

## The Monastic Fathers of Mount Sinai as Teachers of Spirituality

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Someone who is living in the desert and struggling for his way to God does not need a teacher in the sense of classical education. Ever since the promotion of the ideal of the θεοδιδάκτος,<sup>1</sup> which is a wise man directly instructed by God, described by Athanasios the Great in his *Vita Antonii*, we can go a step further and state: You do not even need any teacher in the desert since God serves the fathers and mothers of the desert as one. Such ideas are found in all regions in which monasticism existed during Late Antiquity. This is also true for the area of Mount Sinai. One can find evidence for the instruction of the hermits at the Holy Mountain from God alone in the *Narrations* of Neilos Sinaites:

But these men, though bereft of necessities, spend all their time philosophizing in the desert, being their own teachers of piety.<sup>2</sup>

The unsophisticated ideal image of the *theodidaktos* or of somebody who is taught only by himself in spirituality, is not representative of all monks in Late Antiquity, though. This is also the case with the monks around the Mount Horeb. Key-texts of the region not only show examples of the relationship between teachers and their disciples, but also present theoretical ideals of instructors in spirituality. Hereinafter I would like to point out these ideals. It is important to me to mention different genres of sources. I will not refer to the *Apophthegmata Patrum* which deal with the Sinai monks, because this anthology was covered by Henrik Rydell Johnsén in his contribution to the present volume.<sup>3</sup> Similar apophthegmatic narratives are to be found in the *Tales* of Anastasios Sinaites. He also presents a comparable image of a teacher. I will focus upon these tales because there does not yet exist an analysis of the role of teachers in this text. I will further evaluate some *sensu stricto* hagiographic sources, first of all the *Narrations* of Neilos Sinaites. As is generally known they depict the martyrdom

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Athanasios, *Vita Antonii* 66.2 (SC 400, 308 Bartelink). Cf. also de Andia 1993.

<sup>2</sup> Neilos, *Narrationes* 3.18 (Link 2005: 42): οὗτοι πάντα τὸν χρόνον ἐμφιλοσοφοῦσι τῇ ἐρημίᾳ τῶν ἀναγκαίων σπανίζοντες, ἑαυτοῖς ὄντες τῆς εὐσεβείας διδάσκαλοι. Tr. Caner 2010, 103.

<sup>3</sup> “Physicians, Teachers and Friends: Lower Egyptian Desert Elders and Late Antique Directors of Souls” (pp. 184–205 in the present volume).

of Sinai-fathers, but they also deal with monastic education in this context. The same applies to the *Report* of Ammonios. I would also like to briefly mention the thematisation of the role of a teacher in the basic text for late-antique monastic spirituality, the *Ladder* of John Sinaites.

Before analysing the first source-text I have to present a short overview of the situation of the monastic society at Mount Sinai in Late Antiquity.

## 1. The Monastic Society at Mount Sinai in Late Antiquity

Monasticism was spread out polycentricly at Mount Sinai. The most important centers were at Mount Horeb and at Raithu, today's Et-Tur. Hermits and semi-anchorites were also living, e. g., at Wadi Siğilliya and in the area of Ġabal Umm Shomer.

Already in the fourth century a fortified tower was built at Mount Sinai, which is still verifiable by archeologists today. Several colonies of monks or semianchoritic centers existed with a structure of a lavra as far back as this early time. In the period of prosperity of south-sinaitic monasticism assumingly about 600 monks lived in 60 so called monasteries.<sup>4</sup>

In the 6th century Emperor Justinian built the famous monastery of the burning bush. In this period especially, the hermits and semianchorites were in fear to lose their special kind of monastic life. During this time, Sinai-monasticism is to be characterised by its consciousness of crisis. The abbot of the recently erected cenobitic monastery, John Sinaites, reacted to this with his well known *Ladder*. In this book, he integrated the different types of monastic life in one concept of monastic formation.

In any case, the different social forms of Sinai-monasticism left their marks in the source-texts of this region. Monastic teachers and formation have always had an important part in this framework. For example, we get some information about this in the reports of the raids on the Sinaitic monks accompanied by martyrdom.

## 2. Monastic Formation in the *Narrations* of Neilos Sinaites

The historical value of the *Narrations* of Neilos Sinaites has definitely become controversial.<sup>5</sup> Personally – in conformity with a long tradition of research since Karl Heussi<sup>6</sup> – I do not believe that they are the work of Neilos of Ankyra. Instead

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Dahari 1998: 144. Cf. also *ibid.* 150. The article was already published in English some years earlier with only a few differences: Dahari 1993.

<sup>5</sup> The attribute 'Sinaites' can be found for the first time in Grossmann 1999: 459.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Heussi 1917.

they are likely to have been written on the Sinai Peninsula or at least by a monk of this area – contrary to the position of Michael Link.<sup>7</sup> In contrast to Philipp Mayerson<sup>8</sup> I think that it is possible to reconcile the presentation of monastic ideals in this book with ideals which can be observed in other texts about Mount Sinai. I am not able to explain my position in more detail here. But in the context of this article it is insignificant to answer the question, whether the *Narrations*, a text written no later than in the 5th century,<sup>9</sup> is just a construction of monastic spirituality in the form of hellenistic novels or an authentic report of it. In any case, it is possible to locate the statements about monastic education in the *Narrations*, dated to Late Antiquity, on the Sinai Peninsula. The frame for the formation is the eremitic orientation of monasticism in the writings of Neilos, as already mentioned. The teachers in the *Narrations* are described accordingly. The following idea is especially remarkable, because in my opinion it can only be explained by knowledge of the locality:

Neilos emphasises clearly that monastic spirituality was pointing to the personalities of the Old Testament, who were traditionally linked to the sinaitic desert: Moses and Elijah. The monks felt obliged to imitate their virtues. Literally it says:

For this reason they bear in mind the [earlier] citizens of that desert, Moses and Elijah. In their asceticism they practise the modesty of those residents of that land, considering it righteous to imitate their virtue. For the magnitude of Moses' command did not inflate him with conceit, and Elijah's miracle of the burnt offering did not render him senseless. Both maintained the same disposition, ever preserving it on every occasion: neither changed his outlook when his circumstances changed.<sup>10</sup>

According to Neilos, the Sinai-spirituality focuses on two crucial biblical personalities who were closely associated with the landscape. These links are often mentioned in monastic contexts.<sup>11</sup> This is illustrated by the iconography in the monastery of the burning bush, too. Moses and Elijah appear in a central part of the apse-mosaic of the monastery, because it reflects the transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor and therefore concedes Moses and Elijah a central role beneath

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Link 2005: 23.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Mayerson 1994a: 109–110.

<sup>9</sup> Grossmann 1999: 462 dates the raid on 14th January 367. Consequently the report was written in the 4th century.

<sup>10</sup> Neilos, *Narrationes* 3.16 (Link 2005: 41): Διὰ τοῦτο τοὺς πολίτας ἐκείνης ἀναλογιζόμενοι τῆς ἐρήμου, Μωυσῆα καὶ Ἠλίαν, τούτων ἀσκοῦνται τὸ ἄτυφον ὧν οἰκοῦσι τὴν χώραν, μμείσθαι τὴν ἀρετὴν αὐτῶν ἡγούμενοι δίκαιον. οὐτε γὰρ Μωυσῆα πρὸς ἀλαζονείαν τῆς ἀρχῆς ἐπήρε τὸ μέγεθος, οὐτε Ἠλίαν τὸ τῆς θυσίας ἐφύσησε θαῦμα πρὸς ἀπόνοιαν, ἔμειναν δὲ τὴν αὐτὴν αἰεὶ φυλάξαντες ἐν παντὶ καιρῷ κατὰστασιν, οὐ συμμεταβαλόντες τῇ μεταβολῇ τῶν πραγμάτων τὸ φρόνημα. Tr. Caner 2010: 101.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Anastasios, *Relationes* 34 (Nau 1902a: 80); cf. further *ibid.* 32 (Nau 1902a: 79). John Sinaites is also attributed as “New Moses” in the *Vita Joannis Climaci* of Daniel of Raithu (PG 88, 605AB). John is mediating the good words of God formed by asceticism and looking after his followers.

the Lord himself. Elsewhere I had the possibility to demonstrate that Elijah is portrayed with the clothes of a monk. Moses is closely connected to the local circumstances. The mosaic, at least with its layout, reflects the positioning of the Mount Horeb and the burning bush.<sup>12</sup> Imitation (μίμησις) of biblical personalities is thus not only idealised by the text of Neilos, but also emphasized in late antique monastic iconography. Biblical personalities are highlighted as teachers, whose virtues are a guideline for the monks. Thereby Neilos stresses the humility (τὸ ἄτυφον)<sup>13</sup> of the biblical models. Biblical models, who appear as teachers across time, were – connected considerably to local colour – at least very popular in the sinaitic tradition. I don't know of any other region of late antique monasticism where monks were presented as ἀναλογιζόμενοι τοὺς πολιτας ἐκείνης τῆς ἐρήμου.<sup>14</sup> Education in monastic spirituality by imitating models, which means at Mount Sinai by biblical personalities, is especially important for hermitism.

Neilos also underlines that a pure autodidactic or 'theodidactic' way of education is insufficient even for hermits. At least it contains risks, which Sinai-monasticism tries to combat. This subject is discussed in detail in *Narration* 3.12:

But on the Lord's Day [i. e. Sunday] they go to church, where they gather and commune with each other every week, coming together so that the common bonds of concord might not be broken over time by total separation, and they forget, little by little, their obligations towards each other. For prolonged isolation can make dispositions fearsome and cause one to forget what once was known about the convivial and gregarious nature of charity. – And so they partake in the Divine Mysteries and entertain themselves with exercises in edifying discourse, rubbing each other with the oils of moral exhortation. For the life dedicated to virtue especially needs these exhortations to triumph in its contests. They reveal secret moves so that no one will be caught by their opponent through ignorance of his wrestling technique. [...] That is why men who have trained long for the contest coach those who are inexperienced and have only recently taken up wrestling by advising them to stand obstinate through abstinence against the passion of gluttony. [...].<sup>15</sup>

Referring to the mutual admonitions at Sunday Neilos describes the organisation of sinaitic monasticism like the structure of a lavra, which is very well known in

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Müller 2004; a photograph of the mosaic is to be found in Galey 1990: fig. 119, of Elijah ibd. fig. 121.

<sup>13</sup> Neilos, *Narrationes* 3.16 (Link 2005: 41.20).

<sup>14</sup> Neilos, *Narrationes* 3.16 (Link 2005: 41.19).

<sup>15</sup> Neilos, *Narrationes* 3.12 (Link 2005: 39–40): ταῖς δὲ κυριακαῖς εἰς ἐκκλησίαν φοιτῶσι συναγόμενοι καὶ ἀλλήλοις δι' ἐβδομάδος συνεσόμενοι συνέρχονται, ἵνα μὴ πάλιν ὁ παντελῆς χωρισμὸς τῷ χρόνῳ διακόψη τῆς ὁμονοίας τὸν σύνδεσμον, λήθην ποιήσας κατ' ὀλίγον τῶν πρὸς ἀλλήλους καθηκόντων δικαίων. οἶδε γὰρ ἡ ἐπιτεταμένη μόνωσις ἀγριαίνει τὸ ἦθος, ἀπομανθάνον τῇ μακρᾷ συνηθείᾳ τὸ ἀγελαῖον τῆς ἀγάπης καὶ σύννομον. κοινωνοῦσί τε οὖν τῶν θείων μυστηρίων καὶ ἐστιῶσιν ἀλλήλους γυμνασίᾳ τῶν καθηκόντων λογίων καὶ ἀλείφουσιν ἠθικαῖς παραινήσεσι. τούτων γὰρ μάλιστα χρῆζει πρὸς τοὺς ἀγῶνας ὁ ἐνάρετος βίος, τὰς τῶν ἀντιπάλων τέχνας λανθανούσας δημοσιεύων πρὸς τὸ μὴ ἀλῶναι τούτοις τινὰ τῆς πάλης ἀγνοοῦντα τὴν μέθοδον [...] διὰ τοῦτο τοὺς ἀπείρους καὶ ἄρτι τῶν παλαισμάτων ἀρχομένους παιδοτριβοῦντες οἱ πρὸς τὸν ἀγῶνα γεγυμνασμένοι, ἐγκρατεῖα μὲν ἐστάναι πρὸς τὸ τῆς γαστριμαργίας πάθος συμβουλεύουσι. Tr. Caner 2010: 99–100.

the Palestinian area: There, the hermits of the immediate surroundings also met during the weekends in the center of the lavra.<sup>16</sup> The assemblies not only served the concord of monasticism, but also the instruction of younger monks by elders. According to Neilos, practical monastic knowledge is not only taught by monks who were explicitly appointed as teachers but rather by monks who were qualified to teach by their own experience.

In the narrations, we cannot find the same permanent relationship between master and disciple like the one we will observe in the following text.

Because Neilos mainly focuses on the martyrdom of the Sinai-monks, there do not exist more details on education or teachers in his text. The second report about ordeals at Mount Sinai, the *Report of Ammonios*, contains more precise statements about the relationship between the teacher and his disciple.

### 3. Teachers in the *Report of Ammonios*

The *Report (Relatio)* of Ammonios is a text very difficult to date. The oldest textual witness, which is written in Aramaic, derives from the 7th century.<sup>17</sup> It may well be that the text refers to persecutions in the second half of the 4th century.<sup>18</sup> Of vital importance for our issue is the fact that Ammonios provides deeper insights in the semianchoritic milieu on Mount Sinai than Neilos.

In chapter 15, Ammonios mentions a monk called Psoes, who was coming from the Thebais and who was taught by Saint Moses.<sup>19</sup> For 46 years he lived together with him. Ammonios emphasizes in this case that Psoes did not abandon all the rules of his Geron (γέρων, “elder”), which also concerned himself. On the contrary, he “sealed” them during the long period of cohabitation with the master:

He did not make a single change to the old man’s regimen, but became, so to speak, the seal and the imprint both of what he saw and what he was taught.<sup>20</sup>

The teacher thus instructs here through his visible example as well as through his direct teaching. He himself and his disciple are oriented towards a programme of life, a rule (κανών). The disciple becomes something like an image (ἐκτύπωμα) of his master in so far as he follows the rule of the latter.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. the short overview provided by Perrone 2002.

<sup>17</sup> The text was first edited with an English translation by Smith Lewis 1912. A modern edition is to be found in Müller-Kessler 1996. The Greek and the Syriac text sometimes differ a lot from the Aramaic. The latter depends on another version of the Greek Text, which derived from a Coptic one, cf. *ibid.* 4.68.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Mayerson 1994b: 142; 147–148.

<sup>19</sup> Tsames 2003: 304 (Müller-Kessler 1996: 29 with some small differences).

<sup>20</sup> Ammonios, *Relatio* 15 (Tsames 2003: 304; Tr. Caner, *History*, 157).

Ammonios reports that he also spent some time together with the elder in the beginning of his monastic career. However, he did not bear his strong asceticism permanently. Instruction therefore is first of all education in strict asceticism.

In the subsequent story, Ammonios is again speaking about the relationship between teacher and disciple. He presents Joseph of Aila as a holy, saint monk, who has the charism of discernment and who was living together with a disciple. Ammonios underlines in this case that the disciple does not live in the cell of Joseph, “but in another dwelling nearby” (ἀλλὰ πλησίον εἰς ἕτερον οἶκημα).<sup>21</sup> Obviously, this was an exception, because the author explicitly emphasized it. On the other hand, the fact is important for the following chapter 17, which contains most of the specific information about the intimate relation between a Geron and his disciple.

After the miracle reported in chapter 16 the elder left his cell and disappeared. His disciple Gelasios took care of his cell and inhabited it. After six years, the elder came back to be buried by his disciple. The latter complained about the master, because he abandoned the community (συνοδία) and left him behind orphaned. Generally familial circumstances play a crucial role in the relationship between teacher and disciple. The disciple considers himself a servant (δοῦλος), the elder on the other hand calls him child (τέκνον). The intimate relationship is expressed by the holy kiss (φίλημα ἅγιον), which they exchanged when meeting again. Finally, before dying the elder informed his brother (ἀδελφός) about the human soul and the future goods.<sup>22</sup> Even if these subjects are influenced by the forthcoming death of the master they also reflect the didactic contents which are also well known by the *Gerontikon*.

Family ties were in fact occasionally existing between a Geron and his disciple. The 15-year-old Sergios for example was instructed by his relative Adam in monasticism since his early youth: ἐκ βρέφους αὐτὸν διδάζας τὴν μοναχικὴν ἐπιστήμην καὶ τὸν πρὸς τὸν ἐχθρὸν πόλεμον καλῶς ἐπίστασθαι ποιήσας.<sup>23</sup> It is noteworthy that the subjects of education are not only defined as monastic science (ἐπιστήμη),<sup>24</sup> but at the same time were filled with content. The instruction helps to oppose the devil in an appropriate way. It is thus focussed on the monastic way of life.

<sup>21</sup> Ammonios, *Relatio* 16 (Tsames 2003: 304, cf. Müller-Kessler 1996: 31).

<sup>22</sup> The edition of Müller-Kessler 1996: 35 provides only a reference to things which are useful for the salvation of the soul.

<sup>23</sup> Ammonios, *Relatio* 29 (Tsames 2003: 318).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Ammonios, *Relatio* 29 (Tsames 2003: 318, cf. Müller-Kessler/ Sokoloff 1996: 50). The syro-aramaic text uses *dbyr' dhydyvt'*, which means “leader/instructor of the loneliness”.

#### 4. Teachers in the *Tales* of Anastasios Sinaites

The hagiographic source which treats the relation between disciples and teachers in spirituality the most are the *Tales* of Anastasios Sinaites. This source, too, is very difficult to date. Elsewhere, I have argued extensively that the text developed over a long period. It therefore contains historic material mainly of the 6th and 7th century.<sup>25</sup> I disagree with the editor François Nau who dates all the narrations in the second half of the 7th century.<sup>26</sup> A similar approach is to be found in the – unfortunately up to now unpublished – dissertation of André Bingelli.<sup>27</sup>

Monasticism, as described in the report of Anastasios, is organized in different ways. Hermits, semianchorites and cenobites appear as equal entities. Thus the text reflects typical monastic milieus at Mount Sinai in the sixth century. Different social forms of monasticism were to be found there together.

In the *Tales* teachers and disciples are showing up frequently. They are presented in very different roles. It is noteworthy that almost nothing is said about education itself. More important is the fact of the close relationship between disciples and teachers. This is an essential characteristic of the relationship according to the *Tales*. In the texts one teacher does always have only one disciple. Anastasios obviously does not know elders who have more than one. The teachers mainly bear a kind of mystagogic function like in other monastic texts of this period.

##### 4.1. Introduction into a Transcendent Reality

Immediately in the first chapter of the *Tales* a Geron, who is also a supervisor (ἐπιστάτης) for his disciple, explains a supernatural phenomenon.<sup>28</sup> While the disciple interpreted incense as a source of pleasant aroma on the top of Mount Sinai, his teacher instructed him about the real reason for the fragrance. While the former became afraid of the fire which produced the aroma and fled out of the chapel of Elijah, the latter told him to pray courageously in it. He explained the fire as a sign of the presence of the angelic forces. After their prayer in the chapel both of them descended down into the valley, wrapped by divine splendor. Narrations like this demonstrate that the monastic teachers, the spiritual fathers function as mediators between an immanent and a transcendent world. As instructors they thus offer approaches to a transcendent reality. The teacher does not only point out the penetration of otherworld realities in the present world, he also bolsters (ἐθαρσποίησεν) his disciple to engage in experiences of transcendence. Further, he accompanies him during this experiences.

<sup>25</sup> For the date of the *Relationes* of Anastasios see Müller 2006: 29–32; in his very elaborated study Uthemann 2015: 367–463, especially 461–462 dates the *Tales* 629 CE or a little bit earlier.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Nau 1902a: 59; Nau 1902b: 3.

<sup>27</sup> I had an opportunity to have a look in the up to now unpublished manuscript.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Anastasios, *Relationes* 1 (Nau 1902a: 60–61). Tr. Caner 2010: 1.1, 174–175.

Although this first tale of Anastasios is first of all transmitted as a legend, it explains the function of the monastic teachers at Mount Sinai. They promote spiritual, transcendental experiences of their disciples. This means that they deliver subjects to them which are absolutely different from what a pagan teacher of the time is teaching.

#### *4.2. Physical Protection through the Teachers*

Teachers also take care of their disciples' physical protection. This is even mentioned in miracle stories. Geron Georgios for example seems to have rescued his disciple from death caused by a snake bite by sealing him with a cross.<sup>29</sup>

Vice versa this protection is not granted if the disciple withstands his master. This is why a servant of the custodian on the top of Mount Sinai hurt himself by being locked in the chapel there over night without knowledge of his master.<sup>30</sup> He was struck by a spark of the candlestick. Narrations like this are instructing the disciples not to actively turn away from the protection of their teacher.

#### *4.3. Learning by Shared Life*

Education is characterised by Anastasios similarly to Ammonios, which means that the disciple and the teacher are following the same way of life (πολιτεία). Anastasios is for example telling about a Geron who went into the desert during lent with his disciple to get the blessing of hermits.<sup>31</sup>

The relation between disciples and teachers also includes personal mutual care. This is also valid beyond the grave. Thus, Anastasios reports – again similarly to Ammonios – that the disciples are responsible for the funeral as well as for the grave maintenance afterwards.<sup>32</sup> A careful teacher, Abba Michael, even moved himself into the funeral cave to die there.<sup>33</sup> He wanted to prevent his disciple Eustathios from slipping down into the cave while carrying the corpse of his master and from possibly dying himself. Thus, he shone down to the floor of the cave together with his disciple, gave him a kiss of peace and asked him to pray for him in future. After that he died.

This tale also illustrates the intensive personal relationship between teacher and disciple which also includes the prayer for the master beyond the grave.

Even recluses have their personal relationship to their disciples. Epiphanius the recluse for example asked his servant to come into his cell the following morning,

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. Anastasios, *Relationes* 11 (Nau 1902a: 66–67); Tr. Caner 2010: 1.19, 185.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Anastasios, *Relationes* 2 (Nau 1902a: 61); Tr. Caner 2010: 1.5, 177.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Anastasios, *Relationes* 22 (Nau 1902a: 73); Tr. Caner 2010: 1.30, 190.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Anastasios, *Relationes* 5 (Nau 1902a: 62–63); Tr. Caner 2010: 1.9, 179–180.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Anastasios, *Relationes* 8 (Nau 1902a: 65); Tr. Caner 2010: 1.15, 183.



because he knew that he would die during the night. Indeed his disciple found him dead there.<sup>34</sup>

In some tales, disciples act as servants. They light candles or incense the cells of the masters.<sup>35</sup> Anastasios calls a disciple, who was also sent on errands, “domestic disciple” (οἰκεῖον μαθητήν).<sup>36</sup>

#### 4.4. *The Value of Disciple and Teacher*

Even if disciples are depending on their elders this does not say anything about their value. In the *Tales of Anastasios*, teachers could have disciples who would be in the position of outshining them in future. The narration about Abba Martyrios and John Sinaites illustrates this fact explicitly.<sup>37</sup> When they met Abba John the Sabbaite, the letter paid particular attention to the disciple John, not to his elder. The Sabbaite even washed his feet and kissed his hand. The servant of John the Sabbaite was annoyed by this. His teacher explained to him that with John the Sinaite he received the future abbot of the monastery of the burning bush. He could expect a career as “abbot of the Sinai”, unlike his elder. Narrations like these are illustrating not only the prophetic charism or discerning view (διορατικὸν ὄμμα) of the teachers but also the possibility of an inversion of the authority gradient.<sup>38</sup> Also, Ammonios possibly wants to protect teachers respectively spiritual fathers from pride.

For Anastasios this defining of relationships seems to be of such importance that he also reflects it in another story. In this tale John is labeled as child (τέκνον), servant (δουλος) of the abbot Anastasios and disciple of Martyrios. The latter consecrated him monk. Anastasios emphasizes that Martyrios consecrated a future abbot.<sup>39</sup>

The *Tales of Anastasios* offer only very few facts about the topics of the instruction and only little information about the ideal of a teacher. More is to be found in the *Ladder of John the Sinaite*.

### 5. The Ideal of a Teacher in the Writings of John Sinaites

The image of a teacher is to be found in the remarks of the Sinaites about spiritual fathers. It is not possible to separate the one from the other. In his *Logos pros ton poimena* John the spiritual father is labeled as shepherd (ποιμήν), helmsman

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Anastasios, *Relationes* 21 (Nau 1902a: 72–73). Tr. Caner 2010: 1.29, 189–190.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Anastasios, *Relationes* 12 (Nau 1902a: 67). Tr. Caner 2010: 1.20, 185.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Anastasios, *Relationes* 23 (Nau 1902a: 73–74). Tr. Caner 2010: 1.32, 191.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Anastasios, *Relationes* 6 (Nau 1902a: 63–64). Tr. Caner 2010: 1.10, 180–181.

<sup>38</sup> Vgl. Anastasios, *Relationes* 6 (Nau 1902a: 63–64). Tr. Caner 2010: 1.10, 180–181.

<sup>39</sup> Vgl. Anastasios, *Relationes* 34 (Nau 1902a: 80). Tr. Caner 2010: 1.12, 181–182.

(κυβερνήτης), physician (ιατρός) and teacher (διδάσκαλος).<sup>40</sup> All of these images are recoined with a view of a charismatic person. The definition of a teacher is as follows:

A genuine teacher is he who has received from God the tablet of knowledge, inscribed by His Divine finger, that is, by the in-working of illumination, and who has no need of other books. It is as unseemly for teachers to give instruction from notes taken from other men's writings, as it is for painters to take inspiration from other men's compositions.<sup>41</sup>

The teacher here appears as a charismatic person instructed by God himself. John further emphasizes in this part that the quality of a teacher depends on the success he has with illiterate and difficult disciples. The goal of education is to convert secularly uneducated and unwise pupils into "real philosophers", that is, monks.<sup>42</sup>

### 5.1. *The Methodology and the Contents of Education according to John Sinaites*

According to the *Logos pros ton poimena* the spiritual fathers have to reprimand the disciples rigorously.<sup>43</sup> In this context he has to write down the needed instructions<sup>44</sup> and to transmit them. Written instructions of monastic guides thus are not only composed in the form of rules for a monastery, but also individually by a spiritual father for single monks. As in a cenobium, semianchoritic life should be clearly organized in such a way.

For John, obedience is so to speak situated at the beginning of all the lessons in the "school" of monasticism. In step 26.14 John speaks about three classes, comparable to different classes in a school.<sup>45</sup> For these classes he provides three alphabets. At the beginning of the first alphabet obedience is situated in an exposed position, followed in the first instance by other external visible exercises. Obedience is thus integrated into a kind of spiritual programme, which in the second class for example contains tranquillity (ἡσυχία) and discernment (διάκρισις) and in the third class the imitation of the Lord (μίμησις δεσπότης).

<sup>40</sup> Ware 1990: XIII prefers the title σύμβολος for the teacher. This term does not exist in the systematic preface of the *Liber ad pastorem* of John Sinaites.

<sup>41</sup> John Sinaites, *Liber ad pastorem* 1 (PG 88, 1165BC): Διδάσκαλος ὄντως ἐστὶν ὁ νοερὰν δέλτον γνώσεως θεοῦ δακτύλῳ, ἤγουν ἐνεργείᾳ ἐλλάμψεως ἐξ αὐτοῦ δι' ἑαυτοῦ κομισάμενος, καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν βιβλίων ἀνευδεῖς γενόμενος· ἀπρεπὲς διδασκάλους, ἐξ ἀντιγράφων ἐκπαιδεῖν, καὶ ζωγράφους ἐκ μεταβόλων σημειοῦσθαι.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. for example Daniel of Raithu, *Vita Joannis Climaci* (PG 88, 601 B).

<sup>43</sup> Cf. John Sinaites, *Liber ad pastorem* 6 (PG 88, 1180A).

<sup>44</sup> The PG edition reads ἀπαγγέλματα, Ignatios 1997 has instead παραγγέλματα.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. John Sinaites, *Scala paradisi* 26.14 (PG 88, 1017A–C).

## 5.2. *The Implementation of the Ideal of a Teacher in Texts of John Sinaites and John of Raithu*

Section 100 of the *Liber ad pastorem* illustrates the possibility to implement the ideal of a teacher instructing monks to approach the imitation of Christ.<sup>46</sup> John of Raithu is not labeled only as teacher, but also as an initiated one (μύστης) and as a way to heaven (οὐρανόδρομος). On the basis of his advance in wisdom he is able to introduce this way.<sup>47</sup> John Sinaites himself looks after two disciples according to his *Vita* written by Daniel of Raithu. He does not only lead them to the “real philosophy” (ὄντως φιλοσοφία), that is monasticism, he also protects them from accidents through his prayer.<sup>48</sup> Finally he takes care of them like a doctor of the soul liberating them from sexual phantasies.

## 6. Summary

Sinaitic monasticism underwent enormous changes from the 4th to the 7th century. First of all cenobitism played an increasing role besides the anchoritic and semianchoritic way of life. Consequently the monastic ideal of a teacher altered although its essentials remained the same. In principal the charismatic teacher had to induct his disciple into a spiritual way of life, which leads to the salvation of one’s soul. An exception can only be found in the eremitic texts of Neilos Sinaites. Furthermore, the following characteristics remain to be noted:

1. Ideal prototypes and simultaneously ideal teachers in the Sinai-region are Elijah and Moses. Biblical characters or their imitators can therefore undertake the task to teach, as we have seen in the anchoritic context of Neilos Sinaites.
2. Even hermits need mutual admonition respectively instruction in monastic virtues which they have on Sundays. Particularly younger anchorites benefit from the experiences of the older ones.
3. Semianchorites follow some kind of rule from their teacher which does not seem to be written down in Ammonios. The Geron conveys his κανών by teaching and by his own example. The goal of the disciple is to become an image of his spiritual master. It seems that rules existed in a written form in times of John Sinaites.
4. The community of teacher and disciple in the semianchoritic context has a family character. This also includes the duty of the disciple to take care of his master’s funeral. On the other hand teachers guarantee to protect their disciples in every possible way as mentioned in Anastasios Sinaites and John

<sup>46</sup> Cf. John Sinaites, *Liber ad pastorem* 100 (PG 88, 1201C–1208A).

<sup>47</sup> Cf. John Sinaites, *Liber ad pastorem* 100 (PG 88, 1205C): καὶ πάντων τῶν ὑπὲρ ἡμᾶς ἐν γνώσει προὔχοντα.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Daniel of Raithu, *Vita Joannis Climaci* (PG 88, 604A).

- Sinaites. However, sometimes the disciples are working like a kind of servants in their masters cells.
5. For Ammonius, content-related instruction includes the mediation of knowledge about the soul, the postmortem existence and the combat of evil forces. This kind of ἐπιστήμη always focuses on the monastic way of life.
  6. For Anastasios Sinaites teachers almost encourage their disciples to experience transcendency. Thereby they open up new perspectives on the desert from a transcendental point of view.
  7. The strong obedience of the disciple towards his teacher does not say anything about his spiritual value. In the course of time disciples can outstrip their spiritual masters by far, as is illustrated by Anastasios in the case of John Sinaites.
  8. In the writings of the latter the monastic teacher is similar to the spiritual father of the monk. This charismatic person instructed by God himself is also considered as shepherd, helmsman and physician.
  9. In the writings of John Sinaites the teacher rigorously reprimands his disciples. Education is carried out in three classes. In the first class obedience is the most important subject. The second class is characterised by ἡσυχία and διάκρισις, the third one by imitation (μίμησις) of God.
  10. On the basis of their advance in wisdom teachers as John of Raithu can become οὐρανόδρομος, which means mediator of the way to heaven. Monastic literature from Mount Sinai does not only present different ideas of the relationship between disciples and teachers. It verifies the possibility to implement this ideal by means of real teachers.

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