

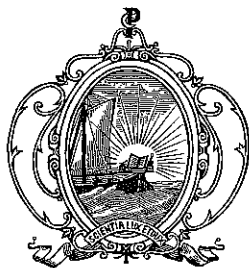
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Some Further Observations Concerning the Early History of the Term ΜΟΝΑΧΟΣ (Monk)

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The term *μοναχός* belongs to those monastic key words which are able to provide us with new insights into the original meaning of the history of the whole Christian ascetical movement.¹

In what follows I would like to present two observations relating to the early history of this term. In order to give basic background information, it must be mentioned that the five earliest Christian evidences of *μοναχός* are transmitted as Greek loanwords in the second century writings the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Dialogue of the Saviour*, the Coptic versions of which were found in Nag Hammadi.² Though the exact meaning of *μοναχός* in these texts is still a matter of discussion, it certainly does not designate 'monks' in the later sense of this word. The earliest evidences for this meaning are known from the beginning of the fourth century. The time between them and the earliest Christian usage of *μοναχός* in the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Dialogue of the Saviour* coincides roughly with the third century and has to be noted also because of the lack of transmitted evidences for the Syriac equivalent for *μοναχός*, *ihidaya*.

As I argued elsewhere, serious theological reasons prevented the Greek speaking Orthodox milieu from taking over the term *μοναχός* in the second century.³ Some of the reasons for this are the absence of the term in the Greek Bible, its circulation in the Gnostic milieu and the ecclesiology of the early Church with its stress on being together according to the model of the primitive community as described in *Acts 2*. Leaving aside the evidence gap of the third century which likewise awaits its explanation,⁴ we will concentrate ourselves

¹ The two recent publications to this subject where the main previous scholarly works are noted are my own, see D. Bumazhnov, Zur Bedeutung der Targume bei der Herausbildung des ΜΟΝΑΧΟΣ-Konzeptes in den Nag Hammadi-Texten: *ZAC* 10 (2006) 252-9 and *id.*, Einige Beobachtungen zur Geschichte des Begriffs ΜΟΝΑΧΟΣ (Mönch): *SP* 39 (2006) 293-9.

² See F.E. Morard, Monachos: une importation sémitique en Egypte? Quelques aperçus nouveaux: *SP* 12 (1974) 242-6 and F. Morard, Encore quelques réflexions sur monachos: *VigChr* 34 (1980) 394-401.

³ See D. Bumazhnov, Einige Beobachtungen (2006) (see n. 1 above).

⁴ See about this problem D. Bumazhnov, Some Ecclesiological Patterns of the Early Christian Period and Their Implications for the History of the Term ΜΟΝΑΧΟΣ (Monk), in: A.A. Alexeev,

on the problem of the sudden appearance of the term μοναχός in the early 4th century sources with a new meaning 'monk'. Needless to say that only very preliminary observations concerning this complex question can be made in this short communication and against the background of the current stage of the research.

Let me start with the second century. 1953, shortly before the publishing process of the Nag Hammadi findings began, the German scholar Alfred Adam had put forward a thesis concerning the Syriac equivalent of μοναχός, ihidaya. Being derived from the root ḥad (one) and designating in the writings of Aphrahat and St Ephrem a kind of community ascetics and later simply monks – both facts make it similar to μοναχός –, the term is, unlike its Greek equivalent, several times evidenced in the Syriac Bible, mostly important in the *Gospel of John*, where it corresponds to the Greek μονογενής as the title of the only begotten Son of God. Both meanings of ihidaya, which can correspond to μονογενής as well as to μοναχός, were understood by Alfred Adam hierarchically: he argues that the true followers of the Ihidaya-Son of God were given His name as a sign of their belonging to Him. This designation of an ascetic ihidaya was, according to Adam, later translated into Greek as μοναχός.⁵ Adam suggested – and this is an important point in his conception – that these processes post-dated the apostolic period but were finished before the end of the second century.⁶

Adam's theory, whose weakness was the complete lack of any second century sources in support of it, had been criticised by such authorities as Arthur Vööbus and Edmund Beck⁷ after which it was mentioned in the scholarly works only as an example of a misled suggestion.⁸

Ch. Karakolis, U. Luz (eds.), *Einheit der Kirche im Neuen Testament. Dritte europäische orthodox-westliche Exegetenkonferenz in Sankt Petersburg 24.-31. August 2005*, WUNT 218 (Tübingen, 2008), 251-64.

⁵ A. Adam, Grundbegriffe des Mönchtums in sprachlicher Sicht: ZKG 65 (1953/4) 220.

⁶ According to A. Adam, Grundbegriffe (1953/4) (see n. 5 above), 220 they took place in the 'Anfänge des nachapostolischen Zeitalters', see *ibid.*, 220-1: 'Als Symmachus seine Übersetzung ausarbeitete, muß die Gleichsetzung des μοναχός mit ihidaya-μονογενής bereits vollzogen gewesen sein.'

⁷ See E. Beck, Ein Beitrag zur Terminologie des ältesten syrischen Mönchtums, in: B. Steidle (ed.), *Antonius Magnus Eremita 356-1956: Studia ad antiquum monachismum spectantia*, StAns 38 (Romae, 1956), 258-61 and A. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient: A Contribution to the History of Culture in the Near East, Vol. I, The Origin of Asceticism. Early Monasticism in Persia*, CSCO 184 Subs 14 (Louvain, 1958), 106-8. For Adam's reply see A. Adam, Rezension von: A. Vööbus, *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient*, GGA 213 (1959) 137-42.

⁸ See e.g. F.-E. Morard, Monachos, Moine: Histoire du terme grec jusqu'au 4^e siècle. Influences bibliques et gnostiques: *FZPhTh* 20 (1973) 375 and W.-P. Funk, 'Einer aus tausend, zwei aus zehntausend': Zitate aus dem Thomasevangelium in den koptischen manichaica, in: H.-G. Bethge et al. (eds.), *For the Children, Perfect Instruction: FS H.-M. Schenke*, Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 54 (Leiden/Boston, 2002), 91, n. 60.

A thorough reading of a passage from the *Dialogue of the Saviour*, a writing not known to Adam, provides, however, some arguments in his favour. The passage in question reads as follows (translation with some modifications according to Stephen Emmel):⁹

Hear us, Father, just as you heard your only-begotten (μονογενής) son and received him [...]... him rest from many ... [...]... You are the one] whose power [...] your] armor ... [...]... light [...]... living [...]... touch ... [...]... the word ... [...]... repentance ... life [...]... you. You are [the] thinking and the [entire] confidence¹⁰ of the solitary (μοναχός, sic). Again, [hear] us just as you heard your elect.

The text cited is a prayer to God the Father which the Saviour of the *Dialogue* teaches his pupils. The pattern for this prayer is the prayer of the Only-begotten (μονογενής) which was heard by the Father. The Only-begotten is received by God and provided with rest as one elected from many. Apparently, on the same way to the Father as the Only-begotten are also the solitary (μοναχός). A few lines above, in the beginning of the *Dialogue*, the Saviour, who is identical with the μονογενής, says that this way was shown by him to the solitary and elect:¹¹ 'But when I came, I opened the path and I taught them about the passage (διάβασις) which they will traverse, the elect and solitary (μοναχός, sic).'

Thus, the Only-begotten (μονογενής) is the forerunner of a group of solitary (μοναχός) and elect and is considered as a model for their spiritual way. These considerations become still more coherent if we admit that on the stage of a supposed Aramaic or Syriac Vorlage of the cited places of the *Dialogue* the Only-begotten on the one hand and the solitary on the other hand had the same designation, namely ܝܗܝܕܝܐ / ihidaya. This common name was later translated into Greek as μοναχός for the solitary, whereas the influence of *John* 1 accounts for the translation μονογενής for the Only-begotten.

Supposed that this analysis is not wrong, it provides something like a second century evidence in the favour of Alfred Adam's thesis about the common name of μοναχός and μονογενής reconstructed as ܝܗܝܕܝܐ / ihidaya and being originally a designation of the only Son of God and then extended on His followers.

⁹ The Coptic text in *Dial* 121.5-20 (NHS 26, 42,5-20).

¹⁰ Silke Petersen and Hans-Gebhart Bethge in: H.-M. Schenke, H.-G. Bethge, und U.U. Kaiser (eds.), *Nag Hammadi Deutsch*, 1. Band: NHC I 1-V 1, GCS NF 8 (Berlin and New York, 2001), 388 translate the Coptic term as 'Sorgenlosigkeit'; S. Emmel in: S. Emmel (ed.), *Nag Hammadi Codex III 5, The Dialog of the Savior*, NHS 26 (Leiden, 1984), 43 understands it as 'serenity'. We suggest that the Coptic word corresponds at this place to Greek ἀμεριμνία in the sense 'confidence', see W.E. Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary* (Oxford, 1939), 308 and W. Bauer, *Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der frühchristlichen Literatur*, 6., völlig neu bearbeitete Auflage hrsg. von K. Aland und B. Aland (Berlin and New York, 1988), s.v.

¹¹ *Dial* 120.25-26, translation according to Stephen Emmel.

To these considerations must be added that both for certain parts of the *Dialogue* and for the *Gospel of Thomas* – the only two second century Christian texts which have the term *μοναχός* – Syriac provenience is probable.¹² This means that the circulation milieu of *ihidaya* / *μοναχός* in the second century was very likely the Aramaic speaking Christianity.¹³

With this conclusion in mind, we come now back to the beginning of the 4th century when the first Greek documents evidencing *μοναχός* in the sense of ‘monk’ do appear. We would like to contribute to the solution of the problem regarding how and why a term, which in the first three centuries – as far as we know – was not in use in Greek speaking Christianity, then made a breathtaking career starting with the beginning of the 4th century.

In this respect, the ps.-athanasian writing *De patientia* available in PG vol. 26 is of fundamental importance.¹⁴ In his article about this text published 1990 – a publication which was unfortunately neglected by most scholars writing about the early history of the term *μοναχός* – Martin Tetz pointed out that it contains a very early evidence for this term.¹⁵ Not being especially interested in this subject, Tetz failed to mention that his dating of the *De patientia* – 311-2 AD – makes this writing to the very first Greek witness for *μοναχός*. If this, in my opinion, convincing dating is right, *De patientia* antedates the papyrus Youtie 77 from the year 324,¹⁶ commonly held to be our earliest *μοναχός* – witness,¹⁷ by more than 10 years.

The importance of the *De patientia* consists, however, not in its bearing an early evidence for *μοναχός* alone. The text of Ps.-Athanasius makes clear that

¹² The problem is, however, very complex. Two contradicting positions were argued for by A. Guillaumont, *Sémitismes dans les logia de Jésus retrouvés à Nag-Hamâdi*: JA 246 (1958) 113-23 and A. Böhlig, *Das Problem aramäischer Elemente in den Texten von Nag Hammadi*, in: *Id., Gnosis und Synkretismus: Gesammelte Aufsätze zur spätantiken Religionsgeschichte*, 2. Teil, WUNT 48 (Tübingen, 1989), 440-53. The position expressed by E.E. Popkes, *Das Menschenbild des Thomasevangeliums: Untersuchungen zu seiner religionsgeschichtlichen und chronologischen Einordnung*, WUNT 206 (Tübingen, 2007), *passim*, who develops Böhlig’s line and denies all connections of the *Gospel of Thomas* with the Syriac-speaking world seems exaggerated.

¹³ See about that also D. Bumazhnov, *Zur Bedeutung der Targume* (2006) (as n. 1 above).

¹⁴ PG 26, 1297A-309B.

¹⁵ M. Tetz, *Eine asketische Ermunterung zur Standhaftigkeit aus der Zeit der maximinischen Verfolgung* (311/313): ZNW 81 (1990) 102.

¹⁶ See E.A. Judge, *The earliest Use of monachos for ‘Monk’* (P. Coll. Youtie 77) and the Origins of Monasticism: JAC 20 (1977) 72-89.

¹⁷ See E. Wipszycka, *Quand a-t-on commencé à voir les moines comme un groupe à part? Pour comprendre Vita Antonii 46,2-5*: JJP 27 (1997) 83 and *ead.*, *Les communautés monastiques dans l’Égypte byzantine*, in: Ch. Décobert (ed.), *Valeur et distance: Identités et sociétés en Égypte*, Collection L’atelier méditerranéen (Paris, 2000), 72. See also *ead.*, P. Coll. Youtie 77 = P. Coll. VII 171 Revised, in: T. Gagos, R.S. Bagnall (eds.), *Essays and Texts in Honor of J.D. Thomas*, ASP 42 (Oakville, 2001), 45, where it is rightly said that P. Youtie 77 is our oldest witness for MONAXOΣ in the papyri.

the *μοναχοὶ τέλειοι*¹⁸ he is speaking about are part of a Christian community among whose members are also *πρεσβύτεροι*, *διάκονοι*, *ἀναγνώσται*, *παρθένοι* and *χήραι*.¹⁹ Thus, *De patientia* confronts us with the pre-monastic setting where people called *μοναχοί* did not yet separated themselves from their communities. Another early Christian pre-monastic writing which can be compared with the *De patientia* in this respect is the tract *De virginitate* of Ps.-Clement of Rom dated by Adolf von Harnack to the first part of the 3rd century.²⁰ The ascetics are here likewise not completely separated from their Christian communities, their designation is, however, *εὐνοῦχοι* (eunuchs) and *παρθένοι* (virgins).²¹

Proceeding further, we can observe that the author of *De patientia* admonishes the *μοναχοὶ τέλειοι* by saying that they have to follow the pattern of Elijah, Elisha and John the Baptist.²² These biblical models of the ascetic life, rather usual in the monastic context, have a pre-monastic history and can also be found in *De virginitate* of Ps.-Clement who teaches his audience to imitate the way of life of the same three biblical figures.²³ The meaning of the names *εὐνοῦχοι* and *παρθένοι* in the text of Ps.-Clement is, therefore, beyond all doubt: like St John the Baptist and the two Old Testament prophets, *εὐνοῦχοι* and *παρθένοι* he speaks to are unmarried ascetics. The same can, as it seems, likewise be said about the *μοναχοὶ τέλειοι* of the *De patientia*, given the similarities between the settings of the both groups.

We can, therefore, conclude that the first people called *μοναχοί* weren’t monks in the usual sense of this word. They were very much like the *ihidaya* known to us from the writings of Aphrahat and St Ephrem the Syrian who also lived inside their communities and shared with the *μοναχοὶ τέλειοι* the name derived from the root ‘one’ respectively ‘alone’.²⁴ The similarities between these Syriac pre-monastic groups and the *μοναχοὶ τέλειοι* are so strong that one cannot help suggesting that in the beginning of the 4th century an influence from Syria was responsible for the appearance of their new name in the Greek speaking area. This new name, *μοναχοί*, could be coined in Syria itself and then was adopted outside of this region. Once translated into Greek, the term

¹⁸ Ps.-Ath., *pat.* 7 (PG 26, 1305B).

¹⁹ Ps.-Ath., *pat.* 7 (PG 26, 1305 B-C).

²⁰ A. Harnack, *Die pseudoclementinischen Briefe de virginitate und die Entstehung des Mönchtums*, SPAW 1891 (Berlin, 1891), 369.

²¹ See e.g. Ps.-Clem., *virg.* I 2.1 (*Patres apostolici* II 1.15) and Ps.-Clem., *virg.* I 3.3 (*Patres apostolici* II 4.10).

²² Ps.-Ath., *pat.* 7 (PG 26, 1305B).

²³ Ps.-Clem., *virg.* I 6.2 (*Patres apostolici* II 9.13-4) and Ps.-Clem., *virg.* I 6.5 (*Patres apostolici* II 11.5-6).

²⁴ See about them S.H. Griffith, ‘Singles’ in God’s Service; Thought’s on the *Ihidaya* from the Works of Aphrahat and Ephraem the Syrian: *The Harp* 4 (1991) 145-59 and *id.*, *Monks, ‘Singles’ and the ‘Sons of the Covenant’: Reflections on Syriac ascetic Terminology*: *StAns* 110 (1993) 141-60.

ihidaya lost its relation to the title of the Only-begotten Son of God and had to be filled with a new meaning. This was developed according to the pattern of the self designations of the already existing Greek ascetic groups which called themselves εὐνοῦχοι and παρθένοι, that is unmarried ascetics. Given that the μοναχοί or respectively ihidaye were unmarried by definition, the change of the meaning might have gone without notice.

The first real Egyptian monks didn't call themselves μοναχοί using other self-designations like 'Israelites' in the letters attributed to St Antony or 'brethren' in the earliest Pachomian sources.²⁵ Their way of life was, however, so similar to that of the μοναχοί that the borrowing must have occurred very quickly. The idea that the name μοναχοί has to do with being alone is, to my knowledge, firstly attested in the letters of St Ammonas written about the middle of the fourth century.²⁶ It is worth noting that St Ammonas depicts the pre-monastic biblical models John the Baptist, Elijah and Elisha not as εὐνοῦχοι and παρθένοι but as hermits.

²⁵ See J.M. Lozano, La comunità pacomiana dalla comunione all'istituzione: *Clar.* 15 (1975) 250: 'Regole e Vite (i.e. of St Pachom) si riferiscono continuamente ai membri della comunità come a *i fratelli* e in alcuni testi è evidente una netta distinzione tra *i fratelli* e *i monaci*... nella tradizione pacomiana... il termine monaco è evitato con cura e quello di *fratello* è l'appellativo tecnico usato per designare un pacomiano' (italic of the author). See also Ch. Joest, Apa Pachom – Mönchsvater und Diener aller: Die Doppelberufung Pachoms (†347) und sein Konflikt mit Theodoros (†368): *StMon* 36 (1994) 175: 'Daß Pachom in der Tat einen Unterschied zwischen dem Anachoretentum, d.h. dem Mönchtum, wie er es bisher kannte, und seinen Mitbrüdern in der *Koinonia* machte, kommt schon darin zum Ausdruck, daß er die Bewohner seiner Klöster niemals "Mönche" nennt: sie sind "Brüder"' and A. Veilleux, Monachisme et gnose: Deuxième partie: Contacts littéraires et doctrinaux entre monachisme et gnose: *LTP* 41.1 (1985) 18.

²⁶ Amm., *ep.* I 2 *graec.* (PO 11, 131.1-2).

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