description itself is full of metaphors. The Father is spoken of as a *source*. The hypostases of the Son and the Spirit are conceived in a scheme of *movement* as proceeding and converting in relation to the Father, almost as if these movements took place spatially. Is it possible to explain the process in a more conceptual, philosophical way? I believe so, even if the explanation would be, as I said above, a quite hypothetical construction. However, even if the description from a philosophical point of view could be brought to a more advanced

²¹ Pl. *Ti.* 29d-30c.

²² *DN* 2.4, *PG* 3.640d.

²³ Cf. *DN* 2.5, *PG* 3.641d.

²⁴ *DN* 2.4, *PG* 3.640d.

level, it would still be within what is accessible to human reason and not adequate for the divine mystery in itself.

The triadic causal scheme of Proclus is historically connected with the Plotinian doctrine of double activity.²⁵ The doctrines of triadic causality and of double activity are the philosophical theories behind what is held to be the Neoplatonist doctrine of emanation. According to Plotinus, everything has its origin in the supreme principle, the One. By just being itself, and without being active as a creator, the One is the source of the next hypostasis, the Intellect. The One has an *ἐνέργεια τῆς οὐσίας* which inevitably is accompanied by an activity *ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας*. This activity *ad extra* culminates in the constitution of the Intellect.²⁶ When it is said that the activity of the essence is “accompanied by” an activity *from* the essence, this does not mean that they are two quite different or separate activities. There seems to be one immanent activity with a transitive aspect. The double activity could be compared with *walking*, as an example of immanent activity, and *leaving footprints*, as the transitive result. This is a general Plotinian principle.²⁷ If we elaborate a little further on this doctrine, we could say that the One remains itself and its “energy of the essence” is its self-contemplation, i.e. its contemplation of itself as good. This contemplation is accompanied by an “activity out of the essence” as a creative activity. This creative activity is established as the next level below, the level of the Intellect, because the “energy out of the essence”, as a rational principle (a *logos*), is turned as self-contemplation towards itself as a derivation from the higher level. Thus “the energy out of the essence” of the One is identified as “the energy of the essence” of the Intellect. This “energy of the essence” of the Intellect is not only its self-contemplation, but at the same time its self-constitution as a new hypostasis.²⁸ The process is repeated in the relation between the Intellect and the Soul.

In this way the Neoplatonic triad of primary hypostases is generated, and it seems quite probable that the doctrine of double activity (Plotinus) or of indwelling-proceeding-converting (Proclus) represents the causal scheme behind Dionysius’ allusions to the mystery of the establishment of the Christian Trinity. But, as we have seen, according to Dionysius, we can neither say nor understand how the divine processions actually take place.²⁹ Even though it might seem conceptually clearer, it would not, however, help much to say that the Son and the Spirit are activities of the Father’s essence. I have already pointed out that the divine mystery is inaccessible in itself, and can only be grasped from the point of view of what is revealed economically. From the point of view of the philosophical doctrine employed, there is an obvious problem involved: according to the Neoplatonic doctrine of causes, the effect, even if generated in the way explained above, is established on a metaphysically lower level of reality than its cause. The “movement” from cause to effect is a “downward” movement from the more to the less real, from the more to the less unified, from unity to plurality. This is not difficult to understand, since while the activity of the first hypostasis is itself quite simple, the activity of the second hypostasis is of a more complex kind: the Plotinian Intellect, for instance, contemplates itself both *as deriving from the higher principle* and *as good*, i.e. as a cause for what comes

²⁵ On this doctrine, cf. Emilsson 1999.

²⁶ Plotinus, *Enneades* 5.4.2.

²⁷ Cf. Plotinus, *Enneades* 6.1.20.

²⁸ Cf. Plotinus, *Enneades* 3.8.1-4.

²⁹ DN 2.7, PG 3.645b.

next. The problem was clearly seen by Dionysius as evidenced by his pronouncement that we cannot understand the divine generation:³⁰ “In reality there is no exact likeness between caused and cause, for the caused carry within themselves only such images of their originating sources as are possible for them, whereas the causes themselves are located in a realm transcending the caused, according to the argument regarding their source”. What Dionysius seems to find problematic is that the Neoplatonic scheme of causality explains the generation of hypostases on an ever descending scale of perfection. It is not adapted to explain how the first hypostasis may generate two more hypostases on the same level of reality as the first, so as to constitute together a primordial Triad of hypostases. This problem does not necessarily represent a weakness in Dionysius’ trinitarian doctrine, but could be a signal that the philosophical theory used to elucidate the doctrine is inadequate for this purpose.

The creation of the cosmos

Why did we make this long detour round the generation of the divine persons before we arrived at the real topic, the creation of the world? The reason is simple: the understanding of the nature of the cause – as far as this is possible for us – helps in understanding the ontological condition of the effect. With this I do not intend to deny the principle that, in the case of God, the cause is known through its effects. The Dionysian approach, however, seems rather to be from what is revealed about God in the Holy Scriptures.³¹ In the *Divinis nominibus* he takes his starting point from the revealed names of God and tries to establish philosophically the correct methods for speaking about Him. In doing so he unfolds his Christian interpretation of the cosmos in its relation to the divine cause. He has some presuppositions and axioms which are played out in his work. Among the presuppositions is a Neoplatonic concept of causality and of goodness. His most important axioms are the Christian confession to the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation. As we shall see, the “mechanisms” at work in his doctrine of creation are the same as those which operate in his doctrine of divine generation. But when it comes to creation, the principles are to a greater degree adequate for their purpose.

In chapter 9.8–9 of the *De divinis nominibus* Dionysius interprets God’s rest and movement. The rest is interpreted as God’s *remaining* (τὸ μένειν) in Himself, while the movement is understood as His *procession* (πρόοδος). In 9.9 Dionysius distinguishes between God’s straight, spiral and circular movement. The straight movement is the procession of His activities or energies (πρόοδον τῶν ἐνεργειῶν), and the coming-to-be of all things from Him. The spiral movement is also connected with procession, while the circular motion means that God holds all things together and secures the conversion (ἐπιστροφή) of all that has come forth from Him. In all of this we clearly see the triadic scheme of indwelling-procession-conversion as applied to the causal relation between God and the created world.

Before we proceed we should note an ambiguity in Dionysius’ use of the terms indwelling and procession. Indwelling means, as we have just seen, God’s remaining in

³⁰ DN 2.8, PG 3.645c. Luibheid’s translation.

³¹ Cf. DN 1.1, PG 3.588a.

Himself. On the other hand, it means the indwelling of the effect in its cause. However, these two aspects are somehow identical, as we shall see below. Procession means, on the one hand, that something, an effect, proceeds from its cause. On the other hand, Dionysius often tends to focus more on the *process* of procession than on its result. In this sense the procession itself is brought forward as a divine activity or power in which God manifests His being. We shall first focus on the moment of indwelling.

How God remains in Himself is first taken up by Dionysius in connection with the creative process. This divine condition of rest must be attributed to the Holy Trinity itself. God's transcendent being exists in an immovable sameness, Dionysius says, and God acts (*ἐνεργεῖν*) according to the same and around the same.³² Now, what are the characteristics of this divine sameness and action within the Trinity, i.e. the sameness and action of the condition of indwelling as relevant to the problematic of creation? Here it will be useful to cast a glance over Dionysius' conception of the different names we use in speaking of God.

In the second chapter of the *De divinis nominibus* Dionysius distinguishes between names expressive of unity and names expressive of distinctions. Names of the second kind are those that are proper to each divine hypostasis, such as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and predicates denoting certain hypostatic characteristics belonging to each of the persons. These names are not held in common and are not interchangeable. The "unified names", on the other hand, are applied to the whole divinity, i.e. they belong to the divine nature and not to any one of the persons specifically. Of these there are two kinds: (i) those that express abstraction (*ἀφαίρεσις*) and involve pre-eminence, and (ii) those that are aetiological (*τὰ αἰτιολογικά*). These "aetiological terms" denote God as cause of the properties found in created being. The first kind of term is exemplified by the following: *τὸ ὑπεράγαθον, τὸ ὑπέρθεον, τὸ ὑπερούσιον, τὸ ὑπέρζωον, τὸ ὑπέρσοφον*. Examples of aetiological terms are *τὸ ἀγαθόν, τὸ καλόν, τὸ ὄν, τὸ ζωόν, τὸ σοφόν*. Some comments should be made in this regard. First, each of these "unified names" denotes the whole simple being of God. Secondly, they are processions befitting the goodness of the godhead (*τὰς ἀγαθοπρεπεῖς τῆς θεαρχίας προόδους*), and as such they are ways in which He differentiates Himself, i.e. "divine differentiations" (*διάκρισιν θεῖαν*).³³ The predicate *ἀγαθοπρεπής* ("befitting the good") points to the basic characteristic of goodness as *that which by nature distributes itself*, i.e. proceeds. Even though all of the processions are divine differentiations befitting the goodness of God, in the text on which I am commenting (cf. note 33), they are primarily directed to the creation of otherness, and do not characterise the superessential internal life of God.³⁴ These processions are also termed 'powers' (*δυνάμεις*) and 'activities' (*ἐνέργειαι*).³⁵ When it comes to divine names for the processions *ad intra*, Dionysius says that the understanding of their nature is beyond mind and knowledge.³⁶ I believe that the abstractive terms denote the divine being in its condition of remaining within itself, an indwelling which is characterised by the divine persons being in a certain way "active" or in processions towards each other.

³² DN 9.8, PG 3.916b.

³³ DN 2.11, PG 3.649b.

³⁴ Cf. DN 2.5, PG 3.641d–644a; DN 5.1, PG 3.816b.

³⁵ DN 2.7, PG 3.645a; DN 9.9, PG 3.916c–d.

³⁶ Cf. DN 2.7, PG 3.645a.

If my interpretation is correct, the processions are considered on two levels of reality: the abstractive terms denote them as belonging to the intra-trinitarian sphere, while the aetiological terms denote them as divine activities *ad extra*.

In the “remaining”, understood in terms of their indwelling, the hypostases of the Holy Trinity proceed towards each other in a way that is beyond knowledge. They are transcendently perfect manifestations of divine goodness, being, life, wisdom, etc. *ad intra*. Considered *ad extra* we should note, however, that in actuality there is no plurality of processions, because, according to Dionysius, goodness is not one thing, being another, life and wisdom yet other, etc. There is one God for all these good processions, and the term goodness denotes God’s universal providence, while the other predicates denote certain aspects of this one goodness.³⁷ In short, all processions *ad extra* are aspects of the one procession of goodness. If this be so, much more should the activities *ad intra* constitute one divine activity. Divine goodness and divine love (*eros*) must be understood as basically the same. In his definition of *eros* Dionysius shows the picture of well-ordered life which, I think, must be a characteristic of the inner life of the Holy Trinity of persons:³⁸

What is signified is a capacity to effect a unity, an alliance, and a particular commingling in the Beautiful and Good. It is a capacity which preexists through (*διὰ*) the Beautiful and Good. It is dealt out from the Beautiful and the Good through the Beautiful and the Good (*καὶ ἐκ τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ ἀγαθοῦ διὰ τὸ καλὸν καὶ ἀγαθὸν ἐκδιδομένης*). It binds the things of the same order in a mutually regarding union.

The indwelling of the Holy Trinity in well-ordered activities (*ἐνέργειαι*) of goodness and love *ad intra* is the starting point of creation. As I said above, this condition of divine rest is somehow identical with the indwelling of the effect in God. Earlier in this paper I quoted a text from Dionysius in which he says that effects pre-exist more truly in their causes.³⁹ How, then, do God’s creatures pre-exist or dwell in Him and how does the plural “causes” fit into the picture?

What we are confronted with now is a rather complex piece of doctrine, in which the three properties of divine goodness, knowledge and will are intimately connected. There is an important section on divine knowledge in the last part of the *De divinis nominibus* 7.2.⁴⁰ In His capacity as the cause of all things, God knows all creatures. This knowledge, however, is not something different from God’s knowledge of Himself. “By knowing itself, the divine Wisdom knows all things” (*Ἐαυτὴν οὖν ἡ θεία σοφία γινώσκουσα γινώσεται πάντα*), Dionysius says. What, exactly, is it that God knows when, knowing Himself, He knows all things? God knows Himself as the One from whom all things derive or proceed, i.e. He knows Himself as *good* or in His *goodness*. This knowledge of Himself as good, i.e. as distributive, takes the form of conceiving within Himself all possible effects in their *παραδείγματα*.⁴¹ These paradigms are pre-existing

³⁷ DN 5.2, PG 3.816c–817a. Cf. DN 2.5, PG 3.641d–644a.

³⁸ DN 4.12, PG 3.709c–d. Luibheid’s translation, Greek terms inserted by me.

³⁹ DN 2.8, PG 3.645c–d.

⁴⁰ DN 7.2, PG 3.869a–c.

⁴¹ DN 7.3, PG 3.869d.

logoi which not only exist “in” God, but are identified with what He knows when knowing Himself as good.⁴² The *logoi* are the plurality of *causes* mentioned above. Here we see that God’s remaining in Himself (as good) and the remaining of the effect in Him (as an Idea of what goodness may accomplish) are identical.

The paradigms or *logoi* are also called “predefining, divine and good acts of will” (*προορισμούς καλεῖ καὶ θεῖα καὶ ἀγαθὰ θελήματα*).⁴³ Earlier in this paper I remarked that there is no clear notion of the divine will or freedom in the Dionysian writings. The identification of the divine Ideas as *θελήματα*, however, indicates that the Areopagite had a notion of divine will, even if this notion is not explicitly developed in the *corpus*. Here we meet the important question of the character of the Dionysian doctrine of creation: emanationism *versus* creationism. We shall return to the Neoplatonic background before we discuss Dionysius’ teaching.

Spearritt, commenting on the Plotinian doctrine of double activity in connection with Dionysius’ doctrine of creation, emphasises the *necessity* involved in the production of the effect: (i) the *cause* necessarily produces the effect *ad extra*, and (ii) the *effect* is a necessary result of the activity of the cause.⁴⁴ I believe that this stress on necessity at least requires some further qualification. Spearritt appeals to two texts from the *Enneads*. The first is from 5.1.6:⁴⁵ “All things which exist, as long as they remain in being (*ἕως μένει*), necessarily (*ἀναγκαίαν*) produce from their own substances, in dependence on their present power, a surrounding reality directed to what is outside of them, a kind of image of the archetypes from which it was produced [...]”. The second text, from 5.4.2, runs as follows: “...and the activity of the essence is the selfsame particular thing, while the other activity is from that one, and must in everything follow it, being necessarily different from the thing itself [...]” (*καὶ ἡ μὲν τῆς οὐσίας αὐτό ἐστὶν ἐνέργεια ἕκαστον, ἡ δὲ ἀπ’ ἐκείνης, ἣν δεῖ παντὶ ἔπεσθαι ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἐτέραν οὔσαν αὐτοῦ*). The conclusion Spearritt draws from these two texts (*viz.* that creation is due to necessity) is, in my opinion, somewhat short-sighted. Maybe the whole problem would be easier to understand if we make an analogy.⁴⁶ The will to walk and the act of walking could be seen as an example of immanent activity. The leaving of footprints, on the other hand, is an external activity. However, there seems to be but one action. The will to walk and the walking is an intransitive description of two aspects of this action, the leaving of footprints is a transitive description of what the walker does. Here we should listen to what Plotinus says in the *Ennead* 6.1.22: “And one should not call all activities productions or say that they produce something. Producing is incidental. Well then, if someone walking produces footprints, do we not say that he made them? But he did it out of being something else. Or [we may say] he produces incidentally and the activity is incidental, because he did not have this in view”. We could say then, that the will to walk and the walking itself is somehow independent of the leaving of footprints, because in most cases one does not walk with this *purpose*. The leaving of footprints is, therefore, usually incidental to the will and the purpose. On the other hand, we should ask whether the footprint-making is

⁴² DN 5.8, PG 3.824c, cf. DN 7.2, PG 3.869a–c.

⁴³ DN 5.8, PG 3.824c.

⁴⁴ Spearritt 1968, 52–53.

⁴⁵ Translation from A.H. Armstrong (transl.), *Plotinus: Ennead V* (Loeb Classical Library 444), Cambridge, Massachusetts 1984. Greek terms inserted by me.

⁴⁶ Cf. Emilsson 1999.

a necessary effect of walking as a physical act. I should think the answer would have to be positive.

Let us return to the two texts from the *Enneads* appealed to by Spearritt. The key to understand the first quotation is the *ἕως μένει* ("as long as they remain in being"). We should ask what is characteristic of the indwelling of the first principle, the One. The One, according to Plotinus, acts according to its *will* (*βούλησις*).⁴⁷ The remaining of the One in its activity of essence must, then, be connected with its will to be itself.⁴⁸ Upon this background, the point is that the One wills to be itself as remaining in its activity, and, because of this will to remain, the One *necessarily* produces an effect *ad extra*, as the citation from *Ennead* 5.1.6 teaches. The conclusion to be drawn from the second quotation is that *if* there is an activity of the essence, which, as we have seen, is willed by the One, *then* an external activity *must* follow it. Further, this external activity is *necessarily* different from the first activity.

There is no external or internal constraint on the One; rather it is free in its internal activity because it has willed to act according to its own nature. From a modern point of view one could, of course, object that this is a strange notion of freedom, because it does not seem that the One has any alternative, i.e. acts from free choice. However, what is expressed here is the idea that to be free is to live according to one's nature. The One wills to be itself, and this means that it wills itself as good. Goodness has the essential feature that it is distributive of itself, but the One does not have this distributive aspect or the external effect in view. From this we may draw the conclusion that the internal activity of the One as an act of will is independent of creatures; as an activity of goodness, however, it is the necessary and sufficient condition for the existence of creatures. The existence of creatures is incidental to the internal activity of the One as an act of will, but necessitated by the resulting immanent activity.

I believe these distinctions are important for the evaluation of the difference between an orthodox Christian doctrine of creation as compared with Neoplatonism. Spearritt seems to suffer from a rather common error regarding the evaluation of emanation versus creation: from a Christian point of view, emphasis is often placed on God's free will as a characteristic of Christian thought, while the Neoplatonist position is branded with the necessity of an emanationist position.⁴⁹ This, I think, is at least partly wrong. From both a Christian and a Neoplatonist point of view the creation of the world does *not* follow by necessity from the divine nature in itself. God, further, knows Himself as good (i.e. as a principle of distribution) and He wills Himself as such. It is at this point that the difference between Christianity and Neoplatonism occurs. It has to do with two things: (i) the character of the divine knowledge and (ii) the *modus* of the divine will. Even if the One of Plotinus knows itself as good and implicitly knows itself as a principle of something possibly *other* than itself, when it wills to be itself, it does not will itself as an actual principle of such an otherness. Neither, *a fortiori*, does it will itself as a principle of an otherness with a temporal beginning. The question now is to what degree Dionysius follows in the footsteps of Neoplatonism or to what degree he approaches an orthodox Christian approach.

⁴⁷ Plotinus, *Ennead* 6.8.13.

⁴⁸ This is the interpretation of Rist 1967, ch. 6. I believe he is right in this.

⁴⁹ In addition, what strikes me as strange in Spearritt's treatment is that he does not at all relate his discussion of Plotinus to the Dionysian doctrine of creation.

In what sense are we to take the Dionysian pronouncement that the Ideas are acts of will? First we should note that the God of Dionysius is the Christian God who contemplates Himself as a principle or cause of something possibly other than Himself. This God, in knowing Himself as distributive of external effects, wills what He knows. But, if this is so, how should this will, or even acts of will, be understood? Does the will include a decision to create an otherness with a temporal beginning? I cannot find any indications that point in this direction. As a matter of fact, I cannot find any texts in the Dionysian writings that provide clear information on the author's concept of divine will in creation at all. Rather, it seems that, according to Dionysius, what God knows from eternity He wills from eternity, and, consequently, the effects of that will are manifested from eternity.⁵⁰

This interpretation may be supported from several texts in which Dionysius speaks about the nature of God's goodness. One text, which is especially telling, is found in the *De divinis nominibus* 4.1:⁵¹

Think of how it is with our sun. It exercises no rational process, no deliberate choice (οὐ λογίζόμενος ἢ προαιρούμενος)⁵², and yet by the very fact of its existence it gives light to whatever is able to partake of its light, in its own way. So it is with the Good. Existing far above the sun, an archetype far superior to its dull image, it sends the rays of its undivided goodness to everything with the capacity, such as this may be, to receive it.

This, of course, is an image, an analogy, but even so it does not receive any definite Christian qualification in the context. Now, the quotation is quite striking and seems indeed to teach that the creation of the world follows eternally from the natural goodness of God. This is consistent with the Neoplatonic concept of causality employed by Dionysius. According to Plotinus, the emergence of the effect is the eternal result of the eternal activity of the One's being. According to Proclus, the eternally remaining cause has eternally proceeding and converting effects. At this point, the Dionysian doctrine of creation, therefore, seems to be more Neoplatonic than specifically Christian. Even if the world is created *ex nihilo*, even if it is created by God's will to be Himself as good and even if it is created by His will to be the cause of something possibly other than Himself, it does not seem to be created by God's free decision to give it a temporal beginning. The Dionysian notion of the divine will seems to lack something which was important for the great thinkers of the fourth century and which was repeated by Fathers after Dionysius, for instance by St. Maximus the Confessor: the divine will is such that God eternally could want that something other than God, i.e. the world, should have a temporal beginning of its existence.⁵³

⁵⁰ St. Athanasius struggled to avoid this consequence, cf. *CA* 1.29, *PG* 26.72.

⁵¹ *DN* 4.1, *PG* 3.693b.

⁵² Luibheid's translation. I would prefer "calculation" to "rational process" (Luibheid). The sun does not execute any calculation, neither does God reason in this way. The divine knowledge should not be confused with calculation or with discursive reasoning. It is more like a contemplative insight or understanding. I have changed Luibheid's "no act of choice" to "no deliberate choice", because *προαίρεσις* is usually understood to be a rational act.

⁵³ Cf. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua* 7, *PG* 91.1081a–b. For a discussion of the concept of God's will in creation, cf. Tollefsen 2000, ch. 3.

This interpretation could be met with at least three objections. First, in *De caelesti hierarchia* Dionysius states the freedom of human beings.⁵⁴ Is it not reasonable to believe *a fortiori* that God, as the supremely rational being, is eminently free as well? Could it not just be a coincidence that Dionysius does not comment on the topic of divine freedom? I would answer that it is not impossible that Dionysius in fact held an adequate doctrine of divine freedom, even though the texts do not bear witness to it. But whatever his ideas on this, his employment of the causal scheme has not received sufficient Christian modification and seems to point decisively in the direction of a beginningless world.

Secondly, is it true that the texts bear no witness at all to a doctrine of divine freedom? In the *De divinis nominibus* 13.2 Dionysius says: “Without the One there is no multiplicity, but there can still be the One when there is no multiplicity, just as one precedes all multiplied numbers”.⁵⁵ If it is possible for God to exist without the world, then the existence of the world must depend, not only on a causality stemming from God’s eternal will to act in accordance with His nature, but also on the divine will to be the cause of a possible otherness with a temporal beginning. Consequently, God could well have a will to decide that the world should emerge from non-being in such a way that its temporal existence had a starting point. To this objection I would say that in the face of the evidence I have put forward, I would be very sceptical of constructing a whole doctrine of divine will on the above citation. However, whatever the exact meaning of these words, I admit they point to the possibility that a specifically orthodox Christian doctrine of divine freedom, in the sense we speak about it now, should perhaps not be excluded. On the other hand, the weight of evidence leans against the attribution of this doctrine to Dionysius, and I really doubt that he had any such doctrine.

Thirdly, does not the fact that St. Maximus the Confessor, whose orthodoxy on the issue of creation is beyond doubt, never criticises Dionysius speak against my conclusion? St. Maximus is highly critical towards the Neoplatonic doctrine of creation and explicitly argues against the idea of a beginningless world.⁵⁶ This objection is interesting. I believe St. Maximus held the Dionysian writings in such high regard, stemming, as he believed they did, from a disciple of St. Paul, that he would not admit that they could contain any erroneous doctrines. St. Maximus interpreted the writings in the light of Tradition and what seemingly lacked in them he would probably read into them. If Dionysius’ teaching is supplemented in regard to the divine will one could argue that his Neoplatonic causal scheme actually could be modified so that we would arrive at an orthodox result, perhaps without any detriment to the Dionysian system. I would not deny this possibility, but is it probable that the Areopagite himself would have accepted such an elaboration of his philosophy?

As it is, then, I will conclude this paper with the dictum that if the Dionysian *corpus* belongs to the last decades of the fifth century, the author does not have an orthodox doctrine of creation.

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⁵⁴ CH 9.3, PG 3.260c–d.

⁵⁵ DN 13.2, PG 3.980a.

⁵⁶ Cf. *De charitate* 4.1–13, PG 90.1048b–1052a.; *Ambigua* 7, PG 91.1081a–b; *Ambigua* 10, PG 91.1176d–1177b; *Ambigua* 10, PG 91.1181a–1188c.

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Martin Luther and Dionysius the Areopagite

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In his writings Martin Luther expresses his opinions of Dionysius the Areopagite at least forty times. His remarks are interesting, because his attitude to Dionysius undergoes a significant change. At the outset of his theological activity Luther is partly under the influence of Dionysius, but he soon emancipates himself from him. He starts to see Dionysius as his theological opposite, and in several theological questions he presents his own position in a dialogue with Dionysius. Luther knows that his attitude to Dionysius has changed, and he indicates several times that liberation from Dionysius' influence has meant a great deal to him. Although Luther changes his position in regard to Dionysius, there are also features in his discussion with Dionysius which pervade his whole production.¹

Luther's view of Dionysius as a historical person

The changes in Luther's opinion of Dionysius become obvious when he writes about Dionysius as a historical person. In his commentary on St. Paul's letter to the Romans from 1515–16 he takes for granted that Dionysius is a disciple of St. Paul. Luther thinks that Dionysius is the person mentioned in Acts 17:34. When Luther comments on Romans 16:23, he says that Sosipater is the man to whom Dionysius wrote a letter, and in connection with Romans 16:23 he mentions that Caius received four letters from Dionysius.² In his lectures on the *Epistle to the Hebrews* in 1517–18 Luther speaks of the divine Dionysius.³ In his second series of lectures on the *Psalms* in 1518–19 Luther calls him the blessed Dionysius.⁴ He refers to Dionysius' negative theology and to his description of the mystical way.⁵ In his discussion of the indulgences in 1518 Luther finds support for his position in Dionysius.⁶ In his debate with Eck in Leipzig in 1519 Luther refers to Dionysius and points out that Dionysius concludes his *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* by speaking of the bishops. Dionysius has nothing to say about the pope. In Luther's opinion Dionysius thus supports him in his rejection of the primacy of the pope.⁷

Towards the end of the 1510s Luther tries to interpret Dionysius in a way which conforms to his own thinking. He associates Dionysius' teaching of *theologia negativa* and of the mystical darkness with his own theology of the cross.⁸

¹ On Dionysius see e.g. Stiglmayr 1911, viii–xxvi; Gilson 1955, 81–85, 597–598; O'Daly 1981, 772–780; Louth 1986, 184–189 and Juntunen 1996, 72–75.

² *WA* 56.152.9–13.

³ *WA* 57/3.111.21

⁴ *WA* 55/2.138.8

⁵ *WA* 3.372.13–26.

⁶ *WA* 1.551.36–39. Cf. *WA* 1.445.13–26.

⁷ *WA* 59.438.162–164, *WA* 59.449.539–545.

⁸ *WA* 5.176.31–33.



The Roman Catholic Cathedral of Dionysius the Areopagite on Panepistimiou Street in Athens was originally designed by Leo von Klenze in 1844, redesigned by Lysandros Kaftantzoglou, and completed in 1887.

It was built in Italianate style with an arcaded loggia.

About 1520 Luther becomes more questioning and critical in his judgement of Dionysius. In *Operationes in Psalmos*, written between 1519 and 1521, he says: “Dionysius, whoever it may be”.⁹ In his pamphlet *De captivitate Babylonica ecclesiae* from 1520 he speaks very critically of Dionysius. He says that Dionysius is devoid of profound knowledge. He finds that Dionysius’ mystical theology is very harmful. Dionysius is more a Platonist than a Christian. No believing Christian should occupy himself with him. One cannot learn anything about Christ from Dionysius. Those who knew something about Christ lost it when they read Dionysius. Luther says that he speaks from experience.¹⁰ Dionysius’ *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* receives a harsh judgement too. According to Luther, Dionysius describes ecclesiastical customs and plays with allegorical

⁹ WA 5.503.9–10.

¹⁰ *Atque mihi (ut magis temerarius sim) in totum displicet, tantum tribui, quisquis fuerit, Dionysio illi, cum ferme nihil in eo sit solidae eruditionis. Nam ea quae in ‘coelesti hierachia’ de angelis comminiscitur; in quo libro sic sudarunt curiosa et superstitiosa ingenia, qua, rogo autoritate aut ratione probat? Nonne omnia sunt illius meditata ac prope somniis simillima, si libere legas et iudices? In ‘Theologia’ vero ‘mystica’, quam sic inflant ignorantissimi quidam Theologistae, etiam perniciosissimus est, plus platonis quam Christianis, ita ut nollem fidelem animum his libris operam dare vel minimam. Christum ibi adeo non discas, ut, si etiam scias, amittas. Expertus loquor: Paulum potius audiamus, ut Iesum Christum et hunc crucifixum discamus. Haec est enim via, vita et veritas: haec scala, per quam venit ad patrem, sicut dicit ‘Nemo venit ad patrem nisi per me’.* WA 6.562.3–14. Cf. WA 8.289.34–290.5.

interpretations in his book. Luther considers himself capable of writing a better hierarchy than Dionysius. He asserts that even the most poorly gifted person can play around with allegories. A theologian should not occupy himself with allegories until he is completely able to interpret the right and simple meaning of the Scripture.¹¹ Luther declares further that he does not regard Dionysius as an authority on the doctrine of the sacraments. He indeed knows that Dionysius is important for the doctrine of the sacraments, because he is the only one of the Church Fathers who speaks of six sacraments and because he includes extreme unction among the sacraments. Luther concedes that Dionysius takes his starting point in the Bible, but he emphasises that Dionysius and his followers do not stick to the proper meaning of the Scripture but interpret the Bible according to their own arbitrary thinking. It is, therefore, not necessary to regard something as a sacrament just because Dionysius has written about it.¹²

In his book against Latomus from 1521 Luther calls Dionysius the romancing Dionysius. He tells us that Dionysius alleges that his letter to Polykarpos is written to the Apostolic Father Polykarpos.¹³ In his lectures on the first letter of St. John from 1527 Luther nevertheless speaks of Saint Dionysius. He refers to Dionysius' tale of Carpus' vision. In Luther's opinion the vision may be authentic because it is in accordance with the Bible.¹⁴

In the 1530s Luther repeats his negative judgements of Dionysius. In his commentary on *Genesis* from 1531, Luther establishes that Dionysius is not a disciple of St. Paul. The writings of Dionysius are filled with silly rubbish. A disciple of St. Paul could not have occupied himself with such things. Luther refers to Dionysius' book *On Celestial Hierarchy* and to his doctrine of the angels. Everyone can see that Dionysius' writings contain useless and worthless human thoughts, Luther asserts.¹⁵ In his first disputation against the antinomians from 1537 Luther admonishes his audience to shun Dionysius' mystical theology like the plague. The mystical theology is a swindle and an expression of the imposture of the devil. Through the mystical theology the devil can capture people's minds so strongly that they accept Dionysius' lies as the infallible truth and the highest wisdom. They believe that they sense a foretaste of the coming life and of the eternal blessedness. Luther puts Dionysius on the same level as Thomas M ntzer, Caspar Schwenkfeld and the anabaptists.¹⁶

¹¹ WA 6.562.15–25.

¹² WA 6.568.24–29.

¹³ WA 8.65.26–30.

¹⁴ WA 20.640.1–5.

¹⁵ *Apud Graecos est Dionysios, quem iactant Pauli discipulum fuisse, sed id non est verum. Est enim plenissimus ineptissimarum nugarum, ubi de Hierarchia coelesti et ecclesiastica disputat. Fingit novem Choros tanquam sphaeras, supremam Seraphim, Deinceps Cherubim, Thronos, Dominationes, Virtutes, Principatus. Postea in Hierarchia inferiore Potestates, Archangelos, Angelos. Haec quis on videt nihil esse quam ociosas et fuitiles hominum cogitationes?* WA 42.175.1–7.

¹⁶ *Admoneo vos, ut istam Dionysii mysticam theologiam, et similes libros, in quibus tales nugae continentur, detestemini tanquam pestem aliquam. Metuo enim, cum tempore fanaticos homines venturos, qui talia portenta rursus in Ecclesiam invehent et per hoc sanam doctrinam obscurabunt et prorsus obruent. Delusiones sathanae sunt, qui ita fascinat sensus hominum, ut talia mendacia pro certissima veritate ac summa sapientia amplectantur aut putent, se sentire gustum quendam vitae ac beatitudinis futurae. Easdem stultitias sparserunt in vulgus Muntzerus et Anabaptistae, qui remoto Christo iactitabant, se habere revelationes, cum nudo Deo agere et loqui. Marcus [St bner], qui primus fuit autor huius erroris, dicebat se plenum divinitate.* WA 39/1.390.3–13. Cf. WA 43.72.23–30; Dionysius, *De mystica theologia* 1.3; Gilson 1955, 82.

Luther's early interpretation of the mystical theology

During the 1510s Luther links up to the mystical theology of Dionysius. In his lecture on the Epistle to the Hebrews from 1517–18 he speaks in connection with Hebr. 5:12 about three types of theology: the symbolic or sensual, the proper or rational, and the mystical or spiritual. He mentions that Dionysius calls the mystical or spiritual theology *alogon* because it cannot be transmitted or apprehended through words or through the reason. It can only be received through experience.¹⁷ Luther also calls the mystical theology ecstatic or negative theology. The mystical or negative theology implies that God is praised by wondering, astonishment and silence. One does not express anything about God, because one knows that it is impossible for our thoughts to praise God in an adequate way.¹⁸

In these contexts Luther accords great value to the mystical theology. The proper, affirmative theology is imperfect when it comes to understanding and speaking. The negative theology is the perfect theology. Compared to the affirmative theology the negative theology is like wine in relation to milk. Luther observes that Dionysius often uses the word *hyper* when he speaks of the negative theology. It is necessary to rise above every thought and above every manifoldness and enter into the darkness of God.¹⁹

In connection with Ps. 18:12 "He made darkness his secret place," Luther says that the word darkness might be interpreted in different ways. God's secret place is darkness because God dwells in the secret and the darkness of faith. God is darkness also because he dwells in a light which no man can approach. Darkness can also refer to the incarnation and the Church. As regards the second kind of darkness Luther emphasises that no reason can approach God until it first loses its own light and is exalted by another light. Luther refers to Dionysius who says that it is necessary to enter into an exalting light and ascend through negation. This is due to the fact that God is hidden and incomprehensible.²⁰

When Luther describes what it means to enter into this darkness, he emphasises that entering the darkness is a movement where the soul is elevated upwards and permeated with the Word of God. He refers to Jesus' parable of the vine in St. John 15. In entering the darkness the branches of the vine are purged. From man's point of view it is a passive process. The soul encounters the inner Word of God. This Word catches the soul. It is not the soul that grasps the Word. The soul is deprived of all imagination and concepts and is carried off by the Word. The Word brings the soul into the desert. Luther quotes Hosea 2:3: "Lest I strip her naked, and set her as in the day she was born, and make her as a wilderness, and set her like a dry land and slay her with thirst".²¹

¹⁷ *Sermones Dei apostolus hic manifeste distinguit in perfectos et incipientes, quare et necessario in proficientes. Que differentia non facilius intelligitur quam iuxta triplicem illam theologiam superius quoque commemoratam, scil. simbolicam, propriam, mysticam, seu sic: sensualem, rationalem, spiritualem. Quam ultimam Dionysius vocat Alogon, i.e. irrationalem, scil. quod nec verbo nec ratione tradi aut capi potest, sed sola experientia. Simbolica theologia est ea, que docet Deum per figuras et sensibiles imagines, ut olim apud Iudeos in templo, tabernaculo, archa, sacrificiis et similibus cognoscere. Que et hodie tollantur apud Christianos in ornamentis imaginum ecclesiarum, item in cantibus, in organis et similibus. WA 57/3.179.6–15. Cf. Dionysius, De caelesti hierarchia 2; Gilson 1955, 82.*

¹⁸ WA 3.372.13–16.

¹⁹ WA 3.372.16–27.

²⁰ WA 55/2.138.5–10, Dionysius, De divinis nominibus 1.5.

²¹ WA 5.176.11–21.

The quotation from Hosea shows, says Luther, that mystical ascension is painful. It is a narrow and unpleasant way. The soul has to leave everything visible. It is stripped of all senses and of all that it knows and has been accustomed to. In other words, it has to die and descend to hell. The soul feels as if it is totally doomed to destruction. It does not touch either earth or heaven, and it does not know itself or God. It is reduced to nothing and it does not know anything. It can only say with the bride in the Song of Solomon 5:8: "I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my beloved, tell him, that I am sick of love". When the soul enters the obscurity and darkness it does not see anything. It becomes increasingly weaker, but in reality it is stronger when it becomes weaker. According to Luther this process is what the mystical theologians call entering the darkness and ascending above being and non-being.²²

As we have seen, Luther connects the mystical ascension with faith, charity and hope. According to him it is impossible to contemplate the uncreated Word if one has not first been justified and received the purity of the heart through the incarnate Word. Only through faith and only through Christ do we have access to the Father. Everything we can do and endure must happen in faith in Christ, Luther points out. When we have been justified by faith and received the remission of sins, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. The incarnate Word is, therefore, necessary for the purity of the heart, and not until we have this purity can we be caught up to the uncreated Word. This elevation, too, is God's gift. Nobody can think that he is so pure in heart that he may claim to be caught up with St. Paul to the third heaven or to be with St. Peter, St. James, and St. John on the mountain of transfiguration.²³

Hope is also important for the mystical elevation. Through hope the person who hopes is led to the object of hope. In hope, subject and object melt together. But the object of hope does not appear. The soul does not know for what it is hoping, but it knows for what it does not hope. The soul moves in something which it does not see. Luther quotes Romans 8:24: "For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope; for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?"²⁴

The ascension into the darkness is above all related to the love of God. Luther emphasises this fact in connection with Romans 5:5: "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts". Luther says that St. Paul speaks of the love of God because he means a love where we love God alone. It is a love where God is loved for his own sake. In this love there is nothing that we can see or experience, either within ourselves or outside ourselves. There is nothing visible that we can trust, nor love nor fear. The love of God is elevated above everything to God, who is invisible, inconceivable and inaccessible. This love does not know what it loves, but it does know what it does not love. In that respect this love resembles hope. This love rejects all that is known and experienced. It does not want what it has and it wants what it does not have. Here again Luther quotes the bride in the Song of Solomon 5:8: "I am sick of love".²⁵

Luther emphasises that the entering into the darkness is impossible through man's own achievements, through deeds which man himself has chosen.²⁶ The entering is, on

²² *WA* 5.176.21–30.

²³ *WA* 56.299.27–300.8.

²⁴ *WA* 56.374.5–21.

²⁵ *WA* 56.307.3–15.

²⁶ *WA* 5.176.29–32.

the contrary, something that happens to man. It is a question of God's dealing with the soul. The love of God does not exist within us. It has not been born within us, and it has not begun within us. We cannot achieve the love of God through moral choices and habits as is the case with the moral virtues. We must turn to God and apply for his love. The love of God is a gift which we have not earned. The Holy Spirit sheds the love of God into our hearts. It is shed into the core of the heart, not on the surface of the heart as foam on water.²⁷

For Luther the trials are instruments for shedding the love of God. They awaken hope, and in the trials the authenticity of this love is tested.²⁸ Entering the darkness means, therefore, to be exposed to the afflictions of the cross, to death and hell. The cross alone is our theology, Luther insists.²⁹

Many authors who have written about the mystical theology of Dionysius have not, in Luther's view, understood what entering the darkness really means. They have no doubt dispensed with all images of the passion of Christ and they have wanted to listen to and contemplate the uncreated Word. But they have tried to do so without first being justified and without getting the eyes of the heart purified through the incarnate Word.³⁰ They have looked at their own righteousness and thus still kept to something visible. They have not been tried and they have therefore not learned to hope.³¹ They have thought that they possessed love, but their love has been foam on the surface. The trials have revealed the pride and the impatience that dwells in their innermost.³² They have not, in other words, loved death and hell, but they have used the mystical theology for the purpose of enhancing their selves. They have then deceived their readers. No one should believe that he is a mystical theologian, Luther says, if he has read, understood and taught Dionysius, or if he believes that he has understood Dionysius. One becomes a theologian, not by understanding, reading and contemplating, but by living, dying and getting judged, Luther emphasises.³³

Luther's later view of Dionysius and the mystical theology

After 1520 Luther becomes more critical of Dionysius and the mystical theology than he was during the 1510s. He keeps a gradually increasing distance from the mystical theology. As mentioned above, in 1537 he admonishes his audience to detest Dionysius' mystical theology as a harmful plague. Luther's negative attitude is bound up with his stronger emphasis on the incarnate Word, Christ's humanity and the means of grace. His conflicts with the Roman Church and his battles with Thomas Müntzer and other spiritualists have driven him to this position.

As time goes on Luther also adopts an attitude of reserve towards the allegorical interpretation of the Bible. He admits that it was very difficult for him to free himself from

²⁷ *WA* 56.307.16–33.

²⁸ *WA* 56.307.13–15.

²⁹ *Crux sola est nostra Theologia. WA* 5.176.32–33.

³⁰ *WA* 56.299.27–300.8.

³¹ *WA* 56.307.11–15.

³² *WA* 56.307.21–23.

³³ *WA* 5.163.17–29.

the study of the allegories even if he realised that they are empty speculations. According to Luther only the historical meaning of the Bible gives true and firm knowledge. When one has treated the historical meaning and understood it correctly one can use allegories as decorations and illustrations. But sheer allegories, which are in no respect coherent with the historical meaning of the text, should be rejected as empty dreams.³⁴ Luther says that he has had an aversion to allegories since he began to appreciate the historical meaning. He has used them only when the text itself points to them or when it is possible to draw the allegorical interpretations from the New Testament.³⁵ Luther recommends that especially younger students of the Bible should read the old teachers with discrimination and discard those who are less probable. They should not, like Luther and the scholastic theologians, be betrayed by the authority which the title Church Father or Teacher of the Church suggests.³⁶ Luther regards Dionysius as a representative of the allegorical interpretation of the Bible, and his critical remarks also apply to Dionysius.³⁷

Luther's criticism of the mystical theology has its background in his distinction between God's omnipotence and God's orderly rule of the world, between God's *potentia absoluta* and God's *potentia ordinata*. Through his omnipotence, through his *potentia absoluta*, God, according to Luther, sometimes makes wonders. God saved the three men in the burning furnace in Babylon and he can see to it that even children who, owing to the neglect of their parents or for some other reason, have not been baptised, do not become condemned.³⁸ But as a rule God works through his *potentia ordinata*, through the ordinances which he has instituted. He works through the things which he has created and he does not want to leave them idle. He does not give us manna from heaven but he wants us to work in our vocation. He does not create men out of dust of the earth but through the union between man and woman.³⁹ The same is true when it comes to the participation of the salvation. According to God's *potentia ordinata* the Church must say and teach that no one is saved without the external baptism. Salvation is not attained through spiritual speculations independent of external things. One must listen to the external Word, one must ask for the baptism, one must receive the Eucharist and one must ask for absolution. All these are external things, but they are enclosed in the Word. Without them the Holy Spirit does not bring about salvation.⁴⁰

Luther criticises Dionysius for giving rise to speculations on the naked majesty of God. Luther obviously thinks that Dionysius imagines a communion with God, which is not mediated by the incarnate Christ and the means of grace, or that he is not content to have communion with God through the humanity of Christ and the means of grace. The hidden God, whom the soul meets in the mystical darkness, is God in his *potentia absoluta*. According to Luther, God has not intended that we should meet him in that way. Luther says that many have followed Dionysius and written much on spiritual nuptials, where they have imagined that God is the bridegroom and they the brides. They have taught that mortal men in their corrupt state after the fall can contemplate God in his inscrutable and

³⁴ WA 42.173.30–37.

³⁵ WA 42.173.26–29.

³⁶ WA 42.173.22–26.

³⁷ WA 7.647.20–32, WA 7.648.16–25 and WA 42.176.19–26.

³⁸ WA 43.71.7–28.

³⁹ WA 43.71.7–16.

⁴⁰ WA 43.71.33–37.

eternal majesty without means and intercessors. Luther alleges that this doctrine has been received as the highest divine wisdom. He admits that he himself during a certain period adopted this doctrine, but he says that this greatly harmed him.⁴¹

The monasteries were of course centres for the mystical and contemplative life. Luther says that many monks and nuns, and especially the best of them, concentrated on practising this life, before God, through the reformation, revealed the light of the gospel. According to Luther some monks and nuns wrote down their dreams because they hoped that through them they would get special revelations.⁴² Luther states that Müntzer and the anabaptists have spread the longing for an unmediated communion with God among people. Müntzer and his followers boasted that they had revelations and that they spoke and communicated with the uncovered God. One of them, Marcus Stübner, contended, according to Luther, that he was filled with divinity.⁴³

Luther does not totally reject special revelations. He admits that some of the revelations which, according to the tradition, Dionysius and others have had, might have been true. Among other revelations, Luther thinks of Dionysius' reports on Carpus.⁴⁴ Luther reminds us of the fact that God revealed himself to patriarchs and prophets either in dreams or visions or through the voices of other patriarchs or angels.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, he says that he does not care for these revelations and that he himself for that matter does not long for them. They have no value compared to the baptism, the Eucharist and a conversation with a pious brother.⁴⁶ Luther is content with the revelations of the face of God which he sees in the baptism and in the ministry of the Word. There a brother becomes an angel for his brother when he absolves, comforts, teaches, admonishes and encourages him.⁴⁷ Luther would not be worried if God did not reveal himself to him in a visual way as he did to Abraham. It is enough for his salvation that he is baptised, that he listens to the gospel and that he receives absolution through the power of the keys.⁴⁸ The mystical speculations and the mystical experiences are not the important thing for Luther, but the means of grace which give him a share in the salvation.

Luther finds support for his reticent attitude to these speculations in an example from the ancient Church. He quotes a desert father, who said to his monks when they devoted themselves to speculations: "If you see yourself ascending to heaven and already have one foot over the threshold, pull it back immediately and don't allow the other to follow". In Luther's interpretation the desert father, through this advice, wanted to persuade his monks to abstain from speculations.⁴⁹

⁴¹ *Scriptura inquit: Non videbit me homo et vivet, et ut hoc periculum evitemus, donatum est nobis verbum incarnatum, quod positum est in praesepe ac suspensum in ligno crucis. Hoc verbum est sapientia et filius patris et enarravit nobis, quae sit voluntas patris erga nos. Qui relicto illo filio suas cogitationes et speculationes sequitur; maiestate Dei obruitur et desperat. Ad has speculationes de maiestate Dei nuda dederunt occasionem Dionysius cum sua mystica theologia.* WA 39/1.389.13–19.

⁴² WA 43.71.37–72.3.

⁴³ WA 39/1.390.10–13.

⁴⁴ WA 42.667.23–24; WA 20.640.5–6; Dionysius, *Epistula* 8.6.

⁴⁵ WA 42.667.29–31.

⁴⁶ WA 42.667.24–27.

⁴⁷ WA 42.667.31–35.

⁴⁸ WA 42.667.38–42.

⁴⁹ WA 43.72.4–9.

Luther has two main arguments against striving for achieving an immediate communion with God. One is that this striving is an illusion, a deceit of the devil. It is an attempt to climb into heaven without a ladder.⁵⁰ The devil tempts people who devote themselves to speculation into believing that they are already in heaven and already sitting in the lap of God.⁵¹ The devil suggests that they can have communion with God without Christ and without the Word and the sacraments. Such a life appeals to reason and it seems to be the worship of angels.⁵² People who are devoted to a contemplative life also gain the admiration of others. They are regarded as great spiritual personalities who have a special holiness.⁵³ They are themselves fond of their worship and speak with contempt of the active life. Luther admits that he, too, took that view before he was liberated from his misconception.⁵⁴

Thus, the contemplative life as an immediate way to God is for Luther a lie and a conceit, it is the devil's farce. Those who are devoted to this sort of life are driven to spiritual pride and they neglect their duties towards their fellow men. That does not mean that Luther totally dismisses the contemplative life. But he wants to connect the active and the contemplative lives with each other and he rejects a speculation which overlooks the humanity of Christ. Dionysius' view has been described as a call from God which is transmitted from one mediator to another until it reaches us.⁵⁵ God thus becomes very distant. Luther insists that God has come close to us in the man Jesus and in the incarnate and risen Lord who is really present in the Word and the sacraments. A right way for living a speculative life is to regard one's baptism, read one's Bible, listen to sermons, honour one's father and mother and help one's working and struggling brother. One should not, as the monks do, lock oneself up in a confined room, but one should fulfil one's vocation.⁵⁶ Luther says that he has a definition of the contemplative life that is different from what they teach in the monasteries. His definition reads: "The true contemplative life is to listen to and obey the audible word and 'not to know any thing, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified'".⁵⁷

Luther's second argument against the unmediated speculation is that it is dangerous. It is dangerous to try to explore and seize God only through reason and rapture without the mediator Christ. In that case one comes in contact with *Deus nudus*, with God in his majesty, and in his absolute power. When the uncovered or hidden God speaks in his majesty, he terrifies and kills. He said to Moses: "There shall no man see me, and live", Exodus 33:20.⁵⁸ Luther also refers to the experiences which the Israelites had when God spoke to them at Sinai, Exodus 20:19 and Deuteronomy 18:16 ff.⁵⁹ Luther stresses

⁵⁰ WA 43.72.1–3.

⁵¹ WA 43.72.9–14.

⁵² WA 43.72.15–17.

⁵³ WA 39/1.391.9–20.

⁵⁴ WA 43.72.15–16.

⁵⁵ Stiglmayr 1911, 144, n. 1.

⁵⁶ *Qui enim recte speculari volet, intueatur Baptismum suum: legat Biblia sua, audiat conciones, honoret patrem et matrem, fratri laboranti subveniat, non concludat se, ut sordidum monachorum et monacharum vulgus solet, in angulum, et delectetur ibi suis devotionibus, ac sic putet se in Dei sinu sedere, et commercium habere cum Deo sine Christo, sine verbo, sine Sacramentis etc.* WA 43.72.9–14.

⁵⁷ *Vera vita speculativa est, audire et credere verbum vocale, ac nihil velle scire "nisi Christum, eumque crucifixum".* WA 43.72.20–21.

⁵⁸ WA 39/1.389.10–390.1.

⁵⁹ WA 39/1.390.13–19.

God's power and active actions, and he knows that his concept of God differs from that of Dionysius. In the 1510s he already criticises Dionysius' notion of a God who is totally inconceivable, a God who cannot be given a name.⁶⁰ Later on he finds Dionysius' speaking of God as ens and non-ens ridiculous.⁶¹ For Luther the negative theology does not mean that God is understood as non-ens. The true negative theology is the holy cross, where God does not appear, but where the groanings of the Spirit which cannot be uttered, nevertheless are present, Romans 8:26.⁶²

A person who follows his own thoughts and speculations is, according to Luther, likely to end in despair. The clarity of the majesty of God depresses him. When the uncovered and hidden God speaks in his majesty, he only frightens and kills.⁶³ Luther, therefore, stresses that the incarnate Word has been given to us in order to preserve us from the danger which the encounter with the uncovered God implies. The incarnate Word lies in the crib and hangs on the cross. This Word is the wisdom of the Father and the Father's Son, and it has proclaimed the Father's will concerning us. When we want to communicate with God we have to listen to the voice of Christ. God has appointed him teacher for the whole world. He alone knows the Father and he reveals the Father to whoever he wants. God does not want us to listen to what happens in rapture. We shall listen to the Son. In him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden, Colossians 2:3.⁶⁴

The Holy Spirit is also working through Christ when he sanctifies and gives life. Luther points out that there is a difference between the Holy Spirit, given through Christ, and the Holy Spirit in his uncovered majesty. In the latter case the Holy Spirit is as terrifying as the uncovered God. The Holy Spirit is a person in the Holy Trinity, and what applies to God also applies to him. Luther also connects the Holy Spirit with the distinction between law and gospel. When the Holy Spirit meets us as God in his nature and majesty, he is attached to the law. Then he is the origin of the law and it is also through him that the law accuses us of our sin. Only when the Holy Spirit is a gift through Christ, he gives us life and sanctifies us. Then he is attached to the gospel, to the promise of salvation.⁶⁵ It is, therefore, not possible to seek communion with God in the Holy Spirit outside the incarnate Christ and outside the external Word. When, in that case, one really meets the Holy Spirit, one encounters the uncovered God and ends in despair. And when one does not meet the Holy Spirit, the speculation ends in presumption.⁶⁶ Both despair and presumption are, for Luther, contrary to the essence of the Christian life.

Luther is nevertheless not unfamiliar with the trials and tribulations and the cross which he connects with the negative theology. He says that he knows them. He experienced them not only in the monastery before his reformatory breakthrough, but many times even later. He points out that the cross and the trials are dangerous situations. The devil can use these situations to drive a man to despair, disdain or blasphemy. The devil reminds us of the fact that we are sinners. He wants us to draw the conclusion that God, because of the

⁶⁰ *WA* 5.187.22–39.

⁶¹ *WA* 40/2.543.8–10.

⁶² *WA* 40/2.543.11–13.

⁶³ *WA* 39/1.389.16–18; *WA* 39/1.391.3–7.

⁶⁴ *WA* 39/1.389.13–16; *WA* 39/1.391.4–17.

⁶⁵ *WA* 39/1.389.26–30; *WA* 39/1.391.17–18.

⁶⁶ *WA* 39/1.389.30–390.22.

sin, is angry with us. In that situation we have to humbly admit that we are sinners and to approach God with groanings which cannot be uttered. These groanings penetrate the heavens and, so to speak, compel the divine majesty to forgive and save.⁶⁷ It seems as if Luther thinks that these groanings come from the assailed man himself. In that case they are an expression of the new man which dwells within him. Luther regards the confession of sins as one element of faith.⁶⁸ At the same time Luther emphasises that, with regard to those who are subjected to trials, we should follow St. Paul's exhortation: "comfort the feebleminded", 1 Thessalonians 5:14. The Holy Spirit exhorts the Christians everywhere to teach and restore each other with divine authority.⁶⁹ The other side of faith is that through Jesus we are saved from our wicked, sinful and damned being.⁷⁰ Luther testifies that he himself has often been helped and restored by a word from a brother, who has in no way regarded himself as an equally good interpreter of the Bible as Luther. A word from a brother has a tremendous weight when, in time of danger, it is directly derived from the Bible. The Holy Spirit is an inseparable companion to the Bible, and he moves and restores the hearts in many different ways through the Word.⁷¹ The means of grace, the external Word of the Bible, the gospel and fraternal dialogue thus play an important role also in Luther's understanding of the negative theology. When Luther stresses the importance of the fraternal dialogue, he perhaps wants to emphasise the significance of community as opposed to the individualism of speculation and mysticism.

Luther's views on Dionysius' doctrine of the angels and of man

It is also possible to observe a development in Luther's concept of Dionysius' doctrine of the angels. In the 1510s he still considers Dionysius seriously, but by 1520 his attitude becomes critical. Luther's own attitude to the angels also changes. During a fairly long period he speaks rather theoretically and objectively of them, but about 1530 they gain a more existential significance for his faith. He gives prominence to the fact that the angels are guardians and they participate in the battle between God and the devil. This battle concerns all men and especially the Christians. Luther's stronger emphasis on the angels might be connected with the fact that he has got married and has children. He has discovered what it means to be responsible for a defenceless child.⁷² As the angels become important for Luther only comparatively late, he cannot assert that Dionysius would have misled him concerning them.

In his lecture on the epistle to the Hebrews in 1517, Luther, in relation to Hebrews 1:14, asks the question if all angels are sent out by God. He mentions that the divine Dionysius says that the higher ranks of angels are never sent out. However, Luther points out that the text in Hebrews 1:14 is very clear. It says that "the angels are ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation". In the Christmas

⁶⁷ *WA* 40/2.543.2–7.

⁶⁸ *WA* 19.77.15–17.

⁶⁹ *WA* 40/2.543.14–21.

⁷⁰ *WA* 19.77.17–19.

⁷¹ *WA* 40/2.543.22–30.

⁷² When Luther writes of the angels, he often stresses the tasks of the parents, e.g. *WA* 34/2.257.21–29; *WA* 34/2.279.22–285.1.

gospel St. Luke also intended that all angels were present when he writes: “And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God”. It corresponds with Hebrews 1:6, which states: “And let all the angels of God worship him”. Dionysius can, on the other hand, refer to Daniel 7:10, which makes a distinction between angels who minister to God and angels who stand before him. Luther tries to solve the contradiction between Dionysius and the epistle to the Hebrews by agreeing with Bonaventura’s solution of the problem. Bonaventura thinks that Dionysius speaks of the visible sending of angels while the apostle in the epistle to the Hebrews speaks of the invisible sending. All angels are not sent in a visible way, but all are sent in an invisible way.⁷³ One can notice that Luther here concentrates on the sending of the angels.

In his book *De captivitate Babylonica ecclesiae* in 1520, Luther is already more critical of Dionysius. He wonders with what authority and with what reasons Dionysius supports his assertions concerning the angels in his book on the celestial hierarchy. When one reads and judges the book freely, one finds that it contains Dionysius’ own fancies and dreams.⁷⁴ In his lectures on Zechariah from the mid 1520s Luther develops his criticism. He says that Dionysius dreams of a heavenly hierarchy where some angels learn from others and where some angels are superior and others inferior. According to Luther, Dionysius presents this and many other things in an unabashed way as if he himself would have seen it. Luther especially rejects the idea that the angels learn from each other. He points to St. Matthew 18:10 and contends that God instructs the angels. God uses their services and he sends them to comfort his tormented and frightened people.⁷⁵ Luther again states that Dionysius dreams and makes up ridiculous things concerning the angels.⁷⁶

In his commentary to Genesis from the mid 1530s Luther says that Dionysius’ books on the celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchy are filled with silly rubbish. Dionysius invents nine choirs or spheres of angels. The highest are the seraphs, the cherubs and the thrones. Then dominations, virtues and princes follow, and then in the lower hierarchy powers, archangels and angels. Is it not clear to anyone that these are nothing but worthless and futile human thoughts, Luther says.⁷⁷ He also wonders at whoever says that there are nine choirs. He declares that the Franciscans have added a tenth sphere, where the Mother of God lives as in a palace.⁷⁸ In another context Luther rejects Dionysius’ idea that the angels are of different substances.⁷⁹ According to him Dionysius dreams when he thinks that cherub is a name for one of the order of angels. Referring to the Hebrew, Luther contends that cherub is a general concept which applies to all angels. Cherub alludes to the apparition of angels, and it means that the angels encounter men in a youthful, fresh shape and that they have a youthful face.⁸⁰ In a sermon from 1537, however, in connection with Colossians 1:16, Luther admits that there is a difference between angels, and that some angels are superior to others. He says that doctors and teachers, basing their

⁷³ WA 57/3.111.21–112.11.

⁷⁴ WA 6.562.3–8.

⁷⁵ WA 13.568.14–21.

⁷⁶ WA 13.604.38–42.

⁷⁷ WA 42.175.1–7; Dionysius, *De caelesti hierarchia* 7.1; Louth 1986, 186.

⁷⁸ WA 42.175.13–16.

⁷⁹ WA 36.406.18–19.

⁸⁰ WA 42.175.23–26.

statements on this Bible passage and on similar biblical quotations, have taught that there are nine orders or choirs among the angels. Without any success they have made great efforts to differentiate between the choirs. Luther says that he cannot distinguish between different kinds of angels either. That perhaps reduces his standing as a theologian, but it does not damage his Christian faith.⁸¹ He is apparently not interested in the idea of a hierarchy of angels and does not bother to polemicise against this idea.

After 1530 Luther speaks fairly often of the angels in his sermons. In a sermon on St. Michael's day in 1532 he asks how we can get to know the angels. He does not accept Dionysius' answer. He suggests that Dionysius speculates about things which we cannot see. We do not get to know the angels with our eyes, Luther says, but we ought to hear what they say. The words of the angels show what is in their hearts. Luther quotes Jesus' saying in St. Matthew 12:34: "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh". Here, as in many other contexts, Luther regards that what is heard, and not that what is seen, as fundamental for the knowledge of God and for the communion with God. At the same time it is clear that he bases his opinion on the Bible. He points to St. Luke 2:14 and he alludes to the hymns in the revelation of St. John. According to Luther the angels sing of the Saviour, of the child in Bethlehem, of the glory of God and of peace on earth. They also sing of those who have welcomed Jesus and of the patience and the sufferings of the Christians. From that we understand what the hearts of the angels are like and how they are disposed towards us. We get comfort not only from our Saviour but also from his heavenly host which has a friendly attitude towards us.⁸²

On St. Michael's day 1531 Luther delivered three sermons on the angels. In 1593 they were published with the title: *Drei christliche, trostreiche und in Gottes Wort wohlgegründete Predigten von guten und bösen Engeln*.⁸³ In these sermons Luther mentions Dionysius, but he also gives a thorough exposition of his own view of the angels and of their signification for the Christian life. Luther says that Dionysius and other Church teachers have written much on the angels. They have written that the angels stand before God and play, and that the angels do not care about men on earth. The monks have said that one should not attribute to the angels such childish works as care about men. Luther remarks, that Dionysius is right in saying that the angels stand before God and praise him. The Bible teaches that the angels always behold the face of God. But the Bible also teaches that the angels keep watch over men on earth. They are valets, nurses and guardians, especially in things which concern faith, Luther emphasises.⁸⁴ He compares the angels to parents and princes. When the parents have bred children, they are the children's protectors and guardians. They are their children's maids. The prince is the servant of the servants, i.e. the servant of the parents. He is obliged to watch and see to

⁸¹ WA 45.290.21–28.

⁸² *Sic sol man auch angelos erkennen contra Theologiam Dionysii scriptam de angelis de substantiis separatis. Speculatur res, quam non viderunt, ut Christus: 'Ex abundantia' etc. Si sol ein man erkennen, ex sermone agnoscitur; ex augen non agnoscitur. Nihil curo, quod non bey der nasen, augen sehe, modo audiam, quomodo loquatur. Sic in omnibus rebus statim videbis, an stultus vel sapiens. Sermo indicat, quale cor et anima. Sic quando de angelis scribendum, cogitandum, nihil, quomodo in celis agant, sed quomodo reden und singen. Ibi quid in eorum corde stick. 'Ex abundantia cordis eorum ghet.' Tamen all gedanken de Salvatore, puero et de gloria dei et pace in terris und gedult und leiden den Christen. Ibi intelligo cor, rationem eorum.* WA 36.406.18–27.

⁸³ Aland 1957, 57.

⁸⁴ WA 34/2.257.21–258.3.

it that the children are not inflicted with damage first of all through preserving the peace in the country.⁸⁵ Luther is deeply conscious of man's constant struggle with the devil. He emphasises that the devil is an indefatigable furious spirit. The devil is extremely angry with men and especially with believing people and he constantly wants to harm them.⁸⁶ In Luther's eyes the parents, the princes and the authorities are instruments in the struggle against the devil. He regards the angels in the same perspective. If the angels should not keep watch over us, the devil could before long prevent the prince's protection and obtain power over us. We could not live an hour but would perish in many ways, were not the angels keeping watch over us.⁸⁷ Luther describes perspicuously how the angels guard us and how they prevent the devil from hurting us even when we, the parents, the authorities and the prince are sleeping.⁸⁸

According to Luther the angels are also charged with the task of being companions and attendants. In relation to Psalms 91:11: "For he shall give his angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways", Luther says that Dionysius, Thomas and other philosophers have written about this biblical quotation without treating the matter the quotation is about. The matter is that God has ordered his angels to be with us in all our ways.⁸⁹ Luther is again very perspicuous. He takes the expression "in all thy ways" literally. According to him "in all thy ways" means that God has ordered his angels to be with us in our bed, in the church, in the town, on the street and in the field. The angels are with us when we have our morning prayers, when we work in the field and while we are travelling. Wherever we may go or stand, we have to know that God's angel is with us and keeps watch over us against the evil powers which surround us on all sides.⁹⁰ The expression "in all thy ways" applies also to our death. For Luther it is very important that the angels are our attendants also when we die. Then we do not know where we are going, but our attendants, the holy angels know.⁹¹ Face to face with death, man is overtaken by anxiety because he feels his sin. But he need not be anxious. He can say with confidence: "It is written: 'He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways'".⁹² Luther advises his listeners to meet death with the following prayer: "My God and Father, I commit myself to you, my highest protector, let your angel and guardian protect me".⁹³

⁸⁵ *Viel Philosophi unnd andere haben von den Engeln geschrieben, alls Thomas, Dionysios, aber sie haben den Schweiss geschrieben, keiner hat diese stück angertüret, davon dieser Psalm saget. Gott der HERR spricht, Er habe das im sinne, das du dich für jhm nicht fürchtest, darumb gibt er Wächter und Hüter, Vater unnd Mutter, Obrigkeit, darzu seine heilige Engel. Die Eltern sind nicht anders denn eine Kinder Magd, Also ein Fürst und Obrigkeit ist ein Knecht aller Knechte, mus wachen unnd warten, dass mein und dein Kind nicht erstochen werde. Also müssen die lieben Engel auch thun, damit du ja sihest, dass Gott der HERR dich reichlich begnade und sicher bewahre.* WA 34/2.279.26–280.21. Cf. WA 34/2.258.22–24.

⁸⁶ WA 34/2.258.25–259.19; WA 34/2.281.12–13.

⁸⁷ WA 34/2.281.12–14; WA 34/2.281.29–31.

⁸⁸ WA 34/2.258.29–259.19.

⁸⁹ WA 34/2.279.22–280.20.

⁹⁰ *Er saget aber: 'Auff allen deinen Wegen' das ist: im Bette unnd ausser dem Bette, inn der Kirchen, inn der Stadt unnd auff dem Felde, In summa: wo wir gehen oder sahen, da soll sein heiliger Engel bey uns sein. Ja, auch wenn wir sterben unnd in eine ander Welt reysen. Gehe nun hin, wo du hin wilt, so hastu treffliche Geleitsleute, die auff dich Warten.* WA 34/2.280.21–25. Cf. WA 34/2.259.24–28.

⁹¹ WA 34/2.280.28–29.

⁹² WA 34/2.281.18–26.

⁹³ WA 34/2.281.16–18.

Luther asserts that his doctrine of the angels has two effects upon men. It makes them careful and it comforts them. The doctrine of the angels is thus connected with Luther's distinction between law and gospel. Luther notices that no one willingly does anything evil when other people are present and watch it. But even when no one is nearby and we are totally alone, we are, according to Luther, surrounded by good and evil spirits, and we ought to be shy of them. Luther's doctrine of the angels thus has a moral educational function. In this respect it is, to a certain degree, law. The consolation, the gospel, consists of the assurance that, even when we are alone in our trouble, we can say: "You are alone, but you are yet not alone, the good angels who God has sent to you are with you".⁹⁴

The notion of the angels is connected with the understanding of the evil angels, the demons. Luther ascribes to Dionysius the statement: "Even if the demons and the human beings fell, their natural faculties, such as intellect, memory and will, etc. remained intact."⁹⁵ Luther finds this statement very dangerous. It means that the evil angels in falling from heaven lost grace, life and justice, but that their nature was not destroyed.⁹⁶ This position has consequences for the understanding of man and of his possibilities to be saved, and it is the anthropological aspect more than the demonological aspect in Dionysius' statement which interests Luther. He thinks that Dionysius' statement is an incisive wording of the idea that the natural faculties are intact after the fall. According to Luther it is a great blasphemy when the scholastics say that man's natural faculties are intact, but it is an even greater blasphemy, when the same is said of the demons.⁹⁷

Luther treats Dionysius' statement, when, in connection with Genesis 1:26, he discusses man as the image of God and the likeness of God. In this context he gives an account of the scholastic interpretation of the relationship between nature and grace. According to Luther, the scholastics teach that the image of God consists of the intellect, the memory and the will which belong to all men.⁹⁸ According to the scholastics, the statement that God created man in his own image means that man has intellect, memory and will. The scholastics think that the likeness of God is a sort of perfection of the image and that grace, in a corresponding way, perfects the nature. The likeness of God means that intellect is illuminated by faith, that memory is strengthened by hope and steadfastness, and that will is adorned by charity.⁹⁹ Faith, hope and charity are not qualities inherent in human nature, but gifts which God grants out of his grace.

When the image of God is described as intellect, memory and will, these mental faculties are regarded as an image of the Holy Trinity. Luther says that he does not reject modes of thought where everything is traced back to the Trinity, but he does not know if they are very useful. They can get unwanted consequences, if they are developed further. Owing to them one can contend that man has a free judgement through the deduction: God is free, and since man is created in God's image, his intellect, memory and will are free. Then it is also possible to say that man's free judgment, his *liberum arbitrium* contributes to the salvation as a preceding and effective cause.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁴ WA 34/2.260.19–28.

⁹⁵ WA 42.45.35–39.

⁹⁶ WA 40/2.384.13–14.

⁹⁷ WA 40/2.322.29–35. See also citation in n. 98.

⁹⁸ WA 42.45.3–10.

⁹⁹ WA 42.45.11–17.

Against the idea that man's natural qualities are intact Luther contends that human nature has been corrupted through Adam's fall. Human nature has a distorted fear and love in relation to God and men.¹⁰¹ Corruption does not affect the functions of the intellect, the memory and will as such, but it appears in man's encounters with God and his neighbours. Man's life is characterised by unbelief and selfishness. His capacity for faith and charity has been destroyed. According to Luther, therefore, we must confess that we are sinners and that all our efforts before God are condemned.¹⁰² It is not enough to say that sin consists of thoughts, words and deeds which are against God's law. According to Luther, everyone who is born of father and mother is already a sinner before he can think, speak and act. Nothing which is good before God can be born out of this evil root. The whole human nature is corrupted by the sin and subjected to eternal death.¹⁰³ It is not enough to say, as the scholastic theologians do, that original sin is taken away in baptism. Least of all can one say that a light is left in man after the Fall, and that man, even if he is not baptised, receives God's grace when he follows this light.¹⁰⁴ According to Luther the corruption of human nature is a permanent condition.

Luther supports his pessimistic understanding of human nature both with quotations from the Bible and with reference to Christ and his salvation. He quotes Psalms 90:8: "Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret *sins* in the light of thy countenance". This passage shows, according to Luther, that we are living under God's wrath. We are prey to death due to God's wrath, which is provoked by our sins. Luther also refers to God's promise concerning the seed of woman who shall bruise the head of the serpent, Genesis 3:15 and to God's promise to Abraham: "and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" Genesis 22:18. In Luther's opinion the promise of blessing shows that the human nature is cursed and belongs to the realm of the devil, where darkness, hatred of God and unbelief reign.¹⁰⁵ Luther asks what Christ is needed for, if the human qualities are unscathed. If man has a good will, if he has an intellect by which the will can be guided, what is it then that has been lost in paradise and which can

¹⁰⁰ *Quare etsi istam diligentiam et cogitationes has non damno nec reprobo, quibus omnia rediguntur ad Trinitatem, tamen haud scio, an sint valde utiles, praesertim cum ea postea longius ducantur. Nam huc quoque affertur disputatio de libero arbitrio, quae ex imagine ista nascitur. Ita enim dicunt: Deus est liber, ergo cum homo ad imaginem Dei sit conditus, habet etiam liberam memoriam, mentem et voluntatem. Ad hunc modum multa excidunt, quae aut improprie dicuntur, aut postea impie accipiuntur. Ita nata est hinc periculosa sententia, qua pronuntiant Deum ita gubernare homines, ut eos proprio motu sinat agere. Ex hoc dicto multae incommoda opinioniones enatae sunt. Simile est, quod citatur: Deus, qui creavit te sine te, non salvabit te sine te. Hinc conclusum est: liberum arbitrium concurrere tanquam causam praecedentem et efficientem salutis. Non dissimile est Dionysii dictum, periculosius superioribus, ubi dicit: Quanquam daemones et homo ceciderunt, inquit, tamen naturalia manserunt integra, ut sunt mens, memoria, voluntas etc. Sed si hoc verum est, sequitur, quod homo viribus naturae possit facere, ut salvus fiat. WA 42.45.24–39.*

¹⁰¹ WA 40/3.384.19–21.

¹⁰² WA 40/3.384.28–38.

¹⁰³ *Si ego, tantus vir, sic quasi de coelo in infernum usque prolapsus sum, an non magnum mihi et aliis hic lapsus documentum est, nihil boni esse in carne mea? Magna itaque sapientia est, scire, nos nihil esse quam peccatum, ne sic leviter de peccato sentiamus, sicut Papae doctores, qui definiunt, peccatum esse dictum, factum aut cogitatum contra legem Dei. Quin tu sic defini secundum hunc Psalmum, Peccatum esse hoc totum, quod est natum ex patre et matre, antequam homo possit per aetatem aliquid dicere, facere aut cogitare, Ex hac autem ceu radice nihil boni coram Deo enasci posse. Hinc nascitur divisio peccati. Nam tota natura primum per peccatum corrupta et aeternae morti subiecta est. WA 40/3.322.16–25.*

¹⁰⁴ WA 40/3.384.33–35.

¹⁰⁵ WA 40/3.384.16–27.

only be restored through Christ, Luther asks.¹⁰⁶ Luther does not accept the philosophical anthropology of his time and he regards Dionysius as a representative of it. Luther's anthropology is theological and based on the biblical revelation and on the message of Christ as Saviour. He does not want to build on Aristotle but on Moses, David and Paul. They have their view of man from the first commandment and from the promises given to Adam and Abraham.¹⁰⁷ Luther regards the doctrine of the corruption of human nature as very important for the Church, because it accentuates the righteousness and glory of God and emphasises Christ's role as Saviour. Luther thinks that neither the pope nor the Turk embraces this doctrine. He admits that he himself had been doctor of theology for many years and had read the Bible carefully without knowing this doctrine.¹⁰⁸ In this context it is important to observe that Luther makes a distinction between creation and salvation, between righteousness valid before God and righteousness valid before men, *justitia coram Deo* and *justitia coram hominibus*. Man can at least partly accomplish the latter, but he cannot achieve the righteousness that is valid before God.

Lasting and changing features in Luther's interpretation of Dionysius

Luther's understanding of Dionysius changes, as we have seen, very much about 1520. But there are, nevertheless, some features which remain firm in all contexts where Luther expresses his opinion of Dionysius. One such feature is the emphasis on the first commandment. The central point in Luther's theology is that we shall let God be God; that God shall be the one from whom we expect everything good and with whom we take refuge in every need. We shall love God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our might. God shall be loved for his own sake. This is the reason why Luther constantly emphasises that our communion with God is founded on God's will and God's activity, not on our efforts. Before 1520, as well as later, justification, understood as God's intervention through Christ, has fundamental significance for communion with God. In this respect Luther points throughout to the incarnate word, Christ's humanity, the audible word and the gospel. Another lasting feature is that Luther attaches great importance to man's experience of his own situation and that he interprets this situation in the light of the biblical revelation.

The changes in Luther's attitude to Dionysius are many. After 1520 he does not regard Dionysius as an authority. He no longer makes efforts to bring his own thinking into agreement with Dionysius' opinions. That is a consequence of the fact that, after the debate in Leipzig in 1519, Luther wanted to build his theology on the Bible alone. In his controversy with Müntzer and other spiritualists in the 1520s Luther lays greater stress than before upon the humanity of Christ, the external word of the Bible and the means of grace. He connects the communion with God with participation of the means of grace, and he dissociates himself from Dionysius' negative theology, which, in his view, is embraced by the spiritualists. One reason for this is that Luther has become more aware of the corruption of human nature and sees man as a subject of the contest between God and the devil. Also, Luther now more clearly perceives the difference between Dionysius'

¹⁰⁶ *WA* 40/3.322.29–35.

¹⁰⁷ *WA* 40/3.384.21–23.

¹⁰⁸ *WA* 40/3.384.30–33.

understanding of God and his own. He does not accept Dionysius' idea of a circulation from God to the world and from the world back towards God.¹⁰⁹ He does not regard God as primarily a subject for contemplation and adoration. He perceives God as an active God, who includes man in his actions and in his combat with the powers of evil. In this combat man is a subject of God's actions through the orders which God has established in his creation and through Christ, the angels and the means of grace. Man is also God's collaborator in his position as parent or authority.

These differences in the perception of God have several consequences. Luther lays stress on that which can be heard, not on what can be seen. He emphasises existential relations instead of intellectual and contemplative attitudes. He regards faith and love as the sum of Christian life. Faith means that we see ourselves as condemned sinners and receive the salvation that Christ has won. Faith fulfils the first commandment. Love is directed to our fellow men. It means that we love them as Christ has loved us and that we refrain from vengeance.¹¹⁰ Luther values active life more than contemplative life, and he understands active life as a life in the daily vocation and in society. It is a life where we serve our fellow beings on God's behalf. He thus emphasises life in the ordinary human community in contrast to the individualistic communion with God that characterises contemplative life. He seems to be especially worried when Thomas Müntzer and other spiritualists try to spread contemplative life to common people. In the monasteries contemplative life was at least supervised and controlled.

Some of these features are also visible in Luther's view of the angels. There one can clearly see how he turns from an ontological to an existentialistic approach. The angels gradually gain a greater significance for him. He regards them as God's fellow combatants in the battle with the powers of evil. His understanding of the contemplative and the active life are reflected in his description of the angels. He does not forget that the angels praise God, but he emphasises more strongly their service to men and their role as God's servants. His interpretation of the angels reminds us of his understanding of the role of faith and love in Christian life, and concerning the angels he puts the stress on love.

The changes in Luther's attitudes also affect the meaning of some theological concepts. In his later theology the hidden God is not the end of the mystical ascent, the inconceivable God beyond being and non-being. The hidden God is instead God in his absolute power, the frightening God, the God of the law and the judgement. The Holy Spirit is also a person in this hidden God if he does not meet us through Christ. For Luther the negative theology is no longer a means for mystical ascent. It is a trial, the culmination of the Christian's spiritual struggle. Only the Holy Spirit, the sighs of the new man and the external word can save man in this precarious situation.

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¹⁰⁹ Gilson 1955, 85.

¹¹⁰ *Solche fragen mag man nemen aus dem unsern betbuchlin, da die drey stuck kurtz ausgelegt sind, odder selbs anders machen, bis das man die gantze summa des Christlichen verstands ynn zwey stuck als ynn zwey secklin fasse ym hertzen, wilchs sind glaube und liebe. Des glaubens secklin habe zwey beutlin; ynn dem eynem beutlin stecke das stuck, das wyr gleuben, wie wyr durch Adams sunde alzumal verderbt, sunder und verdampft sind, Ro. v. Psal. l. Im andern stecke das stucklin, das wyr alle durch Jesum Christ von solchem verderbten, sundlichen, verdampften wesen erlöset, sind, Ro. v. Joh. iii. Der liebe secklin habe auch zwey beutlin. Inn dem eynen stecke dis stücke, das wyr yderman sollen dienen und wolthun, wie uns Christus than hat. Ro. xiii. Im andern stecke das stucklin, das wyr allerley böses gerne leyden und dulden sollen. WA 19.77.11–22.*

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Christ in *Corpus Dionysiacum*

Gunnar af Hällström

Scholars have spent much ink on the question of how to define the place of *Corpus Dionysiacum* (in English often “Dionysian corpus”, henceforth *CD*), also called *Corpus Areopagiticum*, in the history of ideas and the history of theology.¹ In Christian Protestantism the main options seem to have been: either Dionysius was a Christian with traces of Neo-Platonism, or a Neo-Platonist with Christian surface treatment.² The opinion of Martin Luther in this respect is presented by Fredric Cleve in his article in the present volume. Luther’s very critical view met with fierce resistance. Just to mention one example: in Migne’s *Patrologia Graeca* (vol. 3) it is characterised as “*impietas et impudentia intolerabilis*”.³ Among more recent, famous, and very critical attitudes towards the theology of the *CD* Anders Nygren should be mentioned. In his well-known study on Agape and Eros we are told that “the fundamental Neoplatonism is but scantily covered with an exceedingly thin Christian veneer”.⁴ Furthermore he claims that “Now no one could help seeing that the Christianity of Dionysius was entirely different from that of Paul and of the New Testament in general”.⁵ About the same time as the original Swedish version of Nygren’s book appeared, a Finnish theologian and later bishop, Eino Sormunen, wrote a monograph on Dionysius. The title of his study is revealing. A translation of the Finnish original goes as follows: *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Main Lines of his Neo-Platonic Mystagogy*.⁶ Sormunen’s study remains to this day the only monograph on Dionysius in Finnish. The nowadays numerous scholars dealing with Christian spirituality, or “mysticism”, may bypass the question of the ideological background of the *CD* to some extent, but the problem is far from being solved.⁷ A philosopher’s disciplined presentation of the topic is available in Christian Schäfer’s study.⁸ The methodological approaches used in modern scholarship to deal with the question are too numerous to be presented in an article – in fact they would be a useful topic for research themselves.

¹ In this article the editions *CD* 1 and *CD* 2 by B.R. Suchla, G. Heil and A.M. Ritter have been used. Unless otherwise stated, the translations into English and the references are those of C. Luibheid (transl.), *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* (The Classics of Western Spirituality 54), New York 1987.

² Though Protestant scholars seem to have emphasised the Neo-Platonism of the *CD* more strongly than scholars from other denominations, there are nevertheless numerous examples of strongly Neo-Platonic interpretations of Dionysius among the latter also. Rolt 1940, 202–219 provides examples from the history of theology. One of the Orthodox presentations strongly critical towards Dionysius is that of Phrantos 1993, 408, n. 17 who presents the inter-Orthodox discussion. His own conclusion, *ibid.*, 426, is that Christianity is completely secondary in comparison with Neo-Platonism. Other critical Orthodox voices will be presented below in connection with criticism of Dionysius’ doctrine of Christ.

³ *PG* 3, *Prolegomena* 24B.

⁴ Nygren 1953, 576.

⁵ Nygren 1953, 577.

⁶ Sormunen 1934. The original title is *Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita ja hänen uusplatonilaisen mystagogiansa pääpiirteet*.

⁷ Völker 1958; McGinn 1991; Golitzin 1993; and Louth 1981 all deal with the question of Neo-Platonism and Christianity in the *CD*.

⁸ Schäfer 2006.



The Church of Dionysius the Areopagite on Skoufa Street in Kolonaki was designed in Neo-Baroque style by Anastasios Orlandos and built between 1925–1930.

In the present article it is my intention to tackle the old question concerning Dionysius' theological and philosophical affiliation by using one more point of departure. First of all we need to admit that there is no generally agreed way of defining when a person or a text is ideologically Christian more than anything else. Among external characteristics of adherence to Christianity, baptism is often frequently mentioned as an important criterion. But the fact that a person is or was baptised provides the scholar with no binding proof that the person in question was also thinking in a Christian way – whatever this means. However, in spite of the difficulties of definition, many a scholar would presumably admit that Jesus Christ should play a central role in an ideology to which we admit the attribute “Christian”. Therefore the question put forward in this article is the following: is the teaching in the *CD* concerning Jesus Christ such that, on that basis, its belonging ideologically to Christianity can be maintained – or perhaps rejected?

The Christology of the Areopagite has received quite a lot of attention, not least because his position between the Monophysites and the Chalcedonians is a delicate problem.⁹ It has been said, and rightly so, that “all Christological parties claim him (i.e.

⁹ One of the latest stands on this topic is that of Klitenic Wear and Dillon 2007, 4, according to whom the *CD* was “in accordance with the Monophysite position”. A recent contribution is also that of A.M. Ritter in *The Jurist*, according to whom *CD* belongs to a “moderately monophysite milieu”, Ritter 2006, 165. Among older works, Roques 1954, 305–318 gives a detailed presentation of the problem of monophysitism in the *CD*.

the Areopagite), or else see in him their opponents' heresies".¹⁰ The frequently presented view according to which the *CD* was embraced first by the Monophysites and only later by the Chalcedonians, due to the efforts of Maximus the Confessor in particular, probably cannot be upheld.¹¹ But the Christianity of the *CD*'s overall world-view is hardly deductible from his being a Monophysite or not. It is interesting, though, that it is possible to deny the Christianity of a person who is regarded either/or. The present article will not deal with the Christology of the *CD* in this traditional sense. Rather, we wish to see how much bearing the person of Jesus Christ and his work has in the *CD*'s "system".¹² A system of thought that works beautifully without Christ incarnated, dead and resurrected can hardly be called Christian, but on the other hand, if these matters are of crucial importance for the whole of a person's thought, the conclusion that the person's views can be characterised as Christian is at least close at hand.

The aforementioned article by Cleve shows that, according to Martin Luther, Jesus Christ is absent from the *CD*. And even worse: a Christian reading Dionysius will be deprived of his Saviour by the mere reading.¹³ According to Luther, the theology of Dionysius is mainly (Neo-)Platonic. The reformer happened to say similar things about Origen of Alexandria, too. Luther maintained that there is hardly anything about Christ in Origen's works.¹⁴ In this point it is obvious that he was badly mistaken. The incarnated Christ, his life and death were central in Origen's theology, but, and probably this misled the reformer, the "advanced" Christians are supposed to go beyond the historical Jesus and find the eternal Christ as well. Of course, this does not mean that Luther's opinions about Christ in the *CD* were likewise mistaken, but at least we are justified in checking the state of affairs from the Areopagite himself.

A number of later Lutheran scholars have repeated Luther's accusation concerning the lacking presence of Christ in the *CD*. Eino Sormunen's monograph has already been mentioned. According to him "Paul's doctrine of salvation in Christ's blood ... is completely unknown to him" (i.e. to the Areopagite).¹⁵ Bernhard Brons repeats these thoughts by pointing out the Neo-Platonic character of the *CD* in general, and then concluding "wie leicht ...die Verkündigung von Gericht und Gnade in Christus in die geringfügig modifizierende übernahme einer gerade gängigen Weltanschauung umschlagen können".¹⁶ Recently, Paul Rorem has discussed Luther's criticism of the lack of Christocentricity in the *CD* in moderate wordings.¹⁷ His aim was to "dispel the impression that Luther's critique was unique as some sort of Protestant innovation".¹⁸ But not only Lutherans lament the lack of a Christocentric theology in the *CD*. Fierce criticism

¹⁰ Golitzin 1999, 150.

¹¹ Rorem and Lamoreaux 1998 challenge this traditional view.

¹² Our question is thus similar to that put forward but not extensively discussed by McGinn 1991, 180: "The issue is not about the orthodoxy of Dionysius's Christology... nor is it about failure to mention Jesus the Christ – he appears often in the corpus. The issue is rather how central Jesus' theandric activity is to the process of return". McGinn remarks that von Ivanka, Roques, and Rorem answer the question differently from Lossky, von Balthasar, and Corbin, the former having more difficulties in finding Christ in the *CD* than the latter.

¹³ See this article, 115–116.

¹⁴ References to Luther's comments on Origen can be found in *WA* 63.460 and will not be enumerated here.

¹⁵ Sormunen 1934, 11.

¹⁶ Brons 1976, 329.

¹⁷ Rorem 1997. See also Rorem 1993.

¹⁸ Rorem 1997, 304.

is expressed from the side of Orthodox theology by Kenneth Paul Wesche.¹⁹ Dionysius has “distorted” the real meaning of Christ, Wesche claims, and promoted Neo-Platonist gnosis.²⁰ Already before Wesche, the influential Orthodox scholar John Meyendorff wrote a strongly critical presentation of the Areopagite’s doctrine of Christ.²¹ Alexander Golitzin seems to combine his own critical attitude towards Dionysius’ Christology with that of Georges Florovsky in pronouncing the verdict: “With respect to a very important point, nothing less than the person of Jesus Christ, Dionysius merges as, indeed, more a “platoniser” (or at least a Helleniser) than a Christian. Credit must be given Fr. Georges for honesty here. He has admitted a weak point ...”.²²

Even scholars who regard the Areopagite first of all a Christian have found certain problems as regards the doctrine of Christ in the *CD*. Thus Endre von Ivanka, having on numerous occasions noticed that the doctrine of the *CD* changes or even contradicts central Neo-Platonic views in order to favour Christianity, states a certain defect in its Christian teaching, too: “Wenn man der dionysischen Gesamtschau etwas vorwerfen kann, so ist es vielleicht der Umstand, dass in seinem Denken die Gestalt Christi, als des *menschgewordenen* Gottes, und die Inkarnationsidee im allgemeinen keine genügend grosse Rolle spielt”.²³

Statistics

Of course statistics cannot solve the problem of Dionysius’ ideological affiliation. The bare number of references to Jesus Christ in *Corpus Dionysiacum* provides some food for thought, though. Therefore statistics should not be altogether overlooked. The big issue is what conclusions the existence or non-existence of the name of Christ allows. It should be borne in mind that much of the second-century apologetic literature refrains from referring to Christ.²⁴ And this holds true also of the prototype of Christian apology, the famous Areopagus speech by St. Paul (Acts 17:22–31), a speech to which the “genuine” Dionysius was listening. Christ is not mentioned there by name, though an insider is able to find a reference to him towards the end of the speech (verse 31). Nevertheless St. Paul preached the resurrection of Christ in Athens (Acts 17:18), a fact resulting in St. Paul’s arrest and in the delivery of the Areopagus speech itself.

The most remarkable thing as regards references to Christ in the *CD* is the fact that there are no such references in *De mystica theologia* (*MT*).²⁵ The criticism expressed

¹⁹ Wesche 1989.

²⁰ Wesche 1989, 73.

²¹ Meyendorff devoted one chapter in his monograph, Meyendorff 1969, to Dionysius. According to him “Denys ... mentionne le nom de Jésus-Christ et professe une croyance dans l’Incarnation, mais la structure de son système est parfaitement indépendante de cette profession de foi”. Meyendorff 1969, 143.

²² Golitzin 1999, 138.

²³ Ivanka 1964, 286.

²⁴ Is, then, the treatise *De resurrectione* by Athenagoras not Christian since Christ is not mentioned? It is not possible to enter into an extensive discussion concerning the literary genre of the *CD* here, but I do agree with Meyendorff 1969, 123 and others that it should be regarded as a “préoccupation essentiellement apologétique”.

²⁵ Louth 1981 ominously succeeds in presenting the mysticism of the Areopagite without mentioning the name of Christ.

by Martin Luther against Dionysius seems to have built partly on this fact. *MT* is a short tract, only about six pages in modern print. This could partly explain the non-existence of the name of Christ, but there could be other and more important explanations as well. The topic discussed in the *MT*, the ascent to God and the final *theosis* of man might also contribute towards an explanation. For the moment I leave this problem open. It should be stated, too, that Christ is not mentioned in every single letter belonging to the *Corpus Dionysiacum* either. His name is lacking in the first two letters, but is present in the third, written to the same Gaius as the previous letters, and dealing with the same topic, i.e. the hiddenness of God. The topic is discussed in letter five, too, without reference to Christ but with references to St. Paul's epistles. The sixth letter contains a few lines only. The topic deals with the logic of argumentation and it is understandable that no reference to Christ is made here. The rest of the letters do contain explicit references to Christ.

In the other treatises of *Corpus Dionysiacum* the name of Christ certainly occurs, and occurs rather frequently. In *De divinis nominibus* (*DN*), Dionysius discusses initially what names belong to the entire Godhead and which ones to the distinct persons of the Trinity. Consequently quite a lot is said about the Son and the names that He is given in the Scriptures. But admittedly the names given to the entire Trinity play the main part in the tract, names such as the Good, Love (eros and agape are discussed), Life, the One, etc., names that are central in Neo-Platonic thinking as well as in Christianity. One could conclude, cautiously, that the emphasis in *DN* is on the entire Godhead rather than the persons in the Trinity.

The treatise called *De caelesti hierarchia* (*CH*) deals, as the title suggests, mainly with different categories of angels. Christ is mentioned, but little is said about him. A prayer is said to him at the beginning of the tract: "Let us, then, call upon Jesus, the Light of the Father, the true light enlightening every man coming into the world, through whom we have obtained access" to the Father, the light which is the source of all light".²⁶

A similar prayer is repeated later,²⁷ before the actual presentation of hierarchies and angelic orders. There is a reference to Christ at the beginning of *De ecclesiastica hierarchia* (*EH*), too, more detailed than that at the beginning of *CH*. The central part of it goes as follows:

Jesus enlightens our blessed superiors, Jesus who is transcendent mind, utterly divine mind, who is the source and the being underlying all hierarchy, all sanctification, all the workings of God, who is the ultimate in divine power. He assimilates them, as much as they are able, to his own light.²⁸

Most important in this context is the statement according to which Christ in fact is the source and the being underlying all hierarchy. This suggests that Christ in fact is somehow present everywhere in both the treatises on the hierarchies – but this will be discussed below more in detail. There is after all only a limited number of explicit references to Christ in the rest of *EH*. The presentation of the sacraments contains some references and they will be discussed later. All in all it must be conceded that explicit references to Christ are limited in number in the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, a fact that can

²⁶ *CH* 1.2.

²⁷ *CH* 2.5.

²⁸ *EH* 1.1.

easily be taken to support the idea that Christ has a modest position in the theological construction of Dionysius. What is said about Christ, though, is more important than how often something is said about Christ. It is, therefore, time to move from statistics to doctrines. But before doing so one more thing should be pointed out: when Dionysius refers to Christ, he does so remarkably often by using the name “Jesus” (instead of Christ, that is, or Jesus Christ). Even the rather intimate expression “my Jesus” is once used.²⁹ The *Corpus Dionysiacum* does not explain this remarkable use of Christ’s names, though it contains a tract about divine names! The traditional way of explaining such intimate language is to postulate a “mystical” relationship between the writer/speaker and Christ. A personal experience of union with Jesus may also be the answer in the case of Dionysius. However, there are no explicit references to such an experience in the *CD*.³⁰

Christ in the Trinity

The Trinity is often mentioned in *Corpus Dionysiacum*. It is the object of adoration and praise in the famous opening hymn of the Mystical Theology.³¹ When speaking about Christ, Dionysius often takes his point of departure in the Trinity. In our attempt to arrange the scattered references to Christ in the *CD* in an order both logical and true to the Areopagite it is therefore fair to begin our analysis from his Trinitarian views.

The oneness of the Godhead and the distinction between the three divine persons are both thoroughly treated by Dionysius. Both doctrines are emphasised, but Dionysius begins his discussions from the One, the supreme God and arrives at the Trinity later, not the other way round. The theologically correct term “hypostasis” is applied (*DN* 1.4) to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, but in a significant way: the Godhead is said to be “manifested” in a “three-hypostatic” way. Thus the Trinity is presented as an aspect or manifestation of the supreme Deity, but according to the Areopagite there are other aspects as well, such as the Monad and the Cause of beings.³² To all three persons in the Trinity a number of divine names apply, such as God, Creator, Lord, and Life.³³ Consequently they apply to Christ, the second person, also.

References to the second hypostasis in the Trinity are frequently made by using the name “Word” (λόγος), with various attributes. Thus Christ is “the divine Word”³⁴, “the transcendent Word”³⁵, and “the most divine Word”.³⁶ The rich, even innovative language of Dionysius also produced many other names applicable to Christ. The Word

²⁹ *CH* 2.5.

³⁰ Dionysius suggests, however, that he was present at the crucifixion of Christ (see below), a fact which may suggest a mystical relationship with the Saviour.

³¹ “Trinity!! Higher than any being, any divinity, any goodness! Guide of Christians in the wisdom of heaven! Lead us up beyond unknowing and light, up to the farthest, highest peak of mystic scripture, where the mysteries of God’s Word lie simple, absolute and unchangeable in the brilliant darkness of a hidden silence”. *MT* 1.

³² *DN* 1.4. But the Trinity is also presented as being beyond all divinity (not something subordinated to the divine unity) making it difficult to define the Areopagite’s final word in the matter. See the discussion in Louth 1989, 91; and in Klitenic Wear and Dillon 2007, 16–17, 33–48.

³³ *DN* 2.3.

³⁴ *DN* 2.1.

³⁵ *DN* 2.6.

³⁶ *EH* 3.3.12.

is very appropriate, though, since Christ is said to have spoken about the Deity, including Himself.³⁷ In such a context the term “Word” seems to be applied to God revealing himself verbally to people. But “the Word” is also transcendent and pre-existent,³⁸ thus “the Word” is not simply a name emphasising oral transmission. It is also an aspect within the Triune God, but what precisely it means in this context is not systematically explicated.

Terminologically, the Christology of the *CD* represents no consistent logos-Christology, however. In addition to “the Word” a number of other names are given to Christ within the Trinity. Using some scholarly intuition one may see a common factor behind these names. Christ is the light of the Father (πατερικὸν φῶς) according to *CH* 1.2. The Father himself is the original light (ἀρχίφωτος Πατήρ) according to the same passage. Light as a metaphor comes close to the concept of revelation, also present in the appellation “the Word”. The light from Jesus helps people to understand the meaning of the sacred rites, for example.³⁹ This is so also in the case of the “synaxis”, that is, the Eucharist.⁴⁰ And again the Father is the ultimate source (of light) and the Son the immediate successor in the activity of dispensing light to angels and men. The lights (plural!) of Jesus are also called θεουργικά,⁴¹ which means much more than just “divine”: the light of Christ is a transforming power. Some of the parables Dionysius makes use of belong to another type of Trinitarian doctrine, however. The image of three lamps shining with just one light does not presuppose the primacy or initiative of the Father but suggests three divine persons exercising one and the same function.⁴²

Transcendence is a frequently mentioned attribute of Christ. It is, naturally, an attribute applicable to the Trinity as a whole, too. But applied to Christ it receives a special meaning. The transcendence of Christ is over and over again mentioned as the point of departure when Dionysius intends to present the incarnation of Christ. Being in himself transcendent, transcendent for ever, Christ chose at a certain point of time to dwell among men. This brings us to the next aspect of Dionysius’ teaching of Christ: the incarnation.

Christ in the world

The incarnation of Christ is mentioned and discussed several times in the *CD*. Its unexpected and/or paradoxical character is emphasised in two ways: by using the language of negative theology, and by constantly contrasting the incarnation with Christ’s original transcendence. An example of the latter instance is contained in a passage in the fourth letter, where Dionysius in fact uses double negation: “He (Christ) was not man, not as non-man, but as from men and beyond men; beyond man he truly became man”.⁴³

God’s motive for undertaking such a surprise move is also repeatedly stated. The third letter provides an example of how divine love causes the transcendent Word to

³⁷ *DN* 2.1.

³⁸ *DN* 2.6.

³⁹ *EH* 7.3.1.

⁴⁰ Ἰησοῦ φωταγωγοῦντος ὁψόμεθα θεωρίαν. *EH* 3.3.2.

⁴¹ *CH* 7.2.

⁴² *DN* 2.4.

⁴³ *Ep.* 4. The translation is from Mortley 1986, 231, who also discusses the philosophical background of this passage.

become immanent: “As for the love of Christ for humanity, the Word of God, I believe, uses this term (“sudden”) to hint that the transcendent has put aside its own hiddenness and has revealed itself to us by becoming a human being. But he is hidden even after this revelation”.

By emphasising the word “suddenly” (*ἐξαίφνης*), a term used by Plato in his *Symposium* to characterise the moment when a mystic, after lots of preparation, gets sight of the splendid world of ideas,⁴⁴ Dionysius brings out the element of surprise in the fact of incarnation. The word strongly suggests the punctual, perhaps even historically unique, character of the event.⁴⁵ What is definitely new in comparison with Plato’s use of the term is the fact that in the *DC* it refers to a physical event, the incarnation. If the use of the Platonic term is intentional, which it probably is, we witness a dramatic Christianisation of its content, as it refers to the incarnation. Love is mentioned as the motive for the incarnation, in this passage as often elsewhere. Dionysius even speaks of the “endless love of Jesus for us”.⁴⁶ The term used for love in the context of incarnation is usually *φιλανθρωπία*. The incarnation is characterised as an act of mercy: “The hierarch, who «desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth» ... proclaims the good news (*τὰ εὐαγγέλια* – plural!) to all that God out of his own natural goodness is merciful (*ἰλεω*) to the inhabitants of earth, that because of his love for humanity he has deigned to come down to us”.⁴⁷

Even more important than the terminology used is the meaning: in passages dealing with the incarnation, love is unambiguously a “downward” movement, an affection of God towards men. This we state confronted with the criticism presented by Anders Nygren. But Eros is also described as a descending, philanthropic force by Proclus, the Neo-Platonist.⁴⁸ This may or may not be an influence from Christianity.⁴⁹ But in teaching a descending love which reveals itself in the incarnation of Christ, the Areopagite has clearly chosen a doctrinal position which is impossible to Proclus.

Numerous times Dionysius states the fact that the loving subject, the person who loves, is Jesus himself: “Out of love he has come down to be at our level of nature and has become a being. He, the transcendent God, has taken on the name of man”.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Pl. *Symp.* 210e. See also Plotinus, *Ennead* 5.3.17, where the One is “suddenly” present and thereby the mystic has finally reached his goal. But the Areopagite would not be true to himself had he not combined two traditions here, too: “suddenly” is also important in the *NT*, e.g. in the description of Christ’s appearance to Paul on the road to Damascus. I owe this piece of information to Golitzyn 1999, 153, who presents a useful survey of the meanings of the word “suddenly”.

⁴⁵ Mortley 1986, 236–237, referring to Brons 1976, suggests that *ἐξαίφνης* expresses what is “unhoped for”, or “against hope”, and thinks that such a meaning “runs counter to the usual understanding of the incarnation”. Does it really?

⁴⁶ *EH* 5.3.5. In *EH* 3.3.11 the one loving is called “the Deity”, but the context reveals his identity. The text goes as follows: “Yet the goodness of the Deity has endless love for humanity and never ceased from benignly pouring out on us its providential gifts. It took upon itself in a most authentic way all the characteristics of our nature, except sin”.

⁴⁷ *EH* 2.2.1. Rist 1985, 238, n. 11 reads Dionysius in much the same way as we do: “The word *Philanthropia* is used frequently elsewhere in Dionysius. On practically every occasion it is used in connection with the Goodness (agathotes) of God as manifested by the Incarnation”.

⁴⁸ See Rist 1985, 235–236.

⁴⁹ It should be borne in mind that the detailed, polemical treatises against Christianity in the times of the Early Church were written by Middle- and Neo-Platonist philosophers first of all. The knowledge of Christian doctrine displayed by Platonists such as Julian the Apostate and Porphyry is quite amazing.

⁵⁰ *DN* 2.10.

From “So God loved the world” (John 3:16, meaning the Father) has become “so Jesus loved mankind” in the *CD*. And certainly this is so not only in the epistles contained in the *CD* but in the treatises also. An example from *De ecclesiastica hierarchia* may suffice to illustrate this: “For because of his goodness and his love for humanity the simple, hidden oneness of Jesus, the most divine Word, has taken the route of incarnation for us and, without undergoing any change, has become a reality that is composite and visible”.⁵¹

There is one exception, though, to the rule that the incarnation is a consequence of Christ’s love in particular. In the beginning of *DN* there is a passage where the Trinity as a whole is the loving subject: “But they especially call it (the Trinity) loving toward humanity, because in one of its persons (*ὑπόστασις*) it accepted a true share of what it is we are, and thereby issued a call to man’s lowly state to rise up to it”.⁵²

A Christocentric emphasis is present in this passage also, since in the Trinity “one of its persons” is both included in the loving process and the illustration of the love in action. The Christianity of Dionysius is not a message about God’s love in general, similar to the Neo-Platonic doctrine of the goodness of the One, but a message about Christ’s love in particular, revealed in the incarnation.

The scope of this love realised in the incarnation is the salvation of the world.⁵³ Salvation may be understood in different ways, but it should not be claimed, in the way Bernhard Brons does, that the *CD* lacks a soteriological interest.

A feature typical of Dionysius is the constant reminder of the fact that Jesus, even in the incarnation, kept his divine nature intact. It suffered no change whatever.⁵⁴ This is obviously very important to Dionysius. He believes that through communion with Jesus we can become completely changed, that is, divinised.⁵⁵ The Areopagite seems to argue that if Christ’s divinity was reduced, ours would be reduced, too.

It should be remembered that in the same way as the unchanged divinity is emphasised, the unabbreviated humanity of Jesus is again and again pointed out, too. “It (the Deity) took upon itself in a most authentic way all the characteristics of our nature, except sin. It became one with us in our lowliness”.⁵⁶ Christ has “united our humility with his own supreme divinity”.⁵⁷ A witty way of referring to both “natures”, a word which the *CD* avoids, is found in the expression “the divine (*θεουργία*) works of Jesus the man (*ἀνθρωπικά*)”.⁵⁸ According to another passage God “gave us a most perfect share of his nature by completely taking on our own, and that in this way he made it possible for us to enter into communion with himself”.⁵⁹ The Areopagite has the commonly shared Early Christian conviction in mind, according to which Christ must be like us and we like him if salvation is to be reached. Dionysius makes no attempts to divinise the human nature of Christ. He is, on the contrary, keen to stress that the incarnate Christ was really human.

⁵¹ *EH* 3.3.12.

⁵² *DN* 1.4.

⁵³ *EH* 2.2.1, quoted above on page 9. Note also the expression *σωστική ἀγαθοεργία* in *CH* 4.4

⁵⁴ “It (the Deity) became one with us in our lowliness, losing nothing of its own real condition, suffering no change or loss”. *EH* 3.3.11.

⁵⁵ *EH* 3.3.11.

⁵⁶ *EH* 3.3.11.

⁵⁷ *EH* 3.3.12.

⁵⁸ *EH* 3.3.4. A more precise translation would read: “the human divine works of Jesus”.

⁵⁹ *EH* 3.3.7.

He speaks, for example, of Christ's *καθ' ἡμᾶς παντελὴς καὶ ἀναλλοίωτος ὕπαρξις*.⁶⁰ Furthermore, referring to the Trinity, he says that "in one of its persons it accepted a perfect (*ὀλικῶς*) share of what it is we are, and thereby issued a call to man's lowly state to rise up to it".⁶¹ To him Christ is a *σύνθετος*, but his actions not divisible among the "natures".⁶²

Worth noting is the consequence which Dionysius draws from his Christology for Christian spirituality: Christian life means that *ἡμεῖς ὡς μέλη σώματι συναρμολογηθῶμεν αὐτῷ*.⁶³ Christians are supposed to cling to Christ as feet and legs cling to the body. Their goal is to become like Christ, *χριστοποιεῖν*.⁶⁴

In spite of the fact that Christ's divine nature did not change, his status within the hierarchies did. As a true human being he belongs not only to the heavenly realm but also to the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Within this structure of humans and sacraments he is of course the highest. This is not particularly surprising. But being the highest in the ecclesiastical hierarchy he is, all the same, below the lowest ones in the heavenly hierarchy. As such he receives the services of the angels, not the other way round. This is mentioned by Dionysius as an example of Christ's humble obedience, but it also serves to illustrate that the fact of incarnation is also taken seriously by him within his central doctrine of hierarchies.⁶⁵

Christ on the Cross

There is no extensive treatment of the crucifixion of Christ in the *CD*. The passion and death of Christ are, nevertheless, mentioned repeatedly as main points in Christian belief. Dealing with the differentiations in the divine nature, the Areopagite states that the incarnation and suffering belong to the person of Jesus Christ, not to the Father or the Spirit.⁶⁶ This is a statement very much at issue during the Justinian era, when the formula "One in the Trinity suffered" was a favoured topic among theologians. The theology of the *CD* seems to favour such a formula.⁶⁷ *DN* 2.6 also brings out clearly that the incarnation and passion are seen as a unity, though Christ's "actions" are mentioned in the same context as forming a third element within Christ's personal contribution to salvation. Unspecified "works of Jesus the man" is the content of the Gospels, according

⁶⁰ *DN* 2.3, taking *καθ' ἡμᾶς* to mean "in our likeness". In this passage Dionysius also states that Christ became *οὐσιώδης* like us, thus giving emphasis to Christ's true humanity.

⁶¹ *DN* 1.4. Translation partly differing from that in note 1 above.

⁶² "Furthermore, it was not by virtue of being God that he did divine things, not by virtue of being a man that he did what was human, but rather, by the fact of being God-made-man he accomplished something new in our midst – the activity of the God-man". *Ep.* 4.

⁶³ *EH* 3/3 12. Völker 1958, 57 deals with the *imitatio Christi* –concept in *CD*.

⁶⁴ *EH* 5.1.

⁶⁵ *CH* 4.4. See also Roques 1957b, 1104: "Man muss folglich sagen, dass die Inkarnation das Wort auf sehr reale Weise in unsere Hierarchie eingliedert". But Brons 1976, 237 is of another opinion: according to him a Docetic Christology fits best within the Dionysian system.

⁶⁶ *DN* 2.6.

⁶⁷ "In one of its persons it accepted a true share of what it is we are", *DN* 1.4. The suffering itself is not explicitly mentioned here, however. Riedinger 1964, 151 pays attention to the fact that in a Coptic autobiography Dionysius makes explicit use of the mentioned "theopaschite" formula.

to Dionysius.⁶⁸ The main reason for the incarnation is, in the *CD* as in many other Early Christian texts, the passion on the cross.

In addition to the aforementioned non-specified “acts” of Christ only little is said about the works of Jesus from Nazareth in the *CD*. The virgin birth and the walking on the waters are mentioned, and so is Jesus’ prayer in the garden of Gethsemane. The crucifixion is also mentioned, as will be shown below.⁶⁹ The *CD* is, then, similar to many early Christian creeds, where little more is said about Christ than that he was born of a virgin, became man, suffered, and died.

The Areopagite quotes once the famous saying of Ignatius of Antioch (Rom. 7:12): “He for whom I yearn has been crucified”.⁷⁰ The context in the *CD* is to clarify the term “yearning” and thus we are not entitled to discover any “theology of the cross” in the passage mentioned. But we do realise, again, that the passion of Christ is no *Fremdkörper* in the theology of the Areopagite.⁷¹ The quotation from Ignatius does not prove the existence of an Ignatian type of a mysticism of passion, either. A Christian loves Christ, that much can be concluded from the quotation of Ignatius, and from the fact that the Areopagite quotes John 14:23: “He who loves me will keep my word”.⁷² Identification with Jesus suffering on the cross is not a topic discussed.

The probably most famous and commented upon passage in the *CD* dealing with the crucifixion is that dealing with the solar eclipse in Heliopolis.⁷³ The Areopagite seems to claim that he himself actually experienced the darkness that occurred when Christ died on the cross. This is probably the text which comes closest to teaching a “mysticism of passion” in the *CD*. Interesting though this piece of information is from a historical point of view, and as a feature of the spirituality of the *CD*, it provides little new from a dogmatic point of view. We may conclude that the crucifixion was a topic very much present to the mind of the Areopagite. But he recalls the event not in order to expand on the theology of the cross but to provide examples of miracles, trying to convince a certain unbelieving Apollophanes.

The most extensive text on the significance of the death of Christ is a famous passage in *Letter 8*. There the dream of a certain Carpus in Crete is presented. The dreamer wishes disaster over the ungodly, but Jesus, in the dream, addresses him: “So your hand is raised up and I now am the one you must hit. Here I am, ready once again to suffer for the salvation of man and I would very gladly endure it if in this way I could keep men from sin”.

There are many traditional elements in this story. The story itself has a parallel in earlier monastic literature.⁷⁴ Carpus is obviously imported from St. Paul’s second

⁶⁸ *EH* 3/3.4

⁶⁹ The virgin birth and the walking on the waters are mentioned in *DN* 2.9 and in *Epistula* 4. Roques 1957b, 1105 is, all the same, entitled to say that “dabei vernachlässigte Dionysius vielleicht ein wenig den historischen Charakter u. die eigentlich menschlichen Umstände der erlösenden Inkarnation”.

⁷⁰ *DN* 4.12.

⁷¹ Sormunen 1934, 46 claimed that the incarnation was “endlessly more important” to Dionysius than the passion, a claim which I regard as misleading.

⁷² *EH* 2.1.

⁷³ Ep. 7.2 The passage is extensively discussed by Riedinger 1964, but he focuses on chronological, not Christological, issues.

⁷⁴ Louth 1989, 21–22 has drawn my attention to this fact. Louth also points out a number of Platonic elements in this story as told by Dionysius, features not present in the earlier version!

letter to Timothy (4:13). Later Christian tradition made him one of the seventy disciples commissioned by Jesus, and the bishop in Thrace. The tradition says that he met St. Paul's disciple Dionysius the Areopagite on a missionary excursion to Crete. The contrast between the merciful Christ on one side, prepared to die a second time, and the mercilessness of a Christian on the other side is well-known already from the "quo vadis?" episode in the apocryphal Acts of Peter. Christ, in Carpus' dream, was "moved by compassion" (ἐλεήσαντα) towards the sinners. The use of this story within the *CD* indicates that Dionysius lived in a spiritual milieu where the suffering and death of Christ were present even outside their liturgical context. In the same *Letter* 8, Dionysius also reminds his readers that "Jesus asked the Father to pardon those who treated him impiously, even in his suffering",⁷⁵ thereby illustrating that this event in connection with the crucifixion was important for his understanding of Christianity. An obligation to follow the example of Christ, in other words, to follow the principle of *imitatio Christi* is thus deduced from Christ's words on the cross. Love towards one's enemies is the main topic of *Letter* 9.

Christ in the Sacraments

In *De ecclesiastica hierarchia* a number of holy rites are discussed. They are not called "sacraments", which in Greek is usually expressed by the word *μυστήρια*, but occasionally they are called *τελεταί*. The most important of them, according to the *CD* itself, are baptism, the Eucharist, and holy Chrism, but funeral rites are also presented. An examination of their relevance to Christology will be our next task to undertake.

A. Baptism

A daily dying with Christ to sin, for example by practicing penitence, is not mentioned in the *CD*. But baptism certainly means dying with Christ, and dying to sin. Dionysius writes: "By dying to sin in baptism one could say mystically that he shares in the death of Christ himself".⁷⁶ "By his triple immersion and emersion he (the one who is baptised) imitates, as far as the imitation of God is possible to men, the divine death of one who was three days and nights in the tomb, the lifegiving Jesus".⁷⁷

In this passage the imitation of Christ is explicitly mentioned twice, though Christ is called "God" in the latter instance. The ideal life of a Christian can thus be called both "Christ-like", as was noted above (p. 119), but also "imitation of God", *θεομιμησία*.⁷⁸ The limitation expressed by the words "as far as possible" brings a certain realism to the presentation, but its exact meaning is hard to determine. Maybe it is a way of expressing that Christians are to some extent sinners also after baptism.

The cross of Christ, Christ's death, Christian baptism and the benefits of baptism are briefly mentioned later on in *De ecclesiastica hierarchia* when the holy Chrism is the issue:

⁷⁵ *Ep.* 8.4

⁷⁶ *EH* 2.3.6.

⁷⁷ *EH* 2.3.7. Völker 1958, 32 makes the general statement that the Areopagite presents baptism "eng in Zusammenhang" with the death of Christ, a statement with which we can agree.

⁷⁸ Alexandropoulos discusses the concept of *θεομιμησία* in the *CD* in his article, 2008, 49–50. He defines it, in my view correctly, as the imitation of the (sinless) life of Jesus. There is, according to Alexandropoulos, no way to imitate the (hidden) nature of God.

Similarly, in my view, one may explain that rite at the purifying baptistery when the hierarch pours the ointment in drops to form a cross. He thereby shows to those able to contemplate that Jesus in a most glorious and divine descent willingly died on the cross for the sake of our divine birth, that he generously snatches from the old swallowing pit of ruinous death anyone who ... has been baptised “into his death”, and renews them in an inspired and eternal existence.⁷⁹

The effects of Christ’s death, offered to the believer through baptism, are thus the traditional ones: the coming to an end of the former life, new birth to a new life, and renewal.⁸⁰ The “swallowing pit of ruinous death” is the same figure of speech as in the dream of Carpus, dealt with above. The expression used (“renewal...in an eternal existence”) seems to mean more or less the same as rebirth. But of course the logic of the passage requires that those who received new life in baptism go on practising that life. In the passage dealing with baptism and the holy Chrism connected thereto, Dionysius portrays Christ as a kind of all-in-all in the life of the new Christian. He writes:

(The priests) summon the initiate to the sacred contests which, with Christ as his trainer, he must undertake. For it is Christ who, as God, arranges the match, as sage lays down the rules, as beauty is the worthy prize for the victors, and more divinely, as goodness is present with the athletes.⁸¹

The dying to sin in baptism is mentioned at the end of this passage, indicating that there is a logical connection between everyday Christian life as ἀσκητήτης and baptism, but the latter is not explicitly used as an argument for the former. The Christocentric character of Christian life is beyond doubt. Translating the text of Dionysius into more modern language Christ can be called the organiser of the games, the coach of the sportsman, the jury and the trophy to be won. His being “present” with the athletes may or may not be a reminiscence of Matth. 28:20. There are, of course, numerous other biblical passages stating the presence of the Lord with his people.

B. The Eucharist

The Eucharist is usually called *σύναξις* by Dionysius. The term puts emphasis on the coming together, *συνάγειν*, but since Dionysius does not explicate the reason for having chosen this terminology, it is hardly advisable to read much Eucharistic theology into it.⁸² This is so also since our Areopagite is not the first one to apply this term to the Eucharist.

In the *CD* the logical place for a discussion on the Eucharist is the tract on *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*. The most extensive presentation is indeed there, but a short reference can also be found in *De caelesti hierarchia*. Material things are quite necessary

⁷⁹ *EH* 4.3.10.

⁸⁰ Roques 1957a, 276 writes with a certain ambiguity in *Dictionnaire de la spiritualité*: “Cette présentation du baptême constitue certainement le morceau le plus purement chrétien de toute l’oeuvre”. With “oeuvre” the *EH* is meant.

⁸¹ *EH* 2.3.6

⁸² Meyendorff 1969, 140 claims that this Eucharistic terminology, stressing the coming together of the congregation, does not correspond at all to the Eucharistic theology of Dionysius.

for humans, Dionysius claims, in order to reach the heavenly hierarchy.⁸³ He mentions beautiful things (for the eyes), wonderful odours (for the nose), and visible light as examples. Then he goes on to say: “The reception of the most divine Eucharist is a symbol of participation in Jesus”.⁸⁴ The translation seems unnecessarily “spiritualising” here. Dionysius describes participation in the Eucharist by using the words τῆς Ἰησοῦ μετουσίᾳς (participation) but strictly speaking he is not claiming that the participation is only symbolic. All heavenly things are given to us *through* symbols (συμβολικῶς δέδοται). The gift contained in the sacrament is a real one, but it is not given without a visible symbol. The gift, in the case of the Eucharist, is said to be Ἰησοῦς.

In *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, Dionysius discusses the Eucharistic liturgy at length. When dealing with the commemoration of the dead he says that the names of the dead are mentioned while the Eucharistic elements are placed on the altar.⁸⁵ The reason for this procedure is “to make clear in this way that they (the deceased believers) are unshakably bound to him (Christ) in a sacred and transcendent union (ἔνωσις)”. Perhaps it is not too daring to draw from this the conclusion that the goal of the believers’ lives is union with Christ. If this is so, we can hardly maintain that Christ plays a minor role in this interpretation of Christianity. Dionysius has a few words to say about the Eucharistic elements also in this context. They are symbols (σύμβολα) of Christ.⁸⁶ The Areopagite switches terminologically from “Jesus” to “Christ” here, but this probably lacks theological significance. In other Eucharistic passages he speaks in line with his general terminology of “Jesus”. More important is the term “symbol”. If it is read, not in the light of the Eucharistic quarrels in Reformation times but in accordance with the Dionysian theory of symbols, it becomes crucially important. There is no other way of participating in the divine than by means of symbols. Dionysius interprets himself when he states concerning these symbols that through them Christ is meant (σημαίνεται) and is really partaken of (μετέχεται). In a theology such as that of the Areopagite, participation is what Christianity is all about – and it takes place in the Eucharist also.⁸⁷

In connection with the description of the Eucharistic liturgy, Dionysius indicates that the history of the Last Supper and passion of Christ was read/sung. This is, however, indicated using most obscure language, intelligible only to those knowing the order of the liturgy by heart.⁸⁸ More clearly, the same thing is indicated later in the discussion concerning the Eucharist. Dionysius writes:

This imitation of God, how else are we to achieve it if not by endlessly (Gr. *αεί*, my note) reminding ourselves of God’s sacred works and doing so by way of the sacred

⁸³ CH 1.3.

⁸⁴ CH 1.3.

⁸⁵ EH 3.3.9.

⁸⁶ EH 3.3.9.

⁸⁷ There is a major clash between Wesche 1989 and Perl 1994, who rejects Wesche’s “Neo-Platonising” interpretation of Dionysius. The main issue seems to be whether a “symbol” in the CD is something that unites with the thing/God symbolised or if it is an indication of the separation between the thing symbolised and the symbol. Golitzin for his part argues in a note: “I for one would argue that Christ’s presence on the altar is quite real for Dionysius, though it be ‘symbolical’. That is, it is different in degree, if not in kind, from His presence in the other symbols of scripture and liturgy”. Golitzin 1999, 148–149, n. 58.

⁸⁸ The expression used is τὰς ιερὰς θεουργίας υμνήσας, EH 3.3.10 This happens immediately before the elevation of the Eucharistic elements.

hymns and the sacred acts established by the hierarchy? We do this, as the scriptures say, in remembrance of him.⁸⁹

In these passages Christ is, again, called God. The terminology used here is quite remarkable. By “this imitation” (τὸ θεομίμητον) Dionysius refers to his own treatment of the *theosis* of our nature in the previous paragraph. In this context the imitation of Christ does not primarily mean the repetition of Christ’s works and deeds, but the gradual transformation of our nature into Christ’s. The remembering of Jesus’ “providence for the salvation of the human race”⁹⁰ takes place through (singing, listening to?) the “sacred hymns” and attending to the acts of the hierarchy in connection with the celebration of the Eucharist. By saying this, Dionysius indicates that he is a person regularly (*αἰεί*) attending the Liturgy, paying special attention to everything in the Eucharistic liturgy that refers to the work of Christ on our behalf.

One of the best known passages in the *CD*, often presented iconographically, is that where the apostles together with Dionysius himself, and his teacher Hierotheus, are gathered around the *θεοδόχον σῶμα*.⁹¹ It has been argued that this text in fact deals with the celebration of the Eucharist,⁹² though the iconographical presentation takes the *σῶμα* to mean the Virgin. If the Eucharist is meant, we obtain important additional information about the central place the Lord’s Supper has in the Christianity of Dionysius. This interpretation being hypothetical we dare not trust much to this argument.

C. The Chrism

In the *CD* the Chrism is called τὸ μύρον, quite as tradition demands. It is not only an addition to the ritual of baptism. The focus is on the Chrism itself, on the consecration of it, and on the many occasions where holy Chrism could be used. It was, Dionysius says, used in connection with all ecclesial rituals: “A consecrating prayer is offered over the ointment and this is then used in the holy sacraments of sanctification for almost all of the hierarchy’s rites of consecration”.⁹³ And, using slightly different words, he says: “And, what is even more divine, the divine ointment is used for the consecration of every sacred thing”.⁹⁴ Thus it is mentioned also in connection with baptism, the funeral, and the Eucharistic altar. It must be regarded as something particularly holy, since holiness was bestowed to others by means of it in the act of consecration. But the one consecrating everything is Jesus, and thus the Chrism is in fact a symbol of Christ himself.⁹⁵

In him, as scripture says, we have access to consecration and are mystically offered as a holocaust. So let us behold with transcending eye that divine altar where

⁸⁹ EH 3.3.12.

⁹⁰ EH 3.3.12.

⁹¹ DN 3.2.

⁹² Walsh 2001, 846.

⁹³ EH 4.2.

⁹⁴ EH 4.3.10.

⁹⁵ Lampe 1961, s.v. *μύρον* quotes Dionysius using the Migne’s *Patrologia Graeca* (3.497a) saying τὸ τίμιον μύρον σύμβολον τοῦ δεσπότου Χριστοῦ, but alas, this sentence is not to be found in the Göttingen edition. Nevertheless the logic of Dionysius’ presentation requires this same conclusion.

sanctifying consecrations are performed, itself being consecrated by the most divine ointment. For it is the most holy Jesus who consecrates himself for us.⁹⁶

As the Chrism is present in all actions and in the most central place of the church, i.e. the altar, the presence of Christ is thereby indicated to those understanding the meaning of the anointment. Through the Chrism every baptised Christian has access to Christ, not only the highest hierarchs.⁹⁷ “We” have access, Dionysius tells his reader.

The picture becomes more complicated by the fact that Dionysius sometimes combines the Holy Spirit with the Chrism. But even so the general picture remains Christocentric. After baptism Christ got the Spirit, and after baptism a Christian gets the Chrism, and thereby the Spirit.⁹⁸ In connection with baptism the bishop pours ointment (into the baptismal water, consecrating it) in the form of a cross.⁹⁹ The connection between Christ and the Chrism is thereby indicated again.

The Areopagite also combines the Seraphim with the Chrism. The concrete reason for this seems to be the twelve-fold (two times six wings of the Seraphim) cover used on the vessel containing the Chrism in order to protect it.¹⁰⁰ And, in the middle of his exposition on the holy Chrism, Dionysius says:

This is why the twelve folds signify the order of seraphim... They stand in assembly around Jesus and they rightly embark upon the most blessed sight of him, and in the infinitely pure receptacle of their souls they receive the fullness of his spiritual gifts and, if one may use the language of sense perception, they sing, with voices that never grow silent, the glorious hymn of the divine praises.¹⁰¹

This gathering around Christ in the heavens has its counterpart in the liturgy when the assistants gather around the “hierarch”, the bishop.¹⁰² In front of this description the attribute “Christocentric” to Christian worship seems appropriate indeed.

D. The funeral

Dionysius deals with the Christian burial rite, too, though this ceremony is not included among the three sacraments belonging to the hierarchical order. The ceremony aims at strengthening the belief in the resurrection of the body and in eternal life. Christ is said to be the proof and the example of the eternal union between soul and body. An entirely spiritual and a completely materialistic eternity are both rejected: No sacred men will ever fall into such error, for they know that their whole being will be granted the peace which will make them Christlike.¹⁰³

⁹⁶ EH 4.3.12.

⁹⁷ O’Daily suggests, in my opinion incorrectly, that there is a fundamental difference between the relationship between the higher hierarchs to Christ and that of an ordinary Christian. He writes: “Es schliesst die Vorstellung aus, dass jeder Christ direkte Verbindung mit Christus als Menschen habe; diese Verbindung steht vielmehr nur der höchsten menschlich-hierarchischen Stufe kraft ihrer Berufung und Weihe offen”. O’Daily 1981, 775. But it is certainly true that the “uninitiated”, i.e. the unbaptised, are excluded from both the Eucharist and the Chrism according to the CD.

⁹⁸ EH 3.3.10.

⁹⁹ EH 3.3.10.

¹⁰⁰ EH 4.3.5.

¹⁰¹ EH 4.3.5.

¹⁰² EH 4.3.6.

This eternal being in the likeness of Christ is, it seems, a logical consequence of the fact that “in this life they have somehow become «members of Christ»”.¹⁰⁴ From a logical point of view Dionysius could hardly have tied the Christian and Christ more strongly together than he does in the context of the funeral rite. But statistically, and judging from the topics discussed in this context, this Christocentric emphasis is not particularly clear, since Dionysius here and often elsewhere, too, does not deal explicitly with Christ all the time.

Christ in the Hierarchies

The centrality of the hierarchies in the theology of the Areopagite is obvious. The word “hierarchy” is possibly a creation of Dionysius himself. Two of his four extant treatises are devoted to the hierarchies, forming more than half of the entire text of the *CD*. Thus the role played by Christ in this context must be regarded as rather crucial to the question of Christ in the whole of the Dionysian theology.

A hierarchy is a sacred order, the Areopagite says.¹⁰⁵ Knowledge, in the *CD* often called “light”, and a certain kind of providential activity belongs to each member of the hierarchy. These properties make it possible for the members of a hierarchy to serve those lower down the hierarchical scale. Speaking about the goal of a hierarchy the Areopagite says:

A hierarchy bears in itself the mark of God. Hierarchy causes its members to be images of God in all respects, to be clear and spotless mirrors reflecting the glow of primordial light and indeed of God himself. It ensures that when its members have received this full and divine splendour they can then pass on this light generously and in accordance with God’s will to beings further down the scale.¹⁰⁶

The importance of passing on, downwards, is strongly emphasised in other passages as well. In the seventh chapter of *De caelesti hierarchia* Dionysius says:

Now I think I have already said enough about the fact that the aim of every hierarchy is always to imitate God so as to take on his form, that the task of every hierarchy is to receive and to pass on undiluted purification, the divine light, and the understanding which brings perfection.¹⁰⁷

In other words, by reflecting the light of God properly, anyone belonging to a hierarchy will be helpful towards his or her less advanced fellows. Thus the hierarchy in its totality forms a kind of distribution network, where “light” is passed from God “down” to more remote beings.

¹⁰³ *EH* 7.2.

¹⁰⁴ *EH* 7.1.

¹⁰⁵ *CH* 3.1.

¹⁰⁶ *CH* 3.2.

¹⁰⁷ *CH* 7.2. In *CH* 10.2 the gift passed on is, interestingly enough, called *θεολογικαὶ γνώσεις*: “the holiest of the seraphim «cry out to one another», and, it seems to me, this shows that the first ranks pass on to the second what they know of God”.

Jesus Christ is related to this hierarchical structure in a number of different ways. First of all, he is the creator and keeper of the whole construction. The Areopagite brings this out in most solemn language: “Jesus who is transcendent mind, utterly divine mind, who is the source (*ἀρχή*) and the being (*οὐσία*) underlying all hierarchy, all sanctification, all the workings of God ...”¹⁰⁸

Remembering that the hierarchy as a whole consists of different angelic creatures and human beings in the church it is easy to see how Dionysius’ view follows early Christian tradition. According to traditional Christianity, expressed e.g. in the Nicene Creed, God created through the Son both things invisible and visible. Dionysius is stating the same fact. But he arranged the whole creation as a distribution network and here he is rather original. To him the network including the flow of light is an arrangement by Jesus Christ. In the ideal case, when functioning as it is supposed, the hierarchy is not a rival but an instrument of Christ.

There is more to the relationship between Christ and the hierarchy than just the genetic aspect. The light, over and over again mentioned as the primary element in the totality of hierarchies, has a name. When speaking about light, the Areopagite speaks of God, who is light, but transmitted to us only through “the light of the Father”, that is through the Son. It has already been stated that the incarnation is often praised in the *CD*, but in the present context the eternal Son is meant. It is an eternal “arrangement” that the light of God only comes through the Son, but the incarnation is seen as a kind of culmination point in this perpetual system. But to say that the light comes “through” the Son is not all that the Areopagite wishes to say. The Son is himself the light. There can, then, be no true light apart from Him. The Seraphim, being on the highest top of the hierarchies, are allowed to enter into fellowship, *κοινωνία*, with Jesus and participation (*μετενοσία*) in His light.¹⁰⁹ The spiritual gift transmitted through the hierarchies is certainly called “light” over and over again, but this light is understood as being Christ himself.

The hierarchies are thought to function in such a way that the human receiver of light from above himself turns his mind upwards to the origin of the light. In the words of the Areopagite himself: “We come to look up to the blessed and ultimately divine ray of Jesus himself”.¹¹⁰

As the sun turns the plant towards itself, so God turns the soul towards Him by giving light. The goal of the hierarchical system is, then, God himself. Often the Areopagite is more specific than that. Certainly God is the goal, but by God Christ is meant. Christ is the goal. Being like Christ is explicitly mentioned as an eschatological goal in *DN* 1.4.¹¹¹ Enthroned above the whole hierarchical structure he is rightly called the “King of Glory” and “Lord of the heavenly powers”,¹¹² constantly transforming his people, though. He assimilates all beings to his own light.¹¹³ The consequence for humans is thus that “formed of light ... we shall be perfected and bring about perfection”.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸ *EH* 1.1. Wesche 1989, 64–66 interprets Dionysius in the following way: “In His descent from and return to heaven Jesus has brought the ecclesiastical hierarchy into being, making Himself present at every level of the hierarchy, embracing it in the entirety of its structure and movement”.

¹⁰⁹ *CH* 7.2.

¹¹⁰ *EH* 1.1.

¹¹¹ “But in time to come, when we are incorruptible and immortal, when we have come at last to the blessed inheritance of being like Christ, then, as scripture says, «we shall always be with the Lord»”.

¹¹² *CH* 7.3.

¹¹³ *Πρὸς τὸ οἰκεῖτον αὐτὰς ἀφομοίσι ... φῶς*, *EH* 1.1.

An interesting variation of expression is given in the second book of *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*.¹¹⁵ In a context dealing with the incarnation, Christ is said to bring fire to the rational beings (in the hierarchy): “Like a fire, he has made one with himself all those capable of being divinised”. Having stated this Dionysius quotes John 1:12. Accepting the fire-like Christ, then, brings about *ἐνωσις* and *θέωσις*, both mentioned explicitly here. A light ontologically separated from Christ is not present in the hierarchies, but the light and fire who is Christ himself.

In the *CD* Christ is the origin of the hierarchies, the gift given by the hierarchies and the ultimate goal of the hierarchic system. Thus it is hardly surprising to notice that the *CD* refers to Christ with the Pauline words about God who “works all things in all” (1 Cor. 12:6).¹¹⁶ This Christocentric view is partly hidden in the extensive presentation of the hierarchies, since the Areopagite does not call the Son all the time by name, but operates with a more general terminology about God, light etc., a terminology deliberately reminiscent of the Neo-Platonic language.

Conclusions

The most famous passages dealing with Jesus Christ in the *CD* are found in the *Epistulae*. The dream of Carpus on Crete and the solar eclipse in Heliopolis during the crucifixion present a suffering Saviour in a dramatic way, not found elsewhere in the *CD*. But a Saviour-type of Christology does exist also in the main treatises, though it cannot be said to be central. The suffering Saviour-type of Christology is most evident in the baptismal theology, where dying with Christ is a frequently mentioned theme.

The prevalent type of Christology in the *CD* is the Trinitarian one. The Son has a prominent role in the Trinity. Being the eternal Light of the Father Christ plays a crucial role in all communication between God and his creation. He is also the source of all hierarchies, that is, the creator/author of the saving and deifying structure of the spiritual universe. His love for mankind makes him become man, without losing his eternal identity: he is forever “unchanged”. For the fifth/sixth-century debate concerning Christ’s natures the Areopagite has little interest. He manages to express himself in a way acceptable for both Dyophysites and Monophysites.

It is no doubt quite unfair to speak of a “thin Christian polish” only in Dionysius’ world view. The central elements of traditional Christology are all present, and certain parts of it display a Christocentric emphasis. Such emphases are the consistent use of the name “Jesus” for Christ, the importance of Christ’s (not only God’s) love for mankind and Christ’s being in the centre of the whole Christian life.

Certain features in the *CD* make the criticism against Dionysius’ Christology intelligible, though not acceptable. The first is the lack of a chapter on Christology. The references to Christ and his work must be found amid a multitude of other topics, in passages dealing with something other than Christology proper. Then there is also an obvious lack of references to the “historical Jesus”, in particular to the miracles performed by him. Also the quotations from Jesus’ teaching are few. The Christology of *CD* has

¹¹⁴ *EH* 1.1.

¹¹⁵ *EH* 2.2.1

¹¹⁶ *DN* 11.5.

its starting point above, in heaven, and in the eternity, rather than in the Jesus of the Synoptic type. This is, however, a typical Byzantine procedure, not a characteristic of the *CD* only. Finally it can be noted that forgiveness and justification, central particularly for the *CD*'s Protestant critics, are not that central for Dionysius. He concentrates his theology on sanctification and *theosis*, on striving towards God and becoming like God. His baptismal theology illustrates, however, that forgiveness and rebirth are necessary parts of his understanding of Christendom, but the emphasis on deification may create another impression among his readers.

De mystica theologia illustrates how such an erroneous impression is easily borne. If *MT* is read separately from the rest of the *CD* it may appear to have a "thin layer of Christianity" only. Certainly *MT* can be read that way, and Völker has shown that in the Middle Ages *MT* circulated and was commented on – isolated from the rest of the corpus.¹¹⁷ But if it is read in the light of the abundant liturgical material in the *CD* about Baptism, Eucharist, and the Chrism, it will be evident that according to Dionysius there can be no mysticism without the liturgy, the clerics, and the sacraments. And these, in turn, are all related to the incarnated Christ according to the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, a fact which does not change through the Neo-Platonic language used or philosophical patterns of thought.

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¹¹⁷ Völker 1958, 218.

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