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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.

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[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

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[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 Luibheid 1987. Regarding the editions that have been consulted, see *CD* 1 and *CD* 2 in the bibliography.

identified as Stephen bar Sudhaili 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

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[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.

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[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; Luibheid 1987, 70. It can be noted that in Luibheid'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

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[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

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[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; Luibheid 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; Luibheid 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

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[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]

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[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

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[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 *Philoponoi*, 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.

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[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 *Philoponoi* 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 *coinobium*s 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: *phrontistarion* 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.

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[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 Mytilene[66] 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

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[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 *Philoponoi*. 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]

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[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 *Akoimetoi* 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 Monophysitie theological view, was himself originally a Georgian prince born around

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[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 Monopysite 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 *Philoponoi*.[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 *Philoponoi*. 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 Theodosioupolis[86]. Sergius later came into conflict with circles in Theodosioupolis 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)

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[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 Theodosioupolis. Peter of Theodosioupolis 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 *Byzantinishe 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 Dionysiacum* 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 Dionysiacum*, 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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