



Syncretism and the Indian Ocean:
The Genesis of Hesychasm
by the Neoplatonic Reception of Yoga in
Antiquity

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DECLARATION

I Ullrich Kleinhempel declare that this research study:

*Syncretism and the Indian Ocean: The Genesis of Hesychasm by the Neoplatonic
Reception of Yoga in Antiquity*

Except where specifically indicated to the contrary in the text,
is my own work both in conception and execution

All sources that have been used or quoted have been duly acknowledged by means of
complete references

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14. January, 2024

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ABSTRACT

This work responds to the – largely consensual – assumption, held over a century, that the Christian Orthodox meditation form of Hesychasm owes essential features to Yoga. The time and pathway of this reception has so far remained unclear. With a set of theoretical tools I investigate, how, why, when, and by which pathway, it took place, and fathom its depth. I show that this reception did not go directly from (Hindu) Yoga into Christian Orthodoxy, but by mediation through formations of spiritually engaged philosophies of Hellenistic and Greco-Roman culture in Antiquity, especially Neoplatonism, and from thence into Christian Orthodox monasticism, by the end of this era. In this way, this study makes an original, and long overdue, contribution to the field.

Yoga, as practice and doctrine, comprises 'eight steps'. These are described, fairly consistently, in Yogic tradition and commentaries over centuries, already in Antiquity. They have been recognised to exist in Hesychasm, in principle, but not in systematic detail. I identify them in the literature of Hesychasm, from early on, in late Antiquity, up to the culmination of Hesychast theory in the 14th century. I show that they can be regarded as a set of significant, symbolic, and performative, practices, processes, phenomena, perceptions, ritual elements and experiences, with their supporting metaphysical concepts, and social forms. This system has not been analysed in coherence, for Hesychasm, so far.

As to design and method, I apply the systemic Theory of Syncretism, as conceptualising the structured reception of foreign elements by a receiving religion, that is transformed in the process, reasserting itself. The extended cultural and religious contact, as well as the perception of the alien elements as compatible and useful, are identified here. Therefore, I trace the historiography of exchange between the Indian and the Greco-Roman realms, their mutual philosophical understanding, the appreciation of Yogis in the latter, and encounters, as documented by Neoplatonists and Christian authors of the patristic age. As main realm of this transfer, Alexandria is identified, as centre of commerce, academic Neoplatonism, religious syncretism, and of Pagan-Christian coexistence. I include the perspectives of Discourse Theory and Intertextuality. For the symbolism of the bodily aspects Yoga, and of Hesychasm, as

coherent systems, I apply perspectives of Embodiment and Habitus. The consistency of Yoga and Hesychasm is conceptualised as 'Formations of Longue Durée'.

I show that the reception did not only comprise (external) features of body practices, such as breathing meditation, postures, the calming of the mind and stillness, self-awareness, 'energetic centres' of the body, such as the 'heart', and the navel region, but also philosophical, anthropological and cosmological notions, especially the concept and role of 'pneuma' and 'prana', in relation to body, intellect, and the Divine. I also compare the perceptions and phenomena of 'spiritual light' and their conceptualisation. Here, Neoplatonism, as mediating formation, but also Cynicism, is shown to be important. As a feature of 'Tantra', I identify the mantra-like invocation of the 'holy name', the 'Jesus-Prayer', as indication that this reception lasted into very late Antiquity. Thus, I work out a long-standing assumption of reception of Yoga into Hesychasm. Furthermore, I show it to comprise not merely elements of practice, but also their symbolism, philosophical, and systemic significance.

Regarding purpose, I show that a comparison of religious-philosophical literature of Yoga, and of Hesychasm, remains meaningful, and should comprise both the knowledge of their historical and systematic connection. (The theological implications remain to be worked out further.)

In view of the deep global reception of Yoga, and the renewed interest in Hesychasm, over the past century, in Orthodoxy, and in other denominations of Christianity, the identification of their relation is of interest, systematically and historically. In view of rising interest in inter-cultural, and inter-religious exchange, this study is intended to present a profound and formative case of such processes. It shows that a Euro-centric perspective, that takes only the Middle East as wider realm of origin into regard, is insufficient to understand this most eminent form of Christian meditation. Considering that Syncretism Theory focusses on 'reception', a merely 'Orientalising' view is avoided, to ascribe mystic 'Indian origins' as form of mystic legitimisation. Rather, the 'agency' of active interest, understanding, and ensuing systematic appropriation, as source of new development, is taken into view in this study, of a paradigmatic case.

CLARIFICATION OF TERMS

The following terms may be briefly introduced:

- Brahmins: it refers to the caste of priests and scholars of Hinduism that preserve and develop its body of literature. They are relevant to this study by their religious-philosophical conceptualisation (and re-interpretation) of Yoga, with relation to the supreme Divine, Brahman, to Âtman, the immortal soul, to the body, in its material and fine-mattered components, to Prâna, the cosmic force of life, and its anthropological correlate, to individual consciousness, Purûsha, with further concepts designating mind and consciousness, and to the world.
- Cynicism: A movement of practical asceticism, practiced by wandering philosophers, from the 5th century BCE on. This, and their renunciation of culture and society made them appear as similar to the Yogis in the view of Antiquity.
- Christian Monasticism: It developed in early Christianity, in the realm from Egypt to Syria, in two forms: communal, as in monasteries, and of hermits, practicing meditation and prayer in solitude or in loose communities, resembling the social forms of Yogis.
- Greco-Egyptian Syncretism: This culture developed after the Greek conquest of Egypt, in the 4th century BCE. In it, Ancient Egyptian and Greek religion and culture coexisted and influenced each other, and produced new syntheses, that spread to other realms in Roman times. It was a formative environment for early Christian theology and spirituality.
- Greco-Roman Antiquity: It designates the cultural synthesis of Greek and Latin cultures, that coexisted and fused in the Roman Empire. Greek language, culture, religion, and philosophy, remained dominant in the East. It ended in the eastern half of the Roman Empire with the Islamic conquest of Egypt and the Levante, in the early 7th century CE.

- Hellenism: It designates the universalism, that developed after the conquests of Alexander the Great (4th century BCE) in the realm between India, central Asia, Egypt, the Middle East and Greece. Is it marked by lively interest in the elder cultures of these realms, including religion and philosophy, and the striving to integrate them, in the medium of the Greek language.
- Hesychasm: derived from the Greek word for 'stillness', designates a form of sitting meditation, practiced in solitude, with quieting of thoughts, self-awareness, deliberate breathing, introduction of the Holy Spirit into the heart and body, and other features of Yogic character. It originated in late Greco-Roman Antiquity in the realm from Alexandria to Syria, emerging in Sinaite monasticism, in the 7th century CE. Doctrinally endorsed by the Christian Orthodox Church in the 14th century, it formed a movement, aware of its collective identity and tradition, from early on, with its special theology, and body of spiritual literature. It exists to this day, in Orthodoxy, with revivals from the 18th century on. As a formative force of Orthodox spirituality, philosophy, and mystical theology.
- Neoplatonism: This philosophy emerged out of the Platonic tradition in the 3rd century CE. It integrates cosmology and anthropology in a panentheistic synthesis. It reinforced the mystical elements of Platonism in a doctrine of divine emanation and return to divinisation of the soul by inward illumination, by intellectual and mystical ascent of the soul. In its later stages, Neoplatonism integrated ritual, symbolic and bodily means, especially of the mysteries, and meditation, as means of ascent to the Divine.
- Neopythagoreanism: It is a philosophy that flourished in the 1st and 2nd centuries CE, that emphasised the harmony of nature, the soul, and of a pure life, with asceticism and prayer, as means of ascent to God. The Neopythagoreans took interest in mysteries as means of ascent to the divine, involving the idea of rebirth of the soul, and integrating the body.
- Orthodox Church. This is, historically, the major eastern branch of Christianity, related to, but distinct from the Oriental churches of Syrian and Egypt, for mainly doctrinal reasons, with which it shares spiritual traditions. It developed mainly in

the realm of the eastern Roman Empire, that existed as Byzantine empire into the 15th century, with its continuity of Greek philosophy, theology, literature and culture. From here it spread to the Balkans, to the east Slavic lands, and further eastwards, where it became the dominant form of Christianity. Its theology is strongly based on the Platonic tradition, its spirituality, and its rituals, on the Mysteries traditions – of symbolic rituals of Antiquity, that were designated to initiate participants, and to transform them by encounter with the divine. It has a strong tradition of monasticism, and of solitary or communal Hesychasm.

- Syncretism: Literally: 'growing together', designates processes and results of fusion in the sphere of religion. It often has the connotation of 'impurity' of doctrine or practice. However, theory of syncretism can show that the integration of foreign elements, that change a religion perceptibly, need not compromise its doctrinal integrity, but can represent a form of growth, resulting from the integration of elements from beyond the own tradition. This critical term has attained increased application to conceptualise such developments.

- Tantra: It designates a tradition of meditation, that is based on the belief of the identity of the soul with the divine, and that includes the body, prayer and ritual means, in meditative practice. It is marked by emphasis on 'energies' of the body, with centres and channels of 'energy', attributed spiritual properties. It includes mantras, as sacred incantations and repeated prayers as means of attaining union with the divine. It flourished from the 4th century CE onwards.

- Vedânta: It designates the religious philosophy, that emerged in the Upanishads, from the 8th century BCE onwards. To clarify the term: I adopt it here in the definition used by Helmut von Glasenapp [in translation]:
 "The word Vedânta (end of the Veda) comes to be the designation for the Upanishads that stand at the end of Vedic scripture, already in the *Mundaka-Up.* 3,2,6 ... as well as in the *Gitâ* 15,15 [5th – 2nd BCE]. ...later it becomes a discerning designation for those systems, that, in contrast

to ... the classic Sāṅkhya, and the Yoga (of Patañjali), assume a supreme principle of the world as source ['Urgrund'] ... of all being..."¹

Von Glasenapp also states that this usage is wider, than the narrowing of the concept to Śaṅkara's doctrine of the 8th century, sometimes applied.

Radhakrishnan explains it as designation for Brahmanic religious philosophy:

"The term 'Vedānta' means literally 'the end of the Veda' or the doctrines set forth in the closing chapter of the Vedas, which are the Upanishads.

(...) The *Vedānta Sūtra* is called *Brahma Sūtra* because it is an exposition of the doctrine of Brahman, and also *Śāṅkara Sūtra*, because it deals with the embodiment of the unconditioned self. (...) The work of Bādarāyaṇa stand to the Upanishads in the same relation as the Christian Dogmatics to the *New Testament*; it investigates their teaching about God, the world, the soul in its condition of wandering and of deliverance, removes apparent contradictions in the doctrines, and binds them systematically together. (...) In different theological schools different traditions became established [by] thinkers like Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja..."²

Accordingly, the term 'Vedānta' is used in this more comprehensive sense here, emphasising its continuity with the pan(en)theistic doctrines in the Upanishads – which Greeks and Romans, especially of the Platonic and Pythagorean traditions, with similar religious-philosophical convictions, learnt of, in their encounters with Brahmanic sages, as documented in literature of Antiquity (4th BCE – 6th CE).]

Its main themes are the conceptualisation of the supreme divine, Brahman, and its relation to the core of souls, Ātman. In its non-dualistic form of Advaita-Vedānta, as unfolded by Śaṅkara, it teaches the essential unity of both, Thus, it provides a philosophy for mystical union with the divine, attainable, as by Yoga, according to Vedāntic interpretation according to the Vedāntic interpretation of the Yoga Sūtra. It resembles Neoplatonism in essential features. Vedāntic commentaries on Yoga, as by Śaṅkara, integrate Yoga into the religious

¹ Von Glasenapp, H., (1974), *Die Philosophie der Inder. Eine Einführung in ihre Geschichte und ihre Lehren*, (3rd ed.), Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner, p. 147

² Radhakrishnan, S. (2008), *Indian Philosophy*, vol. 2, New Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press. [first publ. 1923], pp.398f.

philosophy of Hinduism. It flourished up to the 9th century CE and anew in Modernity.

- Yoga: derived from the Sanskrit word for 'yoke', for 'discipline' of the mind, it emerges in the early religious-philosophical scriptures of Hinduism, the Upanishads, from the 6th century BCE onwards. It developed a consistent set of meditation, comprising purification, restraint, self-awareness and self-control asceticism, stillness and recollection of the mind, transcendence of the individual self towards union with the divine, controlled breathing, and transformation of the bodily state, and of perceptual faculties, towards luminous and clairvoyant perceptions in some cases. The normative text for reference is the Yoga Sutra of Pātañjali (2nd century BCE on), the Pātañjalayogaśāstra. Yoga has been conceptualised and commented by philosophers, especially of Vedānta, and integrated into Indian religious philosophy. Historically, its social forms are, lives in solitary meditation, as hermits, or in loose communities.

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I. Introduction

1. Aims and Methods of this Study

1.1. Introduction to the Genesis of Hesychasm

Hesychasm is the form of meditation of the Orthodox Church. Its earliest testimonies of theory and practice date from the 7th century. It received full support by the Orthodox Church, when it endorsed key concepts, presented in defence of Hesychasm, by its most important theoretician, St. Gregory Palamas in 1351, as binding doctrine.³

From the late 19th century on Hesychasm became broadly received in culture, in the arts, in spiritual literature and in theology, well beyond the realm of Orthodoxy. It resonated with cultural currents in the 20th century intent on retrieving spiritual perception. It was found attractive, as a form of meditation enacting a spiritual worldview that includes the body and leads to ‘sensoriform’ spiritual *aisthesis*, with its luminous and paranormal phenomena. (‘Sensoriform’ denotes perceptions that resemble those provided by the senses but are not of sensory origin. ‘*Aisthesis*’, as a philosophical term, refers to perceptions that include those deemed ‘aesthetic’, but encompasses a wider range.) It continues to resonate with post-secular movements towards the re-integration of the spiritual into a comprehensive worldview and –perception. The broad reception of Yoga outside of India, since the 19th century contributed to interest in Hesychasm, as a comparable Christian Orthodox form. This coincides with the emergence of Hesychast thought in predominantly Orthodox societies. Editions of selected Hesychasts texts contributed to its popular appeal in some Western countries. Orthodox philosophers have explored the implications of Hesychasm as philosophically profoundly distinct from Western Christianity, in theory, in its *aisthesis*, and its forms of practice. This supports the interest pursued in this dissertation, where this special form and theory of meditation originated, whether in early Christianity, or beyond – and if the similarity of Hesychasm to Yoga is merely coincidental, or whether genetic links can be identified.

³ Meyendorff, J. (1998). *A Study of Gregory Palamas* (transl.: Lawrence, George), Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, p.99. [Original: (1959) *Introduction à l’étude de St. Grégoire Palamas*]

The Hesychast tradition regards itself as consistent, as indicated by the 18th century collection of its most important texts, the *Philokalia*.⁴ The forms of practice and the views of what constitutes 'Hesychasm' diverge to some extent. However, the theory of Hesychasm that its major theoretician, St. Gregory Palamas, presented, in his *Triads in Defence of the Holy Hesychasts*, written between 1337 and 1341, in defence of Hesychasm⁵, and the Hesychastic authors, whom he refers to, shall be considered here. Palamas refers to a set of elements of practices, that were described by Hesychast authors since the 7th century, with some features appearing even earlier. This recourse to tradition, with testimonies spread over centuries, affirms the view presented here, that Hesychasm constituted a 'system' from early on, that has remained quite constant, from its formation on. Its genesis is in the focus of interest here.

Its similarity to Yoga, in a set of features, have been noticed since the 19th century. Since the 19th century it has been suggested, by Orthodox and non-Orthodox authors, that elements of Hesychast method might be of Indian origin. The close affinity between their sets of rules have been noted by scholars in the field,⁶ raising questions about the influence of Yoga on Hesychasm. The pathways of assumed 'influence' have not been researched satisfactorily, much less the conditions, circumstances, and reasons for such adoption. Suggestions of mediation by Sufism have not been substantiated.

Hesychast sources of the Middle Ages do not refer to Yoga, and rarely to India. However, in Graeco-Roman Antiquity there was lively interest in Yoga and the Brahmins, especially by the philosophical (and spiritual) traditions of Platonism, particularly in Neoplatonism, but also of Neo-Pythagoreanism and of Cynicism. They engaged in it theoretically and practically, visiting India and conversing with Yogis and Brahmins. It is therefore interesting, that Palamas and his predecessors – from John Climacus on - interpreted, and conceptualised, Hesychasm by means of Neoplatonism, because it can be suspected that yogic features may have entered hesychasm (or its predecessors) by that pathway. The Neoplatonic philosophical foundation of Palamas, and of authors of

⁴ *Philokalia*. Ed.: G.E.H. Palmer, P. Sherrard, and K. Ware (Eds. and transl.). (1979-1995). *The Philokalia – The Complete Text Compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth*. (4 vols.). London: Faber & Faber.

⁵ Gregorios Palamas (1341). *Triads in defence of the Holy Hesychasts*. Ed. : J. Meyendorff. (1959). *Grégoire Palamas: Défense des saints hésychastes – Introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes*. Louvain: Université Catholique. [critical edition in Greek with French translation].

⁶ Hausherr, I. (1953). L'Hésychasme, Yoga chrétien?. In: J. Massui (Ed.). *Yoga – science de l'homme intégral*, (pp. 177-195). Paris.; Ware, K. (2011)., *Praying with the body: the Hesychast method and non-Christian parallels*. http://www.bogoslov.ru/en/text/2671134.html#_ftn15

Hesychasm from its beginnings, has been recognised. Theologically it has often been criticised, but nevertheless acknowledged. This spiritual philosophy includes the theory of 'theurgy', i. e. of religious ritual, mystagogy, spiritual practice, experience, and perception ('aisthesis'). In this dissertation I intend to show that the two complexes – of Yoga and of Neoplatonism - became integrated by the end of Late Antiquity, through long cultural contact and exchange, and that this formed the basis from which Hesychasm arose.

Based on a set of theory, I assume that Hesychasm, as defended by the theoretically minded authors of Hesychasm, and its chief theoretician St. Gregory Palamas, must be understood as a system of inter-related practical and theoretical features that originated early on. Its consistency over well-nigh a millennium, by the time of Palamas, provides the foundation for an analysis of this development using complementary theoretical tools, as will be shown here.

This dissertation covers a long period. It spans from the early Graeco-Indian encounters in Hellenism, through the early 7th century, when Hesychasm first emerged as Christian Orthodox meditation, after the Islamic conquest of Egypt and the Levantine, up to Hesychasm's theological-philosophical explication by Palamas in the 14th century. Its geographic realm comprises the Eastern Mediterranean and India, with a focus on Alexandria in Egypt, as the eminent centre of Greek and Roman exchange with India, by trade, and of cultural, philosophical, and religious encounter with India. There are sound indications, over centuries, and in manifold sources, that Yoga, and its supporting spiritual philosophy of Vedanta, were studied, appraised, and adopted, by different formations of Hellenistic philosophy. The general cultural awareness of Indian Yogic meditation and philosophy, and its prestige, in Graeco-Roman society, including early Christian authors, supported it.

This adds up to the assumption, that the Yogic features of Hesychasm, documented since the 6th century in its own body and tradition of literature, originates in the Graeco-Roman reception of Yoga in Late Antiquity. However, few traces of direct reception of Yoga into early Christian asceticism exist. Therefore, it must be assumed, that this reception occurred by the pathway of Neoplatonism and preceded formations, of early Platonism, Cynicism and Neo-Pythagoreanism, that it absorbed. From here on, the pathway of transference into early Christian asceticism can be traced. To reconstruct this complex reception process, requires a sound methodology.

The observation that Hesychasm resembles Yoga significantly, and that (some of) its roots may lie here, was expressed by a leading authority on Palamas, and on Hesychasm, the Orthodox scholar, John Meyendorff. He edited the first critical volume and translation of Palamas' *Triads in Defence of the Holy Hesychasts* – his key work on Hesychasm. Meyendorff discussed the view expressed by Barlaam of Calabria, Palamas' chief opponent in the Hesychast Controversy, that the characteristic method of conscious breathing was merely a late invention by Nikophoros the Monk in the late 13th century. Meyendorff agreed with Palamas that the breathing practice of Hesychasm goes back to its beginnings, as to St. John Climacus (7th century C.E.), and was merely clarified in the 13th century, as expressed in his own words:

“Barlaam le considère comme l'inventeur de la méthode respiratoire; selon Palamas, il n'est que interprète d'une ancienne tradition et il est fort possible que le docteur hésychaste ait raison sur ce point: ce que l'on n'a formulé qu'au XIII siècle semble bien avoir existé dès le temps de s. Jean Climaque. Il est incontestable par ailleurs que l'on puisse trouver des parallèles aussi bien dans la mystique musulmane qu'aux Indes. Une intéressante étude de religion comparé serait certainement à faire et des influences mutuelles à déceler.”⁷

[Barlaam considers him to be the inventor of the breathing method, according to Palamas he is merely the interpreter of an ancient tradition, and it is strongly possible that the doctor of Hesychasm is right on this point: What has not been formulated until the 13th century, appears to have existed since the times of St. John Climacus. It is also incontestable that one can find parallels as much in Islamic mysticism as in India. An interesting study of comparative religion would certainly have to be done, and mutual influences would have to be detected.]

Mindful of Meyendorff's call, I wish to show that Hesychasm's origins in Antiquity and in Yoga are indeed intrinsically connected. The roots in Antiquity extend beyond Christian monasticism, as I intend to show. The Yogic complex has not been adopted in the Middle Ages, through Sufism, as often assumed, but in Antiquity, by way of Neoplatonism, as I intend to show. This has not been recognised in scholarship, so far. The purpose of this

⁷ Meyendorff, J. (1959). *Grégoire Palamas: Défense des saints hésychastes – Introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes*. Louvain: Université Catholique), p. XXXI.

study is to show these two to be valid claims, with suitable methods of analysis of science of religion and history.

No consistent explanation for the affinity between both and such origin has so far been presented. Although the characteristic configuration of similar elements has been noticed, no systematic conclusion has been drawn from it. For the present study, this is a decisive point. This investigation is based on the understanding that the configuration of elements that constitute the practice of Hesychasm are to be understood as a system, in which the significance of the elements is determined by their comprehensive system. This precludes a view of these as random 'auxiliaries' for merely practical purposes. They are rather understood to be symbolic elements of a comprehensive philosophical-theological anthropology and soteriology with aesthetic and performative aspects. Accordingly, these elements of practice cannot be detached from the system that they serve to enact. The perception of Hesychasm as a living, dynamic system also supports the assumption that it persisted over time, from its emergence in early Orthodox monasticism in the 7th century onwards, in a consistent form, of which parts are documented in Hesychast literature over the next centuries. Such consistency over centuries, if not millennia, has been documented for Yoga.

On this basis the agreements between Hesychasm and Yoga, that comprise a set of salient features, become even more important. Considering that they extend beyond those features held in common with Sufism, and that they were described before the formation of Sufism, it can be ruled out as a source. Further confirmation of Yogic origins can be expected if agreements can be shown to extend to the philosophical-theological systems, defining the meaning of these elements as well. The hypothesis to be explored is thus, that Hesychasm received its set of elements of meditation with their attributed meaning – or at least a major part thereof – from Yoga, as the elder religious-philosophical doctrine and system of practice.

This raises questions. How does Yoga relate to other sources of Hesychasm? Is Yoga at the origin of Hesychasm or was it adopted at a later stage? Did the Yogic contribution fuse with a pre-existing set of methods? How could it be integrated into a Christian form of meditation? Did Yoga come in after the formation of Christian Hesychasm, or before? In either case, what were the conditions and the pathways of such reception? If Yoga became introduced before the formation of Hesychasm as a Christian form and doctrine of meditation, what was the previous form like and to which religious-philosophical formation did it belong? If such an early reception is to be assumed, where,

when, and under which conditions did it happen? If it did, how and why could the resultant formation of spiritual meditation be adopted into Orthodox Christianity? And if the core set of practices of Hesychasm was received from Yoga, what were the possible effects on the receiving system of Orthodox theology? If this reception of Yoga happened already before the Islamic conquest of the Middle East, that shut down the trade and exchange between the Byzantine Empire and India, then the reception happened most likely before that event. If we also consider our assumption that Yoga was received by Pagan spiritual formations or 'traditions' first, especially by Neoplatonists, then it is likely that this set of practices and adjoined concepts was enriched by Neoplatonic (and possibly other) philosophical concepts, in the process of their assimilation.

The investigation of the genesis of Hesychasm requires a set of methods and of perspectives:

- The systemic: By means of systems theory the processes of formation and reception across the boundaries of cultures and religions can be conceptualised. The conditions for such reception and their consequences can be framed theoretically. This includes 'theory of syncretism' as developed by U. Berner,⁸ as well as reflections on Hesychasm as a 'system' that includes its embodied practices and aisthesis as essential elements of the system.
- The historiographic: This comprises cultural, political, and economic aspects: Cultural horizons and societal conditions need to be identified, that enabled intercultural and interreligious exchange in the times during which the foundations of Hesychasm were formed.

The quest for this formation leads to periods in which intercultural and interreligious exchange between India and the Hellenistic existed and was appreciated. This refers to commerce and to cultural ideals. Under these conditions, formations engaged in spiritual practice and philosophy, with the capacity to form and sustain tradition, and capable of such sophisticated reception, need to be identified. This requires a sociological perspective for a grounded view on these processes.

It is also to be considered that the reception of a 'Yogic set' did not occur directly into Hesychasm – since it shows up here from its beginnings – but that the salient fusion took place before the emergence of Hesychasm as Christian Orthodox meditation

⁸ Berner, U. (1982). *Untersuchungen zur Verwendung des Synkretismus-Begriffes*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrasowitz.

doctrine and practice. This may imply the fusion of the 'Yogic set' with other motifs and elements in the receiving 'formation' – a process that includes practical, theological, philosophical, and sociological elements. The process of reception may be envisaged as having several stages. Its culmination is certainly the full reception of Hesychasm in the mid-14th century by the Orthodox Church.

1.2. About the Chapters of this Study

The main parts of this study shall be:

I. **Theory and research on Hesychasm.**

Chapter 1: The thesis of this treatise on the development of the meditation practice and theory of Hesychasm, by a process of inter-cultural and interreligious reception from Yoga through Theurgic Neoplatonism in Christian Orthodoxy.

Chapter 2: Literature review and editions

Chapter 3: Theory and Methodology: The methods of this treatise, and discussion of theoretical issues about them, are presented. The theoretical perspectives are:

Theory of Syncretism, Systems Theory, Inter-Textuality, Discourse Theory, Habitus, Semiotic approaches to the body and to experience, Hermeneutics as theoretical and interpretative approach, the Structuralist critique of the idea of an 'un-cultured' 'body', anthropological theory of 'initiation', 'transformation', 'liminality' and 'altered states' of being, of perception, contexts of Post-Secularism and of 'Multiple Modernities', and the historiographic approach of phenomena of 'longue durée'.

Section II: Findings - Historiography

Chapter 4 shall be dedicated to the Greek and Roman exchange with India and to the reception of Yoga and Brahman doctrine. The period of one millennium of regular exchange and of continuity of interest and literature is presented. This chapter shall focus on the Pagan Greek and Roman authors and philosophies. The special impact of Alexander the Great, and the continuing interest in Indian philosophy and Yoga, that became prominent with him shall be described. The role of the regular trade and mutual visits, of the city of Alexandria, with its syncretistic culture, and of Neoplatonism there, with its special and lasting interest in Indian philosophy and spirituality shall be depicted as formations from which Hesychasm evolved.

Chapter 5 shall present Christian authors of Antiquity who wrote knowledgeably about Indian spiritual philosophy and practice. Their interest and appreciation, on the background of a universalism friendly to reception shall be discussed. Their suggestion that Christianity might be rightful heir to these ideas and ascetic spiritual practices and ethic ideals is noted as defence of syncretistic reception across religious and cultural boundaries. Corresponding motifs in hymns of Orthodoxy and the Brahman tradition shall be analysed with a view to common motifs.

Chapter 6 shall explore the social forms of Yoga and of ascetic movements in Graeco-Roman antiquity, as well as of early Christian monasticism, as social foundation for the reception of Yoga. Early Christian descriptions and appreciation of Yogic spiritual practice and its motifs are discussed, which provide evidence of early Christian awareness and appreciation for it. In this context Cynicism is seen to have a pioneering role for the reception of Brahman Yogic ideas and practices in the earliest Christian time.

Section III. Findings - Systematic Comparison between Yoga and Hesychasm

Chapter 7 shall describe methods and motifs of Hesychasm from its beginnings in late Antiquity up to Palamas, with a view to their correspondences in Yoga. A review of the most important authors of Hesychasm up to Palamas is given.

Chapter 8 shall develop comparisons between Yoga and Hesychasm, as to defining motifs, concepts, and practices of both. Common features of the eight steps of Yoga and their corresponding elements and sequences in Hesychasm are defined. The symbolism of these steps in Yoga and Hesychasm shall be discussed, with a view to Neoplatonism.

Section IV: Conclusions and Outlook

Chapter 9 shall comprise the results and recommendations for research.

Section V: Bibliography

2. Literature and Editions

2.1. Literature on Hesychasm, Yoga and Neoplatonism

Most studies on Hesychasm were conducted by theologians. They are focussed on doctrinal issues, exploring them Orthodox,⁹ Lutheran¹⁰ or Roman Catholic¹¹ perspectives. The Hesychast controversy¹² and earlier authors of Hesychast thought¹³ have been studied intensively. Few studies exist so far, that are focussed on the philosophical logic of Hesychasm, on its relation to the method, or on its genesis.

A comprehensive bibliography by Mikonja Knežević on Hesychasm covers most of the literature, especially from Orthodox countries.¹⁴ Sergey Horujij presented a voluminous commentated bibliography of Hesychasm.¹⁵

The recognition that Hesychasm resembles Yoga is already stated in the 19th century. The widely read anonymous Russian treatise on the travels of a Hesychast monk, *The Way of a Pilgrim and The Pilgrim continues his Way*¹⁶, declared that the Yogis and Sufis of Bokhara had adopted their method from the ancient Hesychasts – thus implicitly acknowledging this relationship. Irénée Hausherr, a prominent Roman Catholic scholar of Patristics, presented Hesychasm as a method of meditation, a mystical tradition and distinct spiritual culture.¹⁷ Hausherr discussed the early presentations of Hesychast method and conceptualisations by St. John Climacus¹⁸ (579-649 C.E.), who wrote in the monastery of St. Catherine on the Sinai Peninsula. (Living there as a hermit, during his

⁹ Meyendorff, J. (1959). *St. Grégoire Palamas et la mystique orthodoxe*. Paris: Éditions du seuils.; Stăniloae, D. (1993). *Viața și învățătura Sf. Grigorie Palama – cu patre tratate traduse* (2nd rev. ed.). București: Editura Scripta.

¹⁰ Flogaus, R. (1997). *Theosis bei Palamas und Luther – ein Beitrag zum ökumenischen Gespräch*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht.

¹¹ Williams, A. N. (1999). *The Ground of Union – Deification in Aquinas and Palamas*. New York: Oxford University Press (OUP).

¹² Meyendorff, J. (1998). *A Study of Gregory Palamas* (transl.: G. Lawrence). Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press.

¹³ Hausherr, I. (1927). La Méthode d'Oraison Hésychaste. *Orientalia Christiana*, IX –2 (36), 101–209.

¹⁴ Knežević, M. [Кнежевић, М.]. (2012). *Gregory Palamas (1296 - 1357): Bibliography*, Belgrade: Institute for Theological Research.

¹⁵ Horujij, S. S. (2004). *Izikhazm, annotirovannaya bibliografiya*, Moscow: Izdatel'skiy Sovet Russkoy Pravoslavnoy Tserkvi. [Хоружий, С. С. (2004). *Исихазм, аннотированная библиография*, Москва: Издательский Совет Русской Православной Церкви].

¹⁶ [anonymous]. (1954). *The Way of a Pilgrim and The Pilgrim continues his Way*, (tr. by: R. M. French), London, p. 60. [Original: (1884). *Откровенные рассказы странника духовному своему отцу*, Kazan].

¹⁷ Hausherr, I. (1927). La Méthode d'Oraison Hésychaste. *Orientalia Christiana*, IX –2 (36). pp. 101–209.

¹⁸ Idem, p. 137.

middle years, and then as abbot, this highly educated author is an eminent author of Hesychasm. His *Ladder of Divine Ascent*¹⁹ depicts the inner pathway of meditative ascent to God. The Hesychast community has preserved the sense of having its roots here. Hausherr however believed the Hesychast method to be of later origin because it is described in more detail only later, in a treatise attributed to St. Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022 C.E.), the *Three Methods of Prayer*.²⁰ Hausherr pointed out that it resembles the description of method by Nikephoros the Monk (13th century C.E.) in his treatise *On Watchfulness and the Guarding of the Heart*.²¹ Martin Jugie²² and Vassilij Krivocheine rejected this assumption.

Georgios Mantzaridis discussed the thesis of the ancient origins of the meditative breathing technique in Hesychasm “Barlaam thought that Nicephoros the Athonite had introduced such prayer, but Palamas sees Nicephoros as continuing an older tradition.”²³ Mantzaridis referred to the views adopted by the eminent scholar of religion and author on Yoga, Mircea Eliade.²⁴ He also referred to the theologian Endre von Ivanka,²⁵ who both supported the assumption of Indian influence in the origins of Hesychasm. Both, however, stated that they did not know how this reception of Yoga into Hesychasm could have come about: “We do not know to what extent it is also possible to see Indian asceticism as an influence.”²⁶

Elisabeth Behr-Sigel was aware of the Neoplatonic influence in the formation of Hesychasm. She explained that early Egyptian monasticism – including that of the Sinai Peninsula - integrated Neoplatonic ideas with the practices of the hermits in the Egyptian desert. She considers Evagrius Ponticus (345 – 399)²⁷ to be important here, likewise St.

¹⁹ John Climacus. (ca 600 C. E.). *The Ladder of Divine Ascent (Scala Paradisi)*. Ed.: C. Luibhéid (transl.), N. Russell (notes), and K. Ware (intr.) (1982). *John Climacus, The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press.

²⁰ *The Three Methods of Prayer – Introductory Note*. Ed.: (1995). *The Philokalia [...]*, vol. 4, (pp. 64-66). London: Faber and Faber.

²¹ Nikephoros the Monk. (Late 13th century). *On Watchfulness and the Guarding of the Heart*. Ed.: (1995). *The Philokalia*, vol. 4, (pp. 194-195). London: Faber and Faber.

²² Jugie, M. (1932). Grégoire Palamas. *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique (DThC)*, 11, col. 1735 – 1776.

²³ Ibidem, p. 94.

²⁴ Eliade, M. (1948). *Techniques du Yoga*. Paris: Gallimard, p. 254.

²⁵ Von Ivanka, E. (1952). Byzantinische Yogis? *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 102 [N.F. 27] Wiesbaden], 234-239.

²⁶ Mantzaridis, G. I. (1948). *The Deification of Man. St. Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition*. New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, p. 94.

²⁷ Behr-Sigel, E. (1989). *Le lieu du coeur – Initiation à la spiritualité de l'Église Orthodoxe*, Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, p. 62.

John Climacus. She identified the 'nepsis', the 'watchfulness of the heart', the bringing to a stand-still of discursive thought, the constant memory of Christ, and the emotionality, warmth, and intensity of feelings,²⁸ as defining features. She also noted similarities between Hesychasm and Yoga but believes the two to be fundamentally different. In the reception of this debate, Kallistos (Timothy) Ware agreed with Behr-Sigel, that despite the similarities between Hesychasm and Yoga,²⁹ the differences are more important. He defined Hesychasm primarily by the 'Prayer of the Heart' or the 'Jesus Prayer'.³⁰ He depicted four features as essential: (1.) the invocation of the mercy of God, (2.) its disciplined and persistent repetition, (3.) the quest for stillness (hesychia) and (4.) the veneration of the Holy Name. These he tried to trace to the first to the liturgy of the ancient Christian Church as from the 6th century on. He claimed that the first was adopted into Hesychasm by St. Hesychius of Sinai in the 7th or 8th, the second by the monks of the Egyptian desert in the 4th, the third by Evagrius Ponticus - a representative of Egyptian monasticism in the same century - and the fourth by Diadochus of Photike in the 5th century. Ware declares that these four strands were combined by St. John of Gaza in the 6th century and that nothing essentially new has since been added to Hesychasm.³¹ Ware's main interest lies in the element of the *Jesus Prayer*, the invocation of Christ with every breath. This method is described in the widely read book *The Russian Pilgrim and The Pilgrim Continues his Way*, translated into several European languages, including German.³² Desire to distance Hesychasm from Yoga is apparent in Behr-Sigel's and Ware's presentations of Hesychasm³³ and to emphasise its Christian character in a personalistic understanding. Andrew Louth identified the 'Jesus Prayer' and the vision of (spiritual) light as key features of Hesychasm,³⁴ tracing them to Evagrius Ponticus.³⁵

²⁸ Ibidem, pp. 77ff.

²⁹ Ware, K. (2011), *Praying with the body: the Hesychast method and non-Christian parallels*. http://www.bogoslov.ru/en/text/2671134.html#_ftn15

³⁰ Ware, K. (2014). Das Jesusgebet – Was ist das Jesusgebet? in A. Ebert (ed.), *Hesychia II: Wege des Herzensgebets* (pp. 18–54). Munich: Claudius Verlag.

³¹ Ibidem, pp. 20ff.

³² Jungclaussen, E. (ed. and intr.) and R. von Walter (transl.). (1974). *Aufrichtige Erzählungen eines russischen Pilgers. Erste vollständige deutsche Ausgabe*, Freiburg i. B.: Herder Verlag.

³³ Ware, K. (1989), La Puissance du nom – La prière de Jésus dans la spiritualité orthodoxe. In E. Behr-Sigel, *Le lieu du coeur – Initiation à la spiritualité de l'Église orthodoxe* (pp. 121-153). Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, p. 127.

³⁴ Louth, A. (2004). Light, vision and religious experience in Byzantium. In M. T. Kapstein (Ed.), *The presence of light: divine radiance and religious experience*, Chicago, 2004: University of Chicago Press, pp. 85-103. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/66671.pdf>

³⁵ Idem, p. 92.

In this dissertation I intend to show how and why this reception was possible, and by which pathways it happened – based on a set of theory and methods, that support and elucidate the significance of the historic evidence presented here. The scholarly debate on the origins is important here, because this thesis is based on the assumptions that the Hesychast method and its theory are intrinsically connected, that they existed as a structured formation from its beginnings, and that they are probably of pre-Hesychast origin. This is supported by the sense of continuity, expressed in the Hesychast community, with its cross-references, in literature, across centuries. Systematically this supports the assumption, of Hesychasm's continuity as a formation of "longue durée".³⁶

Early in the 20th century, Krivocheine discussed the scholarship of non-Orthodox authors on Hesychasm, in his introduction to Palamas, reflecting the wider interest it attained by that time.³⁷ This evidently responded to the interest in mysticism and in spirituality in European culture, of the 20th century, beyond specifically theological interest. The philosopher Vladimir Lossky, a Russian emigré, after the revolution, based his presentation of Orthodox spirituality and theology³⁸ perceptibly on Hesychasm, thus contributing to the movement of Neo-Palamism, that continues to be vital to this day. He wrote, perceptibly in response to this interest in non-Orthodox societies. John Meyendorff, an emigrant too, who lived and taught in France and in the United States, continued the promulgation of Hesychasm in non-Orthodox contexts, by his edition of the key work of Palamas on Hesychasm, the *Triads*, in French translation and in Greek.³⁹ Palamas' writings and thought. In addition, he wrote about Palamas and about Hesychasm on French and English, introducing them, on their background of Byzantine Orthodox theology and culture.⁴⁰ Meyendorff discussed motifs, such as the 'return to oneself', which

³⁶ *Attributed to St. Symeon the New Theologian: The Three Methods of Prayer – Introductory Note*. Ed.: (1995). *The Philokalia* [...], vol. 4 (pp. 64-66). London: Faber and Faber.

³⁷ Krivoshein, B. (1938). The Ascetic and Theological Teaching of Gregory Palamas. *ECQ* 3, pp. 26-33. 71-84. 138-156. 193-214. [Original Ed. В. Кривошеин. (1936). *Аскетическото и богословското учение на св. Григорий Палама*, Prague: Kondakov Inst.; German Ed. (1939) *Die asketische und theologische Lehre des Hl. Gregorius Palamas (1296 – 1359)*, Würzburg: Rita Verlag].

³⁸ Lossky, V. (1961). *Die mystische Theologie der morgenländischen Kirche* Graz: Styria Verlag. [Original: *Essai sur la Théologie Mystique de l'Eglise d'Orient*, Paris, 1944: Editions Montaigne].

³⁹ Meyendorff, J. (1959). *Grégoire Palamas: Défense des saints hésychastes – Introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes*. Louvain: Université Catholique.

⁴⁰ Meyendorff, J. (1998). *A Study of Gregory Palamas* (transl.: Lawrence, George), Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press. [original title: (1959). *Introduction à l'étude de St. Grégoire Palamas*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil].;

presented as pathway to the divine, in the Platonic tradition, and in Hesychasm, both in theory and in meditative practice.⁴¹ Meyendorff also responded to the growing interest in the role of the body in meditation, in the 20th century. He emphasised the eminent role of the 'heart', in Hesychasm, as centre of human body and soul, as conceptualised in Hesychasm, with a view for its practice, that includes the body, by necessity, in prayer and meditation.⁴² Psychoanalytic emphasis and awareness of the psycho-somatic composition of the human being is clearly in the background here. This feature is emphasised by a philosopher too, by Vassily Zenkovsky,⁴³ who was aware of the significance of the issue of embodiment in that sense – not as naturalistic reduction to mere physiology - for modern culture.

The interest in the Yogic origins of Hesychasm is not merely historical. Present debates in anthropology include the issues of the mind-body-relation, issues of mind and matter – beyond naturalistic paradigms of reductionism of the former to the latter – of 'soul' and of the relation to the 'transcendent'. This may explain the keen interest that Hesychasm received beyond the discipline of theology. Thus, Ettore Perrella, a leading Italian psychoanalyst, and theoretician, declared Hesychasm to be highly important, as a spiritual philosophy, relevant to issues and problems in Western cultures, with its impasses of Materialism, and of Nihilism. He appreciated Hesychasm as foundation for a culture that integrates the spiritual into its epistemics.⁴⁴ This interest motivated Perrella to the enormous task of editing all major works of Palamas in translation to Italian, in three massive volumes. He is adamant about the philosophical importance of Hesychasm, stating that it provides solutions of theoretical problems in psychoanalysis,⁴⁵ with

Meyendorff, J. (1979), *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, (2nd. rev. ed.). New York: Fordham University Press.;

Meyendorff, J. (1954). Le thème du retour en soi dans la doctrine palamite du XIV^e siècle. *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, 145 (2), pp. 188 – 206. http://www.persee.fr/docAsPDF/rhr_0035-1423_1954_num_145_2_6976.pdf ;

Meyendorff, J. (1959). *St. Grégoire Palamas et la mystique orthodoxe*, Paris: Editions du seuils.

⁴¹ Meyendorff, J. (1954), Le thème du retour en soi dans la doctrine palamite du XIV^e siècle, *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, 145 (2), pp. 188 – 206. http://www.persee.fr/docAsPDF/rhr_0035-1423_1954_num_145_2_6976.pdf

⁴² Ibidem, p. 191.

⁴³ Zenkovsky, V. (1931. 1934). *Histoire de la Philosophie russe*, 2 vols. Paris: Librairie Gallimard, vol. 2, p. 396.

⁴⁴ Perrella, E. (2003). Introduzione. In E. Perrella et alii (Eds. and transl.). *Gregorio Palamas. Atto e luce divina scritti filosofici e teologici* (pp. VII – CXXXIX), Milano: Ed. Bonpiani – Il pensiero occidentale, p. XXXIX.

⁴⁵ Perrella, E. (1992). *Il tempo etico*, Pordenone: Biblioteca de l'Immagine, pp. 351-3, 393 and 413.

implications for therapeutic practice too.⁴⁶ This indicates that the present study on the roots and genesis of Hesychasm from Yoga, touches on vital issues of a post-secular culture of late Modernity and beyond.

Hilarion Petzold is an Orthodox theologian and psychologist, who became a pioneer of body-oriented and holistic psychotherapy. In his theological dissertation he presented Orthodox anthropology.⁴⁷ Petzold, who founded the method of Integrative Therapy⁴⁸, is perceptibly influenced by Hesychast thought of embodiment, of holistic perception, and transformation.⁴⁹ This supports our understanding that Yoga, theurgic Neoplatonism and Hesychasm are not to be viewed as merely historical 'objects', but that their '-emic' systems, that are genetically related by their exchange and reception, have theoretical interpretative value for phenomena of spirituality, psychology and being-in-the-body (embodiment), and are thus to be read as texts of 'theory' too. This perspective will be observed in this dissertation too, and applied, where suitable.

In science of religion, Hesychasm has received little attention so far. This surprising, because of its systematic and historical significance, that is reinforced and supported by its convergence with Yoga in its set of concepts and practices. Marco Toti, a scholar of religion, recognised Hesychasm's cultural significance for its emphasis and its affinity to Yoga,⁵⁰ as well as to Sufism.⁵¹ A more detailed recognition of the eight steps of Yoga and its agreements with Hesychasm have been presented by Eiji Hisamatsu and Ramesh Pattni. They take the ethical purification required by both, and the transformations of consciousness and perception attained by recollection of the mind, and the cessation of discursive thought into view too.⁵² Karl Baier proposed that Hesychasm received its Yogic features through Sufism, by monastic encounters and

⁴⁶ Perrella, E., (2003). Introduzione. In E. Perrella et alii (eds. and transl.). *Gregorio Palamas. Atto e luce divina scritti filosofici e teologici* (pp. VII – CXXXIX). Milano: Ed. Bonpiani – Il pensiero occidentale, p. XIV.

⁴⁷ Zenkowsky, B. and Petzold, H. (1969). *Das Bild des Menschen im Licht der orthodoxen Anthropologie*, Marburg: Ökumenischer Verlag R. F. Edel.

⁴⁸ Petzold, H. (2004). *Integrative Therapie. Modelle, Theorien und Methoden einer schulübergreifenden Psychotherapie* (3 vols.), (2nd ed.). Paderborn: Jungfermann.

⁴⁹ Petzold, H. (1996), *Integrative Bewegungs- und Leibtherapie* (3rd ed.). Paderborn: Jungfermann.

⁵⁰ Toti, M. (2008). The Hesychast method of prayer: its anthropological and symbolic significance. *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 8 (1), 17 — 32.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14742250701841699>

⁵¹ Ibidem, p. 17.

⁵² Hisamatsu, E. and Pattni, R. (2015). Yoga and the Jesus Prayer—A Comparison between aṣṭāṅga yoga in the Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali and the Psycho-Physical Method of Hesychasm. *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies*, 28 (7). <https://doi.org/10.7825/2164-6279.1606>

exchange with Hesychast monks. He believes that a translation of Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra* by Abū Raiḥān Bīrūnī (973 – 1048 C. E.) that was read by Sufis in India, paved the way for its transmission to Hesychasm.⁵³ However, this fails to take note of the Yogic features discernible in Hesychasm much earlier. The cessation of theological and spiritual dialogue of orthodoxy with Islam, from the 9th century on,⁵⁴ disfavours this construction of a pathway of transmission. The assumption presented in this thesis that the sources of Hesychasm in Orthodox monasticism go back to at least the 4th century is confirmed by Theodore Sabo in his dissertation on 'Proto-Hesychasts'.⁵⁵ However Szabo did not propose any Yogic origins but suggested the roots of Hesychasm to be in monasticism and theology practiced in Gaza at the time.

Among psychiatric studies of meditation, the study of Andreas Reimers⁵⁶ may be mentioned. He compared the effects of meditation according to the precepts of Hesychasm with those of the Roman Catholic mystic, Theresa of Avila, and those of the Hindu spiritual teacher Maharishi Mahesh Yogi.⁵⁷ Summing up the results of some 700 studies, he declares that the mystical states attained hereby cannot be reduced to any psychological conditions or pathologies, nor explained as psychiatric disorders, nor as manifestations of drives. Despite the phenomenological agreements and similarities of the estates of consciousness and awareness attained by these meditations forms, their theological interpretation follows the specific religious system within which they are made. The experience of the Divine and of self-transcendence are intrinsically connected in these states. They involve the realms of the mind and consciousness, the emotions, the psychological, and the body.⁵⁸ This is relevant to our study, because it indicates that commonalities exist, in phenomenology and experience, between Orthodox and Yogic meditation, that provided the basis for exchange and communication about such experiences, and about their practices, thus facilitating the reception across the boundaries of religions and cultures – as may be extended to the practitioners and

⁵³ Baier, K. (1998). *Yoga auf dem Weg nach Westen: Beiträge zur Rezeptionsgeschichte*, Würzburg: Königshaus & Neumann, pp.30ff.

⁵⁴ Andrae, T. (1960). *Islamische Mystiker*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, p. 41.

⁵⁵ Sabo, T. (2012), *The Proto-Hesychasts: Origins of mysticism in the Eastern Church* [Diss. phil.]. Potchefstroom: North West University.

⁵⁶ Reimers, A. (1993). *Versenkungspraxis und veränderte Bewusstseinszustände in der Mystik Teresas von Avila, im Hesychasmus des Kallistus und Ignatius und in der Transzendentalen Meditation Maharishi Mahesh Yogis* [Diss. Med.]. Tübingen: University of Tübingen.

⁵⁷ Ibidem, pp. 170ff.

⁵⁸ Ibidem, p. 76f.

theorists of Theurgic Neoplatonism too. Reimer's findings support our assumption that the special, mystical states attained here, that include the experience of transformation, and of sensoriform aisthesis of divine light, inwardly and outwardly, and the necessary transformation of state of self in body, soul, and mind, as well as perception, attained by meditative practice, are not reducible to other, psychological, or physiological causes, nor to cognitive misattributions or to secondary 'constructions of meaning'. They also underline the importance of the common conviction of Yoga, Theurgic Neoplatonism, and of Orthodox spiritual literature, that transformations by diligent meditation are necessary for the attainment of these experiences and perceptions. It also supports their common conviction of the beneficial and salutary effects of such meditation in other realms, of consciousness, psychological and physical health.

As to Yoga, Indian philosophies, the Upanishads, and to Vedānta, profound studies exist that make them accessible to the non-Indologist. To mention here are Helmuth von Glasenapp,⁵⁹ for an overview of the history of Indian philosophy, with the schools, systems, and periods, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan,⁶⁰ for the philosophy of the Upanishads, the Yoga system of Patañjali, and the Advaita Vedānta of Śaṅkara, also Paul Deussen,⁶¹ for the latter, who emphasises the continuity between the Upanishads and him. These studies are mentioned in the pertinent chapters. The same applies to the literature on Neoplatonism, such as John Dillon's (and colleague's) studies on Theurgic Neoplatonism⁶², Over the recent decades Neoplatonism has been recognised and appraised as a profoundly spiritual philosophy, associated with 'theurgic' and meditative practices. These sources facilitate this study. Werner Beierwaltes wrote fine presentations of Plotinus' metaphysics⁶³, on Platonism and Christianity,⁶⁴ and on the reception of Neoplatonism.⁶⁵ Special studies exist on the Neoplatonic sources of

⁵⁹ Von Glasenapp, H. (1974). *Die Philosophie der Inder*, (3rd ed.), Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag.

⁶⁰ Radhakrishnan, S. (2008), *Indian Philosophy* (2 vols.), (2nd rev. ed.), New Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press. [first publ. 1923].

⁶¹ Deussen, P. (1906). *Das System des Vedānta. Nach dem Brahma-Sūtras des Bādarāyana und dem Kommentare des Cankara über dieselben als ein Compendium der Dogmatik des Brahmanismus vom Standpunkte des Cankara aus*, Leipzig: F. A Brockhaus (Reprint: Elibrin Classics, 2005).

⁶² Clarke, E. C., Dillon, J. M, and Hershbell, J. P. (ed., transl., introd., and ann.). (2003). *Iamblichus: De Mysteriis*, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature.

⁶³ Beierwaltes, W. (1991), *Selbsterkenntnis und Erfahrung der Einheit. Plotins Enneade V.1. Text, Übersetzung, Interpretation, Erläuterungen*. Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann.

⁶⁴ Beierwaltes, W. (2001). *Platonismus im Christentum*, Frankfurt a. M.: Vittorio Klostermann

⁶⁵ Beierwaltes, W. (1985) *Das Denken des Einen. Studien zur neuplatonischen Philosophie und ihrer Wirkungsgeschichte*. Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann

Orthodox theology and spirituality, such as by David Bradshaw⁶⁶ and on the affinity of Neoplatonism and Vedānta, as by Mar Gregorios [Paulos Verghese],⁶⁷ are important to this investigation too. Reference to Yoga has been facilitated in recent years by the work of Georg Feuerstein⁶⁸ who provides access to a range of scripture of Yoga – including those of Tantra - in translation, with commentaries, and on Buddhist reception of elements of Yoga, for comparison, as well as recently by James Mallinson and Mark Singleton.⁶⁹ For Tantra, Lilian Silburn⁷⁰ may be mentioned as pioneering author. These authors clarify some issues that are at the basis of this thesis of reception of Yoga, in conjunction with a strongly Upanishadic (early Vedāntic) religious philosophical interpretation, that was of interest to the Platonic tradition, especially Neoplatonism and Neopythagoreanism, and is reflected in their literature. These points are: (1) that Yoga's forms of practice and mode of life go far back in time, and may be related to ascetics mentioned in the early Rg-Veda (12th BCE), (2), that it evolved a set of eight steps, early on, as which it was codified Patañjali (by the 2nd BCE, or the 4th CE) in his Yoga Sutra (Pātañjalayogaśāstra), (3) of its interpretation in a modified Shamkhya philosophy by him, and (4) the reinterpretation of Yoga in the commentaries of the Vedāntic tradition, as it emerged in Śaṅkara's commentary, and (5), the emergence of Tantra–Yoga, which appears to have left a mark on nascent Hesychasm, from the 6th century CE onwards. This helps to trace some details of practice of Hesychasm into early Tantra, which would otherwise remain meaningless. The specific eight steps codified from earlier traditions by Patañjali, are however, especially important for this thesis, because they will be shown to exist in Hesychasm, as a set, in some tension with 'Tantric' features, like Mantra-Prayer, which account for differences in Hesychasm, up to the present.

Neoplatonism has been studied intensely from about the mid-twentieth century on. Arthur Hillary Armstrong's introduction into the metaphysical cosmology of the founder of

⁶⁶ Bradshaw, D. (2004). *Aristotle East and West – Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom*, Cambridge: CUP.

⁶⁷ Mar Gregorios [Verghese, P.] (ed.). (2002). *Neoplatonism and Indian Philosophy*, Albany: State University of New York.

⁶⁸ Feuerstein, G. (1998). *The Yoga Tradition - Its History, Literature, Philosophy and Practise*, Prescott: Hohm Press.

⁶⁹ Mallinson, J. and Singleton, M. (2017). *Roots of Yoga*, London: Penguin Classics.

⁷⁰ Silburn, L. (1988). *Kuṇḍalinī. The Energy of the Depths. A Comprehensive Study Based on the Scriptures of Nondualistic Kashmir Shaivism* (transl. by J. Gontier), New York: SUNY Press

Neoplatonism, Plotinus, shows it with clarity.⁷¹ A detailed presentation of the system of Plotinus, with references to Plato and Aristotle, is given by Jean-Marc Narbonne.⁷² They contributed to end a long neglect and derision of Neoplatonism as being a 'mystical' aberration from the purported rationalism of Platonism and Aristotelianism. This was directed especially to Theurgic Neoplatonism that was rejected for its philosophy of religious ritual and experience. Commented editions of its main work, by Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, facilitated the study and reception of Theurgic theory.⁷³ It comprises reflections on the role of the soul,⁷⁴ the body, and on spiritual phenomena.⁷⁵ Hesychastic authors, especially Palamas, drew on this theory. For research on Late Neoplatonic spiritual practice, organisation, life and theory, the works of Polymnia Athanassiadi are important. Her translation of Damascius' history of the last Neoplatonists⁷⁶ provides valuable information for our interest. She also researched Theurgy, with its sources and communities.⁷⁷ Her research allows us to contextualise the intensive reception of Yogic meditation, including its Vedantic interpretation, by spiritually engaged Neoplatonic academics and communities in Late Antiquity.

2.2. Editions

Access to Hesychasm has been much facilitated by John Meyendorff's critical translation and edition of Palamas' *Triads in Defence of the Holy Hesychasts*.⁷⁸ He presents the Greek text with annotations and translation into French. A selection of chapters from the

⁷¹ Armstrong, A. H., (1989), *L'architecture de l'univers intelligible dans la philosophie de Plotin. Une étude analytique et historique*. Ottawa: Éditions de l'Université d'Ottawa. [original: (1940), *The Architecture of the Intelligible Universe in the Philosophy of Plotinus*. London: Cambridge University Press].

⁷² Narbonne, J.-M., (1993), *Plotin. Les deux matières [Ennéade II, 4 (21)]*, Paris : Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin.

⁷³ Clarke, E. C., Dillon, J. M. and Hershbell, J. P. (Transl., introd. and notes). (2003). *Iamblichus: de Mysteriis*, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature.

⁷⁴ Shaw, G. (1995). *Theurgy and the Soul – The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus*, University Park, PA.: Pennsylvania State University Press.

⁷⁵ Shaw, G. (2015). Taking the Shape of the Gods – A Theurgic Reading of Hermetic Rebirth. *Aries – Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism*, 15, 136 – 169. p. 144f.

⁷⁶ Athanassiadi, P. (1999). *Damascius – The Philosophical History* (text with translation and notes), Athens: Apameia Cultural Association.

⁷⁷ Athanassiadi, P. (Ed.). (2015). *Mutations of Hellenism in Late Antiquity*, Farnham: Ashgate Publ.

⁷⁸ Meyendorff, J. (Ed.) (1959). *Grégoire Palamas: Défense des saints hésychastes – Introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes*. Louvain: Université Catholique

Triads, translated into English, has been based on this edition.⁷⁹ Of the Greek edition of Palamas' works by Panayotis Chrestou⁸⁰ five of six volumes have been published. The only comprehensive, bilingual, edition of Palamas' works has been made and edited by Ettore Perrella and a team of specialists, in Greek and Italian.⁸¹

3. Methodology and Theory

3.1. Systemic Theory of Syncretism and the Genesis of Hesychasm

Setting out with Hesychasm as conceptualised by St. Gregory Palamas, its genesis will be investigated here in the perspective of Systemic Theory of Syncretism. A coherent formation of meditation practices – as a set – and of related concepts - is observable, over centuries. This implies that they are not an accumulation of random features but existed as a meaningful configuration from early on. Early mentions of salient features of embodied practice and symbolism indicate a 'system' of Hesychasm, even when not all features are described together in the texts. Palamas' theoretical exposition of Hesychasm in philosophical and theological terms, especially of theurgic Neoplatonism, in connection with his references to Hesychast practice, as existing since Biblical times, indicates that essential features of Hesychasm have likely originated early on. No satisfactory explanation for the origin of the set of practices of Hesychasm has yet been presented. The investigation of the meaning and genesis of Hesychasm here will be

⁷⁹ Gendle, N. (Transl.). (1983). *Gregory Palamas – The Triads*, [a selection of writings from the Triads], (Introduction by J. Meyendorff). Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press.

⁸⁰ Chrestou, P. K. et alii (Eds.). (1962-1992). *Ἡσυχαστικὰ ἔργα τοῦ ἁγίου Γρηγορίου Παλαμά* (5. vols.). Thessaloniki.

⁸¹ Perrella, E. (Ed.). (2003). *Gregorio Palamas. Atto e Luce Divina. Scritti Filosofici e Teologici* (testo greco a fronte) (Intr., trad., annot. and app., by Perrella, E. in collaboration with Zambon, M., Georgopoulos, S., and Greselin, E.). Milano: Bompiani.

- Perrella, E. (Ed.) (2005). *Gregorio Palamas. Dal Sovraessenziale all'Essenza. Confutazioni, discussioni, scritti confessionali, documenti dalla prigionia fra i Turchi* (testo Graeco a fronte). (Intr., transl., annot. and app. by Perrella, E. with Meletiadis, M.), Milano: Bompiani.

- Perrella, E. (Ed.). (2006. 2014). *Gregorio Palamas. Che Cos'è l'Ortodossia. Capitoli, scritti ascetici, lettere, omelie* (testo Graeco a fronte). (Introd., transl., annot. and app. by Perrella, E. with Costalonga, C., Lamastra, L., Greselin, E. and Georgopoulos, S.). Milano: Bompiani.

directed at its classic form, as described by Palamas, and as endorsed by the Orthodox Church.

I will trace the development of Hesychasm through different cultural, philosophical, and religious contexts by the means of the Syncretism Theory, developed by Ulrich Berner,⁸² with some extensions, owing to the inclusion of further features into this model. His theory of syncretism is based on the understanding of religions as dynamic systems. This view clarifies that religions are neither understood as primarily doctrinal systems, nor as mere assemblages of practices and beliefs conditioned by social factors. In the view of Syncretism Theory religions behave as 'living systems', minding about their coherence, reflecting auto-poetically upon themselves, interacting with their environment and with other religious system. Hereby they demarcate their boundaries – their 'Gestalt' – and engage in exchange with others, adopting elements, where deficits are felt, and elements or complexes of other religious are recognised as compatible. On this basis they adopt them and integrate them into the own system. Hereby religions develop and change, while yet maintaining the continuity of identity. This process of syncretism can be well observed for Orthodoxy, in its development and theological integration of Hesychasm by St. Gregory Palamas. The fact that Palamas' Hesychast theology raised severe intra-Orthodox controversy, in his days, may also be due to this systemic dynamism. In a systemic perspective, these are sure symptoms of systemic change and development.

A systemic view of Hesychasm rests on the assumption that its set of embodied forms of meditative practice is significant both as to the single elements, and to their relation to the comprehensive system. Following the definition, that a system is more than the sum of its parts, the entirety of what makes up Hesychasm is significant, as a complex of practices, perceptions, aisthesis, phenomena, experiences and of theory. The comprehensive system determines the meaning of each of its constitutive elements. These in turn have their histories and origins, that are included, consciously or unconsciously, and continue to be effective within the system. This means that both the 'synchronic' view of the system, as it presents itself, or as it is presented by its authoritative authors, like Palamas, is relevant to its understanding, and, that a 'diachronic' view on its genesis must also be included. For the understanding of Palamas this means, that while his explication of Hesychasm is fundamental to its understanding,

⁸² Berner, U. (1982). *Untersuchungen zur Verwendung des Synkretismus-Begriffes*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrasowitz.

it must be assumed that the complex of Hesychasm comprises more elements of meaning, both theoretically and practically, than what he was aware of. Here the genesis of Hesychasm comes in. It discloses elements and frames of meaning of which Palamas may have been unaware.

Theory of Syncretism provides systematic means to understand processes of merging of divergent religious traditions and elements. Its proponent, U. Berner, stated that such mergers can happen at the level of elements of a system, where elements from another system become absorbed into the receiving system without altering it substantially. In this case the elements lose their original systemic definition inasmuch it differs from the new system. The elements absorbed may undergo alterations of meaning and identifications with already present elements of the receiving system.

A single element of a religion which is introduced into another can be compared to a loanword that does not change the structure or grammar of the recipient language. The structural (or grammatic) aspect of a language is far more resilient to change than its vocabulary, as the English language shows. Loanwords are adopted to fill in lacunae, or to facilitate conceptual differentiations on a semantic level. Changes in grammar usually arise out of protracted language contact. In the case of 'creolization' a substrate language superseded by an invading language tends to make its speakers omit the linguistic features alien to their original language. Features of the superseded language sometimes emerge in the creole, as a simplified version, as the Afrikaans language shows.

Borrowing also happens at structural level. Structural borrowing affects the 'grammar' and structure of a religion. A received element may affect the whole system. Syncretistic mergers can happen at different levels of religious systems. They are facilitated if recourse to a common superordinate system of reference⁸³ of mutual understanding is possible. Creolization is a possible outcome in such borrowing. 'Creolization' means that some but not all 'structural' features - theoretical meanings and connotational, systemic links – are adopted and become effective in the recipient system, usually in a simplified form. This may be assumed for Hesychasm, as will be discussed.

Berner points out that syncretistic processes follow a rule of systemic consistency. Of two involved systems, one is usually the dominant one, incorporating elements of another. This can modify the original system considerably. He explains that according to

⁸³ Berner, U. (1982). *Untersuchungen zur Verwendung des Synkretismus-Begriffes*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrasowitz, p. 108f.

systems' theory non-material systems, like the symbolic systems of culture, religion, philosophy, or aesthetics have some intrinsic tendency to regulate, to restore and to complete themselves⁸⁴ as is described by Niklas Luhmann, with the key words 'autopoiesis', 'self-regulation' and 'auto-referentiality'.⁸⁵

The importance of the entire system for the understanding of its components, has been established in classical Structuralism. Dan Sperber states that "the relations between elements, and not the elements themselves define a structure".⁸⁶ He quotes Levy-Strauss here, who stated:

Firstly, a structure shows the characteristics of a system. It consists of elements which are so arranged that an alteration to any one of these brings about an alteration of all the other elements of the system [in transl.].⁸⁷

Levi-Strauss showed that the understanding of 'syncretism' as 'bricolage',⁸⁸ that is a random combination of elements for practical purposes, fails the systemic logic of adoptions from heterogenous sources. This would be so if Hesychasm had been the product of purely pragmatic adoptions of heterogeneous elements of practice from Sufism or Yoga. Its 'syncretistic' features - which will be analysed here – would thus be questionable as to consistency with Christian Orthodox theology.

Claude Levi-Strauss however showed that what may appear as incoherent assemblage of elements of heterogenous origin, can well follow a structural logic of thought that is not motivated pragmatically, but by symbolic, imaginal association. This 'structural logic' can be identified in the philosophical interpretations given to Yoga's elements of practice and experience through formations of thought, of Vedānta, of Neoplatonism, and of Orthodoxy. They must have been mutually 'intelligible', so that a

⁸⁴ Preyer, G. (2006). Selbstregulierung ohne Steuerung. Zu Helmut Willke: Symbolische Systeme. Grundriss einer soziologischen Theorie. *Rechtstheorie* 3 / 2005, [publ. September 2006]: Verlag Duncker & Humblot. http://www.philosophia-online.de/mafo/heft2007-1/Prey_Wil.pdf

⁸⁵ Geulen, E. (2008). Selbstregulierung und Geistesgeschichte: Max Benses Strategie. *Modern Language Notes (MLN)*, (German edition) 123 (3), 591-612. John Hopkins University Press. <http://muse.jhu.edu/login?auth=0&type=summary&url=/journals/mln/v123/123.3.geulen.pdf>

⁸⁶ Sperber, D. (1973). Der Strukturalismus in der Anthropologie. In F. Wahl (Ed.), *Einführung in den Strukturalismus*, (pp. 181–258). Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, p. 237. [Original: (1968) Paris: Ed. Du Seuil]

⁸⁷ Lévi-Strauss, C. (1967). *Strukturelle Anthropologie*, Frankfurt : Suhrkamp, p. 302, [Original: (1958) *Anthropologie structurale*, Paris.]. Loc. cit: Sperber, D. (1973). Der Strukturalismus in der Anthropologie. In F. Wahl, (Ed.). (1973). *Einführung in den Strukturalismus*, (pp. 181–258). Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, p. 237.

⁸⁸ Lévi-Strauss, C. (1962). *La pensée sauvage*, Paris: Plon.

complex of meditation practices and related concepts and perceptions, that they have in common, could be received.

The genesis of Hesychasm in the perspective of Syncretism Theory implies, that the complex of significant elements of Hesychasm, that comprise both 'semantic', singular elements and their organization in the characteristic structure of Hesychast mediation, were thus involved in this reception, with its intermediate steps. It included experiential and aesthetic elements. It implies that the original identity of this complex can be discerned, even in its present integrated state, as received form of Orthodox meditation. The transformations discernible in the process – that continues up to the present – can be explained on this theoretical basis. In this view we can note that Hesychasm has remained indeed a quite distinct component of the system of the Orthodox Church as a complex of social organisation, of liturgical ritual, and of time, of the Church. This systemic isolation indicates that it has probably not been generated by the Church, but rather has been adopted into it.

The perspective of Systems' Theory also enables an understanding of how this complex, which was to become 'Hesychasm', has maintained its structural identity through its reception across different religious and cultural contexts. Such migration across religious boundaries presupposes an element of structural coherence and consistency. 'Systemic coherence' is a property of such systems themselves. They are important in the investigation of phenomena of syncretism. Ulrich Berner describes different processes involved therein:

A new system can come to exist when the boundary between two systems is removed, and the heterogeneous elements become parts of a new encompassing system. This process might be called 'syncretism on the level of systems'. On the other hand, the boundary can also be reinforced if one system redefines its relations to another system, to delimitate its own realm from it. ... The encounter of two systems can also introduce new elements so that the system concerned is transformed. This process could be called 'synthesis'.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Berner, U. (1982). *Untersuchungen zur Verwendung des Synkretismus-Begriffs*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, p. 85.

In Hesychasm, 'syncretism on the level of systems' can be observed as well as 'synthesis'.

Berner identifies a third feature: When an element from one system is practised in the context of another religion, the boundary between the two systems has become permeable. The introduced element, found to be sufficiently compatible, can exert a defining power of its own on the receiving system during its assimilation, resulting in what Berner calls 'harmonising relativism'.⁹⁰ It appears that critics of Hesychasm, especially from outside of the Orthodox Church, have focussed on this aspect.

The comparison to 'creolization' may be applied at this point. In religious syncretism foreign religious elements are introduced, if they are perceived as enriching, suitable and as filling empty spaces.⁹¹ They must be intelligible and found to be systematically compatible. Single elements usually have their systematic (doctrinal) meanings and connotations, which are thereby also imported, sometimes unawares. Processes of syncretism as 'creolization' happen, especially when doctrinal control has softened up, or in transitional, and transformative, stages of development.⁹² Conditions of 'permeability' appear to have existed in the formative stage of Hesychasm, as will be discussed in detail in the following chapters.

Following the perspective of Semiotics,⁹³ the elements of Hesychast bodily practice and experience are also understood to be significant, and as 'readable'. Their relative uniformity and stability attest to it. The individual experiences and perceptions that are characteristic of Hesychasm verify them. The inclusion of the 'body' in this systemic approach reflects this insight. It correlates with the sensitivity to the role of the body, that emerged in culture and in science of religion in recent years, as expressed in the programme of Aesthetics of Religion.⁹⁴

Hesychasm's character as a symbolic and structured embodied meditation, is important for the understanding of its genesis, because significant elements of practice remain sustained when a meditation practice moves from the context of one religion to that of another. This requires that they can be 'read', by the new, receiving religion, and

⁹⁰ Idem, p. 98f.

⁹¹ Idem, p.95f.

⁹² Idem, pp. 124ff.

⁹³ Eco, U. (1976). *A Theory of Semiotics*, Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press

⁹⁴ Wilke, A. (2008). Religion/en, Sinne und Medien: Forschungsfeld Religionsästhetik und das Museum of World Religions (Taipeh). In A. Wilke and Guggenmos, E.-M. (Eds.). *Im Netz des Indra – das Museum of World Religions, sein buddhistisches Dialogkonzept und die neue Disziplin Religionsästhetik*, (pp. 205 – 294). Münster: Lit Verlag, p. 244.

its philosophy. If the religious-philosophical system of origin and the receiving system converge on salient features, the semiotic embodied practice will remain meaningful in the new context. It will thus be understood and preserved. This means that the continuity of a set of rules of meditation can remain unchanged through their transmission from one religious, philosophical, and cultural context to the next, if the receiving system can integrate the meanings embodied in such practices - or to put it metaphorically: if the receiving system can 'read' the encoded messages and interpret them fittingly.

This process may never be exhaustive, because embodied semiotic practices may contain elements that are not understood by its supporting system of philosophy, religion, and culture. These elements may have been acquired in previous layers of formation. When such practice migrates from one religious-philosophical context to another, by conversion or by instruction, and the method comes to be practised in the context of a new religion, and is found to be fitting and meaningful there, then it may be modified according to the concepts of the receiving system.

This implies that such migration may only happen with difficulty, because to learn a complex set of embodied meditation requires an essential understanding of its meaning in its original religious and philosophical context. The extensive agreements between Hesychasm and Yoga which have been noticed can hardly be accounted for by selective copying. The set of symbolic practices of Hesychasm, in view of its resemblance to Yoga, must be regarded as a coherent complex of embodied meaning. The specific spiritual perceptions attained thereby must be considered as 'meaningful aisthesis'.

Applied to the history of Hesychasm, this supports the view that its Yogic elements,⁹⁵ such as Prāṇāyāma,⁹⁶ have manifested the power to re-establish themselves in the context of Orthodox Christianity, not merely as 'techniques of the body' but also with (some of) their attached meanings. Conform to the view of Theory of Syncretism that adopted elements tend to bring about doctrinal developments, resulting from their assimilation, Palamas' doctrine of the divine 'uncreated energies' may be understood as such effect. The integration of these ideas, concepts, and practices into Orthodox theology, and endorsed practice of the Church, can be understood as an instance of 'autopoiesis'. Awareness that Hesychasm might be related to non-Christian forms of embodied meditation, has persisted in Orthodoxy in Hesychast literature.

⁹⁵ Baier, K. (1998). *Yoga auf dem Weg nach Westen: Beiträge zur Rezeptionsgeschichte*. Würzburg: Königshaus und Neumann, pp. 19ff.

⁹⁶ Gentschy, M. (1989). *Yoga und christliche Spiritualität – ein Werkbuch*, Munich: J. Pfeiffer, p. 208.

This process of reception across the boundaries of religions and cultures, took place, as will be shown, in a time when large-scale conversions or 'flow' from non-Christian religious and spiritual formations happened, both by individuals and by communities or groups. This was facilitated by cultural ideals as of Hellenism that fostered trans-religious reception and syncretism, based on universalism. In this period, we may assume that 'dual religious practice' was widespread, either in the sense of 'double practice', as is observable at present in regions where the influence of different major cultures and their dominant religions interact.⁹⁷

As to the pathway of this reception, it is assumed in this study that the initial step towards the formation of the 'Hesychast' meditation was the reception of Yoga into Neoplatonism and its associated philosophies and spiritual practices, which had been fusing from the 3rd century onwards. The next step, most likely, was the reception of this complex of practice and theory into Christian Orthodox spirituality, with its subsequent theological integration and ecclesiastical endorsement, completed by the effort of St. Gregory Palamas. The conditions for this reception across these religious and philosophical horizons in inter-cultural exchange, and the modifications and innovations brought about by this syncretistic process will be considered.

Recalling the figure of the 'excluded origin', of structuralist theory of semiotics, it implies that the origins and genesis of this complex - of significant and coherent theory and practices of Hesychasm - may well be traced to non-Christian origins, even if the traces thereof in Hesychast memory are few. The figure has two theoretical issues attached to it: the first is, that a system does not have to know about its sources, or to remember its origins – especially if these are outside of the present system. The second is, that it has been argued in Structuralism, that with the elements of a system defining each other mutually, factors preceding the development of the system, should remain outside of consideration. The figure of the 'excluded origin' is sometimes justified for practical reasons, when research is limited to the elements of discourse.⁹⁸

The figure of 'excluded origin' has two referents. The one is historical: if the origin lies outside the present system, and has no accepted representation in it, as Judaism and

⁹⁷ Kleinhempel, U. R. (2017). Covert Syncretism: The Reception of South Africa's Sangoma Practise and Spirituality by 'Double Faith' in the Contexts of Christianity and of Esotericism. *Open Theology* (De Gruyter), 2017, issue 1 (3), 642-661. <https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2017-0050>

⁹⁸ Von Stuckrad, K. (2003). Discursive Study of Religion. From States of the Mind to Communication and Action. *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, 15, pp. 255 – 271, p. 268.

the *Old Testament* has in Christianity, for instance. The Middle Platonic figures of 'trinitarian' thought are not commemorated in Christian theology as source of doctrine. The other referent is that which lies outside of 'concepts' of a system. It is a special feature of Hesychasm, and of Palamas' theology, to include these origins, by means of an 'experiential' interpretation of foundational images, such as Jesus' Transfiguration on Mt. Thabor, or of the theological notion of 'uncreated energies' of God, that can be experienced beyond words, but by aisthesis and inner experience too. While the experiential sources are thus included, the historic origins of Hesychasm outside of Christian tradition are not remembered, save for marginal traces. They must be understood as a case of 'excluded origin'. (The figure of 'excluded origin' contributed to the Poststructuralist opening of the concept of 'system' to include 'aisthesis' and 'experience' as constitutive factors interacting with the systemic.)

Processes of syncretistic reception can stimulate the receiving system to spur new growth. The full integration may take time and involve controversy. E. A. Kattan points to the development of the theology of 'icons' - as means of mediation of the Divine - which was adopted as official doctrine of the Orthodox Church at the Second Council of Nicaea in 787, after thorough theological debate.⁹⁹

The theological legitimization of the icon constitutes, in my opinion, the most important element made by Christian theology to 'baptize' a pagan element. [...] the theological legitimization of the images stimulates to a more positive assessment of certain facts of paganism. For this legitimization does not hesitate to give a Christian dimension to one of the most influential pagan ideas, namely that a genuine relationship with God might be established by means of an image or a sculpture. [...] As a Christian phenomenon open to paganism, what has the Byzantine icon to do with modern culture? I believe

⁹⁹ St. John of Damascus, (early 8th century C. E.). *On Holy Images*. Ed.: Halsall, P., (Ed.). (1996). *Mediaeval Sourcebook: John of Damascus, In Defense of Icons, c. 730*, Fordham University. <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/johndam-icons.asp>

that the answer ought to be sought in the fact that this culture is inclined to appropriate and integrate the multidimensional legacy of paganism.¹⁰⁰

Kattan's fundamental assessment is interesting, both as to the specific content and, beyond this, by outlining a structural phenomenon of Pagan-Christian syncretism in Antiquity. The case here is the process of syncretistic reception, and active assimilation, of a central doctrine of (theurgic) Antique Paganism, as extant in Graeco-Egyptian syncretism. It is supported by details, such as that an icon needs to be blessed,¹⁰¹ to convey the presence of the saints, the angels or of Christ not only by image, as in a parable, but also in a mode of reality. This echoes the conviction of Pagan Antiquity that divine statues needed to be consecrated, in order to be 'inhabited' by the deity, as affirmed by Damascius: "Heraiscius had the natural gift of distinguishing between animate and inanimate sacred statues".¹⁰²

For the thesis of the genesis of Hesychasm in a syncretistic process, evidence is important that its central idea existed in Neoplatonic spirituality. This exists by the following testimony: Damascius, as the most prominent of late Neoplatonic, consciously Pagan philosophers, describes the idea of 'hesychia' with concepts that agree with those of Orthodox Hesychasm, in anthropological and theological regard. He wrote, quoting the late Neoplatonic Pagan philosopher Isidoros of Alexandria (c. 450 – 520 C. E.):

He used to say that when the soul is in holy prayer [...] it concentrates on itself; [...] withdrawing from logical into intuitive thinking [...] it is possessed by the divine and drifts into an extraordinary serenity, befitting gods rather than men.¹⁰³

The full quote will be discussed in detail in chapter 9. One may add the idea of sensoriform luminous perceptions of the divine. These have been described for Pagan 'theurgy' by Iamblichus of Chalcis / Syria (240 – 325). They are documented in Yoga. In Hesychast

¹⁰⁰ Kattan, A. E. (2010). The Byzantine Icon – A Bridge between Theology and Modern Culture. In: A. E. Kattan and F. A. Georgi (Eds.). *Thinking Modernity – Towards a Reconfiguration of the Relationship between Orthodox Theology and Modern Culture*, pp. 165 – 178. Balamand, Lebanon; Munster, Germany: St. John of Damascus Institute of Theology, University of Balamand; Westphalian Wilhelm University, p. 170f.

¹⁰¹ Fischer, H. (1989). *Die Ikone: Ursprung – Sinn – Gestalt*, Freiburg: Herder Verlag., p. 206.

¹⁰² Damascius, *The Philosophical History*, fr. nr. 76. Ed.: Athanassiadi, P. (1999). *Damascius – The Philosophical History* (text with translation and notes), Athens: Apameia Cultural Association, p. 195.

¹⁰³ Damascius, *The Philosophical History*, fr. no. 22, Ibidem, p. 99f.

meditation such experiences became connected to Biblical testimonies of spiritual light.

The concept of 'syncretism' is controversial for different reasons. Sebastian Schüler observed that the concept of 'syncretism' first came into disrepute for its connotations of (doctrinal) 'impurity', and then for its reference to a normative systematic concept of religious doctrine so that the concept of 'syncretism' became virtually dropped in science of religion.¹⁰⁴ The two objections reflect opposing evaluations of the same understanding of the concept of 'syncretism'. The tension between dynamism of religions and their doctrinal normativity should be understood as a manifestation of their character as 'living systems'. To reject the concept on the grounds of disputing the notion of 'normativity', would amount to disputing the systemic character of any religion. It appears as short-sighted 'deconstructionism'. Regardless of fluid and changing boundaries and shapes, religions are recognised as such by their adherents and by others. A systemic understanding of 'religion' accounts for consistency and for change. All religions have 'normativity', and thus properties of 'self-reflection', 'self-concept' and 'self-regulation', by which they delimitate themselves from others, whether based on written canonical scripture, or on an orally transmitted body of lore and sacred tradition, or on rituals. This is to be understood as a dialectical relation, characteristic of living systems. (It is a point that members of religious communities often grasp intuitively, as they engage in their religious system, in the polarity between 'ortho-doxy' as well as 'ortho-praxis' and development as well as adjustment and innovation.) Observing Evangelical movements, Schüler, rediscovered the notion of 'syncretism' as an analytical perspective, connoting it with 'religious hybridity'.¹⁰⁵

To speak of 'syncretism' might raise doctrinal concerns. These may be assuaged by recalling, that 'syncretism' properly understood, does not mean as 'mish-mash' of creeds, but denotes the reception of elements of other religions, and (inevitably) of philosophies, in a systematic fashion, by which a receiving religion sustains itself, inspiring theology to new growth through the integration of these new elements. In this process the integrated elements may unfold a life of their own, providing stimuli and acting

¹⁰⁴ Schüler, S. (2013). 'Sie beten, als ob alles von Gott abhängt, und sie leben, als ob alles von ihnen abhängt' – Posttraditionale Vergemeinschaftung und religiöse Produktivität in einer evangelikalen Gebetsbewegung. In: P. A. Berger, K. Hock and T. Klie (Eds.), *Religionshybride: Religion in posttraditionalem Kontexten*, (pp. 243-267). Wiesbaden: Springer VS., p. 245.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-19578-0_14

¹⁰⁵ Ibidem, p. 245

upon the receiving system which accommodates them, by new development, thereby reasserting itself.

The idea of Christianity as a 'new creation' is expressed in the *New Testament*.¹⁰⁶ The process of syncretism is thus not one of alienation, or of estrangement from the roots, but rather as incentive to new sprouts from these very roots (as the metaphor suggests). Syncretism should be understood as a dynamic factor in the growth of religions and in the unfolding of their inherent capabilities. More particularly without reception of Neoplatonism Orthodox theology would not have become what it is, and without the integration of Yoga Hesychasm might not have developed, to become a hallmark of Orthodox identity.

3.2. Inter-Textuality: Hesychasm at the Crossroads of Philosophies and Theologies

In a multi-religious environment, forms of religious practice may be shared by different religions. Thereby the respective theological interpretations can influence each other, leading to a double determination of the rites or forms of religious practice. In this case the phenomenon of 'inter-textuality' occurs.¹⁰⁷ This means for the interpretation of a religion, that the 'primary text' is modified by the knowledge of another set of interpretation, the 'secondary text'. The interpretations interact, with effects on their respective (theological) systems. Hereby new understandings can arise, integrating meanings of both, thus creating a 'new text'.¹⁰⁸ The concept of 'intertextuality' arises from post-structuralist theory of literature; it is established in literary studies.¹⁰⁹ It takes the structuralist insight, that significant elements (of perception, of meaning, of systems of knowledge and belief, constitute systems, in which the meaning of every

¹⁰⁶ *Gal.* 6:15

¹⁰⁷ Kleinhempel, U. R., (2016). Intertextualität - Helferin bei der Predigt. Das Gespräch, das Texte miteinander führen“, in: *Korrespondenzblatt*, 131 (1). 43-44. (Eds. Pfarrer- und Pfarrerinnenverein in der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche in Bayern).

https://www.academia.edu/35500260/Intertextualit%C3%A4t_-_Helferin_bei_der_Predigt._Das_Gespr%C3%A4ch_das_Texte_miteinander_f%C3%BChren

¹⁰⁸ Vögele, B. (1998). *Intertextualität“ - Entstehung und Kontext eines problematische Begriffs*, Vienna: Univ. of Vienna, p. 21ff. https://germanistik.univie.ac.at/fileadmin/user_upload/inst.../voegel.rtf

¹⁰⁹ Kristeva, J. (1967). *Bakhtine, le mot, le dialogue et le roman*. [Republ.] In J. Ihwe (Ed.). (1972). *Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik. Ergebnisse und Perspektiven*. vol. 3: *Zur linguistischen Basis der Literaturwissenschaft II.*, Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, pp. 345-375

element is determined (primarily) in relation to other elements of the system, to further conclusions. This systemic character, it is believed, precedes individual deliberate consciousness. Yet it is dynamic, by its interaction with experience and perception, but especially by its interrelation with other texts. It is thus perceived as being in constant movement, reinstating itself in view of others and undergoing modification.¹¹⁰

The approach of 'inter-textuality' can be applied to non-literary arts¹¹¹ as well. The luminous spiritual perceptions in Hesychasm, became subject to 'inter-textuality' of a Biblical and a Neoplatonic interpretation, when their occurrence in both was recognized. Inter-textuality also applies to cosmological and anthropological concepts, such as 'intellect', 'spirit', 'theurgy', etc. It is a core phenomenon of Graeco-Egyptian syncretism. Consequently, it will have been effective in the reception of Yoga here. The perspective of 'inter-textuality' can be applied to Palamas' theory of Hesychasm too. At times, his terminology oscillates between different 'con-texts' to which he refers, raising their respective connotations. Some authors that he quotes, such as Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, may have used inter-textuality deliberately, which gave rise to questions about their doctrinal identity. Hesychasm's features of inter-textuality can provide leads to its genesis.

These processes of fusion, of inter-textuality and of syncretism, did not make Orthodox Christianity in any way less pure. In view of syncretism theory, it may be established, to which degree the receiving system, thus Christian Orthodoxy, was able to reassert itself essentially through such processes of reception. Thus, new elements were integrated into the system with the theoretical means at disposal of Orthodox theologians. Theological debate establishes to which degree this succeeds. Owing to the embodiment of meaning by some practices, this elicited new developments in Orthodox theology, when they came to theoretical awareness as in the Hesychast controversy led by Palamas and his opponents, to accommodate the new elements with the inherent systemic properties.

The fierce resistance to his creative theological integration of Hesychasm, by leading Orthodox theologians of his time, testifies to the novelty of his Hesychast theology. It indicates an acute awareness that this theology changed Orthodox theology as a system. This was expressed by Barlaam of Calabria (1290 – 1348), Gregory

¹¹⁰ Vögele, B. (1998). *Intertextualität“ - Entstehung und Kontext eines problematische Begriffs*, Vienna: Univ. of Vienna, p. 11ff. https://germanistik.univie.ac.at/fileadmin/user_upload/inst../voegel.rtf

¹¹¹ Graham, A. (2011). *Intertextuality* (2nd ed.), London: Routledge, pp.169ff.

Akindynos (1300 – 1348) and Nicephorus Gregoras (1295 – 1360). They did not engage in Hesychasm, and felt no desire, or the necessity, to integrate this ancient form of meditation, which was practised in the secluded, and sociologically disjunct, communities of some Orthodox monastic traditions, such as those of Mt. Athos, into their theological system of Orthodoxy. They remained keenly aware of its strangeness. The more Barlaam of Calabria learnt about its 'bodily' aspects and phenomena from Hesychast monks, the more alienated he felt by it. He was certainly able to recall the descriptions of similar phenomena from Pagan theurgic literature. His rejection was thus also a philosophical issue. Some elements mentioned by Barlaam are hardly discussed by Palamas. They convey an idea of the range of spiritual and para-normal phenomena recorded and discussed in the Hesychast community of the 14th century. Among these are: "marvellous separations and reunions of the intellect with the soul"¹¹² which Palamas compared to the 'mystical flight' of St. Paul, and, described as 'out-of-body-experience'¹¹³ with the centre of experience being the soul, which is lead beyond intellect and the body.¹¹⁴ Palamas discusses St. Paul's experience frequently, with a view to Hesychast phenomena – integrating them inter-textually by reference to Biblical testimonies. His brief description of the method of Hesychasm mentions the focus on the navel, the role of breathing techniques, the fusion of the transcendent with breathing, and the union of the soul with Christ in the body.¹¹⁵

The perspective of 'inter-textuality' may be applied together with Syncretism Theory to understand changes and developments in a system. Palamas' Hesychast theology can be shown to have developed through recourse to Neoplatonic theory of 'theurgy', and by its inter-textual application to Hesychasm. The long controversy over its acceptance within Orthodoxy and the persisting ecumenical critique of it certainly indicate its systemic novelty. The formal endorsement of Palamas' theology of Hesychasm is thus to be understood as enactment of a 'systemic shift'.

¹¹² Idem

¹¹³ 2. *Corinthians* 12:2-4. Cf. Palamas, *Triads*, I.3.21

¹¹⁴ Palamas, *Triads*, II.3.24

¹¹⁵ Cf. Palamas, *Triads*, I.3.38

3.3. Discourse Theory: Graeco-Roman 'Passages to India' and 'Encounters with Brahmans / Yogis'

The Structuralist insight into the coherence of cultures as systems sensitized researchers to ask about the peculiar 'grammar' of each. Preceding Structuralism, Ruth Benedict inquired in her seminal work about specific values of diverse societies and the way in which these are expressed in ritual and symbolic ways in different cultures.¹¹⁶ C. Lévi-Strauss carried the insight into cultures as systems, to identify symbolic systems which extended beyond the confines of specific cultures to be shared by people of different languages, as in his work on the Amerindians. M. Foucault identified different forms of classification,¹¹⁷ relating the discourses established in such orders of knowledge to issues of power and order in societies.

For our purposes, the awareness of 'cultural discourses' is relevant to assess the meaning and authority of historiographic texts on encounters with Brahman Yogis in Hellenistic and Roman societies. The tales on Alexander the Great have become iconic over centuries, being retold, and retained in cultural awareness – and received by Christian authors of Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Likewise, Philostratos' 3rd century biography of Apollonius of Tyana, a renowned Neopythagorean sage and spiritual master, presents such a discourse on 'pilgrimage to India'. This biography has been belittled as novelistic, miraculous, and unreliable. Its importance however is revealed, when read as a cultural discourse that formulated Roman attitudes towards India, its Brahmans, and Yogis. It should be understood as a programmatic text, endorsing the 'pilgrimage to India', and the reception of the teachings of Brahmans and Yogis, by the authority of Apollonius. It proclaims that Brahman Yoga lay at the source of Pythagorean and Egyptian spiritual wisdom. It promotes the reception of Brahman philosophy of Vedānta, and of Yoga. This book expresses a widely shared 'cultural discourse' in Roman society. Its 'imagination' was certainly connected to the ongoing reception of Yoga and Brahman doctrines, as to be credible to the readership of the time. Traces in literature of Late Antiquity, and the emergence of Hesychasm itself at the end of this period, support this view.

¹¹⁶ Benedict, R. (1934). *Patterns of Culture*, Boston/New York: Houghton Mifflin.

¹¹⁷ Foucault, M. (1966). *Les Mots et les Choses. Une archéologie des sciences humaines*, Paris: Gallimard.

3.4. Theory on the Body in Cultural History

There are good reasons to include the 'bodily' features of Hesychasm into research on its genesis and theory. The 'body' and the 'senses' are not merely instrumental in it, to enact theological propositions or imaginations. They are the site and medium of the Hesychast practice, experience, perception of divinisation, in a dynamic process, as may be shown. Palamas' doctrine of the 'uncreated energies', and his emphasis on their role in perceiving them, shows exactly this. To preclude possible misconceptions here: this is not merely about the 'body' as 'corpus', in its 'material' aspects, but also about the 'living body', which lives by its interrelations with the other systems, of 'intellect' and 'soul', be it in terms of Cartesian dualism, or of Neoplatonic and Patristic ternary models, that have been revived.

The perspective of 'embodiment', with its theoretical attention to the 'body', and to aesthetic experience, reflects a broad cultural 'turn to the body', that has been effective in European and American cultures in recent decades. They have brought forth varied forms of 'culture of the body', in athletics, spirituality, eroticism, health aesthetics and environmental experience. This attention also raised interest in Hesychasm.

The 'turn to the body' has inspired research on somatic factors and patterns in 'meditation research'. This relates to the transformative effect of Hesychasm or Yoga. It is an important element, claimed and emphasised throughout Hesychast literature. Hesychasm does not only consist in a set of meanings ascribed to certain meditative practices. It is also a method and pathway of psycho-physical transformation which leads to a different state of being, and of perception. The Hesychastic tradition - like the Yogic - is unanimous in its assertion that these transformations are qualitative. They lead to outer and inner perceptions of a sensory or sensoriform quality which are identified as 'spiritual'.

In Hesychasm the body is not seen in isolation but as essentially connected to the soul and to intellect, and cannot be juxtaposed against the mind, as in dualistic conceptions, nor as supreme foundational entity. The systemic interrelation of the body with the other systems is a hallmark of Hesychasm, as of Yoga. In their literature the experiences of spiritual aisthesis are distinctly understood as intrinsic perceptions, and not as secondary projections of imaginations. Their non-metaphorical quality is an important point in the Hesychast controversies. Their correlations to similar perceptions,

attained by the pathway of Yoga or of Neoplatonic Theurgy, their agreement and phenomenological delimitations respectively, have been a matter for inter-religious hermeneutics in the formative stages of Hesychasm, and are included in the perspective of Theory of Syncretism on the formation of Hesychasm applied here.

Some authors that have contributed to the study of the 'body' in the 20th century may be mentioned with a view to Hesychasm. The sociologist Norbert Elias conducted studies on the civilisation of the body in the Middle Ages.¹¹⁸ Elias departed from the perspective of History of Ideas by including the realm of culturally defined bodily practise and the meanings attributed to them into the scope of his research. The shift to Cultural History and to special dedication to the bodily and material aspects of culture became influential in the eighties of the 20th century. Shared embodied practises and their meanings have been recognised as an important factor of social cohesion¹¹⁹ and thus of the 'web of culture'.

Marcel Mauss coined the term 'techniques of the body'¹²⁰ to designate culturally specific forms of bodily practices which are transmitted by the web of culture and are understood as relating a person to a specific culture. The work of Michel Foucault¹²¹ has been influential who took special interest in the history of the treatment of 'bodies' in European culture.¹²² He included the body in the 'culture of the self'. Awareness of the body as 'encultured' has influenced 'gender studies' as well as research on the aesthetic expression of the 'embodied self' in recent culture,¹²³ indicating a reciprocal relation between the body and the 'self'. This also applies to Hesychasm. Its embodied practices shape perceptions and concepts, even in the wider Orthodox community.

¹¹⁸ Elias, N. (1969. 1982). *The Civilizing Process, vol. I. The History of Manners, vol. II. State Formation and Civilization*, Oxford: Blackwell. [Original title: (1939). *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation*, 2 vols.).

¹¹⁹ Nash, K. (2001). The 'Cultural Turn' in Social Theory: Towards a Theory of Cultural Politics. *Sociology*, 35 (1), 77–92. (BSA Publications Limited).

https://www.academia.edu/1048046/The_Cultural_Turn_In_Social_Theory_Towards_a_Theory_of_Cultural_Politics

¹²⁰ Mauss, M. (1936). Les techniques du corps. *Journal de Psychologie*, XXXII, (3-4) 1936. [Presentation at the Société de Psychologie on 17th May, 1934].

¹²¹ Foucault, M. (1995). *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books [Original 1975].

¹²² Clever, I. and Ruberg, W. (2014). Beyond Cultural History? The Material Turn, Praxiography and Body History. *Humanities*, 3, 546 – 566. www.mdpi.com/2076-0787/3/4/546/pdf

¹²³ Kleinhempel, U. R. (2019). Der bezeichnete Mensch. *Kontexte* 2019 (1), 10-21 (Eds: Bistum Essen, Dezernat Schule und Hochschule), p. 18f.

3.5. Habitus: Embodied and Enduring Meaning as Key to Hesychasm

The sociologist Pierre Bourdieu took a semiotic approach to reading embodied actions, postures, and modes of self-presentation. He devoted painstaking analysis to embodied expressions of cultural values, practises and status,¹²⁴ designating them as forms of 'habitus'. The concept derives from mediaeval Scholasticism, where it denotes self-reflexive behaviour and attitudes,¹²⁵ and goes back to antiquity.¹²⁶ It was introduced to sociology by M. Weber, to science of religion by W. James and to philosophy by E. Husserl, from whom Bourdieu drew essential inspiration.¹²⁷ A further predecessor is Marcel Mauss who observed, from ethnographic material, that general forms of action, such as walking or marching, are performed in culturally distinct styles, are determined by culture.¹²⁸ This gave rise to his influential concept of 'body techniques'. Bourdieu has discussed habitus variously¹²⁹ and defined it as a set of

systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures... principles that organize and generate practices and representations of an acquired system of generative schemes.¹³⁰

This concept is fruitful to recognise and understand bodily practises, which are formed culturally and are adopted by specific agents. Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' can be applied to Hesychasm as a significant, culturally determined practice. It is learnt in the living tradition of monasticism.

¹²⁴ Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, London: Routledge, [Original: (1979). *La Distinction – critique social du jugement*, Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit].

¹²⁵ Nagamachi, Y. (1997). *Selbstbezüglichkeit und Habitus: die latente Idee der Geistmetaphysik bei Thomas von Aquin*, St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag.

¹²⁶ Moran, D. (2011). Edmund Husserl's Phenomenology of Habituality and Habitus. *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 42 (1), 53 – 77, p. 53.

<https://www.ucd.ie/t4cms/Moran%20Husserls%20Phenomenology%20of%20Habit2011.pdf>

¹²⁷ Idem, p. 13

¹²⁸ Despoix, P. (2010). Afrikanische Silhouetten und Feldfotografie. M. Griaules Beitrag zur Mausschen 'Entdeckung' der Körpertechniken. *NTM Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Wissenschaften, Technik und Medizin*. 18, (4), 523–535. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00048-010-0040-3>

¹²⁹ Bourdieu, P. (1985). The Genesis of the Concepts of Habitus and Field. *Sociocriticism* 2 (2), 11–24.

¹³⁰ Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, p. 53.

Bourdieu tends to eliminate the subjective and cognitive element in Husserl's and Panofsky's concepts of 'habitus', in favour of a conception by which habitus is created by a sociologically and culturally determined 'field' so that it is acquired and practiced rather unconsciously, despite its semiotic significance and readability. This emphasis on the 'field' as generative of habitus has been variously challenged.¹³¹ Bourdieu evidently follows a tradition of determinism in sociology, as represented by E. Durkheim, and by M. Mauss, to whom the social field was the essential determinant of meaning. Bourdieu applies this approach to the interpretation of religious practice in France. What he fails to grasp, is the factor of individual differentiation, and thus of the dynamism of the field, which is owed to its individuals. The impression of a strictly structured and fixed social order emerges, in which the meanings of 'habitus' remains rather set. Husserl and others before Bourdieu however have emphasised the aspect of personal reflexivity in adopting habit, in practising and modifying it: "Habit has to be located between reflexive behaviour and intellectually self-conscious deliberate action. It is not to be understood as something merely mechanical or automatic..."¹³²

The degree to which habit is the result of intentional action, as proposed by M. Merleau-Ponty,¹³³ and the degree to which it is individualised, have been debated. Bourdieu refers back to Erwin Panofsky, who struck on the idea of habitus in his notion of a "collective mentality in the domain of art"¹³⁴ – a concept which can be related to C. Lévi-Strauss' idea of a 'cultural subconscious' ("l'inconscient culturel").¹³⁵ There is some controversy about the extent to which habitus is unconscious and is unconsciously determined by social forces in the tradition of thought about this notion, which are attached to general positions about subjectivity. For Merleau-Ponty habitus was the expression of the individual's existential environment on the body, as "Lebenswelt structuré sur le corps", the existential environment preceding consciousness being expressed in the "schema corporel".¹³⁶

¹³¹ Moran, D. (2011). Edmund Husserl's Phenomenology of Habituality and Habitus, *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*. 42 (1), 53 – 77, p. 54f.

<https://www.ucd.ie/t4cms/Moran%20Husserls%20Phenomenology%20of%20Habit2011.pdf>

¹³² Idem, p. 56f.

¹³³ Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962). *Phenomenology of Perception*. (Transl. C. Smith), London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, [original Ed. (1945)]. *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Paris: Gallimard].

¹³⁴ Panofsky, E. (1967). *Architecture gothique et Pensée scolastique* [transl. from German by P. Bourdieu], Paris: Ed. Minuit.

¹³⁵ Hong, S.-M. (1999). *Habitus, Corps, Domination – Sur certains présupposés philosophiques de la sociologie de Pierre Bourdieu*. Paris: L'Harmattan, p. 45.

¹³⁶ Idem, p. 46.

This aspect of unconscious determination is important for Hesychasm. It supports the interpretation of Hesychasm as autonomous and meaningful embodied *semeiosis* that evolved and was acquired in the Hesychast milieu. For Bourdieu and for Merleau-Ponty the unconscious agency of the entire society expressed itself through the specific *habitus* of its members and milieus, differentiating and identifying them all in a common matrix of culture.¹³⁷

Other, like H. Bergson, insisted on the subject capable of reflection on itself, the “*moi réfléchissant*”, which could transform a daily, unconsciously performed act into an expression of its will and self-consciousness.¹³⁸ Bergson tries to balance the given determination of the subject by a multiplicity of social and cultural forms of expression and perception with the capacity of the spirit of auto-determination and self-reflection.¹³⁹ Limiting the desire for self-comprehension and self-determination, according to Bergson, is ‘time’ in the sense of ‘*durée*’, of lasting, manifold, lived time, which is essentially unfathomable, escaping objectivation.¹⁴⁰ It is from this position of ‘lived time’ that self-reflection happens.

For Hesychasm this means that its theoreticians inherited a practice into which they were initiated, of which they could possibly not fathom its full history or all that went into its genesis. Their definitions were bound to remain secondary to the inherent meanings encoded in Hesychast practice and experienced in it. They contributed to an already decipherable embodied practice. The reading of the ‘ciphers’ encoded in embodiment depends on the identification of the previous layers of significance. Remarkably, Hesychasts do not commemorate a founding event of their practice and tradition. This may indicate an origin beyond their scope of reference.

Hesychasm remains an embodied practice, not wholly determined by the conscious notions that its practitioners have of it. The uniformity and constancy of Hesychasm through various contexts and times affirms that its character of ‘*habitus*’. Its re-enactment and the experiences made affirm both the ascribed meanings as well as unconscious meanings inherited by tradition. It is the defining semiotic practice, *aisthesis*,

¹³⁷ Idem, p. 69.

¹³⁸ Idem, p. 56.

¹³⁹ Idem, p. 52. Cf. Bergson, H. (1993). *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*. (5th ed.), Paris: Presses Univ. de France, p. 71.

¹⁴⁰ Idem, p. 53.

and experience identifying a Hesychast monk. Its constancy supports the assumption of inherent significance.

3.6. Hesychasm as a Formation of 'Longue Durée': Memory and Embodiment

Hesychasm's long duration rests embedded in its embodied practices and their memory – as Jacques Le Goff proposed for the Occidental Middle Ages, that he found encoded in structures, embodied behaviours, and sense of continuity.¹⁴¹

Je propose un long, un très long Moyen Âge, dont les structures fondamentales n'évoluent que très lentement du 3^e siècle au milieu du 20^e siècle.¹⁴² [I propose a long, a very long Middle Age, of which the fundamental structures developed only gradually from the 3rd century, up to the mid-20th century.]

In this period Hesychasm evolved and defined itself. The sense of continuity within Hesychasm supports the assumption, that is basic features have already been present very early on in its formation, and have been preserved in a conservative milieu, ardent on safeguarding the treasures of its spiritual fathers and mothers. Their memory is preserved by readings of the canon of spiritual literature of Hesychasm, in monastic communities, like during common meals, as practice of 'com-memoration'. Embodied in the steps of meditation, the central tenets of Hesychasm are 're-created' by every generation of Hesychasts for 'eternal memory'. Hesychasm has aspects of a mnemotechnic device to ensure consistency and coherence over ages.

Hesychasm will be understood as a 'ritual set', whose every element is significant, and which, as a complex, relates to a coherent 'master discourse' which it encodes. This approach in research has been applied by Michael E. J. Witzel in his reconstruction of the genesis and relation of world mythologies, well beyond the times of written

¹⁴¹ Revel, J. (2015). Le temps de l'historien. In J. Revel and J.-C. Schmitt. *Une autre histoire: Jacques Le Goff (1924-2014)*, (pp. 33 – 39). Paris: Éditions de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales (Éhess), p. 35.

¹⁴² Le Goff, J. (1985). *L'imaginaire médiéval*, Paris: Gallimard, p. XII.

documentations of myth.¹⁴³ He underlined the importance of ritual as 'encoded myth' even beyond living memory:

The procedure proposed in this book thus closely echoes that of comparative linguistics: isolated and unmotivated similarities found in widely separated areas are indications of an older, lost common system, higher on the structural level and cladistics tree, and their non-motivatedness makes them stand out in the individual culture and marks them as a (functionally) unexplained item and strange relict. [...] Similarly, in the related field of ritual behaviour, one may compare many widespread items of current ritualistic conduct...¹⁴⁴

The widespread and sometimes brief testimonies of motifs of experience, of spiritual thought and on instructions of psycho-physical ascent, created over centuries, can be collected into a unified picture depicting the living Hesychasm which St. Gregory Palamas defended and described in the 14th century. It is thus entirely justified to search for the formation of the defining elements of Hesychasm, as they appear more fully in the 13th and 14th century, at the beginning of Hesychasm, in testimonies of Hesychast motifs in the earliest documents from the Sinaitic monasticism at the end of Antiquity.

Following the methodological approaches of M. Witzel, and of U. Berner, it is obvious that Hesychasm did not arise out of no-where, but that its emergence points to a thorough fusion of theurgic Neoplatonic theory and practice with Yoga, that was adopted into Orthodox Christianity - for sound theological reasons, as Palamas showed. The fact that Hesychast sources do not commemorate such origins outside of Christianity, does not contradict this analysis.

The figure of thought here, is that of 'excluded memory of origins': This applies to reception from other religions, in particular. For example, the Egyptologist, Jan Assmann showed, how strongly the Mosaic notion of 'divine righteousness' is indebted to the religious-philosophical concept of 'Ma'at' of ancient Egypt. He speaks about systematic forgetting as means of distancing from such origins outside.¹⁴⁵ With the flight from Egypt

¹⁴³ Witzel, M. E. J. (2012). *The Origins of the World's Mythologies*, New York: OUP, p. VIIIff.

¹⁴⁴ Ibidem, p. 44f.

¹⁴⁵ Assmann, J. (2003). *Moses der Ägypter. Entzifferung einer Gedächtnisspur* Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer TB., pp. 25ff. [original ed.: (1997) *Moses the Egyptian. The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard Univ. Pr.]

however being a defining motif of Israel, it is doctrinally hardly possible to commemorate this reception. It is thus obliterated from memory. The same can be applied to the reception of Pagan ritual practices and symbolisms into Christianity. Their origins are reattributed within the bounds of the own system.

It rather confirms it. It shows that Hesychasm existed as an autonomous, self-contained significant formation, whose experiential evidence is reconfirmed by every Hesychast practitioner who arrived at the aesthesis of divine light through the holistic transformation body, soul and mind by its diligent meditation practice and initiation. This will be traced and shown in this dissertation.

3.7. Research Questions

The following questions shall thus guide this investigation:

- 1) is it possible for the old assumption of Yogic origins of Hesychasm be proven and demonstrated?
- 2) Are inter-religious transfer and reception of such a scale - for the formation of Orthodox meditation and its theory, possible, and if so: why? These questions are to be addressed in all three perspectives listed above. What were the historical conditions, in different spheres, to make such transfer, and reception, possible?
- 3) What do the factors of place – specifically the role of Alexandria in Africa – and of culture – specifically of Hellenism – contribute to this reception?
- 4) How did the millennium of Graeco-Indian encounter and facilitate the reception of Yoga / Vedanta into Hellenism and Graeco-Roman culture, especially Theurgic Neoplatonism, and into early Orthodox Christianity?
- 5) How do the historiographic findings support the theoretical tools applied here? They cover chiefly the historiographic aspect, in combination with the analysis of the 'discourses', and the comparison of the theological-philosophical systems of Yoga/Vedanta, of Theurgic Neoplatonism, (and Cynicism, and Neopythagoreanism), and Orthodox Christianity.
- 6) How does the semiotic perspective, of analysing the role of embodied practices (and perceptions) enable the understanding of the syncretistic processes of inter-cultural and inter-religious processes, presented here – in addition to the comparison of the respective religious-philosophical systems and explications of these three formations?

- 7) Which elements does this set – in Yoga: the 'eight steps' – consist of, and how was it reconceptualised in Theurgic Neoplatonism and in Hesychasm?
- 8) How is the 'initiatory' and 'transformative' aspect of this meditation form enacted, experienced, perceived, and conceptualised?
- 9) Which characteristic features of symbolic practice and spiritual perception were introduced to Hesychasm and to Orthodoxy in this process?

3.8. The reception of Yoga, in Brahmanic, Vedântic interpretation, by Neoplatonism and Hesychasm: its period and philosophical basis

At the outset of this investigation, it is necessary to delimit the time frames, and the partners, involved in this reception. For reasons of historiography and of philosophy, in conspectus, the reception of Yoga practice, and of spiritual philosophy interpreting it, can be shown to have happened in the period between the encounter of Alexander the Great with Yogic Brahmins in north-Western India, around 325 BCE, and the Islamic conquest of Alexandria, in 641 CE, of Egypt and the Levante. I propose that the reception into Hesychasm as Orthodox meditation practice and theory, that emerged in the early 7th century in writings of St. John Climacus,¹⁴⁶ proceeded in two steps: the first, being the reception of Yoga practice and theory into Pagan Hellenistic and Roman philosophy, most of all in the Platonic tradition, and the second being the adoption from here, into the Christian Orthodox spiritual practice, as Hesychasm.

A direct reception of Yoga into Hesychasm, after this period is not to be assumed, as I will show, because there is almost no zone of extended contact, mutual understanding and communication, between Hesychasts and Yogins, after this period.

The suggestion that the Sufis mediated Yoga to Hesychasm can be dismissed. Their theory and practices of meditation practice contain less elements than what Hesychast and Yogic theory and practice have in common. Then too, no sufficient 'contact zone' between Hesychasts and Sufis discernible, neither in time or in space.

¹⁴⁶ Johnsén, H. R. (2007), *Reading John Climacus: Rhetorical Argumentation, Literary Convention and the Tradition of Monastic Formation*, Lund: Lund University Press

Thirdly, the agreements between Hesychast theological-philosophical theory, and that of late (theurgic) Neoplatonism, are so fundamental, that the contact between these formations who lived and developed alongside each other in the realm of Alexandria, for probably two centuries or more – depending on how long the development of nascent Hesychasm as such may have taken - is certain to have been the root-bed of Hesychasm. Details of evidence will be discussed.

Sociologically identifiable formations of spiritually engaged Neoplatonists, in the academic milieu, (and their precursors), were interested and engaged in visits and exchanges with 'Brahmanic Yogins' most of all, in India and in the realm of Alexandria, but also beyond, in the Roman Empire, for centuries. The early encounters, of Alexander the Great with 'Brahmanic Yogins' (in 325 BCE), were commemorated as iconic events, by historiographers, such as Onesicritus (360 – 290 BCE) and his successors, like Plutarch (45 – 125 CE), over centuries, and of, by philosophic biographers in Middle Platonism, like Philostratus (165 – 249 CE) for the visit of Apuleius of Madaura (123 – 170 CE) to priestly Brahmins, and of Apuleius of Madaura for Pythagoras – to the 'naked philosophers', the 'gymnosophists',¹⁴⁷ for the Indian legitimisation of the Pythagorean tradition. Also, the ardent desire of Plotinus (205 – 270 CE), the founder of Neoplatonism, to visit India, in order to study Indian philosophy more profoundly, as his biographer, Porphyry reports (*Vita Plotini* III, 6-24), is important here,¹⁴⁸ in view of the close agreements between his system and that of Vedānta, as noted since the 19th century,¹⁴⁹ and investigated,¹⁵⁰ suggesting that he may have adopted ideas from here. They all served the purpose of legitimisation of the Platonic-Neopythagorean philosophy, by its agreements with Brahmanic thought,¹⁵¹ coupled with interest in the meditative ascetic spiritual practice of the Yogins, according to the Greek

¹⁴⁷ Harland, P. A. (2023). 'Indian wisdom: Apuleius on the amazing naked philosophers and Pythagoras' journeys (mid-second century CE),' *Ethnic Relations and Migration in the Ancient World*, last modified June 7, 2023, <https://philipharland.com/Blog/?p=9426>.

¹⁴⁸ Lacrosse, J. (2014) Plotin, Porphyre et l'Inde : un ré-examen, in : *Le Philosophoïre* 2014/1 (n° 41), pp. 87 à 104, §. 14. <https://www.cairn.info/revue-le-philosophoïre-2014-1-page-87.htm>

¹⁴⁹ Wolters, M. A. (1982). A Survey of Modern Scholarly Opinion on Plotinus and Indian Thought, in; Harris, R. B. (ed.), *Neoplatonism and Indian Thought*, Albany, N. Y., State Univ. of New York Press, pp. 294f.

¹⁵⁰ Bréhier, É. (1958). *The Philosophy of Plotinus* (transl. by J. Thomas), Chicago; Univ. of Chicago Press., pp. 106 – 131.

¹⁵¹ Männlein-Robert, I., (2009). Griechische Philosophen in Indien? Reisewege zur Weisheit, in: Janka, Markus, Andreas Luther and Ulrich Schmitzer (eds.) *Gymnasium – Zeitschrift für Kultur der Antike und Humanistische Bildung*, vol. 116, issue 4. July 2009., Heidelberg: Univ. Vlg. Winter, Pp. 311 – 357, p. 332

ideal of a spiritual engaged philosopher, (The identity of this 'Yoga', with what was codified by Patañjali, emerges from details, such as the mentioning of âsanas - his third step - by Onesicritus. (360 – 290 BCE).

All this all indicates that here the reception of Yogic practice and theory – in a Brahmanic interpretation – is to be sought and found. It is to be understood in the wider frame of philosophical dialogue between representatives of the Platonic (and Pythagorean) tradition, and the Vedântic Brahmins. Their (mutually) perceived affinity is a standard motif in historiographical depictions of Hellenistic and Roman authors.¹⁵²

The basis of this reception is the Vedântic re-interpretation of Yoga, and of Patañjali's strongly Shankhya-oriented metaphysics of it by Bādarāyaṇa, as laid out in his *Brahma-sûtra*. Here, the critical point is that Shankhya regards matter as prime substance of the world in a dualistic view opposed to intelligences. Vedânta teaches Brahman as supreme cause and origin. Thus, Swami Shivananda explains the critical point in the *Brahma-Sûtra* as follows:

“Section I (Pada) of the Second Chapter proves by arguments that Brahman is the cause of the world and removes all objections that may be levelled against such conclusion. Adhikarana I: (Sutras 1-2) refutes ...the Sankhya doctrine (...) The Veda does not confirm the Sankhya Smriti but only those Smritis which teach that the universe takes its origin from an intelligent creator or intelligent primary cause (Brahman). Adhikarana II: (Sutra 3) extends the same line of argumentation to the Yoga-Smriti. It discards the theory of the Yoga philosophy of Patañjali regarding the cause of the world.”¹⁵³

In spite of this, Bādarāyaṇa seeks to preserve the meditative means of Yoga, and to reinterpret them as means of accessing the divine and of cognition of Brahman. Thus, Yoga is extracted from its Shankha interpretative context, and retrieved for a Vedântic interpretation – with the consequence, that its meditation practice can be adopted for the meditative spirituality of Vedânta. This emerges in the following passage:

“By this refutation of the Shâmkhya-Smriti even the Yoga Smriti is to be understood as refuted: ... For, even in that Smriti are assumed, in

¹⁵² idem

¹⁵³ Shivananda, Swami (ed., transl. comm.) (2008). *Brahmasutras. Text, Word-to-word Meaning, Translation and Commentary*. Tehri-Garhwal, Uttarakhand: Divine Life Society, p. 144

contravention of the Scriptures, Pradhana as an independent first cause as well as Mahat and others as effects, none of which are warranted by experience and by the Scriptures. (...) . Wherefore, then, make a special analogical transference. (We reply:) There is here a special cause for doubt, inasmuch as the Yoga is laid down as • the means to right knowledge in Vedic texts like [*Brih. Up.*, ii. 4. 5] — “The self is to be heard, thought of, meditated upon”; while we observe in the *Svetasvatara Upanishad* [ii. 8] Yogic prescriptions with manifold details beginning with the assuming of postures etc. in passages like — “Having rendered the body with its three erect parts (the trunk, the neck and the head) even ...” And there are to be found thousands of references to the Yoga in the Veda, such as [*Katha*, II. iii. 11] — “The steady curbing of the senses is what they call Yoga”; or [*Katha*, II. iii. 18]. “This teaching as well as all the prescriptions about Yoga”; and so forth. In the *Yogasastra* itself with (the Sutra) — “Now, the Yoga, the means to the perception of Reality” — Yoga is acknowledged to be a means for right knowledge. Hence inasmuch as a portion of it is acceptable, the Yoga Smriti would become altogether free from objection, (...), a divergence as regards another part of its teaching. (...) The way out is given by the consideration that it is not by Shâmkhya knowledge or Yoga-method independently of the Veda that the highest goal is achieved. For, Sruti itself [*Svet.*, iii. 8] discountenances any other means of reaching the highest goal save the Vedic teaching of the oneness of the Atman — “Knowing Him alone one goes beyond Death: there exists no other path for going (beyond).” The Shâmkhya and the Yoga followers are dualists: they do not recognise the oneness of the Atman”¹⁵⁴

In this fascinating passage, testimonies from the Upanishads are adopted, to justify the adoption of Yoga meditation, and its re-interpretation, stripped of its Shankya motifs. It is a major political move in the field of religious philosophy. It perceptibly paved the way for the adoption of Yoga in Vedantic interpretation by philosophers of the Platonic tradition.

¹⁵⁴ Bâdarâyana, *The Brahmasûtra*. II, 2.3.. Ed.: Belvalkar, S. V. (ed., transl.), (1931). *The Brahma-Sutras of Bâdarâyana with the Comment of Śaṅkarâcârya*, Chapt. II. Poona: Bilvalkunjia Publ. House, p.8f. <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.44583/page/n21/mode/2up?view=theater>

In a resumé of a century of scholarly debate on the agreements and differences between Neoplatonism and Vedânta, Joachim Lacrosse declares:

[in translation:] “keeping the differences in mind, let us briefly remind of two principal correspondences that can be established between the first Neoplatonists and classical Indian thought:

- 1) The idea that the self-knowledge of the individual and wandering soul ultimately leads to its recognition of its identity with the universal Being and the One.

This idea is expressed in Hindu tradition as identity of the individual self (jîva) and of the universal Self (âtman), the principle of human life and of individual consciousness, which, in turn, is identical with Brahman, the principle of all things. There is a closeness with the Neoplatonic doctrine according to which it is necessary to reconnect the God in us with the God who is in all.

Porphyry tells, in *Vita Plotini* 2, that these were the last words of Plotinus, and his instruction to his successors.”¹⁵⁵

This brief quote, shows the exchange between Neoplatonists (with their predecessors) and Vedantic Brahmans to be at the centre of this dialogue. This extends to Yoga as practiced and interpreted by the latter. The Vedântic understanding of Yoga, as laid out in commentaries of Vyâsa, towards the end of this period, and later by Śaṅkara, are of interest here. This justifies the inclusion of Śaṅkara's commentary, which includes and discusses that of Vyâsa, on Patañjali's Yoga Sutra, in this thesis, even though he wrote after here assumed period of reception.

Viewed from the perspective of the receiving philosophers of the Platonic tradition, the critical point about the Shankhya-based interpretation of Patañjali is that the Shankhya assumes a dualism between ‘matter’ and a plurality of intellectual selves, Purûsha, both human and divine, but no supreme God (- even though Patañjali mitigates this point somewhat by leaving the interpretation open, that Purûsha designates the personal Lord, leaving room for a theistic interpretation of the term). Vedânta and (Neo-)Platonism however agree, that all individual intellects are

¹⁵⁵ Lacrosse, J. (2014) Plotin, Porphyre et l'Inde : un ré-examen, in : Le Philosophoïre 2014/1 (n° 41), pp. 87 à 104, §. 44f. <https://www.cairn.info/revue-le-philosophoïre-2014-1-page-87.htm>

emanations of the one supreme God, whose concept closely resembles that of Brahman, as being beyond attributes. Neoplatonism further agrees with Vedânta that even 'matter' ultimately goes forth from God.

These religious philosophical views held in common, thus make it unlikely, that Yoga and its religious philosophical interpretation could have been adopted from adherents of Shankhya, much less so from Buddhism, to which the differences are even more fundamental. This also indicates or that visitors of the Platonic tradition to India and its 'Brahmans', certainly did not visit Buddhist scholars, (even converted ex-Brahmans). We can thus confide in the Hellenistic and Roman tradition, that the 'Brahmans' whom they visited, were indeed representatives of Vedânta (as prevalent philosophy), of the Upanishadic tradition, and that the 'Brahmanic Yogins', whom they cherished, were indeed such too. This implies that the reception of Yoga, in theory and practice, by these adherents of the Platonic tradition, went indeed by this pathway.

In this context, it is interesting, that Clement of Alexandria (150 – 215 CE), as eminent early Christian author and rector of the Christian academy of Alexandria, clearly distinguished the Brahmans, and Yogins, from the Jains, and from the Buddhists, whom he described as distinct from them in theology and in ritual practice. This certainly reflects common knowledge among philosophically educated persons, in the realm of Alexandria and beyond, especially since Clement writes with reference to Hellenistic historiography. It indicates that the interest of Greek and Roman authors, most of all of the Platonic and Pythagorean traditions, was indeed directed at the Brahmanic thought, and associated Yogic practice. This is confirmed in Porphyry's biography of Plotinus expressly.

This is supported by the extensive agreement between the 'Vedântic' philosophy of the Upanishads,¹⁵⁶ as codified and presented by Bādarāyaṇa (between 200 BCE and 200 CE),¹⁵⁷ and Middle Platonism (80 BCE – 220 CE) with Neopythagoreanism (1st century BCE on),¹⁵⁸ and Neoplatonism (from early 3rd century CE on).¹⁵⁹ The term 'Vedânta' is used here accordingly for this tradition, that was endorsed by the

¹⁵⁶ Deussen, P. (1919), *The Philosophy of the Upanishads*, Delhi: T. T. Clark (reprint 2005). pp. xiff..

¹⁵⁷ von Glasenapp, H. (1974). *Die Philosophie der Inder – eine Einführung in ihre Geschichte und Lehre*, 3rd. ed., Stuttgart: A. Kröner Verlag, p. 70

¹⁵⁸ Dillon, J. (1977). *The Middle Platonists, 80 B.C. to A.D. 220*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, pp. 184ff., 315ff.

¹⁵⁹ Armstrong, A. H., (1989), *L'architecture de l'univers intelligible dans la philosophie de Plotin. Une étude analytique et historique*. Ottawa: Éditions de l'Université d'Ottawa, pp. 99ff.

Brahmans, and not only for the later form of Advaita Vedānta that Śaṅkara developed, on the basis of Bādarāyaṇa, in the 8th century CE.¹⁶⁰ The inclusion of Śaṅkara's commentary on Patañjali's Yoga Sutra is justified here, on the assumption that

As a side view to the presence of Buddhism in the eastern Mediterranean: It is assumed that Buddhism provided a model for the development of organised Christian monasticism.¹⁶¹ It may include the practice of asceticism in this frame. The reception of Yoga, however, went different pathways, as I show, leading to a different form of social organisation, with the Yogic being in looser communities, and sometimes in hermitages. The presence of Buddhism in the eastern Mediterranean, and the adoption of elements from it, is a process of its own. Its apex appears to have been earlier too.

The Platonic interest in Brahmanic Yogins, has a different philosophical basis and a different tradition. The stream of motifs, that were adopted by Christian theology from Middle- and Neoplatonism, and the close coexistence over centuries, in the same academic environment, support that the reception of the eight steps of Yoga occurred from here into Hesychasm, as I intend to show.

It is noted, that some strands of Hesychasm practice a mantra-like prayer and invocation of the holy name of Jesus Christ, that can be identified as a definitely Tantric features. It is a practice that is in tension with the motif of inner silence, that have Hesychasm its name, also with a Vedāntic and Neoplatonic interpretation of Yoga, that appears with classical authors of Hesychasm. It is also not practiced, centrally, in all of Hesychasm. Other features of 'embodiment' may also indicate Tantric notions. This indicates that Tantric influences may have emerged in the eastern Mediterranean by the 6th or 7th century, and have entered Hesychasm here. (They are also in tension with the eight steps of Yoga, laid out by Patañjali.) It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to trace possible lines of transmission, but, in a systematic perspective, these features are identified. They may be traces of tantric practices in the Yoga, that were encountered towards the end of this reception period, in the realm of Alexandria.

¹⁶⁰ Deussen, P. (1906). *Das System des Vedānta. Nach dem Brahma-Sūtras des Bādarāyana und dem Kommentare des Cankara über dieselben als ein Kompendium der Dogmatik des Brahmanismus vom Standpunkte des Cankara aus*, Leipzig: F. A Brockhaus (Reprint: Elibrin Classics, 2005).

¹⁶¹ Kleinhempel, U. R. (2019). Traces of Buddhist Presence in Alexandria: Philo and the 'Therapeutae'. *Aliter - Научно-теоретический журнал*, 11, pp. 3-31.

II. Hellenistic and Roman Relations with India – Hesychasm and Yoga

4. Greek and Roman Exchange with India, and the Reception of Brahman Doctrine and Yoga

4.1. Graeco-Roman Reception of Indian Spirituality in View of Syncretism Theory

Intercultural and interreligious exchange has special requirements. Even in multi-cultural and multi-religious societies different cultures and religions can coexist without much exchange happening between them. Viewed in a systemic perspective, intercultural exchange does not happen easily. Systems tend to define their boundaries and to maintain them. Clear demarcations of the 'other' serve to consolidate and to affirm identities. This applies to language, customs and cultural objects of daily life, whose forms change abruptly from one place to another. The adoption of elements of alien cultures requires specific conditions. Power and prestige are among them, as the spread of colonial languages shows, trade and religion too. Specific conditions in the receiving cultures bring about the adoption of foreign elements. Social encounter and environmental exposure to other cultures is a strongly facilitating factor.

For the transference of religious practices system barriers which normally prevent such reception must be significantly lowered. Conditions for such reception can be:

- 1) the recognition by one culture that specific doctrines and practices of another culture might be superior to the own and thus worth to be adopted.
- 2) a sense of compatibility, that the alien element fits the own culture or religion well and can thus be integrated without endangering the own identity, preferably that the foreign element can be reinterpreted as representing elements of own convictions in a suitable way.
- 3) that sufficient knowledge and understanding of a foreign religious practice and its meanings exists, so that it can be learnt, adopted correctly and remain in use.
- 4) that sufficiently broad cultural contact exists, also as to numbers of participants for such exchange to happen.

- 5) that social settings exist for people to become acquainted with a foreign practice and to learn it. Preferably this would entail the local establishment of a foreign religious community in the local realm to give instruction about its doctrines and practices over an extended period.
- 6) that a sufficiently large group of people share in the learning of an alien religious practice to be able to sustain it, to communicate among each other about it and to transmit it to others. This also requires stability over time, since learning and practising the ways of a foreign religious group comprises a whole web of symbolic relations. These can hardly be learned from textbooks. Spiritual practices have ritual contexts and social settings. They require learning by doing to be mastered and reproduced.
- 7) that a social and cultural environment exists, in which such reception of foreign religious elements is viewed favourably, so that its reception would be ensured by the establishment of a local tradition even without sustained influx from its source of origin.
- 8) that a foreign concept would find social and cultural conditions to be adopted into the own religion, even beyond its perception as a prestigious element of a foreign culture.
- 9) that the received foreign religious practice and its concepts fit in with the frame of the own culture and religion(s), without conversion to the foreign religion of its source.
- 10) that a common frame of reference has been found for the own and the foreign religion form so that adoption may be understood as sharing on a basis of common beliefs and values.

All these conditions can be identified in the reception of Yogic practice into Hellenistic religion and culture, in the eastern Mediterranean, when Christian monasticism originated.

For our investigating of the possibility and the trajectories of reception of Indian spirituality into Hellenistic culture and Christian Orthodoxy some factors may be enlisted:

- 1) The 'long millennium' of Graeco-Indian relations in Antiquity as the basis for religious transference:

Cultural contact between Greece and India in Antiquity lasted for over one millennium.¹⁶² This proceeded originally through the Persian Empire to which Greek provinces belonged. The discovery of the Monsoon shipping route from the Red Sea to the west coast of India made trade independent from political obstacles of the land

¹⁶² Karttunen, K. (1989). *India in Early Greek Literature*, Helsinki: Studia Orientalia, vol. 65. (Eds. The Finnish Oriental Society).

route. Trade settlements were established on the coasts of India. Centuries of mutual exchange by both sides followed. The establishment of trading posts in India and prolonged journeys and stays of Greeks there followed: of merchants,¹⁶³ scholars, and diplomats,¹⁶⁴ such as Megasthenes,¹⁶⁵ in 302 B.C. Conversely the establishment of Indian traders and their associates, as communities, in Alexandria is also documented. They nourished interest in the culture and spirituality of India.¹⁶⁶ The primary sources of knowledge on India were in the first stage, from Alexander the Great until about the birth of Christ the northwest, where Graeco-Indian states and cultures developed. From the Augustan era onwards, the bulk of trade shifted to the southern coast of India, to the Tamil kingdoms. This attests to the range of Graeco-Indian cultural contact.

2) The broad range of interest in Greek culture in India:

Contact was not confined to commercial exchange but was borne by profound and lasting interest in India on the side of the Greek visitors. There is a long tradition of Greek scholarship on India, with authors referring to other historians who had visited and studied India before. Interest in India was a permanent motif of Greek and Hellenistic culture. It is exemplified in the ardent interest of Alexander the Great to meet with Yogis and Indian sages when his conquest arrived at the borderlands of India.¹⁶⁷ This persisted into Roman imperial times. Plotinus' desire to visit India for the study of Indian philosophy¹⁶⁸ is but one prominent example. Interest in the spirituality of India is the central topic of the 3rd century literary biography on the Pythagorean philosopher, spiritual leader and healer, Apollonius of Tyana (1st

¹⁶³ *The Periplus Maris Erythraei* ['Voyage around the Erythraean Sea'], (40-70 C. E.).

<http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/texts/periplus/periplus.htm> |

¹⁶⁴ Arrian, *Indica*. Edition: Chinnock, E. J. (transl.) (1893). *Anabasis of Alexander, together with the Indica*. London: Bohn, ch. 1-16. http://www.shsu.edu/~his_ncp/Indica.html

¹⁶⁵ McCrindle, J. W. (1877). *Ancient India as Described by Megasthenes and Arrian – being a Translation of the Fragments of the Indika of Megasthenes Collected by Dr. Schwanbeck and of the First Part of the Indika of Arrian*, (with introduction, notes and map of ancient India), Calcutta, Bombay, London: Tracker, Spink & Co; Trübner & Co.

¹⁶⁶ Karttunen, K. (1997). Greeks and Indian Wisdom. In E. Franco and K. Preisendanz (eds.). *Beyond Orientalism: The Work of Wilhelm Halbfass and its Impact on Indian and Cross-Cultural Studies*, (pp. 117–122), Amsterdam, Atlanta: Rodopi B. V. Editions, p. 117.

¹⁶⁷ Plutarch [Lucius Mestrius Plutarchus]. (around 100 C. E.). *The Life of Alexander*. Ed.: Dryden, J. (trans). (1906). *Plutarch - Parallel Lives*. Republished by Elpenor (series: Home of the Greek Word). http://www.elpos.net/elpenor/greek-texts/ancient-greece/plutarch_alexander_gymnosophists.asp?pg=2

¹⁶⁸ Gerson, L. (2012). Plotinus. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plotinus/>

century) by Philostratus¹⁶⁹ (early 3rd century). It extended to Christian authors of these times as well, from Clement of Alexandria (150 – 215) and Pseudo-Hippolytus of Rome (3rd century) up to Palladius of Galatia (364 – 430).

3) The perception of spiritual and religious affinity by Greeks to India, and interest in Indian religion, in Yoga in particular, as a widely shared belief in Hellenistic culture: It extends to theology proper, as in the equation which was established between Dionysos and Shiva, and the genealogical links claimed to exist between these deities.¹⁷⁰

4) Greek and Roman belief in the superiority of India in spiritual matters: Greek interest in India differed from interest in Egyptian, Babylonian, and Persian religion. The Greeks knew that these cultures were far more ancient than theirs, to whom they owed much. Philosophic and spiritual interest is taken in Indian philosophy and spirituality, even ethics. The attitude of Alexander the Great towards Indian sages and Yogis differs markedly from that demonstrated in Babylonia, Persia, and Egypt. This is also at the core of Philostratos' biography which depicts a veritable pilgrimage of Apollonius to India to converse with the Brahmins.

5) Knowledge about India in Hellenism and in Roman society: Yogis were known to the educated public in Hellenistic and Roman societies¹⁷¹ and were referred to from various perspectives, as attested by the popular author, Lucian of Samosata.¹⁷² Awareness existed that practices and beliefs of the Shramanas, the Yogis, had been adopted by Greeks and Romans, and were followed. This attests to the foundation for further reception of Yogic practices and beliefs in Graeco-Roman society. Lucian criticises his hero of not being faithful enough in his emulation of the

¹⁶⁹ Philostratus [Lucius Flavius Philostratus]. (217-245 C. E.). *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, Book V, XXIV. Ed.: Conybeare, F. C. (transl.). (1912). London. <http://www.livius.org/sources/content/philostratus-life-of-apollonius/>

¹⁷⁰ Baldini, C. (2010). *Shiva and Dionysus: Far Away so Close*.

https://www.academia.edu/2927327/Shiva_and_Dionysus_Far_Away_so_Close

cf. Arrian, *Indica*. Ed.: Chinnock, E. J. (transl.). (1893). *Anabasis of Alexander, together with the Indica*. London: Bohn. Ch. 1-16. http://www.shsu.edu/~his_ncp/Indica.html

¹⁷¹ Strabo of Amasia. (24 C. E.). *Geography*, 15.1.61, 62-64. Edition: Jones, H. L. (transl.) (1917-1932). *Strabo of Amasia - Geography*. Harvard University Press. http://www.livius.org/aj-al/alexander/alexander_t69.html

¹⁷² Lucian of Samosata. (165-180 C. E.). *The Passing of Peregrinus*. Ed.: Harmon, A. M. (1936). *Lucian of Samosata – The Passing of Peregrinus* [Greek and English]. Harvard: Harvard University Press. Re-publ. by R. Pearse. (2001). <http://www.tertullian.org/rpearse/lucian/peregrinus.htm>

Indian examples, thus playing to the audience of his readers, to which this would matter.

6) The intensity of exchange and historical records of visits by Yogis to the Roman Empire: Visits were also made by Indians to Hellenistic countries and to Rome. Several formal delegations included diplomats, merchants, and Indian Yogis (Shramanas), whose presence was appreciated in the public.¹⁷³ Permanent merchant colonies of Roman citizens and subjects existed in the harbour cities of India and Indians are documented as residents of Alexandria.

7) The existence of states of mixed Graeco-Indian culture in the north-western borderlands of India after Alexander's conquest:

These states existed up to about 10 B. C. Their most powerful ruler, King Menander, who ruled the areas of present Afghanistan, Pakistan and western parts of the Ganges plain is remembered in Buddhist literature as "King Milinda" and as adherent of Buddhism. The first Greeks to be settled in this realm were rebellious Ionians who were deported to the eastern border of Persia. With the establishment of the Hellenistic states of Alexander's successors in this area a Graeco-Indian culture developed and spread into northern India in which Greek and Indian religious, cultural, aesthetic, and philosophical traditions merged.

8) The Buddhist mission of Emperor Aśoka the Great to the Hellenistic lands by the Mediterranean Sea and to Central and East Asia:

In north-west India, a Graeco-Buddhist synthesis developed, in which Buddhism was expressed in Greek language and communicated to the Hellenistic realm with state support during the Mauryan Empire under the rule of Aśoka the Great (304 – 232 B.C.). He ordered the philosophies and doctrines of different religions to be studied and compared. While being a Buddhist himself he held the (Hindu) Brahmins and Yogis (Shramanas) in high esteem and commanded them to be respected,¹⁷⁴ likewise Greek piety. The Buddhist teachings, which he ordered to be observed in his whole empire, were by no means to be understood in a narrow and exclusive Buddhist

¹⁷³ Strabo of Amasia, *Geography*, XV.1.1.

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0239%3Abook%3D15%3Achapter%3D1%3Asection%3D1>

¹⁷⁴ Guruge, A. W. P. (1994). Emperor Aśoka and Buddhism: Unresolved Discrepancies between Buddhist Tradition and Aśokan Inscriptions. In: Seneviratna, A. (ed.). *King Aśoka - Historical and Literary Studies*, (pp. 37–91). Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, p. 61.

https://web.archive.org/web/20120923053250/http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf_file/king_asoka.pdf

sense. In a special imperial decree (*RE XII*), Aśoka refers to the concept of 'Dharma' in an encompassing sense of religious truth and ethics, which are also to be found in other religions. In this sense he ordered that:

there should be a growth of the essentials of Dharma among men of all sects. And the growth of the essentials of Dharma is possible in many ways. But its root lies in restraint in regard to speech, which means that there should be no extolment of one's own sect or disparagement of other sects on inappropriate occasions and that it should be moderate in every case even on appropriate occasions. On the contrary, other sects should be duly honoured in every way on all occasions. If a person acts in this way, he not only promotes his own sect but also benefits other sects. But if a person acts otherwise, he not only injures his own sect and disparages other sects with a view to glorifying his sect owing merely to his attachment to it, he injures his own sect very severely by acting in that way. Therefore, restraint in regard to speech is commendable, because people should learn and respect the fundamentals of one another's Dharma.¹⁷⁵

This decree shows that Aśoka, while adhering to Buddhism, held views of tolerance and universalism, which suited the universalist convictions of Hellenistic culture. It safeguarded the studies of Greek philosophy and religion in the Mauryan Empire and laid out the hermeneutics for the self-explication of the Buddhist doctrine in the context of Buddhist mission to the Hellenistic lands, which Aśoka commissioned. This passage also shows that Yogis and Brahmans were also accommodated as expressing the Dharma. This may have been applied to exchange with Hellenistic countries in the context of these Buddhist missions¹⁷⁶ as well.

Under the rule of Aśoka the Great, a major council of Buddhism was held and imperial edicts about the acceptance of Buddhist teachings (Dhamma) and about their

¹⁷⁵ Idem, p. 62

¹⁷⁶ Gombrich, R. (1994). Aśoka the Great Upasaka. In: Seneviratna, A. (ed.). *King Aśoka - Historical and Literary Studies*, (pp. 1–13). Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, p. 12.
https://web.archive.org/web/20120923053250/http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf_file/king_asoka.pdf

spread by mission were inscribed on stone pillars, also in Greek language. In particular, the emperor mentions sending Buddhist missionaries to Greek lands of which the following are mentioned on stele inscription *RE XIII*:

Antiyoka (also mentioned in *RE II*): Antiochus II Theos of the Seleucid dynasty in Syria and West Asia (i.e. the immediate western neighbour of Aśoka's empire): 261 – 246 B.C., Turamāya (Tulamaya): Ptolemy II Philadelphus in Egypt: 285 – 247 B.C., Antikini (Antekina): Antigonus Gonatas in Macedonia: 277 – 239 B.C., Makā (Magā): Magas of Cyrene in North Africa: 282 – 258 B.C., Alikasundara: Alexander of Epirus: 272 – 255 B. C.¹⁷⁷

It is inconceivable that such missions supported by an empire which was one of the most powerful of all Indian history, comprising almost all of present India, Pakistan and Afghanistan would not have been substantial enough to establish Buddhist communities and a notable presence in the Hellenistic societies here enlisted.

- 9) Possible traces of a spiritual community of Buddhist features in the 1st century B.C. may be identified in Philo of Alexandria's report on the 'therapeutae' of Lake Mareotis: Philo of Alexandria's depiction of a spiritual community which existed on the outskirts of Alexandria, called 'therapeutae',¹⁷⁸ i.e., spiritual practitioners, is strangely ambiguous. It gives the impression of deliberate vagueness, so as to claim link this community, whose form of communal spiritual life, and especially their ritual and spiritual practices are strikingly Buddhist in character, to Judaism. This community is depicted by Philo in Jewish terms although most its practices are not exactly Jewish. This discrepancy has been noticed by early Christian apologetics, like Clement of Alexandria. He declared this spiritual community to have been Christian.¹⁷⁹ Philo claims that references to Moses were made in a sermon there but this remains vague.

¹⁷⁷ Guruge, A. W. P. (1994). Emperor Aśoka and Buddhism: Unresolved Discrepancies between Buddhist Tradition and Aśokan Inscriptions. In: Seneviratna, A. (ed.). *King Aśoka - Historical and Literary Studies* (pp. 37–91), Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, p. 73.

https://web.archive.org/web/20120923053250/http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf_file/king_asoka.pdf

¹⁷⁸ Philo of Alexandria. (Early 1st century C. E.). *De Vita Contemplativa*, book 34. Ed.: Kirby, P. (2012). *Early Jewish Writings*. <http://www.earlyjewishwritings.com/text/philo/book34.html>,

¹⁷⁹ Hiller, M. (n. d.). Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 B.C.E.—40 C.E.). *Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (IEP)*. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/philo/>

However crucial features of the life and organisation of this community are Buddhist. Philo's 'rhetoric of appropriation' evidently serves to claim this community for his own religion and legitimizes it thereby. This may have been a tool for syncretistic reception. It is thus of interest for the reception of forms of Yoga into early Hesychasm. Philo describes a setting of communal spiritual practise in which Indian spiritual practise was taught and learnt and thus transmitted.¹⁸⁰

10) The specific affinity of Cynicism to Yoga and Indian spirituality:

The Hellenistic belief in a special affinity of Greek and Indian philosophy and spirituality and the belief in the superiority of the Indian Brahmanical and Yogic doctrines and practice resonated especially with the Cynics, in public Hellenistic and Roman opinion. Here we may find the most likely pathway for the reception of actual practice from Yoga:

Close agreements between Brahmanical, Yogic teachings and different spiritual and philosophical traditions of Hellenistic culture were recognized both by Greeks and Romans as well as by Indian sages they met. Awareness of agreements and affinities between the respective philosophical and spiritual traditions existed on both sides. Those with Cynicism were seen in asceticism, the liberation from social hierarchies, status, and possession, and in individual freedom, as documented in the report on encounter between Alexander the Great by the accompanying scholars, as well as by Lucian of Samosata. Affinities with Pythagoreanism, and Platonism were also noted by Greeks and Indians.

11) Testimonies of interest of Hellenistic and Roman philosophers in Indian philosophy as indication of basic knowledge and of a sense of affinity as indicators of some degree of philosophical exchange and reception of Indian ideas:

This interest in Indian philosophy is most clearly documented from the Platonic tradition. To authors of Middle Platonism and of Neopythagoreanism the Indian Brahmins are a source of religious philosophy of highest degree. Visiting them and conversing with them serves to legitimise the Platonic tradition to which both adhere. This extends to Yoga, as to spiritual practice, mostly in conjunction with Brahmanism. Long after the philosophical exchange by Alexander the Great and his following with Indian sages, interest in Indian philosophy is reported in Neoplatonism too, such as

¹⁸⁰ Kleinhempel, U. R. (2019). Traces of Buddhist Presence in Alexandria: Philo and the 'Therapeutae'. *Aliter - Научно-теоретический журнал*, 11, pp. 3-31.

by Porphyry, in his *Life of Plotinus*, who notes Plotinus' desire to study Indian philosophy.¹⁸¹ The literature of comparison of Neoplatonism and Indian philosophy sometimes assumes common origins or exchange as basis of affinity;¹⁸² also with regard to the Platonic schools as communities of learning and practise of a spiritual-philosophical life, which correspond to the Yogic communities that are also identified as Brahmans in Hellenistic literature.

This finds some support in the view that Plotinus teacher, Ammonius Saccas, may himself have been of Indian origin. The cognomen Saccas cannot be derived satisfactorily from Greek; the frequent derivation from 'sakkos', as 'bag' or 'sack', is referred as indication that Ammonius must have been an uneducated sack porter in the harbour of Alexandria.¹⁸³ This is grammatically incorrect. However, the derivation from the demonym Sakas appears as meaningful. At the time of Ammonios Sakkas, they were a people of Scythian descent who had established their kingdom in northwest India – the area of Gandhara – in 120 B.C.¹⁸⁴ after conquering the Indo-Grecian Gandhara kingdom.¹⁸⁵ This could indicate descent from there¹⁸⁶. In this case, he would have knowledge of both cultures, with possibly some in-depth knowledge of Indian Brahman philosophy, as has been assumed.¹⁸⁷ Such origin would have been nothing out of the regular order of things since trade relations also existed with north-western India. Ammonios put nothing to writing but must have been a philosopher of great systematic capacity, given the high esteem Plotinus held for him. To teach from

¹⁸¹ Porphyry. (301 C. E.). *Vita Plotini*, ch. 3. In G. Reale (1990). *A History of Ancient Philosophy IV: The Schools of the Imperial Age*. New York: SUNY Press, p. 298.

¹⁸² Mar Gregorios [Verghese, P.]. (2002). Does Geography Condition Philosophy? On Going Beyond the Occidental-Oriental Distinction. In: Mar Gregorios (ed.). *Neoplatonism and Indian Philosophy*, Albany: State University of New York Press, pp. 13–30.

¹⁸³ Mozley, J. R. (1911). Ammonius Saccas. *Dictionary of Early Christian Biography*, (ed. H. Wace). John Murray & Co., London. Cf. Eusebius. (Early 4th century C. E.). *Historia eccl.* VI, 9.

¹⁸⁴ Senior, R. C. (2005). Indo-Scythian Dynasty. *Encyclopaedia Iranica*.

<https://iranicaonline.org/articles/indo-scythian-dynasty-1>

¹⁸⁵ Sakas / Indo-Scythians. (1999). *The History Files*. Kessler Associates (eds.).

<http://www.historyfiles.co.uk/KingListsFarEast/IndiaSakas.htm>

¹⁸⁶ Benz, E. (1951). Indische Einflüsse auf die frühchristliche Theologie. *Abhandlungen der Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse*, Jahrgang 1951 (3), pp. 1 – 34. [Eds. Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur Mainz], pp. 30ff.

¹⁸⁷ Idem.

memory is characteristic of the Brahmanical tradition. The presence of Indian residents in the city of Alexandria is documented by Dion Chrysostomos.¹⁸⁸

The affinities and agreements between Neoplatonism and Brahman thought may well go back to sources of Neoplatonism, in exchange with Indian thought.¹⁸⁹ Given the consensus about this substantial agreement, Plotinus' interest in India, the origin of Neoplatonism in Alexandria, and the extent of Indian presence in Alexandria, this link cannot be ignored or treated as peripheral. Ammonios Sakkas appears to have had a special role here. Plotinus must have had qualified and substantial knowledge of Indian philosophical ideas, to develop such lasting and strong interest. To denounce this as 'orientalist mythmaking'¹⁹⁰ falls short of explaining this complex. This verdict fails to acknowledge the scope of Graeco-Indian cultural and spiritual exchange which was concentrated in Alexandria – apparently deliberately. (In post-war Germany, any indications of 'Arianism' were ideologically highly suspect and dismissed without further investigation.)

12) The broad scale of Graeco-Indian and Roman-Indian cultural and commercial exchange:

Trade relations with India included the necessary infrastructure of merchants based in both countries. They conducted this trade on both sides. Political and cultural contacts provided for familiarity and stability of commerce. These were energetically developed by the Ptolemaic rulers of Egypt,¹⁹¹ accompanied by a dedicated engagement of the Ptolemies, to study the cultures of their partners. The Library of Alexandria was built to accommodate the greatest collection of manuscripts in the world up to that date. Attached to it was the Mouseion, as academy for scholars of all faculties. The historian D. Abulafia describes it:

Its origins lay in a decision by Ptolemy I to 'equip the library with the writings of all nations so far as they were worthy of serious attention.' [Irenaeus]... it

¹⁸⁸ Dion Chrysostomos. (ca 100 C. E.). *Orationes* XXXII, 373. Ed.: Cohoon, J. W. and Crosby, L. H. (transl.). (1940). *Dio Chrysostom*, vol. III. Cambridge MA.: Loeb Classical Library, p. 358.

¹⁸⁹ Wecker, [...]. (1916). India. *Paulys Realencyclopädie des Classischen Altertums* (PWRE), vol. IX, 2, cols. 1264 – 1325, col. 1324.

¹⁹⁰ Dörrie, H. (1976). Ammonios, der Lehrer Plotins. In: H. Dörrie. *Platonica minora*, (pp. 324–360), Munich, p. 325.

¹⁹¹ Abulafia, D. (2011). *The Great Sea – A Human History of the Mediterranean*, London: Allan Lane, pp. 157ff.

is clear that the Library extended its interests far beyond the Greek world, though it is likely that most non-Greek texts were translated before they were deposited – chronicles of the Egyptian Pharaohs, the Hebrew Bible, Indian tales.¹⁹²

This massive, enduring, coordinated, financed, and politically supported scholarly institutionalized endeavour provided a frame and basis for the study of Indian culture and religion as well, since India was both foremost trading partner and held in highest esteem for its philosophy, religion, and spiritual culture. Indian studies were thus not the matter of a few adventurous individuals, detached from scholarly work and study, but firmly integrated in society and academia. The institution existed up to the end of Antiquity. With the collection of this library largely lost, this literature of translation is gone. The traces of Graeco-Indian philosophical and spiritual exchange, of ideas, scholars, and practitioners, have to be imagined on this background, to be properly assessed. The testimonies of contact and interest can thus not be dismissed as isolated and marginal. They refer to broad, profound, and lasting studies. Among these are the testimonies of Plotinus (3rd century), who studied here, whose philosophy is acknowledged to have Vedāntic elements, and who held India in highest esteem, as well as the report by Damascius (6th century) about an extended visit by Brahmans to Alexandria, hosted by a wealthy student of philosophy. This implies that the reception of Yoga was certainly connected to its Vedāntic interpretation, as the consistent reference to Yogis (shramanas) and Brahmans together in Greek and Roman literature indicates.

The scope of Indo-Grecian trade and exchange was broad enough to provide for many opportunities of learning and teaching. The detailed report by a Graeco-Egyptian sea captain and merchant on the ports from, Egypt all along the East African and Arabian coastlines, up to the west and east coasts of India, with his notes on commercial, political, cultural sometimes spiritual facts, including an ashram on the southern tip of India, shows the range and depth of knowledge and cultural interest in India. His *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*¹⁹³ is extraordinarily illuminating.

¹⁹² Ibidem, p. 159f.

¹⁹³ *The Periplus Maris Erythraei*, pts. 4–18.

<http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/texts/periplus/periplus.html>

13) Awareness of Indian spiritual communities and scholarly assumptions of Indian models for Christian monasticism:

A similar group setting as described in the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* is also described in the reports from Alexander's campaign: the Pythagorean's insistence on vegetarianism, non-violence, and a purified, simple way of life in spiritual communities. Greeks were aware of the existence of 'ashrams', also attended by women, in India and had a concept of them.¹⁹⁴ The necessary social setting for the transmission of Indian philosophy in Yogic communities has thus apparently existed in the cultural receptivity and knowledge as well as to existing pathways of transmission of such forms of organization of spiritual communities and of their meditation practices in Hellenistic and in particular Graeco-Egyptian society.

All these traditions have probably contributed to the development of Christian monasticism. Research has shown that the Cynic tradition has had formative influence on Jesus and on St. Paul, especially in their embodied forms of practise and in their habitus.¹⁹⁵ There is a certain degree of acceptance that early Christian monasticism owes decisive influence, if not the very model of monastic organization to Indian models.¹⁹⁶

14) A culture of conversion, of multiple religious belonging and of syncretistic fluidity of practices and reception across cultural and religious boundaries in Hellenistic culture, especially in Alexandria:

Evidence exists of widespread conversions and of participation in different religious practises and spiritual traditions in Hellenism. This was common and is documented for the time of Hellenism, particularly in the multi-ethnic cities, especially Alexandria, but also Rome. An early example of such fusion is the spiritual community of 'therapeutae' at Lake Mareotis, described by Philo of Alexandria. Through his 'rhetoric of appropriation' he described this community in Jewish terms. Several features of its spiritual life however agree with Buddhism and may derive from there.¹⁹⁷ This supports the assumption that Yogic practices, forms of organization and basics of religious-

¹⁹⁴ *The Periplus Maris Erythraei*, pts. 14-18.

<http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/texts/periplus/periplus.html>

¹⁹⁵ Downing, G. F. (1998). *Cynics, Paul and the Pauline Churches*, London: Routledge, p. 295

¹⁹⁶ Von Lilienfeld, F. (1994). Mönchtum II. *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol. XIII, Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, pp. 150 - 193

¹⁹⁷ Kleinhempel, U. R. (2019). Traces of Buddhist Presence I Alexandria: Philo and the 'Therapeutae'. *Aliter - Научно-теоретический журнал*, 11, pp. 3-31.

philosophical concepts have been similarly received. As an example of individual conversion, we will discuss the Cynic Peregrinus Proteus, who oriented himself towards Brahmanism, towards the end.

- 15) The prevalence of Neoplatonic motifs in Palamas' interpretation of Hesychasm, and corresponding motifs in Yoga, especially in its Advaitic interpretation, confirms the perception of most Greek and Roman historians, who describe Yoga as a spiritual practice of Brahmans in a stage of their life as renunciates, although other forms of 'shramanism' are mentioned too. This implies that Yoga was received in its Brahman interpretation. Furthermore, the affinity between the Platonic tradition (including Neoplatonism), and Brahmanic (Vedāntic) thought, was recognised and acknowledged. The similarities with Cynicism, which were also observed, from early on, related especially to the ascetic and renunciate lifestyle. The affinities with Neopythagoreanism were seen to exist in the rejection of meat consumption, the ideal of purity, harmony, and non-violence of the individual and of their spiritual communities. These three philosophies were mentioned explicitly and discussed as having the closest affinity to Brahman thought and Yoga at the first major encounter between Hellenism and Brahman Yoga, when Alexander the Great visited Brahman Yogis, together with his entourage of philosophically educated historians, in northwest India. These encounters became a 'founding event' retold by several Greek and Roman historians since and confirmed by the writings of subsequent authors.
- 16) Towards the end of Roman Antiquity, the historian of monasticism and theologian, Palladius of Galatia (364 – 430) describes the Brahmans explicitly as practitioners of 'un-interrupted prayer', which by that time had already become a designation for the Hesychast form of continuous prayer.¹⁹⁸ The Brahmans were thus acknowledged as the Indian equivalent of Christian practitioners of this form of prayer established in communities of hermits. This may indicate a sense of affinity.
- 17) In the realm of Alexandria, the boundaries between the Christian academic theology and the Neoplatonic institutions of academic learning were not as rigid as elsewhere in the Roman Empire, as at Athens. Intellectual exchange and studies of Christians with Pagan Neoplatonists (and vice versa) went on. The Neoplatonist Hierocles (5th

¹⁹⁸ Palladius of Helenopolis (Galatia). (420 C. E.). *Historia Lausiaca*, ch. 22, 9. Ed.: Hübner, A. (ed. and transl.). (2016). *Palladius – Historia Lausiaca. Geschichten aus dem frühen Mönchtum* [Greek and German], Freiburg i. B.: Herder Verlag.

century) may serve as example, among whose students the Christian Neoplatonist Aeneas of Gaza (d. 518) became notable¹⁹⁹. Hierocles' commentary on the Pythagorean *Golden Verses*²⁰⁰ became widely read by Neoplatonists and Christians, into the Middle Ages. This also shows that Neo-Pythagoreanism came to be regarded as suitable form of spiritual practice by Neoplatonists. It may indicate a merger of forms of spiritual life, of the individualistic style of Cynicism and of the communal form of Neo-Pythagoreanism with Neoplatonism as associated spiritual philosophy. With these traditions being felt to be close to Brahman Yoga in theory and practice by Greek and Roman scholars of Antiquity it is likely that forms of Yoga have been adopted by their spiritual practitioners and communities in the first step, before these would have been introduced to the Christian Orthodox realm, to be continued by coenobitic communities of spiritual practitioners as foundations for Hesychasm. In this process Neoplatonism would provide the continuum for the understanding of this Yogic practice, since the essential ideas of Neoplatonic interpretation are to be found in its Christian Orthodox theory of Hesychasm of Palamas as well as in some of his patristic sources.

This provides a pathway of reception of spiritual ideas and practices across religious borders up the end of Graeco-Roman Antiquity here. The first clear testimonies of Hesychast ideas and practices in the monasteries of the Sinai Peninsula, as by St. John Climacus a few decades later, may be thus stem from these headwaters in the realm of Alexandria. Processes of fusion probably began already in Hellenistic times between Yogis and Cynics, possibly also Pythagorean communities, in Alexandria, possibly supported by Graeco-Indian coexistence and cultural fusion in northwest India and the ports on the southern coast of India. The essential role of Neoplatonic concepts in Hesychasm however point to Alexandria. There are no traditions of Hesychasm among the Syriac Christian Church of India, which traces its origins, credibly, to the apostle St. Thomas, and its existence to the communities of Levantine traders – among them Jews - in the southern Indian ports.

¹⁹⁹ Schibli, H. S. (2002). *Hierocles of Alexandria*, Oxford: Oxford Univ. Pr., pp. 31ff.

²⁰⁰ Hierocles of Alexandria. (ca. 430 C. E.). *The so-called 'Golden' Pythagorean Verses, containing an elementary exposition of the most perfect philosophy of the Pythagoreans*. Ed.: Schibli, H. S. (2002). *Hierocles of Alexandria*, Oxford: OUP, pp. 165–325.

4.2. Graeco-Egyptian Syncretism as Pathway for the Adoption of Indian Ideas and Practices

Religious fluidity in Hellenistic led to the creation of the *Graeco-Egyptian Magic Papyri*.²⁰¹ Here an admixture of Judaism is discernible too. A Graeco-Jewish cultural synthesis developed in the region of Alexandria, with the translation of the Septuagint as a major achievement.²⁰² Cultural and political conditions existed in which the threshold for conversions were lowered existed. Christianity grew rapidly in these conditions where it was able to pass from a Jewish cultural and religious milieu into the Hellenistic cultural realm. These conditions existed especially in Alexandria where one third of the population was Jewish, and where Greeks and indigenous Egyptians made up most of the rest, with other nationalities also existing there. Here the origins of Hesychasm are located.²⁰³ The religious symbolism of the 'heart' in ancient Egyptian theology, which reappears in Hesychasm, supports the assumption.²⁰⁴

Partial transference and reception of foreign cultural and religious elements in Hellenism was common in this Hellenistic culture. The reception of the goddess Isis is an example. She was reinterpreted in terms of Hellenistic theology and philosophy²⁰⁵ and equated with goddesses of different peoples of the Graeco-Roman realm,²⁰⁶ Cultural and theological particularities were thus largely omitted, resulting in a 'reduction of complexity' in the process of reception. Partial or incomplete transference is not an argument against the reception of an embodied practice from one system into another, as K. Ware maintains, considering the adoption of Yoga by Hesychasm. In terms of Theory of Syncretism, this is no obstacle to transference. When in trans-cultural and trans-religious reception some of the features get lost, and are not reproduced in the receiving system,

²⁰¹ Fowden, G. (1993). *The Egyptian Hermes – A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind*, Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, p. 66. fn. 85 and 86.

²⁰² Berger, K. (1994). *Theologiegeschichte des Urchristentums – Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, Tübingen: Francke Verlag, p. 712.

²⁰³ Hausherr, I. (1927). La Méthode d'Oraison Hésychaste. *Orientalia Christiana*, IX – 2 (36), p. 142ff.

²⁰⁴ Cannuyer, C. (1976). L'origine égyptienne de la prière du cœur. [Le Monde Copte](http://eocf.free.fr/text_priere_coeur_egypte.htm) (Revue semestrielle de culture égyptienne), 11. Limoges. http://eocf.free.fr/text_priere_coeur_egypte.htm

²⁰⁵ Plutarch. (around 100 C. E.). *De Iside et Osiride*. Ed.: Griffiths, J. G. (intr., transl., and comm.). (1970). *Plutarch's de Iside et Osiride*. Cardiff: Univ. of Wales Press.

²⁰⁶ Apuleius of Madaura, *The Golden Ass*. Ed.: Walsh, G. P. (transl., intr., and comm.). (2008). Oxford: Oxford University Press (OUP)

this is to be understood as evidence of 'creolization'. No argument against origins of Hesychasm in Yoga²⁰⁷ can be derived therefrom.

Hellenistic universalism had the effect of lowering of boundaries between heterogeneous religions and cultures as the basis of reception of non-Greek religious practises and beliefs into Hellenistic culture and spirituality. The prevailing universalism promoted the self-explication of religions in its sphere to others, as well as their study and adoptions from them. Examples of such self-explications are St. Paul's speech on the Areopagus in Athens²⁰⁸ and Philo of Alexandria's apologetic explanation of Judaism, where he claimed Moses to be the teacher of Pythagoras.²⁰⁹ Likewise the Middle Platonist philosopher Numenius declared: "For who is Plato but a Moses speaking Attic?"²¹⁰ as quoted by Clement of Alexandria.²¹¹ Lineages of tradition existed by which forms of argumentation, ideas and practises were introduced from beyond into the nascent doctrine and practise of early Christianity.

The conviction of the pedigree of Greek philosophical thought, tenacious as it is, has long been dismissed as an ethnocentric and Euro-centric phantasma. This applies to the issue of Egyptian inspiration of Plato, to which Chaldean, Persian, Indian, and a host of other sources were added by historiographers of philosophy in Antiquity. Detailed investigation, and inter-disciplinary exchange at conferences, have brought sound evidence of centuries of Greek and Roman reception of Egyptian beliefs by Hellenistic and Roman authors.²¹² Summarizing the results of the latest inter-disciplinary conference of Egyptologists and Classicists on Platonism, and late Egyptian religion, in Würzburg in 2014, the editors of the conference volume, Michael Erler and Martin A. Stadler, declare that it can be shown, that several Graeco-Roman authors, especially of the Platonic tradition, had sound knowledge of Egyptian religion, based on knowledge of the ancient Egyptian language and its three writing systems (hieroglyphic, hieratic, demotic). This can

²⁰⁷ Ware, K. (2011). *Praying with the body: the Hesychast method and non-Christian parallels*.

<http://bogoslav.ru/en/text/2671134.html>

²⁰⁸ Acts 17: 16-34

²⁰⁹ Hiller, M. (n. d.). Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 B.C.E.—40 C.E.). *Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (IEP)*. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/philo/>

²¹⁰ Numenius of Apamea. (2nd half 2nd century C. E.). [Fragments], fr. 8.13. Ed.: Des Places, É. (ed., and transl.). (1973). *Numénius. Fragments*, Paris: Belles Lettres.

²¹¹ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 1.22.150.4. Loc cit: Dawson, D. (1992). *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria*, Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, p. 204

²¹² Erler, M. and Stadler, M. A., (2017). Zur Einführung. In M. Erler and M. A. Stadler (eds.). *Platonismus und spätägyptische Religion* (pp. 1-6). Berlin: De Gruyter.

be demonstrated for Plutarch as well as to some degrees for Plato, Iamblichus, Plotinus, and Porphyry, even for Synesius, in the early 5th century A.D. ²¹³

A bilingual cultural situation developed in lower Egypt after the Macedonian conquest, in the multi-ethnic city of Alexandria. In this milieu translations of Egyptian scripture into Greek were made, in which Egyptians took an active part.²¹⁴ The priest Manetho engaged in conveying the doctrines of ancient Egyptian religion to the Hellenistic readers,²¹⁵ in a similar way as Philo of Alexandria did for Judaism in this time. Detailed knowledge of Egyptian religion also existed among Roman authors, such as Apuleius of Madaura.²¹⁶

The example for this reception was set by Plato himself, whose disputed visit to Egypt and to its cultural centres, especially to Heliopolis and its huge temple-library, is fairly ascertained by now.²¹⁷ The visits by Plato and his successors were obviously not made for entertainment, but in quest for 'ancient wisdom'.

In such syncretistic reception Greek philosophy had the role of interpretative tool. It was applied to the study of ancient Egyptian religion.²¹⁸ It was also applied to Brahman thought and Yogic spirituality as well. The hermeneutics of this 'interpretatio Graeca' began with Herodotus in the 5th century B. C.²¹⁹ The old age, and the divine origins, of the Egyptian and other ancient cultures and religions – of the Chaldeans, Persians and Indians - were accepted. Their interpretation as revelation was made primarily through Platonism,²²⁰ as part of a wider process of philosophical interpretation of myth, spirituality,

²¹³ Idem

²¹⁴ Stadler, M. A. (2017). Ägyptenrezeption in der römische Kaiserzeit. In: M. Erler and M. A. Stadler (Eds.). *Platonismus und spätägyptische Religion* (pp. 21-42), Berlin: De Gruyter, pp. 23f.

²¹⁵ Ibidem, p.38.

²¹⁶ Nagel, S. (2017). Mittelplatonische Konzepte der Göttin Isis bei Plutarch und Apuleius im Vergleich mit ägyptischen Quellen der griechisch-römischen Zeit. In M. Erler and M. A. Stadler (Eds.). *Platonismus und spätägyptische Religion*, Berlin, 2017: De Gruyter.

²¹⁷ Stadler, M. A. (2017). Ägyptenrezeption in der römische Kaiserzeit. In: M. Erler, and M. A. Stadler (Eds.). *Platonismus und spätägyptische Religion*, (pp. 79-126). Berlin: De Gruyter, pp. 21ff.

²¹⁸ Brenk, F. E. (2017). Searching for Truth – Plutarch's On Isis and Osiris. In: M. Erler and M. A. Stadler (Eds.). *Platonismus und spätägyptische Religion*. (pp. 54–70). Berlin: De Gruyter. p. 60.

²¹⁹ Henri, O. (2017). A general approach to *interpretatio Graeca* in the light of papyrological evidence. In: M. Erler and M. A. Stadler (Eds.). *Platonismus und spätägyptische Religion* (pp. 43 – 54). Berlin: De Gruyter

²²⁰ Brenk, F. E. (2017). 'Searching for Truth' – Plutarch's On Isis and Osiris. In M. Erler and M. A. Stadler (Eds.). *Platonismus und spätägyptische Religion* (pp. 54–70). Berlin: De Gruyter, p. 60.

and religion in Graeco-Roman Antiquity.²²¹ We may assume the same for Brahman thought and Yoga.

4.3. Early Sinaitic Hesychasm and its Roots in Alexandrian Neoplatonic Spirituality

The emergence of Hesychasm in the monastic literature of Mt. Sinai in the early 7th century, indicates that its roots and process of formation are certainly older – and not the result of a spontaneous invention. The monastic communities on the Sinai Peninsula drew their theological education and their forms of spiritual practice chiefly from Egypt, i.e., especially from Alexandria, with integration of Syrian motifs. Personal, biographic connections existed to Egypt as well as to the Levante. The differences between this monasticism, with its learned theologians, and that of the hermits of the Egyptian desert indicate distinct origins. A. Golitzin noted the influence of the Egyptian and Syrian sources on the formation of Palamas' thought.²²²

Alexandria has several features, that make it the most likely site of origin for Hesychasm. Here religions of the Eastern Mediterranean merged and influenced each other, in a culture of syncretism, that remained vital from Hellenism onwards to the end of Graeco-Roman Antiquity. Further south the early Christian monasticism of the Desert Fathers and Mothers arose, which Hesychasm counts among its ancestry. In the 4th century monks by that name ('ἠσυχασταί'), lived as hermits, some of them in coenobitic communities. Among them St. Pachomius the Elder (292 in Thebes - 342 in Middle Egypt) founded the first structured communities. His rules became foundations for monasteries. Christian monasticism is also understood to be in the tradition of a spiritual ascetic community near Alexandria whom Philo had described as 'therapeutae', i.e. as

²²¹ Athanassiadi, P. and Macris, C. (2013). La philosophisation du religieux. In: C. Bonnet and L. Bricault (Eds.), *Panthée. Religious Transformations in the Graeco-Roman Empire* (pp. 41-83). Leiden: E. J. Brill.

²²² Golitzin, A. (1999). Dionysius Areopagites in the Works of Saint Gregory Palamas: On the Question of a 'Christological Corrective' and Related Matters [paper given on November 6th, 1999, at the Second International Conference on St. Gregory Palamas, Limassol, Cyprus]. [Original ed.: (2000.)

Ὁ Ἁγὸς Γρηγόριος Παλαμᾶς καὶ τὸ Ἄνω Πνεῦμα. In

“Ὁ Ἁγὸς Γρηγόριος Παλαμᾶς καὶ τὸ Ἄνω Πνεῦμα” (1998) Ἁγία Μεταξὺ (1999), (pp. 619-643). Mount Athos: The Holy Great Monastery of Vatopediou, <http://www.marquette.edu/maqom/Corrective.html>

'devotees'.²²³ It has been proposed that the Buddhist monastic organization have provided a model to the formation of Orthodox monasticism.²²⁴ Considering the centuries of time span between Emperor Ashoka's Buddhist missions to the Mediterranean and the first traces of Christian asceticism this influence is probably indirect, through the pathway of non-Christian organized spiritual communities as existed in the periphery of Alexandria.²²⁵

Although Hesychasm came to be practised in monasteries, it preserved a degree of autonomy in its form of social existence, often as loose association with closely-knit monastic communities, but chiefly as a practice of independent hermits. This indicates a distinct origin.

In this culture of syncretism Ancient Egyptian, Jewish, Greek, and Indian thought, religious ideas and practices, merged and influenced each other, with lasting effects in the spheres of religion and philosophy to this day. Here was the hub of the extensive Greek and Roman trade with India. Networks of experienced traders and seafarers existed who conducted the trade and who had sufficient cultural knowledge and experience to sustain the infrastructure of such commerce on both sides.²²⁶ This exchange was not limited to merchandise but included ideas and spiritual pursuits as well. Visits of Yogis to Rome are documented. Keen interest in Indian philosophy and Yoga is attested in this region. The cultural and social conditions here made a transfer of sets of ideas, beliefs, and spiritual practices from India possible, as well as their reception into evolving Christianity.

The cultural ideal of syncretism was supported in Alexandria, due to its mixed population of Greeks, Egyptians, Romans proper, Jews and Indians, that brought forth the powerful Graeco-Egyptian and Roman –Egyptian syncretism. Exchange with India added to that. Here Judaism had made its transition to the Greek language some time before. Cultural, social, economic, academic, religious, institutional, and philosophical

²²³ Gribomont, J. (1993). Mönchstum und Aszese - Östliches Christentum. In: B. McGinn, J. Meyendorff, and J. Leclerc (Eds.). *Geschichte der christlichen Spiritualität, von. 1: Von den Anfängen bis zum 12. Jahrhundert*, (pp. 115-136). Würzburg: Echter Vlg. p. 115f. [Original: (1985). *Christian Spirituality: origins to the twelfth century*, New York: The Crossroad Publ. Co.].

²²⁴ Von Lilienfeld, F. (1994). Mönchtum II. *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol. XIII, (pp. 150–193). Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, p. 159.

²²⁵ Kleinhempel, U. R. (2019). Traces of Buddhist Presence in Alexandria: Philo and the 'Therapeutae'. *Aliter - Научно-теоретический журнал*, 11, pp. 3-31.

²²⁶ *The Periplus Maris Erythraei*. (40-70 C. E.).

<http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/texts/periplus/periplus.htm>

conditions for encountering and learning from Brahman Yogis, as well as for visiting India, existed here for centuries.

Coexistence and communication between Neoplatonists with Christians, their common studies institutions of academic learning, existed up to the interdict of the Pagan school of Horapollon by emperor Zenon in 488 E. C.²²⁷ It persisted beyond, under Christian leadership, and facilitated the adoption of such concepts and practices into Christianity. It is therefore not by coincidence, that sophisticated methods and theory of meditation emerged in Hesychast practice and literature, soon after the Muslim conquest, in monasteries, especially of the Sinai Peninsula.

Memory about the old age of Hesychasm and of its origin in late Antiquity is preserved in the Hesychast tradition. St. Gregory Palamas expressly points to St. John Climacus of the 6th – 7th century as predecessor.²²⁸ Jean Meyendorff supports this view, even though clearer descriptions of details only emerged in the 13th century.²²⁹ Meyendorff underlines the origin of the motif of the return of Soul into itself in the Platonic tradition, pointing out that it has been adopted by Greek Church fathers already in the 2nd century, as of Clement of Alexandria and subsequently by Origenes, Evagrius Ponticus, and Gregory of Nyssa.²³⁰ Spiritual practice was connected to it.

Meyendorff discusses Plotinus' belief that the higher, noetic part of the soul is divine²³¹ and the method of returning introspectively into oneself, to perceive the divine element in one's soul, as laid out in Plotinus' *Enneads*.²³² Meyendorff thus indicates a time for the origins of Hesychasm. Since Plotinus describes the divinizing ascent of the soul, with an indication of method to attain it, a basis for Hesychasm can be assumed to exist here in the 3rd century. Meyendorff refers especially to this depiction by Plotinus:

And this inner vision, what is its operation? Newly awakened it is all too feeble
to bear the ultimate splendour. Therefore, the soul must be trained ... Withdraw

²²⁷ Athanassiadi, P. (1999). *Damascius – The Philosophical History* (text with translation and notes), Athens: Apameia Cultural Association, pp. 24ff.

²²⁸ Palamas, *Triads* I.3.2

²²⁹ Meyendorff, J. (1954). Le thème du retour en soi dans la doctrine palamite du XIV^e siècle. *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, 145 (2), pp. 188–206, p.191. http://www.persee.fr/doc/AsPDF/rhr_0035-1423_1954_num_145_2_6976.pdf.

²³⁰ Idem, p. 188.

²³¹ Plotinus. (270 C. E.). *Enneads*, I.6.9. Ed.: Mackenna, S. (transl.), and Dillon, J. (intr., abr., and annot.) (2011). *Plotinus – The Enneads*. London: Penguin Books

²³² Ibidem, p. 54f.

into yourself and look. And if you do not find yourself beautiful yet, act as does the creator of a statue that is to be made beautiful: he cuts away here, he smoothes there, he makes this line lighter, this other purer, until a lovely face has grown upon his work. So do you also: cut away all that is excessive, straighten all that is crooked, bring light to all that is overcast, labour to make all one glow of beauty and never cease chiselling your statue, until there shall shine out on you from it the godlike splendour of virtue, until you shall see the perfect goodness surely established in the stainless shrine. ... When you know that you have become this perfect work, when you are self-gathered in the purity of your being, nothing now remaining can shatter that inner unity, nothing from without clinging to the authentic man, when you find yourself wholly true to your essential nature, wholly that only veritable Light which is not measured by space.... Therefore, first let each become godlike and each beautiful who cares to see God and Beauty.²³³

Plotinus describes the inner process of this method for divinisation, but emphasises that it requires methodical, untiring effort, practice, and art, as well as a synaesthetic intuitive sense for divine beauty in this 'culture of the self'. It is reminiscent of Hesychast instructions, even though the imagery differs. His metaphors of hard, unceasing work indicate an active process requiring diligent work: "the soul must be trained", "withdraw into yourself", "act as the creator of a statue", "labour", "never cease chiselling". The method became elaborated and combined with features from Yoga – as will be shown discussed in chapter 8. Yoga converges with Neoplatonism in many ways. Substantial exchange between Neoplatonists and Brahmins as well as Yogis occurred all through this period, only to cease in the early 7th century.

As to the closing time of this process, the end of the 6th century may be assumed. By then the reception of Neoplatonism by theologians was far advanced. Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita had developed his complex system on this foundation, integrating

²³³ Ibidem, p. 54f.

the doctrine of 'theurgy', in his religious epistemology and theory of sacraments, symbols, roles and rites. Palamas' theory of Hesychasm can be read as a reconstruction of these foundations.

The first stage of development of Christian asceticism probably goes further back. Yogic influences. The first mediation apparently happened through the Cynics' orientation towards Yogic models, that is well documented. A prominent example was Peregrinus Proteus (100 – 165 C. E.), who will be discussed in chapter 14.

For later 'flow' from Yoga into Christianity trajectories through Neo-Pythagoreanism, Middle- and Neoplatonism are important. This was embedded in social contexts, such as Christians studying with Pagans at Neoplatonic academies whose teachers engaged in spiritual practice and in exchange with India. Conversions by individuals and by communities should be envisioned. Those spiritual practices – as of Yoga – which were found suitable to Christian spirituality were likely received. Conditions for such 'flow' existed most of all in Alexandria, where inter-religious and inter-cultural exchange was prevalent.

With the demise of this culture by the Muslim conquest of Egypt, what had been received into Christian spirituality by then emerged in monasteries, especially on the Sinai Peninsula. With such practices being taught and transmitted orally – sometimes as 'secret doctrine' and safeguarded by arcane discipline – written descriptions of them are rare. Such secrecy and the requirement to be initiated into 'living tradition' exists from Plato's time, evidenced by the motif of his 'unwritten teachings' through the spiritual circles of followers of Neoplatonist scholars, such as of Iamblichus at Apamea, up to St. Gregory Palamas and beyond. Iamblichus, who was rooted in Graeco-Egyptian syncretism and who integrated Cynic and Pythagorean teachings, is a model of such practical syncretism based on philosophy. His successors, such as Damascius, wrote on the encounter with Yogis and their ideas in the Neoplatonic academic milieu.

The first monastic author to outline salient features of Hesychasm, St. John Climacus, has been shown to have been a highly educated man, well versed in the literary and philosophic studies which were included in the curricula for formation in 'rhetorics',²³⁴ as preparing for public civil service. By education he is thus based in this academic milieu which studied Yoga and Brahman thought and engaged in encounters. The legend that

²³⁴ Duffy, J. (2010). Reading John Climacus: Rhetorical Argumentation, Literary Convention and the Tradition of Monastic Formation (review). *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 18 (1), pp. 145–146.
[doi:10.1353/earl.0.0303](https://doi.org/10.1353/earl.0.0303)

he became a monk at the age of sixteen has been disproven. Most probably he entered monasticism at a mature age, rather late in life.²³⁵ This is important, since it shows that we can safely attribute the genesis of Hesychasm to educated milieus, which combined the religious-philosophical quest for 'ascent to God' with sophisticated methods of meditation. They apparently had basic methods of meditative recollection for their theories of divine ascent, purification, self-recollection, and initiatory transformation. On this basis they will have understood the more sophisticated methods of Yoga, which they could study and learn in their manifold encounters with Yogis. That they found Brahman and Yogic thought to be close to their own convictions is well documented.

4.4. A Millennium of Encounters as Basis for the Reception of Yoga

The earliest Greek historiographer to report on India was Herodotus (484 – 425 B. C.). Born in the Persian Empire he wrote on the Persian-Greek wars and conflict. He mentioned the settlements of Greeks on the eastern frontier of Persia, to Bactria, where they had been banished to. Two centuries later they were found by Alexander the Great. Having preserved Greek culture and contact with the motherland, they were mediators of knowledge and served as interpreters.²³⁶ The manifold presence of Greeks in the north-western borderlands of India, from the age of Persian rule to the establishment of Graeco-Indian kingdoms, as well as in India proper has been well documented by W. Tarn.²³⁷

The relation of Hellenistic and Roman societies to India had many facets: the economic exchange was certainly the oldest. Trade between India and the near East existed since Sumerian times. Ships of the Indus civilization carried out direct trade with the Sumerians along the coast.²³⁸ The other trade route went overland through Persia. For the Mediterranean realm direct trade with India began after Alexander's conquest of

²³⁵ Johnsén, H. R. (2007). *Reading John Climacus: Rhetorical Argumentation, Literary Convention and the Tradition of Monastic Formation*, Lund: Lund University Press

²³⁶ Karttunen, K. (1989). *India in Early Greek Literature*. Helsinki: Studia Orientalia, vol. 65. (Eds. The Finnish Oriental Society), p. 55.

²³⁷ Tarn, W. W. (1997). *The Greeks in Bactria & India*. (3rd rev. ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [1st ed. 1938]

²³⁸ Karttunen, K. (1989). *India in Early Greek Literature*. Helsinki: Studia Orientalia. (Eds. The Finnish Oriental Society), p.12f.

Persia. For the Greeks, the discovery of the 'Monsoon route' was a decisive innovation, which they learned from Indian sailors in the second century B.C.²³⁹ With reasonably direct routes and means of communication established, Greeks and Indians soon discovered that they could converse meaningfully with each other – especially about philosophy and spirituality, and to some extent also about religion.²⁴⁰

The following sequence for the reception of Yoga and Neoplatonism into Hesychasm emerges:

- From 326 B. C. on: Alexander's the Great encounters with Brahman Yogis and their impact on Hellenistic culture:

When Alexander the Great finally reached the fringes of India he fulfilled his ardent desire to meet with Yogis. Several encounters are reported. This implies that Yoga and Brahmanism were held in high esteem in Greek culture by that time. These encounters are of extraordinary significance for the subsequent development of Graeco-Indian relations. It is remarkable that the reports of Alexander's learned entourage²⁴¹ – who were deliberately brought along to 'write history' as it was made – present the Brahman Yogis as quite well informed about Greek philosophy. Special affinities with three Greek philosophical 'schools' were discussed: the Cynics, the Pythagoreans, and the Platonists – and differences. This set a precedent.

The literary reports of Onesicritus, a philosophically trained scholar, Nearchos, and others were quoted and retold by Greek and Roman historians, thus sustaining awareness of these encounters in Hellenistic and Roman cultures. Christian scholars up to the end of Roman Antiquity referred to them. Mediaeval historians preserved them in Christian memory.

- 326 – 10 B. C. The Hellenistic Era and Indo-Greek kingdoms:

Several states and kingdoms with Greek rulers and Indo-Greek culture became established in north-western India (roughly in present Afghanistan and Pakistan) and mediate between both spheres. During this period Greek ambassadors lived in India, especially in the Mauryan Empire, at Paliputra in the Ganges plain, like Megasthenes. Their reports, classified as a unique literary genre of 'Indika', sustain this interest and

²³⁹ Ibidem, p.19f.

²⁴⁰ Vassiliades, D. (2000). *The Greeks in India – A Survey in Philosophical Understanding*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publ., p. 89.

²⁴¹ Vassiliades, D. (2000). *The Greeks in India – A Survey in Philosophical Understanding*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publ., p. 44.

provide more details. Megasthenes (350 – 290 B. C.) served as ambassador of Seleucus I at the Indian court of “Sandrocottus”, Chandragupta Maurya, in Pataliputra in present Bihar. In his *Indika* he wrote in detail about India.²⁴² He was succeeded by further ambassadors, such as Deimachos (3rd century) and Dionysius, who sustained the exchange.

- 258 – about 240 B. C. Emperor Ashoka of Maurya and his Buddhist mission:

The Maurya Empire encompassed almost all of India, save the Tamil kingdoms. Emperor Ashoka converted to Buddhism, after years of bloody battles. He commissioned Buddhist missions to several lands outside of India, among them to the Hellenistic kingdoms, of the Seleucids (Persia up to the Levante), the Ptolemaean rulers of Egypt, and to the kingdoms of Macedonia, Epirus and Lybia. Known as the *Rock Edicts*, they are engraved on pillars in several languages, among them in Greek. The missions apparently had some success in the realm of Alexandria. Philo of Alexandria (25 B. C. – 50. C. E.) described a monastic community of Buddhist character near the city. Clement of Alexandria (150 – 215 C. E.) explicitly mentions Buddhist beliefs.

- 323 – 30 B. C. The era of Ptolemaian rule of Egypt.

The Ptolemies made Alexandria their intellectual and commercial metropolis, with Hellenistic culture, with major library and academies, teaching philosophy, medicine and the natural sciences. Graeco-Egyptian syncretism developed, with Egyptians and Greek intellectuals, some of them priests, engaging in this cultural and religious transfer. That cults of Egyptian religion came to be adopted by Hellenistic and Roman societies supports the assumption that the same happened with Yogic-Brahman spiritual practice and religious philosophy.

The Macedonian dynasty developed maritime trade with India. The route went from the Red Sea directly to southern India, with the Monsoon. Permanent merchants' colonies were established in both realms. Archaeological findings support the historiographic notes. By the end of the Ptolemies' rule, these ties, that included politics, and culture, were firmly established.

The Ptolemies commissioned extensive translations of Scripture (sacred and philosophical) of other nations for the library of Alexandria. Thus, a basis for the study of

²⁴² McCrindle, J. W. (1877). *Ancient India as Described by Megasthenes and Arrian – being a Translation of the Fragments of the Indika of Megasthenes Collected by Dr. Schwanbeck and of the First Part of the Indika of Arrian*, (with introduction, notes, and map of ancient India), Calcutta, Bombay, London: Tracker, Spink & Co; Trübner & Co.

Indian thought existed here, which can explain, why later philosophers took such eager and apparently informed interest in Indian religious-philosophical thought.

- 30 B. C. – 3rd century C. E. Roman Empire and the early Christian Era:

From the Augustan times on, trade with India surged, providing for the whole Roman Empire. Annually fleets of 120 ships departing from the northern Red Sea port for India have been observed by Strabo. Due to conflicts between Rome and Persia the bulk of trade with India shifted from the overland route, through Syria and Persia, to the Indian Ocean. The volume of this trade, which now serviced the whole Roman Empire multiplied.

Political ties with Tamil kingdoms reinforced this trade: with the Pandya kingdom, especially in present Tamil Nadu, with the Chera kingdom in the southwest, in present Kerala, and with the Chola kingdom further north. Diplomatic delegations from the Pandya kingdom to Emperor Augustus are recorded in Roman historiography, as by Plutarch and Strabo. They included Yogis.

From this era, a Greek sea captain's manual describing the sea routes and the harbours from the Red Sea, all along the coasts of India, up to present Bangla Desh, the *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*, has survived. He was an experienced mariner, based in Alexandria. Besides mercantile information about ports, merchandise, and conditions for trade, he includes notes about spiritual life, and culture in the various ports, mentioning an ashram for men and women at Cape Coromandel.

With this shift the Hindu, chiefly Shaivite realms of India became partners in this exchange. This is important for our assessment of the Indian spiritual and religious presence and influence in the realm of Alexandria and the Roman Empire. Given the volume of the Indian-Roman trade, its duration and well-developed infrastructure, the historiographic notes about the presence of Indians, especially of Yogis, becomes more meaningful. Dion Chrysostomos mentions Indians alongside Bactrians as residents of the city.

Religious influence also went the other way: The traditions report the travel of the Apostle Thomas to India, in about 43 C. E. to establish early Christianity there. They are credible since the name of an Indian king of Taxila is mentioned who ruled in this time. Thomas' further travels may have taken him southwards to the coastal towns where merchants, especially from the Levante, including Jews, were established. Here Indian Christianity, belonging to the Syriac Oriental Church, originated. For its doctrinal and ritual

development, further stable contacts were required. These continued to exist, with some disruption, up to the early 7th century.

During this period historians like Strabon of Amasia (63 B. C. – 23 C. E.) and Plutarch, priest at Delphi (45 – 125 C. E.) preserved and retold historiography about India. The Neopythagorean spiritual teacher, Apollonius of Tyana (40 – 125 C. E.) was said to have made a pilgrimage to northwest India during this time. He too is reported to have visited Taxila, to converse with the Brahmans.

- The 3rd century C. E. The time of the Severan Dynasty (193 – 235 C. E.) and the founding of Neoplatonism:

The rule of this Levantine dynasty consolidated the Roman Empire, extended its influence eastward and brought about a cultural climate of religious tolerance, also for Christianity, and renewed interest in Indian philosophy and spiritual practice. During this period, the Empress Julia Domna (160 – 217 C. E.), who descended from a priestly family from Emesa (Homs), exerted political and cultural influence over an extended period during which her husband and sons ruled. She fostered religious syncretism. She commissioned the Sophist Philostratos (170 – 250 C. E.) to write a biography of Apollonius of Tyana (40 – 120 C. E.) (Ἡ βίη τοῦ Ἀπολλωνίου τοῦ Τυανέου / *Vita Apollonii*). He was a leading figure of Neopythagoreanism in his time, before it merged into Neoplatonism, in the third century.

Apollonius is depicted as a wandering Pythagorean philosopher and spiritual teacher, who undertook a voyage to India, to Taxila, to converse with the Brahmans there, returning by sea to Ethiopia and to Egypt for conversations with the 'gymnosophists' – the 'nude sages', a Hellenistic designation for Yogis - living in Egypt. Although this biography is regarded as quite fictional, it is important for the values it conveys and illustrates. The travels of the hero convey a tour-d'horizon of religion and spirituality between the Eastern Mediterranean, the Levante, Babylonia, India, Ethiopia, Egypt, Rome, Spain and back to Greece. Thematic strands are woven into the novelistic biography, such as the relationship between the philosopher and the emperor. They appear in his talks with the Brahmans, and in his relations with Domitian. Issues of theurgy and comparisons between Indian and Egyptian spirituality recur throughout the book.

The *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* has been derided as historically unreliable and fantastic. It should however be understood as a highly important and interesting programmatic discourse, which encodes and illustrates the syncretism of this age. The

fact, that this book was commissioned by the empress, makes it a programmatic text. It encodes the spirit of this era. The growing awareness of the depth and range of Graeco-Egyptian syncretism for the religious and philosophical culture of the Roman Empire²⁴³ supports this view. Philostratus told not only of visits of Apollonius to Brahmans and Yogis in India, but also to the latter in Egypt, including the realm of Alexandria. He is depicted as discussing learning from the Indian sages, the adoption of their practices, and religious beliefs and syncretism. He presents Pythagoreans as being rooted in Indian and Egyptian religion.²⁴⁴ Philostratus certainly referred to a religious, philosophical, and spiritual 'landscape' present in the Roman Empire and the Roman mind of this age, discussing issues of concern for his readers. We may infer, that practitioners of Yoga were established at this time in this realm, and that their beliefs and practices had begun to be adopted by Neopythagoreans (and like-minded people) in their environment, as depicted by Philostratos.

The detailed descriptions of Christian authors, of Clement of Alexandria (150 – 215 C. E.) and of (Pseudo-)Hippolytos of Rome (3rd century C.E.), about Indian religious, philosophical beliefs and practices, with special mentions of the Yogis, must be read on this background: They do not only refer to the distant lands of India but also to environmental experience.

Towards the end of this period, the founder of Neoplatonism, Plotinus (204 - 270 C. E.) went to study with Ammonios Sakkas (about 175 – 243 C. E.) in Alexandria, from 234 – 243 C. E. Ammonius, who left nothing in writing, is credited with providing Plotinus with the foundations of his philosophy, which could explain the ardent interest in Indian philosophy and the desire to visit India in his student. Plotinus may also have learned directly from Indians in Alexandria. The similarity between Neoplatonism and Vedānta is acknowledged in scholarship. The political and economic crisis of the third century, after the demise of the Severan dynasty, led to a stark reduction in trade with India.

- 3rd – 6th century C. E.: Late Antiquity: religious coexistence and academic exchange of Christians and Pagans, continued exchange and commerce with India

²⁴³ Erler, M. and Stadler, M. A. (2017). Zur Einführung. In M. Erler, Michael and M. A. Stadler (Eds.). *Platonismus und spätägyptische Religion*, (pp. 1-6). Berlin: De Gruyter.

²⁴⁴ Philostratos (the elder). (217-245 C. E.). *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*. Ed.: Bells, C. P. (transl.). (1923). *Life and Times of Apollonius of Tyana, rendered into English from the Greek of Philostratus the Elder*, Stanford, Ca.: Stanford Univ. Publications, pp. 148ff.

In this period the religious, cultural, political, and cultural spheres underwent considerable change. In Neoplatonism, a marked shift to the inclusion of Pagan ritual and Mystery Cults was enacted by Iamblichus of Chalcis (240 – 325). His treatise *De Mysteriis*²⁴⁵ presented a theory of ritual and of symbolic means of communication with the Divine, including passages on the aesthesis of the divine. It may be acknowledged as an early philosophical aesthetics of religion. This book is framed as a response of the Egyptian priest Abamon to a letter of Porphyrios (233 – 305 C. E.) to Anebon concerning difficulties about theurgy and divination.

Iamblichus of Chalcis (today: Qinnasrin), was of Syrian descent, originating from a priestly noble family of Emesa (present: Homs). This certainly sensitized him to issues of ritual. For some time, he studied with Porphyry (from Tyre) who was a student of Plotinus (from Egypt). He established an academy at Apameia. Major philosophers of Neoplatonism share Levantine roots. They are preceded by Neo-Pythagoreans, and by Middle Platonists, like Numenius of Apameia, who combined both, and who expressed interest in India as source of spiritual philosophy. This is relevant to our quest. They were raised in a culture with long traditions of exchange with India, facilitated by the Aramaic language, which was also lingua franca in Persia. Their contribution to the syncretistic processes in the formation of Hesychasm could receive further scrutiny. It resonates with the contributions of Syrian Christian mysticism of divine light so essential to Hesychasm.

Theory of theurgy was further developed by Proclus (412 – 484 C. E.) in comments on the *Chaldean Oracles* (late 2nd century), describing the soul's ascent by ritual and symbolic means. It was received into Christianity by Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita (5th – 6th century). The sense of tradition in the 'theurgic community' indicates that it was accompanied by spiritual practice, of which we only have sparse information, partly due to the secrecy of arcane Mysteries. The assumption that elements of Yoga may have been adopted by this time and passed on within such communities, as in Alexandria, is confirmed by continued interest in Brahman Yoga, as documented by Christian historiographers of this age.

The continuity of bonds of the Neoplatonic community with India right into Late Antiquity is documented by Damascius (458 – 538 C. E.) the last rector of the Neoplatonic Academy of Athens up to its closure by Emperor Justinian I in 529, in his *History of*

²⁴⁵ Clarke, E. C., Dillon, J. M., and Hershbell, J. P. (eds., transl., intr., and ann.). (2003). *Iamblichus: De Mysteriis*, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature.

*Philosophy*²⁴⁶ (also known as *The Life of Isidor*). Damascius, who had studied at the Neoplatonic school in Alexandria, reports about the visit of a group of Brahmans here, who resided as guests in the house of Flavius Messius Phoebus Severus, a Roman politician, who gave up his office as consul in 470, to go to study at the Neoplatonic academy in Alexandria. Severus made his house a venue for lectures and seminars, some of them conducted by himself, and gave his visitors access to his substantial personal library. The Brahmans who stayed with him, and whom he introduced to his circle, lectured on their roles, their practices, and beliefs.

That a group of Brahmans visited this academy shows that ties with India persisted, in spite of all political and economic crises. Neoplatonists (and the affiliated Neopythagoreans) continued to cultivate them, personally and institutionally. The Brahmans expressly did not come for purposes of sightseeing. That Severus hosted the group indicates an involvement of the Neoplatonic community. It is inconceivable that they would not have spoken about the practices of Yoga, in which Brahmans were trained according to Hellenistic historians. That both sides could communicate even details, indicates knowledge of Greek or capable interpreters.

The late age of this documented visit shows that doctrinal developments in the Yoga and Brahmanism, of the late 5th century should be considered for the reception of Yoga. The earliest surviving Tantric texts were compiled between 300 and 500 C. E.²⁴⁷ This is especially relevant for the Tantric notion of introducing the transcendent 'prāṇa' – roughly the equivalent of divine *pneuma* – into the body by means of deliberate breathing, and of intellect and awareness too. These features, which have a Tantric character, also mark Hesychasm.

Just a few decades earlier Bishop Palladius of Galatia (364 – 430 C. E.) wrote about the beliefs and the customs of the Brahmans of India.²⁴⁸ Apologizing that he had not travelled to India in person, he refers to the reports of a Roman attorney who had grown tired of his profession, and set out to visit India, travelling with Indian traders. Approaching the Malabar Coast, he is captured and sold as a slave. His voyage thus

²⁴⁶ Damascius, *History of Philosophy*, 51D. Ed.: Athanasiadi, P. (1999). *Damascius – The Philosophical History*, Athens: Apamea, p.147.

²⁴⁷ Feuerstein, G. (1998). *The Yoga Tradition - Its History, Literature, Philosophy and Practice*, Prescott: Hohm Press, p. 342.

²⁴⁸ Palladius of Helenopolis. (Early 5th century C. E.). *De gentibus Indiae et Bragmanibus*. Ed.: Maraval, Pierre (intr., trans, and annot.). (2016). *Alexandre le Grand et les Brahmanes – Palladios d'Héliénopolis Les mœurs des Brahmanes de l'Inde, suivi de Correspondance d'Alexandre et de Dindime* (anonyme), Paris: Belles lettres, pp. 1-30.

lasted longer than intended but gave him the opportunity to learn an Indian language properly. This frame story is revealing, since, regardless of embellishments of the tale, it would not appear as out of the ordinary to the reader and may thus reflect cultural customs of that age. It resonates with Damascius' report. In his second-hand account Palladius presents the Brahmans as practitioners of 'incessant prayer', thus as the Indian counterpart to the prayer of Christian hermits of the Egyptian Desert whose history he had written. This signifies the learned bishop's perception and recognition of the Brahmans as counterparts to be taken seriously in religious respect – a view that resonates with what Clement of Alexandria and other Christian authors had to say on the subject.

Palladius' religious concern emerges where he compares the Brahmans to the monks, and when he introduces a second treatise, which he claims to have retrieved from Arrian, a philosopher from the time of Nero, containing Alexander's conversations with the Brahmans. Palladius recommends this treatise. It deals with the value of an ascetic, peaceful life of devotion and self-control to the reader as helpful to find peace of mind. This treatise – which was quite likely also composed by Palladius himself – tellingly concludes with the words of Dandamis, leader of a group of Brahmans to Alexander:

And as to me, that which is useful for you will be written down for the attainment of eternal joy, because this is what you have asked me about in the beginning. We do not reject any one of those who wish to live truly in piety to God and who desire to imitate our life, because we have compassion with all mankind.²⁴⁹

Here Bishop Palladius, renowned specialist for Christian monasticism, speaks in the literary role of Dandamis, leader of the Brahmans, presenting their spiritual life and commandments as a true way of devotion to God and to peace of the soul by implication. Palladius, as a Christian, acknowledges the faith and spiritual life of the Brahmans as true in a religious sense, and presents Christian meditative and ascetic spirituality as heir to their example. On this basis the reception of Yoga into Hesychasm is conclusive. J. Meyendorff points to Palladius as witness for the interest of the Byzantine monks of this era for India.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁹ Ibidem, p. 30

²⁵⁰ Meyendorff, J. (1959). *Grégoire Palamas: Défense des saints hésychastes – Introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes*. Louvain: Université Catholique, p. XXXI, fn. 6.

- 6th – 7th century C. E. The termination of access to India, the interdict of Paganism, the closure or transformation of the last Neoplatonic academies and emergence of Hesychasm:

In 476 the Western Roman Empire came to its formal end. After the closure of the Platonic Academy of Athens by Emperor Justinian I Neoplatonism lacked an independent academic institution and was increasingly forbidden and excluded from public life. In Alexandria however there was a more gradual transition, with Christian scholars, like John Philoponus (490 – 570 C. E.) taking over the academy, which even before had not been exclusively Pagan. In this intellectual climate and in the social formations in which it existed, a drift of Neoplatonic ideas and of spiritual practices, such as those of Yoga, was possible and likely.

In 640 C. E. Alexandria and Egypt were conquered by Muslim armies, following upon the loss of Syria and the Levantine by the devastating defeat in the Battle of Yarmouk in 634. This effectively ended the intellectual and spiritual syncretistic culture in which relations with India had been cultivated for so many centuries and where much of this came to influence Christianity and to be received by it. Results of these processes of reception now began to show up in the monasteries of the Sinai Peninsula and beyond, where the early forms of Hesychasm emerged.

The Muslim conquest, which occurred in the lifetime of the first major author of Hesychasm, St. John Climacus (died mid-7th century), who describes deliberate breathing as means of introducing intellect and the Holy Spirit, as well as the awareness of Christ, into the body and the heart. He also describes the figure of reversion of intellect into itself as means of ascent to the Divine. A jurist, and possibly lecturer by profession, he had received a classic Byzantine philosophical and literary higher education before entering monasticism in the Sinai Peninsula.²⁵¹ With the Muslim conquest however, whatever had survived of these by this time, came to an end. The gates of trans-religious transfer were shut. It is thus highly important to find that the first author of Hesychasm who describes Yogic features, was still educated, and rooted in these Byzantine intellectual traditions.

Memories of connections to India however persisted in the nascent Hesychast tradition, as John of Karpathos' *Letter to the Monks in India*²⁵² shows. Arab sources still

²⁵¹ Johnsén, H. R. (2007). *Reading John Climacus. Rhetorical Argumentation, Literary Convention and the Tradition of Monastic Formation*, Lund: Lund Univ. Pr., p. 7f.

²⁵² St. John of Karpathos. (late 7th century C. E.). *Ascetic Discourse Sent at the Request of the Same Monks in India*. Ed.: *The Philokalia*, vol. 1 (1979). London: Faber & Faber, pp. 322 – 326.

report the presence of unspecified “monks from India” in the realm of Syria and Mesopotamia in the 7th and 8th centuries.²⁵³ Guesses have been made that they could have been wandering Yogis.²⁵⁴ This is unlikely, since they would have lacked any social institutions here to accommodate them or to visit. These itinerant monks were probably Christians from south-western India, where the Syrian Oriental Orthodox Church has been established from the mid-first century on. This explains why they visited Syria and Mesopotamia in particular. It supports that St. John of Karpathos' *Ascetic Discourse Sent at the Request of the Same Monks in India* may reflect some ongoing awareness and monastic contacts with the Christian Church in India, even after the Islamic conquest of Syria and Egypt.

Intensive contacts of the Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman countries of the Mediterranean realm with India have left deep traces in Graeco-Roman culture, in the spheres of commerce, historiography, spirituality and philosophy.²⁵⁵ The detailed knowledge also of Christian authors of Antiquity, like Clemens Alexandrinus, about religious and philosophical concepts and practises of India is based hereon. This period was marked by fascination and admiration for many things Indian. After the disruption of contact by Muslim rule in Egypt, exchange between Europe and India was resumed by the Portuguese, with Vasco da Gama's voyage to India by sea (1497 – 99). Finally, European colonial presence in India provided the basis for renewed studies of Indian philosophy and religion by European scholars since the late 18th century. It created a powerful mainstream interest in European and American countries.²⁵⁶

For Hesychasm this implies that Indian, and particularly Yogic influence is relevant in the formative centuries, from the time of the early Egyptian monasticism and its predecessors, Christian and Pagan, up to the end of Antiquity. By that time however, the formative stage of Hesychasm was largely accomplished.

²⁵³ Haq, M. E., *A History of Sufism in Bengal*, [Dacca, 1975: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh], p. 120. Loc. cit.: Baier, K. (1998). *Yoga auf dem Weg nach Westen: Beiträge zur Rezeptionsgeschichte*, Würzburg: Königshaus & Neuman, p. 29, fn. 24.

²⁵⁴ Baier, K. (1998). *Yoga auf dem Weg nach Westen: Beiträge zur Rezeptionsgeschichte*, Würzburg: Königshaus & Neuman, p. 29.

²⁵⁵ Karttunen, K. (1989). *India in Early Greek Literature*, Helsinki: Studia Orientalia, vol. 65. (Eds. the Finnish Oriental Society), p. 121f.

²⁵⁶ Goldberg, P. (2010). *American Veda – From Emerson and the Beatles to Yoga and Meditation. How Indian Spirituality Changed the West*, New York: Harmony Books.

4.5. Alexander's the Great Visit to Brahman Yogis in India as Iconic Event and its Memory

The report of the first prominent encounter between representatives of both sides shows traits of a 'pilgrimage' on the side of the Greeks. The Indians are described as being well prepared and informed about the philosophies and beliefs of the Greeks. The names of Indians taking part in the meetings, of Brahman Yogis and of Indian rulers are given. Thus, the Roman historian Plutarch – drawing on earlier sources – depicts the meeting of Alexander the Great with Brahman Yogis. An initial meeting with ten Yogis, entitled expressly as 'philosophers', whom he accused of conspiracy to rebellion, is described as turning into a test of mettle and strength of minds, whereupon Alexander releases them:

These philosophers, then, he dismissed with gifts; but to those who were in the highest repute and lived quietly by themselves he sent Onesicritus, asking them to pay him a visit. 2. Now, Onesicritus was a philosopher of the school of Diogenes the Cynic. And he tells us that Calanus very harshly and insolently bade him strip off his tunic and listen naked to what he had to say, otherwise he would not converse with him, not even if he came from Zeus; 3. but he says that Dandamis was gentler, and that after hearing fully about Socrates, Pythagoras, and Diogenes, he remarked that the men appeared to him to have been of good natural parts but to have passed their lives in too much awe of the laws. 4. Others, however, say that the only words uttered by Dandamis were these "Why did Alexander make such a long journey hither?" 5. Calanus, nevertheless, was persuaded by Taxiles to pay a visit to Alexander. His real name was Sphines, but because he greeted those whom he met with "Cale," the Indian word of salutation, the Greeks called him Calanus. 6. It was

Calanus, as we are told, who laid before Alexander the famous illustration of government.²⁵⁷

In this report, the Brahman Yogis appear as figures of authority. Three schools of philosophy mentioned: Platonism, Pythagoreanism, and Cynicism. All of these three had specific fields of common convictions and agreements with Brahman Yogic philosophy and spiritual practice: The Platonists (and later especially the Neoplatonists) shared salient features of their religious-philosophical system with Vedānta.²⁵⁸ The Pythagoreans shared the convictions of avoidance of meat, the culture of spiritual communities dedicated to purity, harmony and devotion with the Yogis; the Cynics the ideals and practices of renunciation, asceticism and life as wandering philosophers or as hermits. Each of them had special attachments to India and absorbed Indian ideas and spiritual practices. Plutarch and his sources thus include this background of exchange into their depiction of this encounter. The entourage of Alexander included several scholars and educated men, such as Onesicritus, a Cynic, disciple of Diogenes, Nearchos, commander of the fleet, who wrote his own report of the campaign, Kallisthenes, a nephew of Aristotle, Ptolemaios, son of Lagos, the future king of Egypt and founder of the Ptolemaian dynasty, Eumenes of Cardia as chief historiographer – D. Th. Vassiliades mentions a dozen names.²⁵⁹

Many of the reports have gone lost or survive only in fragments or quotations by other authors of Antiquity. Apart from the informational value we also have to recognize the emotional impact of this common 'excursion' to India and the impression of the encounter with its Yogis. These have perceptibly shaped their attitudes and have left a lasting impact. It was a collective, formative experience of the founders of the Hellenistic realm. Ptolemaios, who was to become ruler of Egypt, may have been sympathetic to those Yogis who travelled to Alexandria on visit, as of members of some delegations, as documented, or who may have stayed to teach there. The motif of a pilgrimage to India

²⁵⁷ Plutarch. (Around 100 C. E.). Life of Alexander. In: *The parallel lives*, 64-65, Ed.: A. H. Clough (ed.) and J. Dryden (transl.). (1906). *Putarch's Lives*, vol. IV, Boston: Little, Brown & Co., pp. 159–255. http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Lives/Alexander*/9.html#64

²⁵⁸ Mar Gregorios [Verghese, P.]. (2002). Does Geography Condition Philosophy? On Going Beyond the Occidental-Oriental Distinction. An Introduction to the Second International Seminar on Neoplatonism and Indian Thought. In: Mar Gregorios [Verghese, P.] (ed.). *Neoplatonism and Indian Philosophy*, (pp. 13-30). Albany: State University of New York Press.

²⁵⁹ Vassiliades, D. (2000). *The Greeks in India – A Survey in Philosophical Understanding*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publ., p. 44.

for encounter with its Brahman Yogis has imprinted itself firmly on the cultural consciousness of Hellenism.

In the following three centuries the presence of Greek ambassadors from Hellenistic kingdoms in India, especially in the Mauryan Empire, such as of Megasthenes, contributed much to the understanding of India, including religion and philosophy. Extensive cultural exchange happened in the Graeco-Indian kingdoms in the regions of present Afghanistan and Pakistan, which lasted even after the Greek rulers had been subjugated by Scythian peoples, such as the Sakas.

From the reports of Onesicritus, Megasthenes, Nearchos and others, Roman historiographers, in the horizon of Middle Platonism, like Strabo, Arrian, and Plutarch, copied and preserved much for posterity where the original sources have gone lost. Strabo (63 B.C. – 23 C. E.) gives detailed reports about the cultures, customs and religion, economy, history, botany etc. of India, as well as reports about various historical encounters and about present exchanges during his time in the 15th book of his *Γεωγραφικά* (The *Geography*). His work is probably the most detailed document of what has survived into our times about the knowledge of India in Hellenistic and Roman antiquity. The son of a Georgian mother came from the province of Bythinia and Pontus on the Black Sea, in proximity to the Persian Empire, studied in Rome and travelled far abroad, even to Ethiopia, before engaging on writing as historiographer and geographer. Realism, a sense for significant detail, integration of multiple perspectives and interest in cultures characterise his writings. His reports about India and the history of Hellenistic/Roman – Indian relations are marked by a sense for realism.

Strabo begins his documentation in book XV, by calling “India, the first and the largest country situated towards the east”²⁶⁰ – emphasising not only her size but also importance. He continues by mentioning the uninterrupted line of travellers, especially merchants who ventured there, from the times of Alexander the Great onwards, even if they were few, and not always well informed about the many facets of this great country. Strabo expresses some dismay at a host of fragmentary information, but he seems to have had sufficient good sources to sift the grain from the chaff. He also speaks about

²⁶⁰ Strabo of Amasia, *The Geography*, XV, 1, 1.

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0239%3Abook%3D15%3Achapter%3D1%3Asection%3D1>

contemporaries, “who at present make their voyages thither”²⁶¹. This indicates a regular exchange for over three centuries, with all the nets of personal contacts, experience, familiarity, and mutual interest that go with them, beyond the military and commercial, as is witnessed by various of his sources.

Strabo mentions the Tamil kingdom of Pandya. Apart from the Pandyan kingdom, two other dynasties ruled territories in the north and in the west of the Tamil realm. He reports diplomatic ties between the southern Indian kingdom of Pandya Nadu, which covered about the area of the present state Tamil Nadu and of Kerala to the West, whose ruling dynasty, the Pandyans, ruled from 500B.C. to 134-5 C.E., and Rome. Thus, a delegation from the kingdom visited Rome:

From one place in India, and from one king, namely, Pandion, or, according to others, Porus, presents and embassies were sent to Augustus Caesar. With the ambassadors came the Indian Gymno-Sophist, who committed himself to the flames at Athens, like Calanus, who exhibited the same spectacle in the presence of Alexander.²⁶²

Strabo mentions the visit of this important trading partner's delegation, as a political event, but also that 'gymnosophists' formed part of the delegation. Telling about the self-immolation of their leader he reminds of the example set by the Yogi Calanus, who accompanied Alexander, thus reinforcing its presence in historic memory. The overcoming of all mortal bondage in Athens, the 'seat of philosophy' is admired. In terms of 'discourse analysis' this resembles St. Luke's report on St. Paul initiating the theological discourse of Christianity with Hellenism's philosophy.²⁶³ Apart from the symbolic importance of this city, Strabo also asserts a symbolic continuity of this contact. The visit of the South Indian Yogi is presented as event in the continuum of bonds with the Indian realm, whose diversity in language, race and custom was well known. Yogis were perceived to represent the Brahman tradition.

²⁶¹Strabo of Amasia, *The Geography*, XV.1.3.

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0239%3Abook%3D15%3Achapter%3D1%3Asection%3D3>

²⁶² Strabo of Amasia, *The Geography*, XV.1.4.

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0239%3Abook%3D15%3Achapter%3D1%3Asection%3D4>

²⁶³ Acts 17:16-34

Interestingly Strabo is not only aware of their beliefs, but also of the social role of Yogis for their communities:

Aristobulus says that he saw two of the sophists at Taxila, both Brahmans; and that the elder had head shaved but that the younger had long hair, and that both were followed by disciples; and that when not otherwise engaged they spent their time in the market-place, being honoured as counsellors and being authorized to take as a gift any merchandise they wished; and that anyone whom they accosted poured over them sesame oil, in such profusion that it flowed down over their eyes; and that since quantities of honey and sesame were put out for sale, they made cakes of it and subsisted free of charge...²⁶⁴

Their role as counsellors is vividly depicted. They were a public presence, with a clear role in society, and organised into groups of followers around an elder master. Strabo continues:

...and that they came up to the table of Alexander, ate dinner standing, and taught him a lesson in endurance by retiring to a place nearby, where the elder fell to the ground on his back and endured the sun's rays and the rains (for it was now raining, since the spring of the year had begun); and that the younger stood on one leg holding aloft in both hands a log about three cubits in length, and when one leg tired he changed the support to the other and kept this up all day long; and that the younger showed a far greater self-mastery than the elder; for although the younger followed the king a short distance, he soon turned back again towards home, and when the king went after him, the man bade him to come himself if he wanted anything of him; but that the elder accompanied the king to the end, and when he was with him changed his dress

²⁶⁴ Strabo, *Geography* 15.1.61, 62-64. Ed. Jones, H. L. (transl.), (1930). *Strabo, Geography*, vol. VII, Book 15-16. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, (Series Loeb Classics).
http://www.livius.org/aj-al/alexander/alexander_t69.html

and mode of life; and that he said, when reproached by some, that he had completed the forty years of discipline which he had promised to observe...²⁶⁵

These postures, the 'āsanas', are mentioned early on, briefly in Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra*. The precise description here surpasses in detail what is preserved in Indian literature of that time. "Āsanās" were practised within settlements and in the countryside, as Strabo tells:

Onesicritus says that he himself was sent to converse with these sophists; for Alexander had heard that the people always went naked and devoted themselves to endurance, and that they were held in very great honor, and that they did not visit other people when invited, but bade them to visit them if they wished to participate in anything they did or said; and that therefore, such being the ease, since to Alexander it did not seem fitting either to visit them or to force them against their will to do anything contrary to their ancestral customs, he himself was sent; and that he found fifteen men at a distance of four kilometers from the city, who were in different postures, standing or sitting or lying naked and motionless till evening, and that they then returned to the city; and that it was very hard to endure the sun, which was so hot that at midday no one else could easily endure walking on the ground with bare feet.²⁶⁶

The remarkably detailed descriptions reveal a good degree of familiarity and interest in these practises that have been sustained from the time of Alexander the Great up to Roman imperial times. The feature of endurance, and mastery of the body, is most prominent here. This occurs on Hesychasm too, when Palamas mentions that the Hesychast saints have withstood hunger and cold by these means. 'Āsanās' had a meditative character, more in agreement with the Hesychast posture, as will be explained further on. The social role of Yogis as counsellors and spiritual guides for lay people resembles that of Hesychasts. Some influence of their model on the formation of the 'social figure' of the Hesychast can be assumed.

²⁶⁵ Idem

²⁶⁶ Idem

Alexander's eagerness to encounter was the fruit of extant interest of Greek philosophers in Indian doctrines and spirituality. Regular commerce through the Red Sea brought sufficient knowledge to raise interest and awareness where it resonated with own ideas and practises. An account of Alexander's encounter and dialogues with the Yogis also survives in the *Life of Alexander* by Plutarch (45 – 125 C. E.). It is based on the writings of Onesicritus (360 – 290 B. C.) who had been witness to these events:

But to those who were in greatest reputation among them, and lived a private quiet life, he sent Onesicritus, one of Diogenes the Cynic's disciples, desiring them to come to him. Calanus, it is said, very arrogantly and roughly commanded him to strip himself, and hear what he said, naked, otherwise he would not speak a word to him, though he came from Jupiter himself.²⁶⁷

Here we find a motif of irreverence to power and status which certainly appealed to Cynics. The theme recurs further on.

But Dandamis received him with more civility, and hearing him discourse of Socrates, Pythagoras, and Diogenes, told him he thought them men of great parts, and to have erred in nothing so much as in having too great respect for the laws and customs of their country.²⁶⁸

The passage affirms that the learned Indians had a reasonable idea and understanding of Greek philosophers and their doctrines. This has been doubted because there is hardly any reference in Indian literature to Greek sources. However, that may be due to a certain self-containment of frames of reference to the own culture, which is also evident in much of patristic literature. As to making themselves actively known to the others, Plutarch observes reticence on the Indian side:

Others say, Dandamis only asked him the reason why Alexander undertook so long a journey to come into those parts. Taxiles, however, persuaded Calanus to wait upon Alexander. [...] He is said to have shown Alexander an

²⁶⁷ Plutarch, *The Life of Alexander*. Ed.: Clough, A. H. (ed.) and Dryden, John (transl.). (1906). *Putarch's Lives*, vol. IV, Boston: Little, Brown & Co., pp. 159–255. http://www.elopos.net/elpenor/greek-texts/ancient-greece/plutarch_alexander_gymnosophists.asp?pg=2

²⁶⁸ Idem

instructive emblem of government, which was this. He threw a dry shrivelled hide upon the ground and trod upon the edges of it. The skin when it was pressed in one place, still rose up in another, wheresoever he trod round about it, till he set his foot in the middle, which made all the parts lie even and quiet. The meaning of this similitude being that he ought to reside most in the middle of his empire, and not spend too much time on the borders of it.²⁶⁹

At the time of emperor Ashoka such restraint was discarded. He actively sought to promote the spread of knowledge about Buddhist religion and spirituality to the Hellenistic countries, as is well documented. For Hesychast communities this pattern prevails: Hesychast monks receive visitors in their hermitages, provided they have opened themselves to communication, after sometimes years of near complete withdrawal.

In the three centuries after the conquest of the Indus valley by Alexander close interaction between Hellenism and Buddhist-Indian culture developed, which brought forth a unique synthesis, especially in the arts, influential until today. Dialogues between Greek sages and Indian monks are also documented. Most famous is the conversion of the learned Hellenistic king Menander of Bactria, king Milinda according to Buddhist tradition. He is said to have known Hindu and Buddhist philosophies and rites. He was won over by the Buddhist sage Nagasena between 150 and 130 B.C. Knowledge of him also came to the Hellenistic west. These connections however, are hardly mentioned by the authors of the following centuries, of Roman times. The end of the Greco-Indian kingdoms and cultures on the eastern borders of Persia, by the time of the birth of Jesus Christ, also diminished the presence of Buddhism in the eastern Mediterranean. The resurgence of Hinduism in India may have added to it.

²⁶⁹ Idem

4.6. Roman – Indian Commerce in Merchandise, Spirituality and Politics: 1st – 2nd century

4.6.1. The *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*: On Roman-Indian Trade and Cultural Interest

Rome's special partner in this trans-Indic partnership was southern India, in particular the Tamil kingdoms, although Roman trade covered all coasts of India. This shift may have been due to the presence of the resurrected Persian Empire, which created a barrier to trade and exchange on the land route, as it had been prevalent since Alexander's times. This however also means that the focus of communication now lay with a region which had remained unconquered by the Mauryan Empire.

The spiritual and philosophical exchange that took place in Roman times was primarily with the Hindu realm. The sea route from Egypt to southern India, to the Tamil kingdoms, carried the bulk of trade.²⁷⁰ This trade was embedded in cultural and political relations too. Graeco-Roman merchant colonies on the southern coasts of India provided for communication. Yogic influences that have arrived, originated from the Hindu realm. The primary stations for such exchange have evidently been Alexandria, the first major city in the Roman Empire for a visitor from India, then Roma and other cities, where partners existed. The brief report of Strabo on composition of the diplomatic delegation shows that both sides knew that a participation of learned ascetics (gymnosophists) would be desirable and expected. It is in response to such demand that members of this delegation were evidently chosen.

A string of Roman trade settlements existed in the coastal towns of Southern India.²⁷¹ These settlements persisted even after the decline of the western Roman Empire. Roman trade settlements on the coasts of southern India are important to our quest for several reasons:

- Firstly, they are evidence of sustained contact and familiarity with the Indian trading partners, having obtained the permission to be established by the local kings. They testify to harmonious and mutually beneficial relations and to trade of a

²⁷⁰ Cobb, M. A. (2013). The Reception and Consumption of Eastern Goods in Roman Society", in: *Greece and Rome*, vol. 60 (1), pp. 136-152. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017383512000307>

²⁷¹ Lindsay, W. S. (1874). *History of Merchant Shipping and Ancient Commerce*. [reprint: (2006)]. Boston: Adamant Media Corporation, p. 101.

considerably volume, to make these trade posts viable and to provide for the maintenance of their staff at any profit.

- Secondly, they provide the basis for prolonged cultural contact, comparable perhaps to the function and effects of trading outposts in coastal cities in the early times of modern European colonisation. Living in these settlements was a basis to learn the local languages and to become familiar with culture and religion, as well as laws and customs even beyond the matters of immediate commercial interest.
- Thirdly, they served functions in mediating diplomatic communications.
- Fourthly, they provided for a basis for non-commercial travellers who have accompanied merchants repeatedly.
- Fifthly, they also seem to have provided the basis for Indian travellers to visit the Hellenistic Roman realm, merchants, but also sages, and ascetics as reports about their presence in Alexandria, Athens, and Rome²⁷² show.

The *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* is a manual for traders from the 1st century C.E., written by a Greek shipping merchant based in Egypt, describes Indian ports from the delta of the Indus River, all the way down the west coast, to Sri Lanka, which he only mentions in passing, and along the Tamil Nadu coast up to the mouth of the Ganges River, also the East African coast downwards, up to northern Mozambique, and eastward to China are also covered.

The author, an experienced navigator himself, reports in detail on the trade, on merchandise for each port, on the legal condition, the volume of shipping between Egypt, India, the east African coast, whose ports he describes in detail, southwards up to the coast of Mozambique – mentioning in passing that at the southern coast of Africa the Indian and Atlantic oceans merge²⁷³ - Arabia and Greece, on the interactions between these trading partners, as well as the history of navigation between the Gulf of Aden and India,²⁷⁴ not failing to praise the direct route and its favourable seasons, discovered by Hippalus, a Greek captain.²⁷⁵ All of this shows that this trade had a long history, long-standing traditions, considerable communications and a supportive network of political and diplomatic relations between Rome and India, including various partners in between.

²⁷² The *Periplus Maris Erythraei*, pts. 4-18. :

<http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/texts/periplus/periplus.html>

²⁷³ Ibidem, pt. 18.

²⁷⁴ Ibidem, pt. 56.

²⁷⁵ Ibidem, pt. 57.

The author also mentions settlements of Greeks, even in outlying areas, as Socotra, and the extent of intermarriage with Indians and Arabs.

Describing the ports of Southern India, the author mentions a spiritual retreat for both men and women seeking to live in asceticism and worship in the kingdom of Pandya, noting that this was also open to women:

Beyond this there is another place called Comari at which are the Cape of Comari [=Cape Comorin] and a harbour; hither come those men who wish to consecrate themselves for the rest of their lives, and bathe and dwell in celibacy; and women also do the same; for it is told that a goddess once dwelt here and bathed.²⁷⁶

This means that he was aware of the spiritual life of Hinduism, which remained prevalent in the Tamil south even at a time when much of northern India was dominated by Buddhism, taking interest in an 'ashram'. He was not the only Roman subject or citizen to do so.

The membership of women in spiritual ascetic communities was remarkable to Graeco-Roman visitors. Indian written sources do not mention women as practitioners of Yoga until the Middle Ages, with the Kashmiri poet Lalla (Lal Devi) being the most famous.²⁷⁷ However the reports by Greek authors of antiquity remain credible, as with other aspects of Indian spiritual culture too, where they provide the oldest historical documentation, as in the descriptions of postures.²⁷⁸ The presence of women, also as spiritual teachers and masters, reported from the early Christian ascetics of the Egyptian Desert,²⁷⁹ may have been influenced by Indian Yogic role models. They have been encoded in the sacred memory of the Hesychast tradition, represented by St. Mary of Egypt as prototype, to whom Palamas refers as example for the powers attainable through practice of Hesychasm.²⁸⁰

The authors own range of experience extends up to the mouth of the Ganges River. From China he reports briefly about the capital, and the goods exported from there

²⁷⁶ The *Periplus Maris Erythraei*, pt. 58. <http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/texts/periplus/periplus.html>

²⁷⁷ Mallinson, J. and Singleton, M. (2017). *Roots of Yoga*, London: Penguin Classics, p. 54.

²⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 88.

²⁷⁹ Schulz, G. and Ziemer, J. (2010). *Mit Wüstenvätern und Wüstenmüttern im Gespräch – Zugänge zur Welt des frühen Mönchtums in Ägypten*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, pp. 109ff.

²⁸⁰ Palamas, *Triads*, I.3.31

and the export routes, mentioning finally Siberia as the limits of accessible land. He must have been well-read in history and geography, since also states that the “great ocean” sweeps around the south of Africa, where the climate becomes cooler and trade is not worthwhile anymore. He may have referred to the Phoenician circumnavigation in 596-4 B. C. commanded by Pharaoh Necho, reported by Herodotus, or to contemporary explorations about which no records exist. Describing the south-western Indian coast, he also comments on architectural remains going back to the influence of Alexander’s successors, of the Ptolemaeans, and of Menander.²⁸¹

The interest this sea captain shows in Hindu mythology, taking note of the story of the goddess who bathed there, reflects interest of the Roman public in Hindu deities. A statue of the Hindu goddess Lakshmi which was found in Pompeii provides evidence. It was not an isolated find of an exotic object, as of a souvenir, but was understood and received in its iconographic meaning. The depiction of Lakshmi and her two assistants has influenced the Roman iconography in the depiction of Venus, as art historians found.²⁸² The statue dates from the time of Emperor Nero, when Roman-Indian commerce was at its peak. This detail may further show the depth and range of Roman-Indian exchange in the sphere of religion and culture. The immense volume of this trade, which went into some decline from the 2nd century on to rise again towards the end of Antiquity, is described by M. A. Cobb.²⁸³

4.6.2. Dio Chrysostomos on Brahmans, Yoga, and Indian Presence in Alexandria

The voluminous trade of the Augustan and following times was embedded in social structures and cultural relations. Thus, the permanent establishment of merchants’ colonies on both sides are documented, supported by archaeological evidence. These had grown over centuries of contact, rising cultural familiarity and trade. Thus D. Vassiliades reports:

²⁸¹ Ibidem, pt. 47. <http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/texts/periplus/periplus.html>

²⁸² Levi D’Ancona, M. (1950). An Indian Statuette from Pompeii. *Artibus Asiae*, 13 (3), pp. 166-180 (Asiae Artibus Publ.). <https://www.scribd.com/document/260301968/An-Indian-Statuette-From-Pompeii>

²⁸³ Cobb, M. A. (2013). The Reception and Consumption of Eastern Goods in Roman Society. *Greece and Rome*, 60 (1), pp. 136-152. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017383512000307>

“...by the early years of the Christian era Greek trade and shipping to the ports of India and Ceylon had increased enormously and small communities of Indian merchants and immigrants had established themselves in the cosmopolitan centres of Egypt and Syria. The discovery of a gravestone with a wheel and trident (trisula) in Alexandria attest to the fact that the Indian immigrants brought their customs and religions with them.”²⁸⁴

The Brahmans and Yogis who established themselves there, are discussed by the Roman historian, and literary author, Dion of Prusa, also known as Chrysostomos (40 – 111 C. E.).²⁸⁵ It is relevant to this investigation, that archaeologists found ritual objects of Hindu Brahmanism, even trident as symbol of Shiva, in Alexandria. This indicates a firm establishment of Brahmanic Hindu religion here. He writes about Indians who gave up the wonders and pleasures of India – as he phrased it - to trade in foreign countries:

For I see in the midsts of you (Alexandrians) not only Greeks, Italians, Syrians, Lybians, Cilicians, Ethiopians, Arabs, but even Bactrians and Scythians and Persians, and some Indians...²⁸⁶

This confirmation of the permanent presence of Indians in Alexandria is very important. Their distinction from the Bactrians, who also belonged to the Indian cultural realm and to the Graeco-Indian culture established there, as well as their neighbouring Scythians and Persians, indicates that he was speaking about Indians from the core lands of India, quite likely from the southern Indian coast. Dion Chrysostomos has a clear idea of the Brahmans' spiritual prowess:

22 So wonderful and so numerous are these blessings, and yet there are people called Brachmanes who, abandoning those rivers and the people scattered along their banks, turn aside and devote themselves to private speculation and meditation, undertaking amazing physical labours without compulsion and enduring fearful tests of endurance. And it is said that they

²⁸⁴ Vassiliades, D. (2000). *The Greeks in India – A Survey in Philosophical Understanding*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publ., p. 44.

²⁸⁵ Ibidem, p. 80.

²⁸⁶ Dion Chrysostomos.(ca 100 C. E.). *Orationes XXXII*. Ed. Cohoon, J. W. and Crosby, H. L. (transl.) (1940). *Dio Chrysostom*, vol. III. Cambridge MA.: Loeb Classical Library 358, p. 373.

http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Dio_Chrysostom/Discourses/32*.html

have one special fountain, the Fountain of Truth, by far the best and most godlike of all, and that those who drink their fill thereof have never been known to lie.²⁸⁷

This passage expressly confirms the identity of Yogis and Brahmins here. For the reception of Yoga in Antiquity this confirms the special link to Vedānta and to Hinduism. Dion Chrysostomos mentions their meditation, the extraordinary (super-natural) feats and accomplishments attained by the physical exercises of Yoga. This means that 'meditation' is not to be understood as solely meaning devotion or spiritual introspection and philosophy – which he designates as 'private speculation' – but as comprising the bodily practices of 'āsanas', the figures of posture and movement, as well as breath-control and other features. He thus has Yoga in this distinct meaning in mind, not in a generic meaning of 'discipline'. The allegorical image of the 'fountain of truth' clarifies that this meditation was not a spiritually neutral exercise for the attainment of special powers but attached to the quest for truth in these dimensions, also in the Roman perspective. Dion then points out that these reports are not legendary embellishments of tales from a distant land, but that they have been verified by (Greek and) Roman travellers and merchants, who have socialized with the Indian people in the coastal cities, implying that more and deeper knowledge might be attained by travelling inland:

Regarding conditions in that land, then, it is a true story that you have heard.

For some of those who have been there have vouched for it; though only a few do go there, in pursuit of trade, and they mingle only with the people of the coast.²⁸⁸

Dion then recalls the Platonic ideal of the philosophically educated rulers, as presented in the *Republic* (*Politeia*), to discuss the social role of the caste of Brahmins in an intercultural perspective, with comparison to Persia, with its Zoroastrian clergy, and to Egypt with its traditional role of the priesthood as guardian of public ethics, righteous conduct, and a culture of self-control as well as guardianship of common religion:

²⁸⁷ Dion Chrysostomos. (Ca 100 C. E.). *Orationes* XXXV. Ed. Idem. p. 413f.

http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Dio_Chrysostom/Discourses/35*.html

²⁸⁸ Idem.

Furthermore, since they cannot always be ruled by kings who are philosophers, the most powerful nations have publicly appointed philosophers as superintendents and officers for their kings. Thus the Persians, methinks, appointed those whom they call Magi, because they were acquainted with Nature and understood how the gods should be worshipped; the Egyptians appointed the priests who had the same knowledge as the Magi, devoting themselves to the service of the gods and knowing the how and the wherefore of everything; the Indians appointed Brachmans, because they excel in self-control and righteousness and in their devotion to the divine, as a result of which they know the future better than all other men know their immediate present;²⁸⁹

In the perspective of Discourse analysis Dion's interest is in the societal role of the Brahmins, as representing a function which was apparently felt to be fulfilled only inadequately by the philosophers of the Roman Empire. Dion connects this function to the performance of devotion and of Yoga, including its physical exercises, as leading to self-control and righteousness – and to deeper insights of reality, including predictions of the future. This aspect also fascinated other authors of Antiquity about the Brahmins. Yoga is depicted as bound to issues of ethical conduct, personal self-reflection, and foresight – which also feature in the descriptions of Hesychasm.

4.7. Middle Platonist and Neo-Pythagorean interest in Brahmanic philosophy and Yogins, and the pilgrimage to India:

Apollonius of Tyana (40 – 120 C.E.) was a wandering Neo-Pythagorean philosopher and spiritual teacher, who spent most of his life in the eastern Mediterranean. He was a public figure. Spiritual healings were attributed to him, and he was reputed to have paranormal

²⁸⁹ Dion Chrysostomos (ca. 100 C. E.). *Orationes* XLIX. Ed. Cohoon, J. W. and Crosby, H. L. (transl.). (1946). Dio Chrysostom, Vol. IV. Cambridge MA.: Loeb Classical Library 358.
http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Dio_Chrysostom/Discourses/49*.html

gifts. By his lifetime, Neo-Pythagoreanism with its culture of self and introspection, its desire to a pure life, with vegetarianism, and its interest in the transmigrations of the soul in the afterlife, was merging with the Platonic tradition. It may be one of its strands of spiritual ancestry of Hesychasm.

Apollonius' biography was written by Flavius Philostratos between 217 and 238 at the demand of the empress Julia Domna of the Severan dynasty. The travels of Apollonius are told, among them his visit to India. There are doubts, if he has ever been there. However, his visit to India probably did happen. An Indian source, the *Agamasāstra*, a commentary on the *Mandukya Upanisad* by the great Hindu teacher Gaudapāda (c.500 CE) mentions the names given by Philostratus as members of Apollonius' delegation. This attests that the exchange went indeed in both ways. It is reported that he could converse freely with Brahmans and that they had a good knowledge of Hellenistic Philosophy. The book also conveys Hellenism's respect for the spirituality of the Brahmans,²⁹⁰ which continued beyond time of the Severan dynasty.

In Philostratos' vita Yoga is mentioned by reference to acetic practices – also of Brahmans – and by the term 'gymnosophists', the naked sages. (These he finds in Egypt too, and claims that they had the origins of their teachings in India.) Several elements are described which point to a Yogic setting. Philostratus distinguishes Brahmans and 'Gymnosophists', but, associates them, by allusion to concepts of Vedānta, that interpret meditative practices, especially the access to the Divine by means of introspection. His report on the travels of Apollonius to India has often been labelled as 'phantastic' or 'legendary'.²⁹¹ However, it is rich in significant detail, as to ritual, theology, myth, and religious philosophy, of which merely some can be discussed here.

The Vedic fire ritual (āgnihotra) is described,²⁹² which is performed at sunrise and sunset of spiritual purification and illumination. This mention is important in several ways. Firstly, it is stated that the participation in it purifies of sin. The Vedic fire ritual is expressive of an understanding of the divine, which came to be connected to the notions of divine supreme consciousness, as attribute of Brahman and of breath of life, Prāṇa.²⁹³

²⁹⁰ Meunier, M. (ed.). (1974). *Apollonius de Tyane ou le séjour d'un dieu parmi les hommes - suivi de Les Vers d'Or de Pythagore*. Malesherbes: Robert Lafont, pp. 75ff.

²⁹¹ Eells, C. P., (1923). *Life and Times of Apollonius of Tyana*, Stanford, CA.: Stanford Univ. Press, p. 5f.

²⁹² Philostratus the Elder [Flavius], *Life and Time of Apollonius of Tyana.*, III, 14. Ed.: Bells, C.P. (transl.) (1920), Stanford, CA., Stanford Univ. Press, p. 69f.

²⁹³ *Chandogya Upanishad* I.11.5, loc. cit: Deussen, P. (1906). *Das System des Vedānta. Nach dem Brahma-Sūtras des Bādarāyana und dem Kommentare des Cankara über dieselben als ein Compendium der Dogmatik des Brahmanismus vom Standpunkte des Cankara aus*, Leipzig: F. A Brockhaus, p. 159ff.

According to the importance of the divine fire, personified as God Agni, in the Vedas, the first hymn of the Rg Veda invokes him (with many more following):

1 I Laud Agni, the chosen Priest, God, minister of sacrifice,
The hotar, lavishest of wealth.

2 Worthy is Agni to be praised by living as by ancient seers.
He shall bring hitherward the Gods. [...]

7 To thee, dispeller of the night, O Agni, day by day with prayer
Bringing thee reverence, we come

8 Ruler of sacrifices, guard of Law eternal, radiant One,
Increasing in thine own abode.

9 Be to us easy of approach, even as a father to his son:
Agni, be with us for our weal.²⁹⁴

The address to Agni as guard of eternal law evokes the theme of righteousness, Dharma', which developed later, and the issue of purification. (The motif of the divine 'fire' is relevant to this investigation, as the excursus on the Gayatri Mantra and the Phos Hilaron hymn will show.) More Vedic gods are mentioned, such as Surya, the Sun God, and his ritual veneration. With him, the theme of 'illumination' is connected:

. 1 HIS bright rays bear him up aloft, the God who knoweth all that lives,
Sūrya, that all may look on him.

2 The constellations pass away, like thieves, together with their beams,
Before the all-beholding Sun.

3 His herald rays are seen afar refulgent o'er the world of men,
Like flames of fire that burn and blaze.

4 Swift and all beautiful art thou, O Sūrya, maker of the light,
Illuming all the radiant realm.²⁹⁵

²⁹⁴ *Rig Veda*, I. 1, Ed.: Griffith, R.T. H. (1896). *Rig Veda*. Kotagiri (Nilgiri). <https://sacred-texts.com/hin/rigveda/rv01001.htm>

²⁹⁵ *Rig Veda*, I. 50, Ed.: Griffith, R.T. H. (1896). *Rig Veda*. Kotagiri (Nilgiri).

Further, Shiva is referred to, in an interpretatio Romana, as 'Bacchus' (or Dionysos).²⁹⁶ The myth of Gangâ, springing forth from his head, as a well,²⁹⁷ is apparently alluded to. This is confirmed by an enigmatic detail: According to Philostratus, Apollonius had told to Egyptian naked sages: "I have seen the Indian Brahmin living on the earth, and at the same time not in it, ... owning nothing, yet having the wealth of all the world."²⁹⁸ The paradox reminds of the parable of Uddalaka, about of the fig seed, containing the cosmos, through inner identity of the knower and the known – a parable that expresses the limits of ritual knowledge in view of attaining unity with the divine, and thus with the world, by meditation.²⁹⁹ Apollonius' Brahman guide explains to him about the miraculous fountain:

"His saying that they own nothing yet have the wealth of the world Damis interprets to mean that the same fountains which burst from the ground for Bacchic revellers, when Bacchus simultaneously convulses the earth and them, also spring up for these Sages, who both drink of them themselves, and to give to others their water to drink."³⁰⁰

It seems that here, myth and veneration of Shiva ('Bacchus') is combined with ecstasy, and with the meditative path of yogic introspection of ascetics, who thus partake of the fill of the world, by inner unity with the divine – here represented by shiva. Thus, a tenuous union of Brahmanic - or possibly Shaivite ritual and myth – with Yogic meditation, in Advaitic understanding, as a pathway to unity with Brahman though Atman, appear to be expressed, in the symbolic image of drinking from the fountain that Shiva, who lets the earth and the inner person tremble, lets spring forth, figuratively in two worlds³⁰¹: "This is what Apollonius meant by the Brahmins being on earth and at the same time not on it."³⁰²

Philostratus also describes the attire of the Brahmins: "The let their hair grow long ... they cover their head with a white turban, and go barefoot, and wear a sleeveless garment ... They wear his raiment in their religious ceremonies."³⁰³ This description adds additional clarification, that the 'Brahmins' he writes about are indeed Hindu priests (and

²⁹⁶ Philostratus the Elder [Flavius], *Life and Time of Apollonius of Tyana.*, III, 15, p.70

²⁹⁷ Kramrisch, S., (1981). *The Presence of Shiva*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, p. 345

²⁹⁸ Philostratus the Elder [Flavius], *Life and Time of Apollonius of Tyana.*, III, 15, p. 70

²⁹⁹ *Chandogya Upanishad*, 2, 12.

³⁰⁰ Philostratus the Elder [Flavius], *Life and Time of Apollonius of Tyana.*, III, 15, p. 70

³⁰¹ Kramrisch, S., (1981). *The Presence of Shiva*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, p. 283

³⁰² Philostratus the Elder [Flavius], *Life and Time of Apollonius of Tyana.*, III, 15, p. 70

³⁰³ *Ibidem*, p. 70f.

no Buddhists or Jains). – with the additional qualifications, that they are presented as learned ('intellectuals'), and as engaged in yogic meditation.

In the encounter of Apollonius with the leader of the Brahmans, whom he visits, the theme of clairvoyance, self-knowledge, and the theory of the different states of the mind, are discussed and demonstrated. At their first meeting, Iarchas tells Apollonius his father's and his mother's pedigree, and all he had done and met on his journey to India.

"Apollonius was astounded, and asked him how he knew, and Iarchas replied:

'You have it already some of this wisdom before you came here, but not et all of it.'. 'Will you tach me all your wisdom then?' asked Apollonius. 'Freely', he answered, 'for it befits wisdom better to teach it ... and besides, I perceive that you have an excellent memory, Apollonius, and that is the goddess whom we most adore.'. 'Can you discern then what qualities I have?' asked Apollonius, and Iarchas replied.'We perceive all the phases of the mind, tracing them by innumerable indications. But since it is early noon, and we must makeready that we will please the gods, let us now give attention to them, and afterwards we may converse...'”³⁰⁴

Here, the 'siddhis', the powers of clairvoyance attained though Yoga in the final stage, according to the Yoga Sutra: "From that arise supernatural knowledge and hearing, touch, sight, taste, and awareness of events."³⁰⁵ and Vyâsa's comment: "From supernatural knowledge (prâtibha) arises knowledge of what is subtle, hidden or remote, in the past or future. From supernatural hearing comes hearing of the divine..."³⁰⁶ Thus, according to Philostratus, the Yogic theme and attainment of clairvoyance, is found by Apollonius, in a Brahmanic setting, with the religious philosophy to integrate this in a unified metaphysics. Side motifs are the theory of different states of mind, and the allusion to the Indian goddess of memory, and her Greek counterpart, Mnemosyne. It is significant, that, according to Philostratus, the Brahmans accord, that the Greeks have a certain degree

³⁰⁴ Ibidem, p. 71

³⁰⁵ Patañjali. *Yoga Sūtra* III. 36

³⁰⁶ Leggett, Trevor (transl.). (1990). *Śaṅkara On the Yoga Sūtras – A Full Translation of the Newly Discovered Text*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publ, p. 339

of this knowledge too. This alludes to the central Platonic, Neopythagorean,³⁰⁷ and (later) Neoplatonic motif of self-knowledge, and by it, knowledge of the Divine, as taught by Plotinus.³⁰⁸ The motif is also standard in the literature of Hesychasm, as in recent time, of the famous starets Ambrose of Optina (A. M. Grenkov, 1812 – 1896).³⁰⁹

The mention that the Brahmanic hosts have daily ritual obligations to fulfil – in which the Greeks take part – are significant. In the following it is emphasised, that the Brahmans venerate the Greek gods too, (which can also be read the other way round). After the rites, the conversation is resumed, with psychology and the motif of divine ascent by this pathway, also or reincarnation, are topic. Philostratus declares a fundamental agreement between the (Neo-)Pythagorean and the Brahmanic doctrines about the soul: “What do you think of the soul?’ Iarchas replied: ‘What Pythagoras has taught you...’.”³¹⁰

This claim to fundamental identity, based on essential agreements,³¹¹ creates a basis in cultural discourse, for the reception of Vedântic thought, and of associated spiritual practice of Yoga, with its metaphysical interpretation, apart from legitimising the Pythagorean-Platonic tradition by its agreements with the system of the Brahmans.

Another detail refers to the motif of ‘divinisation’, that is central to the Platonic tradition, and to the Christian Orthodox theology of Hesychasm:

Apollonius... asked whether they also knew themselves, supposing that Iarchas, like the Greeks would think self-knowledge difficult, by he replied with a confidence unexpected by Apollonius: ‘We know everything, for the reason that we have learned ourselves first of all. None of us attained philosophy until he first knew himself.’ (...) Apollonius’ ... next question was, what they thought themselves to be, and the Sage replied ‘Gods!’.³¹²

³⁰⁷ Lacrosse, J. (2014) Plotin, Porphyre et l'Inde : un ré-examen, in : *Le Philosophoire* 2014/1 (n° 41), pp. 87 à 104, §. 29

³⁰⁸ Beierwaltes, W. (1991). *Selbsterkenntnis und Erfahrung der Einheit. Plotins Enneade V.1. Text, Übersetzung, Interpretation, Erläuterungen*. Frankfurt a. M.: Vittorio Klostermann, p. 96f.

³⁰⁹ Mileant (Bishop Alexander), (2003), Ambrose - Elder of Optina (transl. Larin, S.), in: *OrthodoxPhotos.com*, at: <https://www.orthodoxphotos.com/readings/ambrose/>

³¹⁰ Philostratus the Elder [Flavius], *Life and Time of Apollonius of Tyana.*, III, 19, p.73

³¹¹ Lacrosse, J. (2014) Plotin, Porphyre et l'Inde : un ré-examen, in : *Le Philosophoire* 2014/1 (n° 41), pp. 87 à 104, §. 36.

³¹² Philostratus the Elder [Flavius], *Life and Time of Apollonius of Tyana.*, III, 19, p.73

This passage leads into the core of Vedântic philosophy, of spiritual Platonism, and of the Orthodox theology of Hesychasm. As to the latter, the motif of 'divinisation' is fundamental: of a transformative participation in God, by means of mediative introspection: The Orthodox theologian Karl C. Felmy renders it in a pithy formula: [in translation] "As God I shall be connected to you as gods': Redemption and Divinisation".³¹³

About the focus on the cognition of self as pathway to the divine, with the inclusion of the aspects of righteousness and beauty, that is also important in Hesychasm, the following may be recalled: According to Plato, *Republic*, Book VII, the truth, righteousness, and beauty, all emanate from the one (luminous) divine source, and are recognised, by the divine faculty within a human being, as light. Thus Socrates explains the Parable of the Cave to Glaucon:

This image then, dear Glaucon, we must apply as a whole to all that has been said, [517b] likening the region revealed through sight to the habitation of the prison, and the light of the fire in it to the power of the sun. And if you assume that the ascent and the contemplation of the things above is the soul's ascension to the intelligible region,²³ you will not miss my surmise, since that is what you desire to hear. But God knows²⁴ whether it is true. But, at any rate, my dream as it appears to me is that in the region of the known the last thing to be seen and hardly seen is the idea of good, [517c] and that when seen it must needs point us to the conclusion that this is indeed the cause for all things of all that is right and beautiful, giving birth²⁵ in the visible world to light, and the author of light and itself in the intelligible world being the authentic source of truth and reason, and that anyone who is to act wisely²⁶ in private or public must have caught sight of this.³¹⁴

This combination was adopted in Neoplatonism, determining its inclusion of ethical purification, and righteousness, as conditions for the cognition of God, also by meditation and introspection, and its aesthetics. The same combination of motifs is found in Hesychasm in theory and practice.

³¹³ Felmy, K. C. (1990). *Die Orthodoxe Theologie der Gegenwart. Eine Einführung*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, p. 133.

³¹⁴ Plato, *The Republic (Politeia)*, VII, ed.: (1969) Plato. *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vols. 5 & 6 transl. by P. Shorey. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press.
<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0168%3Abook%3D7%3Asection%3D517a>

In Pantanjali's Yoga Sûtra, the ethical perspective is important in the preparatory first two steps of Yoga. It is retained in Śaṅkara's comment, who also introduces the motif of aesthetics, in his discussion of the eighth step of Yoga.

Philostratos also tells about conversations of Apollonius with Egyptian ascetics,³¹⁵ in which reference to Indian philosophy and spirituality is included. The identity of the Egyptian and Ethiopian ascetics is hard to determine. (Given the presence of early Christian hermits in the Egyptian desert, a link to them is not to be ruled out, possibly as their successors.). Their spiritual knowledge and practices are compared.:

Even before he arrived, Alexandria was in love with him, and its inhabitants longed to see Apollonius as one friend longs for another; and as the people of Upper Egypt are intensely religious, they too prayed him to visit their several societies. (...) and the ears of the Egyptians were literally pricked up to hear him.... to his descriptions of the Indian Phraote, and (...) above all to the forecasts and revelations imparted to him by the gods concerning the future of the empire.³¹⁶

This description fits well with Philo's report of spiritual communities of 'gymnosophists' in Egypt, the focus now shifting southwards. This means that the process of reception of Yoga into Neoplatonism likely included Egyptian thought and spiritual practitioners, possibly beyond the confines of Neoplatonic philosophers at Alexandria. A comparable appearance of 'naked sages' in Egypt is mentioned, whose religious affiliation is left undefined.

On quitting Egypt, after settling and rejuvenating the country, he invited Apollonius to share his voyage; but the latter declined, on the ground that he had not yet seen the whole extent of Egypt and had not yet visited or conversed with the naked sages of that land, whose wisdom he was very anxious to compare with that of India.' Nor' he added, 'have I drunk of the sources of the

³¹⁵ Philostratus, Flavius. (217-245 C. E.). *The Life of Apollonius*. Ed.: Conybeare, F. C. (transl.). (1912). London. http://www.livius.org/ap-ark/apollonius/life/va_3_16.html

³¹⁶ Philostratos, Flavius. (217-245 C. E.). *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, Book V, XXIV. Ed.: Conybeare, F. C. (transl.). (1912). London, p. 515. http://www.livius.org/ap-ark/apollonius/life/va_3_16.html

Nile.' The emperor understood that he was about to set out for Ethiopia and said: 'Will you not bear me in mind?' 'I will indeed,' replied the sage, "if you continue to be a good sovereign and mindful of yourself."³¹⁷

This passage conveys the impression that spiritual communities of 'naked sages' also existed in Egypt. They share features in common with the 'shramanas.' They are described as 'Ethiopians', living in the borderland with Egypt. Whatever their identity may have been, their function soon becomes apparent: It is told that they, as Ethiopians, had common origin with the Indians; furthermore, that they originally followed Indian precepts, but chose to follow Egyptian religion, forgetting their roots. Finally, they are brought into connection with the Pythagoreans. Philostratus presents Apollonius as addressing the 'Ethiopian gymnosophists', accusing them of denying their ancestry and claiming an alien and spurious ancestry:

In the same fashion you are in love with knowledge which the Indians have developed and you do not call it after its natural parents, but after those who are only its parents by adoption; you are ascribing to the Egyptians more excellence than if, as their song says, the Nile flowed upward to them mixed with honey. This advice took me to the Indians before coming to you, in the belief that men like them were more subtle in intellect, and enjoyed a clearer light, and thought more accurately of nature and of the goods, because they were closer to the divine, and dwelt nearer the warm and vivifying essence of life. When I had met them, their revelations affected me as the genius of Aeschylus is said to have affected the Athenians. [...] But the pleasure derived from philosophy, under the system established by Pythagoras, and gifted with such divination as the Indians practiced before Pythagoras, is not transitory, but unending and incalculable. Wherefore I feel that I have not paid too dearly for my devotion to that well-rounded philosophy, which the Indian Sages wheel

³¹⁷ Philostratos, Flavius, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, Book V, XXXVIII, vol. 1. Ed.: Ibidem, p. 561. http://www.livius.org/ap-ark/apollonius/life/va_3_16.html

out, after mounting it on a lofty and suitable pedestal. [...] I found them to be men living on earth and yet not on the earth; defended without walls; possessing nothing yet having all the wealth of the world. [...] You yourselves became the disciples and upholders of Pythagoras, when you adopted the doctrines of the Indians. Long ago you were Indian too ...”³¹⁸

Their presentation by Philostratos must have been acceptable to the reader. The presence of Christian hermits and coenobitic communities along the fringes of the Nile valley may support that. Graeco-Egyptian syncretism in the Roman Empire made orientation to the ‘ancient mysteries of Egypt’ fashionable, as advised by Iamblichus some decades later. In Philostratos’ symbolic discourse the religion, the philosophy of the Brahmins is declared to be older and superior to that of the Egyptians and of the Pythagoreans, as whose leader Apollonius speaks.

Philostratos lets his hero declare that his voyage to the Brahmins was a pilgrimage to the origins even of his own faith of Pythagoreanism. In emotional words – certainly reflecting Philostratos’ convictions - he describes this encounter as inspiring, vivifying and salvific. Emphatically he declares the essential identity of Pythagoreanism’s spiritual life-forms, practices and beliefs with those of the Brahmins. This paves the way for the reception of Yoga and legitimises it. Philostratos also discusses slander of Yogis:

You have given a sample of it, full of insult and ridicule, by asserting that the Indian Sages have discovered nothing valuable, but merely stage tricks, and delusions of eye or ear; and when you know nothing yet of my philosophy, you exhibit your want of sense by expressing your opinion about it. ... I shall say nothing on my own behalf, for I wish to be what the Indians think of me; but I will not allow you to assail them.³¹⁹

We may assume that these declarations of support for Yoga and Brahmanism were not without foundations in the convictions of the readers – most prominently of the empress

³¹⁸ Philostratos, Flavius. (217-245 C. E.). *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, VI, 11. Ed. Bells, C. P. (transl.). (1923). *Life and Times of Apollonius of Tyana, rendered into English from the Greek of Philostratos the Elder*. Stanford, Ca.: Stanford Univ. Publications), p. 158f.

³¹⁹ Ibidem, p. 159.

– nor without effect, as expressed by the leader of Pythagoreanism of this age. The adoption of Yogic concepts and practices of meditation by Pythagorean practitioners of a spiritual life will have ensued.

4.8. Neoplatonic interest in Vedântic philosophy and Yogic spiritual practice: perceived affinities and agreements

Gradually awareness emerges, that Plotinus, who received his intellectual formation in Alexandria, was indebted to Indian philosophy for his own system, as the Paulos Mar Gregorios (1922 – 1996), Syrian Orthodox Metropolitan of Delhi, and Catholicos of the East, declared in philosophical conferences and publications. Mar Gregorios reminded that Plotinus had been initiated into philosophy through eleven years of study by Ammonius Saccas, the influential Platonic teacher at Alexandria, who according to Porphyry was the greatest scholar of his time. Mar Gregorios quotes a pivotal statement by Porphyry about Plotinus and goes on to put it into the cultural, spiritual, and economic context of the city in that age:

And from that day continually staying with Ammonios, (Plotinus) acquired such a mastery of philosophy, that he became eager to gain knowledge of the teaching prevailing among the Persians, as also among the Indians.³²⁰

Porphyry, who edited Plotinus' works and to whom we owe his biography, describes his Indian interests in no uncertain terms: Plotinus had become accomplished in philosophy at the end of his studies with Ammonius. He then wished to study the corresponding systems of the Persians and the Indians. Mar Gregorios suggests that Plotinus' desire to study the Persian and Indian systems must have resulted from his studies with Ammonius. He emphasised that something must have kindled in Plotinus "a great zeal to get better acquainted with Persian and Indian thought". Plotinus sought an integration of philosophy and a mystically orientated spirituality, framed by a spiritual way of life in the Pythagorean tradition, including ascetic practice and charity. He is characterised as having had a penetrating intellect and a highly focussed mind not given to easy or

³²⁰ Mar Gregorios [Verghese, P.]. (2002). Does Geography Condition Philosophy? On Going Beyond the Occidental-Oriental Distinction. In: Mar Gregorios [Verghese, P.] (ed.). *Neoplatonism and Indian Philosophy*, Albany: State University of New York Press, pp. 13–30, p. 17.

superficial solutions. The following report by Porphyry may illustrate how serious Plotinus was about his endeavour:

It happened that the Emperor Gordian was at that time preparing his campaign against Persia; Plotinus joined the army and went on the expedition. He was then thirty-eight, for he had passed eleven entire years under Ammonius. When Gordian was killed in Mesopotamia, it was only with great difficulty that Plotinus came off safe to Antioch.³²¹

If we remember that this was an age of economic decline and political uncertainty, after the demise of the Severan dynasty and their succession by a series of military commanders raised to the throne, the risk involved for Plotinus is obvious. He narrowly saved his life in the ill-fated campaign. Probably Plotinus had the Macedonian king's Persian campaign in mind, which led him to India and, importantly, to a direct encounter with Indian sages, of which dialogues were preserved in Greek historiography. It might have been a certain lack of political judgement, to expect that Gordian's campaign would lead him to the gates of India, unless he would have expected to attain at least partial fulfilment of his philosophical desires in the Persian realm.

What may have fascinated Plotinus are the ideas of the supreme Divine, the 'One' or 'Brahman' as being beyond all form and shape, as source of emanation of all reality and as present in intellect, accessible in the unified, non-dual recollection.³²² As textual basis for Plotinus's system, a section of the Mahabharata has been proposed. Vishwa Adluri declares:

I introduce such a text: the *Nārāyanīya*, found in the *Moksadharmaparvan* or the soteriological portion of the Indian epic, the *Mahābhārata*. In eighteen short chapters, this text contains a combination of elements that were also essential for Plotinus' thought.³²³

³²¹ Idem

³²² Tripathi, R. K., (1982). Advaita Vedānta and Neoplatonism. In R. B. Harris (ed.). *Neoplatonism and Indian Thought*, Albany: State University of New York Press, pp. 233-242.

³²³ Adluri, V. (2014). Plotinus and the Orient: Aoristos Dyas. In: *The Routledge Handbook of Neoplatonism*, (eds.: P. Remes and S. Slaveva-Griffin). New York: Routledge, pp. 75–99. https://www.academia.edu/14382995/Plotinus_and_the_Orient_Aoristos_Dyas. In *The Routledge Handbook of Neoplatonism* ed. Pauliina Remes and Svetla Slaveva-Griffin 75–99. New York: Routledge, 2014.

This is a bold statement, since later texts might well contain ideas which were already extant before Plotinus. However, the identification of this text in a major, 'canonical' work of Indian literature indicates a source, from which Plotinus may have drawn ideas. Whichever sources may have raised Plotinus' desire, to study Persian and Indian systems of philosophy and religious thought, all reports agree on the extraordinary quality of Indian spiritual culture and on the comparability of Indian systems with those of Greek philosophy, even of substantial agreements. Paulos Mar Gregorios, himself at the crossroads of the currents of thought involved here, as a scholar of Neoplatonism, Syrian archbishop of Delhi, born in Kerala, and erstwhile president of the Indian Philosophical Congress, draws a comprehensive picture from the details at hand:

Whether Ammonius was also well versed in Persian and Indian thought, Porphyry does not clearly say. [...] Was literature from India and Persia available in the Alexandrian Museion? By the time we come to the third century, Buddhists have established themselves in Alexandria, with a Vihara or place of teaching of their own. ... or did he continue to pursue that interest in Rome, where all roads met, including the ones from Alexandria, Persia, and India?³²⁴

The overall similarities between Platonic and Vedāntic thought, Neoplatonism included, exert an ongoing fascination and challenge on foremost scholars of Neoplatonism. Important about the biographical report of Porphyry (233 – 305 CE), Plotinus' master student and successor, is the paradigmatic significance of his depiction of Plotinus' desire to visit India for studies of its philosophy. This emerges from the reception of this report by St. Augustine (354 - 430 CE), who thus confirms it. He reflects awareness of early Christian authors of these connections, and the high esteem of some, for their spiritual wisdom, shows that educated Orthodox Christians also participated in this reception. Augustine referred to Porphyry in *De Civitate Dei* X, 32 quoting his lost work *On the return of the Soul*, where he wrote about the convergence between the true (Platonic) philosophy and of the (Neopythagorean) *Chaldaic Oracles*, with the spiritual

³²⁴ Mar Gregorios [Verghese, P.]. (2002). Does Geography Condition Philosophy? On Going Beyond the Occidental-Oriental Distinction. In: Mar Gregorios [Verghese, P.] (ed.). *Neoplatonism and Indian Philosophy*, (pp. 13–30). Albany: State University of New York Press, p. 17.

disciplines and practices of the Indians, the “Indorum mores ac disciplinae”.³²⁵ This shows that the combination of religious philosophy and meditative spiritual practice of the ‘Indians’, i.e. for reasons stated above; of the ‘Brahmanic Yogins’, was noted and appreciated at the end of Roman Antiquity in Christianity too, as by St. Augustine.

4.9. Damascius on Personal Ties: Hosting Brahmans in the Neoplatonic Academy of Alexandria

Damascius, the last rector of the Neoplatonic Academy of Athens, was well connected to Alexandria. Of the academy there he reports on the visit of a group of Brahmans to Flavius Severus, a prominent member of this institution, who had retired as a civil servant for studies here. Damascius tells about the Brahmans whom he hosted in his house:

They for their part spent all their time undisturbed at home in a truly holy manner, without seeking to visit either the public baths or anything else which went on in the city, being altogether uninterested in external things. They ate dates and rice, and their drink was water. They did not belong either to the Brahmans who live in the mountains or to the city dwelling Indians, but were inhabitants of two worlds, giving service when needed to the Brahmans who live in the mountains [i.e., the recluses] and to the cities concerning the Brahmans. They also related stories about the mountain Brahmans, which are repeated by the authors, that they cause rain and droughts by prayer as well as driving away famines and epidemics or removing any other evil which is not destined to be incurable.³²⁶

Damascius shows himself well acquainted with the specific roles of these visitors, and with distinctions between different groups of Brahmans. The groups identified here are the recluses and ascetics among the Brahmans, living in the mountains, where they had

³²⁵ Lacrosse, J. (2014) Plotin, Porphyre et l'Inde : un ré-examen, in : *Le Philosophoïre* 2014/1 (n° 41), pp. 87 à 104, §. 16. <https://www.cairn.info/revue-le-philosophoïre-2014-1-page-87.htm>

³²⁶ Damascius, *History of Philosophy*, 51D. Ed.: Athanasiadi, P. (1999)., *Damascius – The Philosophical History*, Athens: Apamea, p. 147.

attained special psychic powers, 'siddhis' by Yoga, which are described in vivid detail. These powers are well documented in Yogic tradition and perceived to be the fruit of meditation. Palamas reports similar powers for Hesychasts.³²⁷ These visitors were apparently also not part of an 'urban establishment' of Brahmins, in their priestly roles, but mediators and advisors. Being familiar with both Brahmin doctrines and with Yoga and able to communicate, they probably told about these matters of interest to the students and to staff of the academy as well, among which Christians were a major part by the late fifth century.³²⁸ Of Damascius' report unfortunately merely fragments have survived.

³²⁷ Palamas, *Triads*, I.3.24.

³²⁸ Papachristou, I. (2015). The Neoplatonic School of Alexandria. *Encyclopedia of Plato* (Eds.: Foundation of the Hellenic World). <http://n1.intelibility.com/ime/lyceum/?p=lemma&id=823&lang=2>

5. Christian Awareness of Indian Religion and Philosophy in Antiquity

5.1. St. Clement of Alexandria on India's Contribution to Spiritual Philosophy, and Eusebius of Caesarea

In Roman society, Indian philosophy and spirituality were held in high esteem by representatives of the Platonic and Pythagorean traditions, who included them in their 'genealogies'. Christian authors shared this view Clement of Alexandria (born 140-150, died before 215 A.D.),³²⁹ He wrote at about the time of Plotinus' birth. In a passage of the initial chapter of the *Stromateis*, he sums up the contributions of the non-Greeks to Hellenistic philosophy and religion:

These are the times of the oldest wise men and philosophers among the Greeks. And that the most of them were barbarians by extraction, and were trained among barbarians, what need is there to say? [...] Pythagoras did with the same persons, by whom he was circumcised, that he might enter the adytum and learn from the Egyptians the mystic philosophy. He held converse with the chief of the Chaldeans and the Magi; and he gave a hint of the church, now so called, in the common hall which he maintained. [...] And Plato does not deny that he procured all that is most excellent in philosophy from the barbarians; and he admits that he came into Egypt. [...] And as appears to me, it was in consequence of perceiving the great benefit which is conferred through wise men, that the men themselves were honoured and philosophy cultivated publicly by all the Brahmins [...] And it is well known that Plato is found perpetually celebrating the barbarians, remembering that both himself and Pythagoras learned the most and the noblest of their dogmas among the

³²⁹ Méhat, A. (1981). Clemens von Alexandrien. *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol. VIII, (pp. 101–113). Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, p. 101f.

barbarians. Wherefore he also called the races of the barbarians, 'races of barbarian philosophers,' recognising, in the Phaedrus, the Egyptian king, and shows him to us wiser than Theut, whom he knew to be Hermes. But in the Charmides, it is manifest that he knew certain Thracians who were said to make the soul immortal. [...] and in the Timaeus³³⁰ he introduces Solon, the very wise, learning from the barbarian. The substance of the declaration is to the following effect: 'O Solon, Solon, you Greeks are always children. And no Greek is an old man. For you have no learning that is hoary with age.'³³¹

This extract of a long passage may be read as a manifesto of Hellenistic universalism. Notable sages of Hellenistic culture and Greek philosophy are enlisted stating from which nations they came – including those with oral cultures who would not readily be thought of in terms of sources for the written tradition of antique philosophy. The reference to the Thracians alludes to Greek ambivalence about their spiritual practices of 'immortalization', which Eliade interprets as an ancient shamanic technique, which Greek tradition relates to the cults of Orpheus and Dionysos.³³² Yoga and Hesychasm have aspects thereof too.

Clement uses a peculiar phrase: the "philosophy cultivated publicly by all the Brahmins". He connects them to the culturally powerful reception of Egyptian religion and concepts – as established in cultural memory by Plato and Pythagoras – which in Roman Imperial times had become.³³³ The visits of Plato and Pythagoras are well documented in Antiquity, as by Herodotus, Isocrates, Diodorus Siculus, Cicero and others.³³⁴ It is a motif which Iamblichus too picks up some decades later in the introductory chapter of his *De Mysteriis*. Here he claims a double initiation for them by both the Greek and the

³³⁰ Plato. (360 B. C. E.). *Timaios*, 22a+b. Ed: Lamb, W. M. R. (transl.). (1925). *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 9 *Timaeus*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press.

³³¹ Clement of Alexandria (c. a. 200 C.E.). *The Stromata, or Miscellanies*, Book I, ch. XV. <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/clement-stromata-book1.html>

³³² Eliade, M. (1994). *Geschichte der religiösen Ideen II: Von Gautama Buddha bis zu den Anfängen des Christentums*, Freiburg i. B.: Herder Verlag, pp. 151ff. [Original: (1978). *Histoire de croyances et des idées religieuses – de Gautama Bouddha au triomphe du christianisme*, Paris: Eds. Payot]

³³³ Stadler, M. A. (2017). Ägyptenrezeption in der römische Kaiserzeit. In: M. Erler and M. A. Stadler (eds.). *Platonismus und spätägyptische Religion*, Berlin: De Gruyter, pp. 21-42

³³⁴ Clarke, E. C., Dillon, J. M., and Hershbell, J. P. (transl., introd. and notes). (2003). *Iamblichus: de Mysteriis*, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature. p. 5, fn. 5.

Egyptian 'Hermes' (Thoth).³³⁵ Porphyry lauds the effort of Pythagoras to be admitted to initiation in Egypt in his biography:

Antiphon, in his book on illustrious *Virtuous Men* praises his perseverance while he was in Egypt, saying, 'Pythagoras, desiring to become acquainted with the institutions of Egyptian priests, and diligently endeavouring to participate therein, requested the Tyrant Polycrates to write to Amasis, the King of Egypt, his friend and former host, to procure him initiation. Coming to Amasis, he was given letters to the priests; of Heliopolis, who sent him on to those of Memphis, on the pretence that they were the more ancient. On the same pretence, he was sent on from Memphis to Diospolis. 8. From fear of the King the latter priests dared not make excuses; but thinking that he would desist from his purpose as result of great difficulties, enjoined on him very hard precepts, entirely different from the institutions of the Greeks. These he performed so readily that he won their admiration, and they permitted him to sacrifice to the Gods, and to acquaint himself with all their sciences, a favour theretofore never granted to a foreigner.' 9. Returning to Ionia, he opened in his own country, a school, which is even now called Pythagoras's Semicircles

...³³⁶

What Porphyry states here is that the initiation into the 'mysteries of the Egyptians' was desired by Pythagoras as final step of his education before he set up his own school and community of philosophy. For Clement of Alexandria the aspect of these stories is important, that the most revered Greek philosophers had sought and attained spiritual and intellectual inspiration from cultures beyond their bounds. He frames Christianity in this field.

³³⁵ Iamblichus of Chalcis. (ca. 300 C. E.). *De Mysteriis*, I. 1 and 2. Ed. Clarke, E. C., Dillon, J. M., and Hershbell, J. P. (transl., introd., and notes). (2003). *Iamblichus: de Mysteriis*, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, pp. 5-7.

³³⁶ Porphyry, *The Life of Pythagoras*, 7–9. Ed.: Guthrie, K. S. (transl.). (1920). *Porphyry, Life of Pythagoras*. http://www.ccel.org/ccel/pearse/morefathers/files/porphyry_life_of_pythagoras_02_text.htm

In Clement's genealogy of philosophy the Chaldeans are mentioned several times, but remarkably often the Indians, as source of wisdom, both the Brahmins as Indian sages, and the Yogis. He is also aware that only some Indians follow the teachings of Buddha. Clement continues with a detailed account of India and its spiritual culture – not failing to intersperse a note about the divination technique of the ancient Germanic tribes, inserting them in a genealogy of philosophy that he traces to the high cultures of the Middle East, to India, to the Celtic Druids, and to the divining women of the Germanic tribes:

There are also among the Germans those called sacred women, who, by inspecting the whirlpools of rivers and the eddies, and observing the noises of streams, presage and predict future events. These did not allow the men to fight against Caesar till the new moon shone.³³⁷

The divinising women of the Germanic people were well known to the Romans. They had encountered them in their frontier wars when they observed the earls taking advice from them.³³⁸ Tacitus mentions them with respect.³³⁹

Immediately following he writes about the Bactrians at the western fringes of India, stating symbolically that these were equally sources of wisdom for Hellenic culture to him.

Alexander, in his book *On the Pythagorean Symbols*, relates that ... Pythagoras was a hearer of the Galatae and the Brahmins. [...] Thus philosophy, a thing of the highest utility, flourished in antiquity among the barbarians, shedding its light over the nations. And afterwards it came to Greece. First in its ranks were the prophets of the Egyptians; and the Chaldeans among the Assyrians; and the Druids among the Gauls; and the Samanaeans among the Bactrians; and the philosophers of the Celts; and the

³³⁷ Clement of Alexandria. (ca. 200 C. E.). *The Stromata, or Miscellanies*, Book I, Ch. XV.

<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/clement-stromata-book1.html>

³³⁸ Hasenfratz, H. P. (1992). *Die religiöse Welt der Germanen – Ritual, Magie, Kult, Mythos*, Freiburg i. B.: Herder Verlag, p.43.

³³⁹ Tacitus. (98 C. E.). *De Germania*, I. 8. Ed.: Brooks, E. (transl.). (1887). Oxford. [Republ. in: Project Gutenberg (Produced by A. Soulard, C. Aldarondo, T. Vergon, E. Casteleijn et al.). (2003).

<http://www.archive.org/stream/thegermanyandthe07524gut/8aggr10.txt>

Magi of the Persians, who foretold the Saviour's birth, and came into the land of Judaea guided by a star.³⁴⁰

Here the differentiation between different religions and roles in Indian religions is remarkable. Clement then includes the Brahmans expressly among the eldest sources of philosophy, with Greek nature philosophy and with Judaism. In particular, he declares the Brahmanical doctrines – presumably of the *Upanishads* – to agree with those of elder Greek philosophy, according to his source, Megasthenes (350-290 B.C.), who lived for four years as ambassador at the court of the Mauryan empire in India. He wrote about Indian nature, society, culture, history and thought in his *Indica* of which only fragments have survived. Megasthenes certainly had some knowledge about the doctrines of the Brahmans. Clement reports:

Very clearly the author Megasthenes, the contemporary of Seleucus Nicanor, writes as follows in the third of his books, *On Indian Affairs*: "All that was said about nature by the ancients is said also by those who philosophise beyond Greece: some things by the Brahmins among the Indians, and others by those called Jews in Syria."³⁴¹

Ranking the Jews and the Indians as equally ancient sources for a 'philosophy of nature', preceding the Greeks, means that both are acknowledged as sources of divine inspiration on equal terms. The detailed attention to their spiritual practises of Yogic mediation suggests that this some Christian milieus had become aware of it and adopted it as well as they could.

Clement speaks as representative of a current in early Christianity which subsequently came to be curtailed. The closure of his academy in Alexandria, of which he was the rector, and his expulsion, as well as the persecution of his most illustrious student, Origenes (185-254 C. E.), his successor, by the metropolitan of Alexandria, from 230 C. E. on, mark this doctrinal 'closure'. It is in this cultural and religious milieu that the process of fusion may be sought which led to the syncretistic formation of the early stages of Hesychasm. This means that the formation of Hesychasm was not the affair of some

³⁴⁰ Clement of Alexandria (ca. 200 C. E.). *The Stromata, or Miscellanies*, Book I, ch. XV.

<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/clement-stromata-book1.html>

³⁴¹ Idem

eccentric spiritual outsiders on the fringes of heresy or beyond, but that it reflected the spirit of the culture in which it was formed, and that it was rather 'mainstream' in its cultural inclusivity. It is safe to assume that Clement's treatise corresponded to developments in the religious field, with processes of fusion here too. This Hellenistic 'culture of inclusivity' may well have contributed much to the genesis of Hesychasm.

Pythagoras' circumcision, as first step to initiation into the Egyptian mysteries, is apparently interpreted in a typological sense: this suggests continuity from the Pythagorean spiritual community to Christianity as its legitimate successor. Chaldean magi are legitimated as source of further instruction, by mentioning their presence at the birth of Christ.³⁴² Clement's text requires reading on various levels and planes of correlation. The Indian sources are inscribed into this spiritual genealogy.

All of this supports his claim that Christianity is a legitimate heir to Greek culture's tradition to seek divine inspiration beyond its bounds. Clement situates the genesis of Christianity in this syncretistic perspective. In other words, the essential ex-centricity of Greek culture, which he presents as hallmark of its universal validity, is also attributed to Christianity.

This contradicts the assumption that Clement proclaimed the introduction of Christianity by means of an 'oriental revolution' against Greek classical culture,³⁴³ as has been proposed by Guy G. Stroumsa.³⁴⁴ A careful reading shows the opposite. Clement reminds the reader of a most cherished element of Greek culture: its readiness and proven eager to learn from the elder cultures and religions – and not only from these, but also from those of illiterate societies surrounding the Roman empire. Clement's 'de-centering' of Greek philosophy is not un-Greek by any means, nor does he intend it to be. Rather he bases his argument for Christianity on the Greek tradition of preparedness to listen to new (and old) revelations from abroad. There is no indication in this text, that Clement intended to put an end to this universalism. The reasons for his personal conversion to the Christian faith lay with the lack of perceived ethical purity and compassion that he found in the Pagan religions of his time. It does not construct a 'true-untrue divide' between Christianity and the Pagan religions. Unfolding the universalist approach to Christianity, he also discusses the Oracle of Delphi:

³⁴² *St. Matthew 2.*

³⁴³ Stroumsa, G. G. (1999). *Barbarian Philosophy – The Religious Revolution of Early Christianity.* Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr Siebeck, p. 75.

³⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 74

Heraclitus says that, not humanly, but rather by God's aid, the Sibyl spoke. They say, accordingly, that at Delphi a stone was shown beside the oracle, on which, it is said, sat the first Sibyl, who came from Helicon, and had been reared by the Muses. But some say that she came from Milea, being the daughter of Lamia of Sidon. And Serapion, in his epic verses, says that the Sibyl, even when dead ceased not from divination. And he writes that, what proceeded from her into the air after her death, was what gave oracular utterances in voices and omens; and on her body being changed into earth, and the grass as natural growing out of it, whatever beasts happening to be in that place fed on it, exhibited to men an accurate knowledge of futurity by their entrails. He thinks also that the face seen in the moon is her soul. So much for the Sibyl.³⁴⁵

This passage appraises oriental mantic power as a prelude to the revelation of Christ. In the motif of the semi-divine first Sybil of Phoenician descent being effective at her sanctuary well beyond her death, Clement acknowledges the powers of divination at Delphi, thus inscribing the stratum from which Christian revelation went forth in the core of the Greek oracle. This passage reveals that St. Clement apparently shared the belief of Serapion in the ongoing mantic power of the Sybil – a belief shared by St. Luke³⁴⁶ – even as a transcendent entity. The notion returns in Palamas' imagination, although he devaluates it.³⁴⁷ The gift of divination and foreknowledge is highly cherished in Hesychast tradition as sign of the spiritual transformation and progress.

It is in this spirit of universalism of Clement, as the foremost academic Christian teacher of his age in Alexandria,³⁴⁸ that we must read his statements on Hindu and Buddhist thought, spiritual teachings and practise. We also should keep in mind that he himself was a convert to Christianity, after having been initiated into the Eleusinian

³⁴⁵ Clement of Alexandria. (ca. 200 C. E.). *The Stromata, or Miscellanies*, Book I, ch. XV.

<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/clement-stromata-book1.html>

³⁴⁶ *Acts* 16:17.

³⁴⁷ Palamas, *Triads*, I.1.10.

³⁴⁸ Méhat, A. (1981). Clemens von Alexandrien. *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol. VIII, (pp. 101–113). Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, p. 102.

Mystery cults.³⁴⁹ His knowledge of the mystery cults is praised as excellent.³⁵⁰ His depictions of Indian spirituality are precise. He is the first Christian author to mention Buddha by name.³⁵¹ It is quite likely that Clement may have entered in contact with the Buddhist or Brahman sages or monks who repeatedly visited Alexandria, in particular since their presence is also documented by archaeological finds. Eusebius, who discusses Clement's knowledge of Indian matters, mentions that his teacher, Pantaenus, had travelled to India as missionary and encountered Christians of the Syrian tradition there,³⁵² as well as Jewish communities. What is the basis of knowledge about the Indian traditions that Clement mentions? According to Klaus Karttunen:

For ancient Greeks, the distant and exotic Indians were also a somewhat admirable people. They were for varying reasons, generally held in high esteem. It is not a new idea to emphasize the importance of Alexander's campaign as a boundary line in the Greek awareness of India.... The Greek concept of wisdom stemmed originally not from ideas about India, but rather about Egypt and the near East. In the early period the supposed source of wisdom was especially perceived to be in Egypt. It was later located in Mesopotamia and was determined to be in India only with Alexander the Great.³⁵³

This sequence is preserved as a topos by Clement of Alexandria. It also finds itself in Philostratos' arrangement of the travels of Apollonius as well as in the implicit hierarchy he assigns to these two sources of spiritual knowledge, respectively.

Against the wide-spread opinion, shared by W. Halbfass,³⁵⁴ that contacts between Greeks and Indians have been essentially external, with no inner understanding and

³⁴⁹ Ibidem, p. 101

³⁵⁰ Stroumsa, G. G. (1999). *Barbarian Philosophy – The Religions Revolution of Early Christianity*. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr Siebeck, p. 74.

³⁵¹ Idem

³⁵² Ibidem, p. 74, with reference to *Eusebius, Church History*, 5.10.3.

³⁵³ Karttunen, K. (1997). Greeks and Indian Wisdom. In E. Franco and K. Preisendanz (Eds.), *Beyond Orientalism: The Work of Wilhelm Halbfass and its Impact on Indian and Cross-Cultural Studies*, (pp. 117–122). Amsterdam, Atlanta: Rodopi B.V. Editions, p. 117.

³⁵⁴ Halbfass, H. (1981). *Indien und Europa: Perspektiven ihrer geistigen Begegnung*, Basel, 1981: Schwabe. [English Ed. (1988). *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding*, Albany: State Univ. of New York Press]

knowledge exchanged in the process, K. Karttunen declares: "On several occasions I have emphasized that to some extent Indian sources could be at the basis of early classical accounts." He points out that there existed in Greek culture since the times of Herodotus an ethos among ethnographers to rely on "ἴδιον ἢ ἀλλοτρίων ἠκούσαντων ἢ ἀκούσαντων ἢ ἀκούσαντων ἢ ἀκούσαντων", i.e. on own travels, investigation, dialogue with reliable informants and on written sources.³⁵⁵ H. Halbfass' criticism of 'Orientalism' serves to ward off the notion of any 'Indian subversion' of European and Christian thought, observable since the 19th century. Karttunen explains the significance of Alexander's encounter with Indian sages on the background of the already existing interest in Indian wisdom and admiration for it:

... real Indians were met in Taxila; Onesicritus apparently conversed with them, and soon they became famous. Later these ascetics were given the name Gymnosophists, the naked philosophers. In the Hellenistic and Roman periods, they, or more generally the Indian Brahmans described in Alexander histories and by Megasthenes, were seen to represent the paragon of Indian wisdom, a wisdom which was itself a new kind. The Brahmans were now freely given the status of philosophers who used intellectual arguments and who had attained their admired saintliness by deliberate choice but whose frugal way of life was even more admired ... The new conception of Indian wisdom, too, was thus to a great extent a Greek phenomenon. There was a demand for Indian sages, and their wisdom was provided according to this demand...³⁵⁶

Karttunen, who is averse to jumping at fashionable conclusions, repeatedly shows how ancient and deep-running the Graeco-Indian relations were, and how much detailed knowledge existed, from what has been preserved to us. After centuries of trade and visits, of commercial, military, diplomatic, and spiritual interest, 'India' did not only designate a far-off great country, but also a realm within Greek culture, to which specific themes and values were attached. Its spiritual and ethical standards were admired: The

³⁵⁵ Karttunen, K. (1989). *India in Early Greek Literature*, Helsinki, 1989: Studia Orientalia, vol. 65. (Ed. by the Finnish Oriental Society), p.121f.

³⁵⁶ Karttunen, K. (1997). Greeks and Indian Wisdom. In E. Franco and K. Preisendanz (Eds.), *Beyond Orientalism: The Work of Wilhelm Halbfass and its Impact on Indian and Cross-Cultural Studies*, (pp. 117–122). Amsterdam, Atlanta: Rodopi B.V. Editions, p. 120

rejection of slavery, vegetarianism, the abandonment of property, the access of women to philosophical studies, and to spiritual, ascetic communities, the indifference to death, the belief in the immortality of the soul, judgement in the afterlife, and even rebirth – whereby Strabo points out the similarities between Indian and Platonic thought on issues of the soul - were among the themes which radiated into Hellenistic and Roman society.³⁵⁷ Strabo enlisted them, expressly referring to Megasthenes, and endorsed them.³⁵⁸ These themes had imprinted themselves on the Hellenistic mind, as their recurrence as 'topoi' of reference to India, in various selections, show. It would seem strange to assert that these themes should have no formative influence on philosophical and spiritual thought in Hellenistic and Roman society.

We find Clement perfectly in the line of interest and appreciation for India. The agreement which he could expect, from his Christian readers too, is the result of interest in Indian spiritual matters which by then had lasted over five centuries and which had been sustained continuously. It is unlikely that this should have remained purely theoretical.

That this interest in India was not merely a matter of curiosity, and of mere 'knowledge', but included the reception of Indian views and spiritual practices, is stated, and recommended unequivocally by Eusebius of Caesarea (265 – 339 C.E.). The learned historian of the Church adopted a passage of the Neopythagorean Numenius of Apamea (floruit 2nd century C. E.), a forerunner of Neoplatonism, that is also discussed by Origenes (185 – 254 C.E.):³⁵⁹

Also from the Pythagorean philosopher himself, I mean Numenius, I will quote as follows from his first book *On the Good*: 'But when one has spoken upon this point, and sealed it by the testimonies of Plato, it will be necessary to go back and connect it with the precepts of Pythagoras, and to appeal to the nations of good repute, bringing forward their rites and doctrines, and their

³⁵⁷ Jourdan, F. (2021), Numénus et les traditions "orientales": essai sur l'accord perçu entre elles et Platon (fr. 10 F = 1dp), in: Massa, F. and Belayche, N.(eds.), (2021). *Les Philosophes et les mystères dans l'empire romain.*, Liège : Presses Universitaires de Liège., pp.59 – 90, p. 78f.

³⁵⁸ Strabo, *Geography*, Book XV.1.59.

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0239%3Abook%3D15%3Achapter%3D1%3Asection%3D59>

³⁵⁹ Athanassiadi, P, (2006). *La lutte pour l'orthodoxie dans le platonisme tardif: De Numénus à Damascius.* Paris: Les Belles Lettres, p. 78.

institutions which are formed in agreement with those of Plato, all that the Brachmans, and Jews, and Magi, and Egyptians arranged.³⁶⁰

It is evident, that Numenius, who prepared the fusion of Platonism with 'theurgic' doctrine and religious rites, had spiritual practice in mind. His explicit mentions of Platonism, Brahmanism - which included Yoga, foremostly, of Judaism, Zoroastrianism and Egyptian religion, quite probably corresponded to an integration in the realm of practice. Fabienne Jourdan comments, that Numenius, as Middle Platonist performed a "interpretation Graeca, à la fois Platonica et Pythagorica, de l'enseignement Brahmanique."³⁶¹ This included interest in meditation, the doctrine of the soul, and the belief in a supreme Divine.

It is important, that Numeius' depiction of Brahmanism as the most eminent source for inspiration on religious philosophy and spiritual practice – after Judaism, and the teachings of the (Chaldaean) magi and the Egyptians - was received by the eminent Christian theologians of the following decades, by Eusebius, the church historian, and Origines, the exegete and systematic theologian, who both lived and taught in Alexandria. This implies, that they shared this views on these sources of divine wisdom and ascetic meditative practice. Their reference to him may show on which (implicit) theological basis these Brahmanic and Yogic teachings could be received in early Christian religious philosophy and spiritual practice in the realm of Alexandria, where Hesychasm developed. That the 'gravitas' of Numeius statement is underlined by its reception by Origen and by Eusebius, indicates, that this was perceived as a programmatic statement. Its introduction to Christian literature indirectly endorses this integration also for the heritage of Christianity.

Numenius was connected to Apamea. Here, an oracular site of the theurgic tradition existed.³⁶² It was a centre of religious and divinatory activity in the Roman Empire, where such fusion and exchange happened over an extended period. The sympathy displayed to Judaism and to Christianity by Numenius, and his collaborator, Amelius, certainly facilitated such integration of which traces exist.³⁶³ This tradition of

³⁶⁰ Eusebius of Caesarea. (Early 4th century C. E.). *Praep. Ev.*, IX. 7. 1. Ed.: Gifford, E. H. (transl.) (1903). London: Henry Frowde. http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/eusebius_pe_09_book9.htm

³⁶¹ Jourdan, F. (2021), Numénius et les traditions "orientales": essai sur l'accord perçu entre elles et Platon (fr. 10 F = 1dp), in: Massa, F. and Belayche, N.(eds.), (2021). *Les Philosophes et les mystères dans l'empire romain.*, Liège : Presses Universitaires de Liège., pp.59 – 90, p. 69f.

³⁶² Athanassiadi, P. (2006). *La lutte pour l'orthodoxie dans le platonisme tardif: De Numénius à Damascius*, Paris: Les Belles Lettres, p. 84.

³⁶³ Ibidem, p. 91.

integration of a Platonism, systematised as spiritual philosophy, with religious practice, comprising oracles, Mystery cults, initiations, and ritual veneration, and with a culture of spiritual aisthesis, as of the perception of divine light, brought forth the *Chaldean Oracles*, but is not limited to them. The influence of Numenius and Aemelius on Plotinus, and the connections of Iamblichus, and Damascius, to Apamea indicate that an enduring tradition was created here. This connects his line of tradition to Alexandria, by the Neoplatonic philosophes who studied and taught there. Quite probably the focus on perception of 'spiritual light' and its integration with religious philosophy and with other practices, that became a special feature of Syrian Christian spirituality and philosophy -up to Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita and St. John of Damascus – arose here. The assumption that the integration of Yoga with Neoplatonic spiritual philosophy and practice most likely happened in Alexandria, does not contradict this assumption, due to their manifold connections.

5.2. Pseudo-Hippolytus of Rome on Brahman Views on God, Body and Soul, Divine Light, Ascetic Purification and Divinisation

The detailed depiction which the author of the *Refutatio omnium Haeresium* gives of the beliefs of the Brahmans, is extraordinary for its detail and for its location. The *Refutatio omnium haeresium* was written after 222 C. E. by a major theologian of the third century.³⁶⁴ The author has been identified with Hippolytus of Rome (180 – 230 C. E.), a bishop of the third century.³⁶⁵ This ascription is probably secondary. The name of the author remains uncertain.³⁶⁶ The author, who was probably a bit younger than this bishop, is referred to as 'Pseudo-Hippolytus'. References to this treatise by Eusebius and Hieronymus indicate the authority attributed to this author early on. It contains a summary of positions of Greek and Roman philosophy from the beginning, such as Pythagoreanism, Platonism, Druidism and Gnosticism. In this context Brahman

³⁶⁴ Hippolytus of Rome. (Early 3rd century C. E.). *The Refutation of all Heresies*, Book I.21. Ed.: MacMahon, J. H. (transl.) (1886). *Hippolytus of Rome*, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark. <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/hippolytus1.html>

³⁶⁵ Idem

³⁶⁶ Bracht, K. (2014). *Hippolyts Schrift In Danielem – kommunikative Strategien eines frühchristlichen Kommentars*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, p. 30.

philosophical and philosophical doctrines, and Yoga, are also discussed. The author gives evidence of Christian knowledge thereof. The context is significant, since the book evaluates contemporary religious beliefs and practises in Roman society. This supports the assumption that they were indeed within the range of knowledge and familiarity of the early Christian community. It bespeaks the sense of tradition that had evolved in Rome, by that time. Brahman doctrines were evidently not perceived as alien, but, together with doctrines of the Chaldeans or of the Druids, as part of the common spiritual heritage.

The specificity of Pseudo-Hippolytus' depiction surpasses the evidence of earlier or contemporary Greek and Roman texts on the beliefs of the Brahmans. In-depth knowledge of the system of Vedānta shows up here. This requires sources and pathways of learning. Either this author sat down with visiting Brahmans fluent in Greek – something which is documented over two centuries later by Damascius from Alexandria – or he had access to written documentation about the beliefs of the Brahmans by an author capable of discerning and remembering the subtle details and the coherence of the system. A social setting would be required for such encounter. If Pseudo-Hippolytus drew on written accounts these would reflect a process of familiarisation and exchange of ideas, documented by a philosophically educated author. We can assume an in-depth reception process, with the necessary social and cultural framework of encounters and observations for such knowledgeable documentation to happen- especially since the Brahmans were known not to advertise their beliefs and philosophies. The contours of specifically Advaitic features of the system reported by Pseudo-Hippolytus is a further indication of the depth of understanding and interest apparent in this documentation. The likely institutions for such studies and exchange are the philosophical academies in the field of Neoplatonism, as at Alexandria, but also in Rome, such as the school founded by Plotinus at the time.

Considering that Pseudo-Hippolytus composed his *Refutatio omnium haeresium* as a summary of philosophies, it may be assumed that his sources have been quite more detailed. His account of the Brahman positions and practices of a spiritual life are amongst the longest chapters of this treatise, reflecting their perceived importance. Viewed in the perspective of reception, this text conveys the impression that its author felt it necessary to include this chapter as a necessary part of an overview of relevant philosophies (“heresies”), towards with Christianity would define itself. This means that it would not be perceived as overly exotic, but as part of those philosophies ‘on the market’, which a reader might be interested to find reviewed. Fortunately, Pseudo-Hippolytus does not

take a polemical attitude, but discusses the theories he presents, pointing out their interesting aspects, where he finds them. This chapter of the *Refutation of all Heresies* also reflect the strength and appeal of these beliefs and practises in Roman society of early Christian age and indicates that they had adherents.

Of the Brahmins, their mode of life, theology, and ethics Pseudo-Hippolytus writes:

But there is also with the Indians a sect composed of those philosophizing among the Brachmans. They spend a contented existence, abstain both from living creatures and all cooked food, being satisfied with fruits; and not gathering these from the trees, but carrying off those that have fallen to the earth. They subsist upon them, drinking the water of the river Tazabena. But they pass their life naked, affirming that the body has been constituted a covering to the soul by the Deity³⁶⁷

Pseudo-Hippolytus describes Yogis as learned ascetics and as spiritual philosophers. He interprets their mode of life in terms of Christian theology, taking them seriously. He explains the Yogic custom of nudity with the idea of the 'koshas', that the body is a covering of the soul.³⁶⁸ The concept was originally applied to God, in the *Taittiriya Upanishad* (6th century B. C.), in the doctrine of five sheaths (koshas) covering the Divine and, by identity, the 'Ātman' the divine Self.³⁶⁹ These five sheaths consist of:

- (1) the 'Sthula sarira': the gross material body (also called: 'Annamaya-kosha', the sheath of food),
- (2) the 'Suksma sarir", the subtle body, consisting of:
 - a. 'Prāṇamaya-Kosha' the sheath of vital breath and energy (note: 'prāṇa' has similar connotations to pneuma),
 - b. 'Manomaya-Kosha': the sheath of mind
 - c. 'Vijnanamaya-Kosha', the sheath of intellect

³⁶⁷ Idem

³⁶⁸ Kosha. (2011). In: W. Huchzermeyer, *Das Yoga-Lexikon. Sanskrit – Āsanās – Biographien – Hinduismus – Mythologie* (p. 148). Karlsruhe: Edition Sawitri.

³⁶⁹ Deussen, P. (1906). *Das System des Vedānta. Nach dem Brahma-Sūtras des Bādarāyana und dem Kommentare des Cankara über dieselben als ein Kompendium der Dogmatik des Brahmanismus vom Standpunkte des Cankara aus*, Leipzig: F. A Brockhaus [reprint: Elibrin Classics, 2005], p. 148.

- d. 'Karana-sharira': the sheath of the sphere of causality, or: the 'Anandamaya-Kosha': the sheath of bliss³⁷⁰

The mystical ascent requires the ascetic to pass through them consciously but to transcend them, liberating himself from their bondage, to unite with the divine, Brahman. The theological and metaphysical concepts explain Yogic practice in Vedāntic terms. The ideal of liberating oneself from all bondage of possessions and attachments resonated well with Cynicism; the principle of not eating meat, and of not spilling blood of living beings, reflected a fundamental rule of Pythagoreanism, as was repeatedly discussed in Graeco-Roman literature.

The brief note indicates the depth of Pseudo-Hippolytus' knowledge of Brahman Vedāntic doctrine, connected to Yoga. He refers to the doctrine of the 'koshas', describing them as "coverings of the soul" given by God, with a role for spiritual asceticism. He also describes their concepts of God, identifying motifs that are most significant for comparison with the theologies of Middle Platonism and of Hesychasm:

These affirm that God is light, not such as one sees, nor such as the sun and fire; but to them the Deity is discourse [the original text has 'logos' here], not that which finds expression in articulate sounds, but that of the knowledge through which the secret mysteries of nature are perceived by the wise. And this light which they say is discourse ['logos'], their god, they assert that only the Brahmans only know on account of their alone rejecting all vanity of opinion, which is the soul's ultimate covering...³⁷¹

Pseudo-Hippolytus adds that the Brahmans designate god as 'Brahman'. The translation as 'discourse' apparently aims at the enunciated form of this divine 'Word' or 'logos'. Here the Vedāntic correlative term is probably 'Vac'. Speech, utterance, as stated in the magisterial *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (9th – 6th century B. C.). Here the ambivalence of apophatic and cataphatic manifestation of God (Brahman) in different forms is presented:

³⁷⁰ Feuerstein, G. (1998). *The Yoga Tradition Its History, Literature, Philosophy and Practice*, Prescott: Hohm Press, p. 132.

³⁷¹ Hippolytus of Rome, *The Refutation of all Heresies*, Book I.21.
<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/hippolytus1.html>

[10] Whatever is unknown is a form of the vital force [lit.: Prāṇa – comparable to 'pneuma'], for the vital force [Prāṇa] is what is unknown. The vital force [prana] protects him (who knows this) by becoming that (which is unknown).

[11] The earth is the body of that organ of speech, and this fire is its luminous organ. And as far as the organ of speech extends, so far does his fire.

[12] heaven is the body of this mind, and that sun is its luminous organ.

And as far as the mind extends, so far extends heaven, and so far does that sun.

The two were united, and from that the vital force [prana] emanated. It is the Supreme Lord.³⁷²

These verses are spoken by the hypostatic 'Prāṇa', a hypostasis of the supreme God, of Brahman, who also appears as 'light' in other form. The passage, to which this extract belongs, is regarded as one of the earliest documents of Prānāyama,³⁷³ of the breathing meditation of Yoga, that was probably received as foundation of Hesychasm.

The idea of a 'covering' of the supreme Divine, Brahman, that manifests Itself as 'light' or a 'speech', in its objectified form, but that can, and must be uncovered, by inward knowledge of the (divine) Self, is expressed a chapter earlier in this Upanishad:

[15] Brahman was there in these two forms.

If however anyone departs from his world without realising his own true world,

the Self [Ātman, the divine 'Self', identified with Brahman],

It, being unknown, does not protect him. [...]

One should meditate only upon the world of the Self....³⁷⁴

³⁷² *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad* I. v.11 -13. (9th century B. C. E.). Ed.: Swami Mādhavānanda (transl.). (1965). *The Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad with the Commentary of Shankrācārya* (4th ed.), Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, pp, 221ff.

³⁷³ Deussen, P. (1921). *Sechzig Upanishad's des Veda*, (3rd ed.) Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, p. 400f. <http://12koerbe.de/hanumans/deussen.htm>

³⁷⁴ *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad* I. iv.15. (9th century B. C. E.). Ed.: Swami Mādhavānanda (transl.). (1965). *The Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad with the Commentary of Shankrācārya*. (4th ed.) Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, p. 181.

This early passage explicitly states that 'meditation' and introspection, or more precisely: the reversion of consciousness and awareness into itself, and thereby into its divine core and source, lead to union with God and thus to salvific divinisation. This is affirmed by the authoritative Shankarācārya. Commenting on exegetical tradition of this passage, he states:

... the passage extols meditation on the world for the Self. The meaning is that the world of the Self alone stands for all that is desirable to him, for he has nothing else but It to ask for.³⁷⁵

Here we find central motifs of Vedānta theology in conjunction with mentions of Yogic meditation. This micro-analysis - which could be continued with more refinement and detail – shows to which depth Pseudo-Hippolytus was familiar with figures and concepts of Vedānta theology and philosophy. His brief report suggests that he could have expanded on Brahman thought. The systematic connections that he indicates between the different manifestation forms of the supreme divine Brahman, and the mode of attaining divinisation by Self-knowledge and meditation, with the motifs of divine light, of penetrating the 'coverings' of the supreme reality, the dialectics of cataphatic knowledge of God ('speech'), etc. suggest, that he has an in-depth understanding of Brahman thought, that he renders here as far as conceptual parallels in Middle Platonist thought permit him to do. Thus, we find Pseudo-Hippolytus engage in exactly the process of reception and re-interpretation of Vedāntic doctrine, conjoined with Yoga, on the theoretical foundation of Middle Platonism. This agrees with the pathway of transmission to Hesychasm and Orthodox theology, proposed in this thesis.

Pseudo-Hippolytus' focus on the 'theology of light' of Vedānta, further supports this. His description of their concept of God as 'light' agrees with Hesychasm, that God manifests as divine light, but also with Yogic tradition and Advaitic doctrine. Here we find the motif of God as 'light', not perceptible by natural eyes. It also symbolises philosophic truth, but beyond expression, as apophatic. This doctrine is firmly stated in the *Upanishads*. The revered *Chandogya Upanishad* (8th – 6th century B.C.) states of Brahman:

³⁷⁵ Swami Mādhavānanda (transl.). (1965). *The Brhadāranyaka Upanishad with the Commentary of Shankarācārya*. (4th ed.) Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, p. 187.

All this is Brahman. Let a man meditate on that (the visible world) as beginning, ending, and breathing in it (the Brahman) ... The intelligent, whose body is spirit, whose form is light, whose thoughts are true, whose nature is like ether (omnipresent and invisible), from whom all works, all desires, all sweet odours and tastes proceed, he who embraces all this, who never speaks and is never surprised.³⁷⁶

P. Deussen interprets the scriptural statements on Brahman and the 'self-translucent divine light, in relation to the idea of 'intellect' as follows:

Alles, was wahrgenommen wird, das wird durch Brahman als Licht wahrgenommen, weil es sein Wesen ist, Selbstlicht zu sein...³⁷⁷

[Everything that is perceived, is perceived through Brahman as light, because it is its essence to be self-illuminating.]

This statement echoes the Neoplatonic view of God as manifest in Self-translucent intellect, as divine light, which Palamas adopted from Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, and with phenomenological aspects, from spiritual writers like St. Symeon Metaphrasticus. This is conjoined to meditative practice as Pseudo-Hippolytus indicates. He continues his report with a discussion of the concept of 'maya' (delusion): "They assert that the Brahmins only know on account of their alone rejecting all vanity of opinion which is the souls' ultimate covering."³⁷⁸

P. Deussen quotes Bādarāyana on the concept of 'māyā', who rejects the idea of a multitude of souls as ultimate reality as follows:

³⁷⁶ *Chandogya Upanishad*, III.14.2, Ed. Müller, M. (1879). *The Upanishads*, pt. 1, (pp. 1-146). Oxford: Clarendon Pr., p. 48. <https://archive.org/stream/upanishads01ml#page/n7/mode/2up>, Cf.

Radhakrishnan, S. (1953). *The Principal Upanishads*, New Delhi: Harper Collins. <https://archive.org/stream/PrincipalUpanishads/129481965-The-Principal-Upanishads-by-S-Radhakrishnan#page/n279/mode/2up>

³⁷⁷ Deussen, P. (1906). *Das System des Vedānta. Nach dem Brahma-Sūtras des Bādarāyana und dem Kommentare des Cankara über dieselben als ein Kompendium der Dogmatik des Brahmanismus vom Standpunkte des Cankara aus*, Leipzig: F. A Brockhaus (Reprint: Elibron Classics, 2005), p. 141.

³⁷⁸ Hippolytus of Rome, *The Refutation of all Heresies*, Book I. 21. <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/hippolytus1.html>

“Against them the *Cārīrakam* (the Sūtra’s of Bādarāyana) are directed, to show that the sole, supreme, highest God, whose essence is intellect, appears multiplied through the illusions of (māyā), of ignorance, like appearing as multiplied by magic, and that there is no other subject of cognition but Him.”³⁷⁹
[my translation]

The concept of ‘māyā’ also has a wider sense, signifying that the (created, unfolded) world is delusion, as to the supreme divine reality of Brahman, in the aspect of supreme consciousness.³⁸⁰

Pseudo-Hippolytus tells how the Yogis or ‘shramanas’ forsake marriage and civil life, for worship and asceticism, renouncing all attachments to the world and living in communities outside of the civil society’s settlements for good. He indicates that some of them are Brahmans, whereas other Brahmans do not practise renunciation, and live married lives in the communities.

These despise death, and always in their own peculiar language call God by the name which we have mentioned previously, and they send up hymns (to him). But neither are there women among them, nor do they beget children. But they who aim at a life similar to these, after they have crossed over to the country on the opposite side of the river, continue to reside there, returning no more; and these also are called Brachmans. But they do not pass their life similarly, for there are also in the place women, of whom those that dwell there are born, and in turn beget children.³⁸¹

Drawing on the Advaitic concept of Brahman, Pseudo-Hippolytus then discusses how asceticism follows from it, as a casting off delusion and attachment to a world which is indelibly characterised by ‘māyā’.

³⁷⁹ Deussen, P. (1906). *Das System des Vedānta. Nach dem Brahma-Sūtras des Bādarāyana und dem Kommentare des Cankara über dieselben als ein Kompendium der Dogmatik des Brahmanismus vom Standpunkte des Cankara aus*, Leipzig: F. A Brockhaus, p. 202.

³⁸⁰ Māyā. In W. Huchzermeier. (2011). *Das Yoga-Lexikon. Sanskrit – Āsanās – Biographien* (pp. 177f.). Karlsruhe: Edition Sawitri.

³⁸¹ Hippolytus of Rome, *The Refutation of all Heresies*, Book I.21.

<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/hippolytus1.html>

And this discourse [- the original text has “logos” -] which they name God, they assert to be corporeal, and enveloped in a body outside himself, just as if one were wearing a sheep's skin, but that on divesting himself of body that he would appear clear to the eye. But the Brachmans say that there is a conflict in the body that surrounds them, (and they consider that the body is for them full of conflicts); in opposition to which, as if marshalled for battle against enemies, they contend, as we have already explained. And they say that all men are captive to their own congenital struggles, viz., sensuality, and in chastity, gluttony, anger, joy, sorrow, concupiscence, and such like. And he who has reared a trophy over these, alone goes to God; wherefore the Brachmans deify Dandamis, to whom Alexander the Macedonian paid a visit, as one who had proved victorious in the bodily conflict. ... But the Brachmans, putting off the body, like fishes jumping out of water into the pure air, behold the sun.³⁸²

(Pseudo-)Hippolytus' discourse on asceticism and the striving to control the impulses and desires of the body, and thus to attain liberation as condition for deification, may reflect similar convictions in early Christian monasticism. It is soundly Yogic. This is evidence of knowledge in detail of monastic and ascetic practise among the Brahmins.

Palamas' account of how asceticism is necessary for the divine *intellect* to be liberated to fulfil self-luminosity and self-encounter in the Hesychast echo these statements to a degree, that reception is probably, which is facilitated by the substantial agreement between Vedānta and Neoplatonism – or Middle Platonism at the time of (Pseudo-)Hippolytus. The affinities in this passage are reinforced by the Platonic and Christian monastic concepts he uses, like 'deification' but they do represent Yogic ideas too. The notion that God is “enveloped in a body outside himself” represents the notion, described by P. Deussen above, that Brahman assumes form and shape in the manifold

³⁸² Idem

world of appearances, but that these are recognized as external to Brahman by a mind purified and in union with Brahman.³⁸³

This idea reflects the Platonist system of emanations. The connection to the practise of Yogic asceticism which Pseudo-Hippolytus tells of is interesting, since it combines motifs which are likewise conjoined in Hesychasm as presented by Palamas. Roots of Hesychasm in this Yogic tradition with its philosophical underpinning and motivation is strikingly evident.

(Pseudo-)Hippolytus' sentence on the link between the "casting off (the bondage of) the body" by the Brahmans and their vision of *divine light* is remarkable: "But the Brahmans, putting off the body, like fishes jumping out of water into the pure air, behold the sun."³⁸⁴ It reflects what Hesychasm has put into practice too – if 'putting off the body' is understood as attaining mastery of the impulses and desires of the body, in the physical and psychological realm, by means of asceticism, fasting, self-observation and restraint. The image of the 'sun' is to be understood as symbol of the divine light, as explained before. It is likewise the aim of Hesychasm. The 'theology of light' which is so important in (Pseudo-)Hippolytus' report on the beliefs and practices of the Brahmans, is echoed in early Christian theology of this age, and has been received subsequently. That this theological motif is central to both Brahmanism and to early (Orthodox) Christianity becomes apparent, if one compares their two most central daily prayers, deeply established as ancient tradition: the *Gayatri Mantra* and the *Phos Hilaron*.

5.3. Excursus on the *Gayatri Mantra* and the *Phos Hilaron*

The veneration of God as light – and of the divine light in the image of natural lights of sun and fire, goes back to Vedic times. The most ancient *Gayatri Mantra* – named for its metre "embodying the Divine" – was in use in his time, and remains so to this day. Its core verses are taken from the *Veda*. It is explained as follows:

³⁸³ Deussen, P. (1906). *Das System des Vedānta. Nach dem Brahma-Sūtras des Bādarāyana und dem Kommentare des Cankara über dieselben als ein Kompendium der Dogmatik des Brahmanismus vom Standpunkte des Cankara aus*, Leipzig: F. A Brockhaus, p. 110.

³⁸⁴ Hippolytus of Rome, *The Refutation of all Heresies*, Book I.21.

<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/hippolytus1.html>

One mantra that occupies a very special place in Hindu life is called the *Gayatri*. It is central to the religious ceremonies, celebrations, and spiritual attainment. It is part of the *Vedas* and described for meditation in the *Upanishads* (*Brihadaraynkya Upanishad* V. 14. 1-8 and *Chandogya Upanishad* III. 12. 1-9). [...] The *Gāyatrī Mantra* is a highly revered mantra, based on a Vedic Sanskrit verse from a hymn of the *Ṛg Veda* (3.62.10), attributed to the sage Visvamitra. The mantra is named for its Vedic Gayatri Metre. As the verse can be interpreted to invoke God Savitr (The Sun, the Creator) it is often called Savitri. Its recitation is traditionally preceded by OM and the formula *bhūr bhuvaḥ svaḥ*, known as the *mahāvyaḥṛti* ("great utterance"). The *Gayatri Mantra* is repeated and cited widely in Vedic literature and praised in several well-known classical Hindu texts...³⁸⁵

The core verses of the Gayatri Mantra are "preceded by OM and the formula *bhūr bhuvaḥ svaḥ* known as the *mahāvyaḥṛti* ('great utterance'). This prefixing of the mantra proper is described in the *Taittiriya Aranyaka* (2.11.1-8)."³⁸⁶ The syllable 'Om̐', represented by a special symbol: ॐ, symbolises the invocation and expression of the supreme Divine, since the *Chandogya Upanishad*. Thus A. Wilke and O. Moebus explain:

Om̐ has symbolized and signalled the concept of absolute transcendency and absolute immanence. Equipped with this symbolic value, it creates for itself new ritual contexts, and even transfers itself into new theological systems, such as the monotheism of Patañjali (the composer or compiler of the *Yoga Sūtras*), in which it advances to become the name of God (*īśvara-vācaka*) ...³⁸⁷

It was in ritual use in Yoga by the time of Antiquity. It is followed by a verse taken from the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, invoking three cosmological realms: "1. 'Bhūḥ,' 'Bhuvah,'

³⁸⁵ Sethumadhavan, T. N., (2013). Gayatri Mantra. *Esamskriti*, June, 2013.

<https://www.esamskriti.com/e/Spirituality/Mantras-ad-Jap/GAYATRI-MANTRA-1.aspx>

³⁸⁶ Idem

³⁸⁷ Wilke, A and Moebus, O. (2011). *Sound and Communication – An Aesthetic Cultural History of Sanskrit Hinduism*, Berlin: De Gruyter, p. 444f.

'Suvah': there are thus, verily, these three utterances."³⁸⁸ P. Deussen explains that a common ritual formula invoked at the beginning of Vedic rituals is reinterpreted in the sense of Vedāntic spiritual philosophy.³⁸⁹ The relevant passages are:

1) Bhūr! Bhuvah! Suvar! These are thus verily, these three [sacred] utterances.

2) Of them, verily, that one, the fourth, 'Maha', did the son of Machamasya discover.

3) That is Brahman; that is Ātman (the Self, the Body), its limbs are the other gods.

[to which the commentators have explained:]

The Vyahriti uttered as 'Maha' and discovered by the son of Machamasa – that is the Brahman. Indeed, Brahman is Mahat (the Great), and the fourth Vyahriti, too, is Maha – What else is that Vyahriti? It is Atman because it is all-reaching.

The other Vahritis – i.e., the worlds, the Gods, the Vedas, the prāṇas – or all indeed reached by the Vyahritis, 'Maha', i.e. by the sun, the moon, Brahma (Prāṇava) and food respectively. The other gods are therefore its limbs. [...]

'Maha', the fourth Vyahriti, should be regarded as Brahman, the Reality. Because it is Brahma ... this is Atman abiding in the middle of the body. [...]

4) As Bhūh, verily is this world, as Bhuvah is the mid-region, as Suvah the other world, as Maha, the sun, by the sun indeed do all the worlds excel.

³⁸⁸ *Taittiriya Upanishad*. (6th century B. C. E.). I, 5. Ed. Sastri, A. M. (transl.) (2007). *The Taittiriya Upanishad: With the Commentaries of Sri Sankaracarya, Sri Suresvaracarya and Sri Vidyaranya*, Chennai: Samata Books.

³⁸⁹ Deussen, P. (1921). *Sechzig Upanishad's des Veda*, (3rd ed.). Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, p. 218.

5) As Buvah, verily is Agni, Fire, as Bhuvah is Vayu, the Air, as Suvah is Adiya, the Sun, as maha is Chandramas, the Moon, by Chandramas indeed do all luminaries excel. [...] ³⁹⁰

The seventh verse, which gives an application of this symbolic reading to Yoga is rendered conceptually precise, by Paul Deussen:

7) Bhūvah' is exhalation, bhuvah the inhalation, suvar the intermediate breath, mahas the nourishment, because by nourishment all vital airs thrive.

These are the four times four, every time four exclamations. Whoever knows them knows Brahman, to whom all Gods bring offerings. ³⁹¹

This passage is most important for the link between Vedic sacrificial ritual, with its established polytheism, Vedāntic theology of Brahman as the supreme Divine, and with the foundations of Yoga. The special interpretation of the three cosmological elements to the three stages of breathing in Yoga: inhalation, exhalation, and the intermediate retention of breath, are included in this symbolism: “*Bhūr* is exhalation, *bhuvah* the inhalation, *suvar* the intermediate breath...” ³⁹² The three movements correlate with the drawing in of the divine *prāṇa*, and the raising of vital force, as well as its dispersal in the body and the release. The opening verse of the *Gayatri Mantra* thus conveys an arcane meaning to the central figure and practice of Yoga, the *Prāṇāyāma*. In daily recitation, it combines the worship of the supreme divine envisioned in the image of the Sun and of light. After the ‘Om bhūr bhuvah svaḥ’, the invocation, the *mahāvyaḥṛti*, follows the mantra proper, the verse from *Ṛg Veda*: “tāt savitūr váreṇ(i)yaṃ / bhárgo devásya dhīmahi / dhíyo yó naḥ pracodáyāt” ³⁹³

The Gayatri verse has been literally translated by R. T. H. Griffith as: "May we attain that excellent glory of Savitr the god: So, may he stimulate our prayers?" ³⁹⁴

³⁹⁰ *Taittiriya Upanishad*, I.5.1-5. Ed. Sastri, A. M. (transl.) (1903). *The Taittiriya-upanishad by Sankaracarya; Suresvaracarya; Madhava, son of Chavunda, d.1391?, Madhava, d. 1386, Mysore.* [Republished: (2007) University of California Libraries].

<https://archive.org/details/taittiriyaupanis00sankiala/page/76>

³⁹¹ *Taittiriya Upanishad*, I.5.7. Ed.: Deussen, P. (1921). *Sechzig Upanishad's des Veda*, (3rd ed.) Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, p. 218.

³⁹² Ibidem

³⁹³ *Ṛg Veda*. (1900–1200 B. C. E.). 3.62.10. Ed.: Griffith, R.T. Hotchkin (transl.). (1896). *The Hymns of the Rig Veda*, Kotagiri Nilgiri. <https://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/rigveda/rv03062.htm>

³⁹⁴ *Rig Veda*. 3.62.10.

Its symbolic meaning is explained by the philosopher S. Radhakrishnan as:

We meditate on the effulgent glory of the divine Light; may he inspire our understanding. We meditate on the adorable glory of the radiant sun; may he inspire our intelligence.³⁹⁵

Here the transcendent understanding of the sun as symbol of the divine is unfolded. It resonates with (Pseudo-)Hippolytus' interpretation of the worship of the sun as representing the divine light,³⁹⁶ as is central to Hesychasm. The significance of the *Gayatri Mantra* – in use at the time of (Pseudo-Hippolytus) - is explained by T. N. Sethumadevan:

In traditional Brahmin practice the Gayatri Mantra is addressed to God as the divine life-giver, symbolized by Savitr (the sun), and is most often recited at sunrise, noon, and sunset. It is believed by practitioners that reciting the mantra bestows wisdom and enlightenment, through the vehicle of the Sun, Savitr, who represents the source and inspiration of the universe. Recitation at sunrise every morning, at noon and in the evening at the sunset is part of the daily ritual (*sandhya vandana*). While often associated with outward ritual offerings, it can be recited more inwardly and without rites, a practice generally known as *japa*.³⁹⁷

The veneration of divine light also has a regular place in Orthodox daily prayers. The *Phos Hilaron* (Φῶς ἱλαρόν) is the oldest recorded hymn in Christianity, with the complete metrical structure of a true hymn.³⁹⁸ The hymn is sung in Orthodox Vespers at the lighting of the candles. It is documented in the early authoritative text on Christian liturgy, prayer

³⁹⁵ Sethumadhavan, T. N. (2013). Gayatri Mantra. *Esamskriti*, June, 2013.

<https://www.esamskriti.com/e/Spirituality/Mantras-ad-Jap/GAYATRI-MANTRA-1.aspx>

³⁹⁶ Hippolytus of Rome, *The Refutation of all Heresies*, Book I.21.

<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/hippolytus1.html>

³⁹⁷ Sethumadhavan, T. N. (2013). Gayatri Mantra. *Esamskriti*, June, 2013. Retrieved from

<https://www.esamskriti.com/e/Spirituality/Mantras-ad-Jap/GAYATRI-MANTRA-1.aspx>

³⁹⁸ Plank, P. (2001). *ΦΩΣ ΙΛΑΡΟΝ. Christushymnus und Lichtdanksagung der frühen Christenheit*, Bonn: Borengässer Vlg.

and rites, the *Apostolic Constitutions* (8, 34ff.) of the third century,³⁹⁹ for use in Morning Prayer.

The *Phos Hilaron*, the *Hail Gladdening Light*, has been adopted throughout Christianity, and has been adopted in the rites of Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran Churches too. It was soon considered as a most antique and venerable hymn of Christianity.⁴⁰⁰

<p>„Φῶς ἰλαρὸν ἀγίας δόξης ἀθανάτου Πατρὸς, οὐρανοῦ, ἀγίου, μάκαρος, Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, ἐλθόντες ἐπὶ τὴν ἡλίου δύσιν, ἰδόντες φῶς ἑσπερινόν, ὑμνοῦμεν Πατέρα, Υἱόν, καὶ ἅγιον Πνεῦμα, Θεόν. Ἄξιόν σε ἐν πᾶσι καιροῖς ὑμνεῖσθαι φωναῖς αἰσίαις, Υἱὲ Θεοῦ, ζῶν ὁ διδούς· διὸ ὁ κόσμος σε δοξάζει.”⁴⁰¹</p>	<p>“Hail gladdening Light, of his pure glory poured from th’immortal Father, heavenly blest, holiest of holies, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Now we are come to the sun’s hour of rest, the lights of evening round us shine, we hymn the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit divine. Worthiest art thou at all times, to be sung with undefiled tongue, Son of our God, giver of life, alone: therefore, in all the world thy glories, Lord, they own.”⁴⁰² [literally: ‘therefore, the cosmos praises thee’.]</p>
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³⁹⁹ Vassiliadis, P. (2012). From the Pauline Collection to Phos Hilaron of Cappadocia. *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* (SVTQ), 2012, 1, pp. 1–9, p. 5.

https://www.academia.edu/2001058/From_the_Pauline_Collection_to_Phos_Hilaron_of_Cappadocia

⁴⁰⁰ Idem.

⁴⁰¹ Plank, P. (2001). *ΦΩΣ ΙΛΑΡΟΝ. Christushymnus und Lichtdanksagung der frühen Christenheit*. Bonn: Borengässer Vlg.

⁴⁰² *Hail Gladdening Light*. (1844). (Keble, J. transl.) Ed.: (2000). *Complete Anglican Hymns Old & New*, (compilers: Moore, G., Sayers, S., Forster, M. and Mayhew, K.). Buxhall, Stowmarket: Kevin Mayhew Ltd., Nr. 253 (transl. Keble, J.).

This hymn was soon recognised as theologically important by St. Basil of Caesarea (329-379 C. E.) in his treatise on the Holy Spirit.⁴⁰³ Its emphasis is interesting. Thus P. Vassiliades writes:

What is, however, even more important, is that *Phos Hilaron* provides a further argument for the plurality of the theological reflection in early Christianity; for a different Christology and soteriology from the overwhelming Pauline theologia crucis; and at the bottom line for a less vertical/soteriological and more horizontal/ecclesiological perspective in the divine economy.

There is some evidence that in Jerusalem in the early days a lamp was kept perpetually burning in the empty tomb of Christ as a symbol of the living light of Jesus. [...] The symbolism here is clear: not the death, but the life is celebrated; not the theologia crucis, but the theologia gloriae; not the (Pauline) soteriological emphasis on Jesus' death on the cross, but the (Johannine) δόξα [...] In *Phos Hilaron* there is not a single hint to the cross or to the soteriological significance of Jesus' death.⁴⁰⁴

The *Phos Hilaron* mentions neither the death nor the resurrection of Christ. An early liturgical use is reported by the pilgrim Egeria from the Christian congregation of Jerusalem: there an 'eternal light' was kept burning in the burial chapel of Jesus Christ. At Evening Prayers candles were lighted and brought out in solemn procession. There is no mention that these Vespers or Vigils were celebrated with a Eucharist.⁴⁰⁵

Jesus Christ is venerated in eternal, trans-mortal, existence as the giver of life and as the embodiment of the spiritual light, which is the aesthetic manifestation of the glory of God. This is deeply Hesychast, relating to the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ. The symbolism of divine light in the ceremonies of lighting candles, is fitting. By its ancient use

⁴⁰³ Basilios of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit*, XXIX.73. (4th century C. E.). Loc cit: Vassiliadis, P. (2012). From the Pauline Collection to Phos Hilaron of Cappadocia. *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly (SVTQ)*, 2012, 1, pp. 1–9.

⁴⁰⁴ Vassiliadis, P. (2012). From the Pauline Collection to Phos Hilaron of Cappadocia. *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly (SVTQ)*, 2012, 1, pp. 1–9, p. 7.

⁴⁰⁵ Felmy, K. C. (2003). Peter Plank: *PHOS HILARON*. Christushymnus und Lichtdanksagung der frühen Christenheit“, [review]. *Theologische Literaturzeitschrift – Monatsschrift für das gesamte Gebiet der Theologie und Religionswissenschaft (ThLZ)*, November 2003, cols. 1173–1175.

in Pseudo-Dionysius⁴¹⁰ and in Hesychasm.⁴¹¹ Preceding St. Gregory Palamas, St. John of Damascus (675 – 749 C.E.) adopted the images of the 'fire' and 'light' to visualise the common essence of God the Father and the Son, demonstrating the Son as an en-hypostasised power of the Father⁴¹² – and to represent the synergy of the Father and the Son.⁴¹³ This relates to the Pneumatology of Palamas, where the *divine light* is defined as a manifestation of the Holy Spirit en-hypostasized in the beholder. Sergey Bulgakov clearly understood its symbolism. He refers to the *Phos Hilaron*, for the title of his seminal book on Orthodox epistemology.⁴¹⁴ S. Bulgakov's 'Sophianic' understanding of Hesychasm may be deeper than that of his critics, such as G. Florovsky.

5.4. Palladius' Claim to Inheritance of Pythagoreism and Brahmanism for Christian Spiritual Life

The interest which Bishop Palladius of Galatia (364 – 430 C. E.) took in the philosophy and spiritual practise of the Brahmans is to be understood on the background of his long studies of the hermits of the Egyptian Desert, documented in his *Historia Lausiaca*.⁴¹⁵ His treatises on the philosophy of the Brahmans have two frames. He retells the talks between Alexander the Great and Dandamis, the spiritus rector of a group of Brahmans living as Yogis from historiographical sources available to him, especially the Stoic historian Arrian. He recommends his treatise as useful to read for the peace of mind. He emphasises Pythagorean positions and motifs. Palladius thus claims the wisdom of the Brahmans for Christianity through its reception by Hellenistic philosophy. It most likely

⁴¹⁰ Golitzin, A. (2003). Dionysius Areopagita – a Christian Mysticism. *Pro Ecclesia*, XII (2) 161–212, p. 167.

⁴¹¹ Flogaus, R. (1997). *Theosis bei Palamas und Luther – ein Beitrag zum ökumenischen Gespräch*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, p. 167f.

⁴¹² Ibidem, p. 170.

⁴¹³ John of Damascus. (early 8th century C. E.). *Expositio fidei* 8. Ed.: Chase, J. (transl.). (1958). *The Fathers of the Church: St. John of Damascus – Writings* (pp. 165–406). Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, pp. 185ff.

⁴¹⁴ Bulgakov, S. (2012). *Unfading Light*. Grand Rapids, Mi. 2012: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publish. Co. [Original: Булгаков, С. (1917). *Свет невечерний. Созерцания и умозрения*. Moscow: Путь]

⁴¹⁵ Palladius of Helenopolis (Galatia), *Historia Lausiaca*. Ed.: Hübner, A. (Ed. and transl.). (2016). *Palladius – Historia Lausiaca. Geschichten aus dem frühen Mönchtum* (Greek and German), Freiburg i. B.: Herder Vlg.

included instructions on meditative techniques - if this text reflects encounters and exchanges with Yogis.

The figure of Alexander the Great represents the 'spiritual traveller to India' in Graeco-Roman literary imagination. As such Palladius depicts his adventurous informant, a Roman attorney, who, during midlife-crisis, embarked on a journey to India which came to last somewhat longer than foreseen, due to temporary enslavement. For most of the readers this 'passage to India' will have remained a literary adventure of exploring spiritual horizons. Palladius may have drawn on information by personal encounters with Yogis on their views, as noted. Palladius perceptibly frames it as such. He has Dandamis address Alexander:

You came here because you aspire to wisdom, which we, the Brahmans, have in store pre-eminently, for this is what is most royal in our lives. You have wished to learn this, King Alexander, because the philosopher is not dominated but he dominates, and no man has power over him. So far you have not believed in us, because of the trouble between us, but now you have come to taste the words of truth.⁴¹⁶

This resonates with Biblical motifs, such as in *St. John*: "In the world ye shall have tribulations: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."⁴¹⁷ Likewise the motif of 'tasting the words of truth'⁴¹⁸ echoes with Holy Scripture. Dandamis then compares the military victories of the king to the inner victories of the Brahmans, by their spiritual life:

Don't you see that you are a victor over what is external, and that you are defeated by what is internal? [...] [By the senses of:] sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, the tongue, the stomach, the sex, the whole body? They are numerous inside, giving incessantly commands like strict masters and insatiable tyrants: desires, love of

⁴¹⁶ Palladius of Helenopolis, *De gentibus Indiae et Bragmanibus*, II, 2 [114D]. Ed. : Maraval, P. (Intr., trans, and annot.). (2016). Alexandre le Grand et les Brahmanes – Palladios d'Hélénopolis *Les mœurs des Brahmanes de l'Inde*, suivi de *Correspondance d'Alexandre et de Dindime* (anonyme), (pp. 1 – 30). Paris : Belles lettres.

⁴¹⁷ *St. John* 16:33

⁴¹⁸ *Ezechiel* 3 :1-3

riches, love of pleasures, homicides, greed, discord. Of all these things and of many others the mortals are slaves, and because of this they kill and they get killed.

7. The Brahmans, who have gained the victory in the inner battles, are strengthened and the rest, contemplating the forests and the sky. We listen to the agreeable songs of the birds and we live in plain air, we eat the fruit and drink water, we sing hymns to God and we desire of the things to come, we do not listen to anything superfluous, and we make some many discourses fall silent; this is how we live, the Brahmans.⁴¹⁹

Palladius gives a eulogy of the asceticism and the inner struggles of the monks of the Egyptian Desert - in the guise of the Brahmans - transposed into the lush landscapes of the hills of India, nourished by a very Neopythagorean sense of nature and harmony with her. As subtext one may read a praise of Christian asceticism in the image of the Brahmans. What follows is a veritable sermon to live up to the calling of being created in the image of God. The text increasingly becomes constituted by an 'inter-textual' overlay of Brahman and Christian motifs, with Pythagorean elements included. The perspective of 'inter-textuality' is necessary to grasp the underlying meaning of these passages. Palladius has Dandamis talk to Onesicritus, Alexander's envoy, about the mortal danger he and other Yogis find themselves in by Alexander's wrath over their insubordination. Onesicritus greets Dandamis:

Greetings, doctor of the Brahmans; the son of the great Zeus, the king Alexander, who is master of all mankind, calls for you ... and if you don't come, he will cut off your head. ... [whereupon Dandamis replies:] 15. God, the great king, has not brought forth any arrogance, but light, peace, life and water, bodies of men and souls, and he receives them when destiny delivers those who are not subject to desire anymore. He is my sole master, and God, who rejects killings and does not create war. But Alexander is not God because he knows he will die. [...]17. If Alexander cuts off my head, he does not destroy

⁴¹⁹ Palladius of Helenopolis, *De gentibus Indiae et Bragmanibus*, II, 2 [114D]. Ibidem, p. 10f.

my soul, but only a dumb head. My soul will go to her master, leaving the body behind, like a rag, to the earth from which it has been taken. Having become spirit, I will rise to my God, who has enclosed us in the body and has sent us to earth, to show how, we live for Him, as he as ordained once we have descended.⁴²⁰

Here theological motifs of Christian and Brahman theology are blended. The latter emerged in the reports of the elder Greek historians, upon which Palladius drew. Martyrdom is included in the discourse. It shows the reception of an array of Brahman motifs by him. Thus, he assigns Brahmanism a place in the genealogy of Christian spirituality. According to Palladius, Alexander asks Dandamis, when they finally meet:

19. Greetings, Dandamis, doctor of the Brahmans and master of wisdom, I came to see you because I have heard your name and because you did not come to us. [...]

20. I come to learn from you a bit about wisdom, because it is said that you converse with God. I wish to know in what you differ from the Greeks, or where you believe and think in a way more remarkable than the others.⁴²¹

After a dressing down of the emperor for his violence and avarice, Dandamis finally states:

25. But you seek, Alexander, to learn from me what I have more than the other people and what I know of wisdom more than many of them, by comparison. You see me as I was created in the beginning; I live naked as I was brought to earth by my mother, without riches and without cares. This is why I know what God does and I know what shall come. [...] 29. Choose therefore, king Alexander, to live our non-materialistic life. I don't know if you are as happy as

⁴²⁰ Ibidem, sect. 17, p, 13f.

⁴²¹ Ibidem, sect. 19f. p. 15f.

you might be, if you would let yourselves be convinced by our words, to find yourself.⁴²²

Here we find several motifs combined:

- the justification of pilgrimage to the Brahmans to learn from them
- their well-known reluctance to go abroad on missions, noted in Antiquity
- the motif of the superior wisdom of the Brahmans compared to the Greeks,
- followed by the interpretation of the nudity of the Brahmans living as 'gymnosophists',
- their acquisition of knowledge of God, and of the future, through their Yogic practice,
- their fundamental opposition to the materialism of Graeco-Roman Epicureans,
- and finally, the motif of self-exploration and self-knowledge, which resonates both with the Delphic commandment and with Hesychasm and its predecessors.

Palladius here too, combines Brahmanic and Yogic motifs with those of Christianity and some strains of Greek philosophy, to formulate a fundamental critique of the value system of greed, violence and materialism, which Alexander is seen as following, despite of his quest for the wisdom of the Brahmans, which is praised. Palladius thus claims heritage and orientation to the spiritual philosophy and practice of the Brahmans and Yogis for Christian asceticism.

5.5. Cosmas Indicopleustes: a Christian Merchant in India in the 6th Century

The vitality of the Graeco-Roman trade with India and the participation of Christians therein is well documented by the work of Cosmas Indicopleustes. He was a seafarer from Egypt who sailed to India and Ceylon for some two decades in the early 6th century. He then became a monk and wrote the extensive *Christian Topography*, around 500 C. E. It contains valuable details of the countries he visited, like Ethiopia, sometimes for extended time. His descriptions of Sri Lanka contain interesting and precise detail. He mentions the sites of Syriac Churches in different towns, reports on their liturgy and

⁴²² Ibidem, sect. 25-29, pp. 17ff.

ecclesiastical organization.⁴²³ His report is evidence of the degree of social exchange between foreign merchants and local authorities. Although he mentions nothing about Yoga or Hinduism, he visited a Buddhist stupa. Remarkably Cosmas Indicopleustes does not mention interpreters. He and his Persian colleagues apparently learnt the local languages well enough to communicate. This well-established network of commerce which existed over centuries, made visits to Brahmans and Yogis to Alexandria possible too, as surviving accounts show. The preservation of Cosmas Indicopleustes' work through the Middle Ages appears to have been motivated by his *Christian Topography's* account as well as by general interest in India. Details from his report on Ceylon convey an idea of his observations:

The great island, as the natives report, has a length of three hundred *gauria*, that is of nine hundred miles, and it is of the like extent in breadth. There are two kings in the island, and they are at feud the one with the other. The one has the hyacinth country, and the other the rest of the country where the harbour is and the centre of trade. [365 It is a great mart for the people in those parts. The island has also a church of Persian Christians who have settled there, and a Presbyter who is appointed from Persia, and a Deacon and a complete ecclesiastical ritual. But the natives and their kings are heathens. In this island they have many temples, and on one, which stands on an eminence, there is a hyacinth as large as a great pine-cone, fiery red, and when seen flashing from a distance, especially if the sun's rays are playing round it, a matchless sight. [Fn: The Chinese pilgrim Hiouen Thsiang, a century after Cosmas, relates that at Anarajapura, on a spire surmounting one of its temples, a ruby was elevated which with its transcendent lustre illuminated the whole heaven.] The island being, as it is, in a central position, is much

⁴²³ Cosmas Indicopleustes. (ca. 550 C. E.). *Christian Topography* book 11. Ed.: McCrindle, J. W., (Transl., ed., annot., and intr.). (1897). *The Christian Topography of Cosmas, an Egyptian Monk*, Edinburgh: The Hakluyt Society. Republ. http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/cosmas_11_book11.htm

frequented by ships from all parts of India and from Persia and Ethiopia, and it likewise sends out many of its own.⁴²⁴

Cosmas gives a vivid report of a visit to Anuradhapura, the ancient royal city of Sri Lanka, situated inland in the north. Here a centre of Theravada Buddhism existed, where Buddhagosa, a commentator and philosopher lived in the Great Monastery (Mahāvihāra) in the 5th century. The temple, which Cosmas described, was evidently the great stupa. This means that Cosmas did indeed take interest in the culture of Sri Lanka, well beyond his concerns as a merchant. It is also of interest that the Ceylonese participated actively in maritime trade, sending their ships to other shores of the Indian Ocean as well. This supports reports of visits by Brahmans to Alexandria.

5.6. Traces of Indian Connections in Early Hesychast Literature

Memories of connections to India however persisted in the nascent Hesychast tradition, as John of Karpathos' *Letter to the Monks in India*⁴²⁵ shows. Arab sources still report the presence of unspecified "monks from India" in the realm of Syria and Mesopotamia in the 7th and 8th centuries.⁴²⁶ Speculations exist that they could have been wandering Yogis.⁴²⁷ This is unlikely, since they would have lacked any social institutions here to accommodate them, or to visit. These itinerant monks were probably Christians from south-western India, where the Syrian Oriental Orthodox Church has been established from the mid-first century on. This explains why they visited Syria and Mesopotamia in particular. It supports that St. John of Karpathos' *Ascetic Discourse Sent at the Request of the Same Monks in India* may reflect some ongoing awareness and monastic contacts with the Christian Church in India, even after the Islamic conquest of Syria and Egypt.

Memory of connections to India, and of Christian presence there, have remained alive in Europe throughout the Middle Ages. Wolfram von Eschenbach (1170-1220) in his epic romance

⁴²⁴ Ibidem

⁴²⁵ St. John of Karpathos, *Ascetic Discourse Sent at the Request of the Same Monks in India*. Ed.: *The Philokalia*, vol.1. (1979), (pp. 322-326). London: Faber & Faber.

⁴²⁶ Haq, M. E. (1975). *A History of Sufism in Bengal*. Dacca: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh], p. 120. Loc. cit.: Baier, K. (1998). *Yoga auf dem Weg nach Westen: Beiträge zur Rezeptionsgeschichte*, Würzburg: Königshaus & Neumann, p. 29, fn. 24

⁴²⁷ Baier, K. (1998). *Yoga auf dem Weg nach Westen: Beiträge zur Rezeptionsgeschichte*, Würzburg: Königshaus & Neumann. p. 29.

Parzival, has the hero's half-brother Feirefiz, born of an African mother, and his wife, Repanse de Schoye (Joie) emigrate to India, to become parents of the legendary priestly king John there, after Parzival finds the Holy Grail.⁴²⁸

⁴²⁸ Wolfram von Eschenbach. (1210). *Parzival* II, 16.822. Ed. Lachmann, K. (Ed.) (1981). Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, 2 vols. (Mittel- und Neuhochdeutsch). Stuttgart: Reclam, vol. 2, p. 663f.

6. The Social Forms of Yoga and Hesychasm and the Origins of Christian Monasticism

6.1. Brahmans, Shramanas, and Yogis, according to Clement of Alexandria

Clement gives a detailed description of different representatives and groups of Indian philosophy, religion, and spirituality:

The Indian gymnosophists are also in the number, and the other barbarian philosophers. And of these there are two classes, some of them called Sarmanae, and others Brahmins. And those of the Sarmanae who are called Hylobii neither inhabit cities, nor have roofs over them, but are clothed in the bark of trees, feed on nuts, and drink water in their hands. Like those called Encratites in the present day, they know not marriage nor begetting of children. Some, too, of the Indians obey the precepts of Buddha; whom, on account of his extraordinary sanctity, they have raised to divine honours. ...⁴²⁹

Clement knows to distinguish them and assumes his readers can follow. He mentions:

- The Indian 'gymnosophists', the 'naked sages':

Greeks and Romans designated Brahmanic (Hindu) Yogis by this term. Clement counts them among the philosophers since the time of Alexander the Great. Their asceticism is described, their practice of arduous āsanas, and their life in renunciation of property, family, and status in civil life. Lucian of Samosata presents them as familiar figures.

- The Brahmins:

These are described as one form of 'gymnosophists', distinguished from the 'sarmanae' – in other Hellenistic sources the 'shramanas'. The Brahmins are described by Greek historians and by Roman authors. Their status in Indian society and their role as guardians of Hindu religious philosophy and ritual are depicted. Basics of their Vedāntic doctrines were known and perceived to agree with the Platonic tradition.

⁴²⁹ Clement of Alexandria, (ca. 200 C. E.). *The Stromata, or Miscellanies*, Book I, ch. XV. <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/clement-stromata-book1.html>

- The Shramanas:

The term denotes spiritual practitioners of the Yogic type. The concept also covers Buddhist and Jain ascetics and renunciants engaged in meditation. Clement regards the 'shramanas' as part of the Vedic tradition, naming them together with the Brahmins. He discusses "the Samanaeans among the Bactrians", i.e., in the region of Indo-Greek culture.

- The Hylobii:

Clement mentions a special type of the Shramanas, distinguished by their radical renunciation of property and even housing, living off fruits of nature, celibate, and hardly dressed: the Hylobii, the 'forest dwellers': Their form of life resembles that of some Hesychasts. Clement compares them to early Christian ascetics, the Encratites. They may have adopted their form of life from these Yogic radical ascetic renunciates.

- The Buddhists:

Clement distinguishes them from Brahmins and Shramanas by their belief in Buddha. Clement enlists the Hindu Sanskrit 'śramana', and the Pali Buddhist form of the word. The latter designates the Buddhist monastic ascetics. 'Samana' is used in Pali Buddhist literature for Buddhist monks.⁴³⁰ Buddha himself became a Śramana. Likewise, Jainism has adopted it.

Clement's interest is focussed on the 'Hindu continuum' of Brahmins and Shramanas. The issue of non-Vedic roots and branches of Shramanism or Yoga, and their integration with the Vedic tradition, or of a rejection of these in some traditions, appears to have been noted in passing by Clement but is not of much interest to him.

For interest in the origins of Hesychasm the form of Yogic asceticism associated with the Vedic tradition and its doctrines is essential. Considering that a certain supporting 'social infra-structure' is necessary for visits of Yogis to the Hellenistic and Roman lands, this may best apply to Yogis associated with organised Brahmanism. Mediation by way of Buddhism may be largely excluded, for two reasons: firstly, that Greek and Roman authors consistently mention Yogis together with Brahmanism, while distinguishing them as Clement does.⁴³¹ The second reason is doctrinal: the closeness between Vedānta and the Platonic tradition has been affirmed by Greek authors since Alexander the Great. It has been reaffirmed for Neoplatonism.

⁴³⁰ Samana. *Pali-English Dictionary*, (Eds. Rhys Davids, T.W. and Stede, W. (1921). London: The Pali Text Society), vol. VII, p. 141. : http://www.ahandfulofleaves.org/documents/PTS_Pali_Dictionary.pdf

⁴³¹ Idem

The concept of 'Samana' or 'Śramana' is derived from the verbal root 'śram', meaning 'to exert effort, labour or to perform austerity'. While the term's connotations extend beyond those of Yoga, it came to be used for Yogis in the Hellenistic realm. Its origins are specifically described in Vedic literature. A compilation of elder teachings exists in the *Rgvidhana*, attributed to Saumana, who is said to have lived in the 5th century B.C.⁴³² The treatise itself and its content matter belong into the context of growing criticism of Vedic sacrificial cult, which was increasingly perceived as senselessly bloody and devoid of inner meaning – even as ineffectual. This criticism was shared across a broad range of the spiritually engaged population of India, giving rise to various reform movements, among them Buddhism and within the Brahmanic tradition, the Vedāntic reform movement, which expressed itself in the *Upanishads* – a current to which Yoga as a spiritual doctrine also belongs.

The spiritual crisis resulted from the experience that the sacrificial rituals were felt to be void and powerless as means of communication with the divine powers. The need arose to supplant them with more effectual and adequate means. As often in processes of religious reform, the search went 'ad fontes'. This implied to resort to Yogic means. Sociologically its practitioners, the Śramanas, who had lived somewhat on the fringes of elder Vedic religion, moved into the centre. This process laid the foundation for the differentiation of this movement.

In the reports of the Hellenistic authors, we find both association and distinction between Brahmans and the Śramanas, to varying degrees. The 'magic' heritage is mentioned rather in passing, and as something not essential to them. In the elder *Rgvidhana*, we find this practice still in the context of a broad variety of rituals, of which some involve meditation of the Yogic type, within the Vedic tradition.⁴³³ The Hellenistic sources reflect the process of purification in their perception of Yogic practitioners with the shift to 'purification' and 'spiritualization'.

The presence of 'śramanas' in the Eastern Mediterranean, and the esteem in which they were held, is documented by the inscription on the epitaph for the leader of the group of eight Yogic sages, who were part of a delegation of a Tamil kingdom to Emperor Augustus, who chose to immolate himself in Athens. This text read: "ZAPMANOXHΓΑΣ

⁴³² Bhat, M. S. (1987). *Vedic Tantrism: A Study of Rgvidhana of Śaunaka with Text and Translation*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publ., p. 5.

⁴³³ Eliade, M. (1990), *Yoga – Immortality and Freedom*, (2nd ed.). Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, p. 136. [Original 1969]

ΙΝΔΟΣ ΑΠΟ ΒΑΡΓΟΣΗΣ” [Zarmanochēgas indos apo Bargasēs – The śramana master from Barygaza in India], still visible in the time of Plutarch.⁴³⁴

Apart from his interest in the Brahmanic Yogis (‘śramanas’), Clement also discusses less philosophical strains, which he compares to a special type of early Christian ascetics. He mentions “the Encratites among us”, whom neither he nor early Christian polemicists, among them St. Paul,⁴³⁵ considered to be ‘philosophers.’ It is not clear if this movement originated within Christianity, but it spread there and influenced Christian monasticism in ways which are yet unclear. To the degree that Encratites formed a distinct spiritual movement with ideas about matter, sex, and the body, which may not have separated them necessarily from ideas of Christian monasticism, but which went along with a fundamental rejection of marriage, meat, wine and material existence that was unacceptable to the comprehensive Christian doctrine,⁴³⁶ they were increasingly excluded as heretics or as Manichaeans, and threatened with the death penalty by emperor Theodosius, 382 A.D.⁴³⁷

Clement did not share their radical renouncement of the created world. He contends himself to observe the phenomenological similarity between them and the specific group of ascetic ‘forest dwellers’, whom he identifies as a subgroup of the Yogic movement in Hinduism, Buddhism and even among the Jains. Clement mentions ‘Hylobii’ among the Shramanas and their peculiar life in the woods:

... those of the Sarmanae who are called Hylobii neither inhabit cities, nor have roofs over them, but are clothed in the bark of trees, feed on nuts, and drink water in their hands. Like those called Encratites in the present day, they know not marriage nor begetting of children.⁴³⁸

About these Hylobii McKrindle explains:

In the same way Clement’s □ □ □ □ □ □ must be changed into Strabo’s □ □ □ □ □ □ corresponding with the Sanskrit Vanaprastha – ‘the man of the first three castes

⁴³⁴[Strabo], *Strabonis Rerum geographicarum libri XVII*. Ed.: (1819). *Strabonis Rerum geographicarum libri*. Ad optimorum librorum fidem accurate editi, vol.1, Leipzig: Tauchnitz, p. 303f.

⁴³⁵ 1. *Timothy* 4:1-4

⁴³⁶ Arendzen, J. P. (1913). Encratites. *Catholic Encyclopedia*.

http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Catholic_Encyclopedia_%281913%29/Encratites

⁴³⁷ Idem

⁴³⁸ Idem

who, after the term of his householdership has expired, has entered the third asrama or order, and has proceeded (prastha) to a life in the woods (Vāna).⁴³⁹

Clement may be aware of this change of status. He does note that 'sarmanae' is a broad concept that covers various groups. Ascetic monasticism existed among the Hindu ascetics of a looser form,⁴⁴⁰ as these sources indicate.

Clement's awareness of the 'hylobii' suggests that their model be included in the genesis of Hesychasm, since some of its representatives have chosen a life in the wilds similar to this model. The two types of renunciates have been described by P. Olivelle as: anchorites living settled lives in forest hermitages cut off from social intercourse, and renouncers living itinerant lives in the wilderness but in interaction with towns and villages from which they begged their food.⁴⁴¹

This interaction is described as mutually beneficial in Greek sources, with the ascetics providing services as counsellors. About the anchorites, a Brahmanical source states:

'An anchorite shall live in the forest, living on roots and fruits and given to austerities. He kindles the sacred fire according to the procedure for recluses and refrains from eating what is grown in the village. He may avail himself of the flesh of animals killed by predators. He should not step on plowed land or enter a village. He shall wear matted hair and clothes of bark or skin and never eat anything that has been stored for more than a year. (GDh 3.26-35)⁴⁴²

Here the distance to culture, especially to agriculture is salient. These anchorites are perceived as part of the Vedic ritual community, with the permission to perform rites with the sacred fire (as of 'agni puja'). This means that they had a meaningful place in the Brahman symbolic universe.

⁴³⁹ McCrindle, J. W. (1877). *Ancient India as Described by Megasthenes and Arrian – being a Translation of the Fragments of the Indika of Megasthenes Collected by Dr. Schwanbeck and of the First Part of the Indika of Arrian*, (with introduction, notes, and map of ancient India), Calcutta, Bombay, London: Tracker, Spink & Co; Trübner & Co., p. 98.

⁴⁴⁰ Idem

⁴⁴¹ Olivelle, P. (2003). Ascetics and Brahmins. In G. Flood (Ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism* (pp. 271-287). Oxford: Blackwell, p. 272f.

⁴⁴² Loc cit.: Idem

The elder form of withdrawal is associated with the memory of the Vedic Munis⁴⁴³ who lived in the forests, in close relation to the spirits and divine beings – a motif which recurs in Hesychast hagiography until modern times, such as of St. Seraphim of Sarov. Their appearance in ascetic garments, without family and free to migrate posits them in this tradition. Likewise, the Yogis, the Shramanas, are described in Hellenistic historiography as living outside the cities and villages, in the forest. This agrees with the Hesychast tradition.

Some Hesychast saints have led lives of utter withdrawal into nature, such as St. Mary of Egypt (344 – 421 A.D.), who spent all her adult life as a hermit in the wilderness. She stayed not far from the hermitage of St. John the Baptist, who was perceived as having retreated into the 'wilds' as well. This resonates with the deliberate retreat of the early Egyptian Christian hermits into the 'desert', from the 4th century onwards. Antonios (250-356) and Makarios (300-390) are regarded as the founding fathers of this influential movement of Christian monasticism.⁴⁴⁴ Hesychasts venerate the Fathers and Mothers of the Egyptian desert as their spiritual ancestors and models. The retreat to the 'desert' as to a spiritual place and state has become a hallmark of Hesychasm. In northern countries forests and mountains became chosen as sites of such 'desert'. Hesychast hermits, like St. Serafim of Sarov (1754 in Kursk - 1833 in Sarov), who lived in full retreat in the forest for a decade, have become paradigms of such retreat to nature. The connection to nature is emphasized in the lives of these saints: St. Mary's of Egypt is guarded by a lion, and St. Serafim was accompanied by a bear. Their communion with wild animals symbolizes their union with nature. The motif recurs in the lives of several saints, also in the Roman Catholic tradition. In Palamas' time Mt. Athos was perceived as such 'wilderness', beyond its monasteries – and remains so to this day.

The association with the wilderness is an important element of Hesychasm. In Biblical tradition the 'desert' is an archetypal sphere of spiritual transformation, as experienced collectively by the Israelites according to the Pentateuch, of individually by Moses, Elijah and Jesus. Going into the desert, as practiced by the early Egyptian hermits recalls this motif. As such it set the example for the retreat of Russian hermits into the virgin forests of the north, or of Hesychasts like St. Gregory Sinaites, to the Bulgarian

⁴⁴³ *Rg Veda* X.136. Loc. cit: Radhakrishnan, S. and Moore, C. A. (Eds.). (1957). *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, p. 30.

⁴⁴⁴ Schulz, G. and Ziemer, J. (2010). *Mit Wüstenvätern und Wüstenmüttern im Gespräch – Zugänge zur Welt des frühen Mönchtums in Ägypten*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, pp. 25ff.

mountains. St. Serafim of Sarov chose the forest wilderness deliberately for his long years of seclusion as a hermit. Wilderness and the wilderness (or desert) share the opposition to the civil world and its inevitably corrupted state, as a return to pristine purity, in a movement of approximation to the state of creation.

6.2. Social forms and Symbolism of Hesychasm and the Question of Buddhist or Yogic Influence

The question of Buddhist influence on Christian monasticism is relevant to our context primarily because of the communal setting of Hesychast practice. Hesychasm is peculiar in this respect for its dual nature: In principle it is every Hesychast's solitary practice in the hermitage or cell. However, the Hesychast monks form communities, loosely or more closely knit, in which the tradition with its practice and spiritual knowledge is communicated and transmitted. The organisation of monastic life on Mt. Athos exemplifies this. Some live as hermits while others stay in the community of their cloister. There are wandering monks, as described in the *Russian Pilgrim*. There are also loosely knit networks of hermits like the early Christian monks of the Egyptian desert. Some live for years without any regular attachment to a monastery, like St. Mary of Egypt. Some live in their monastic communities, and may assume ecclesiastical responsibilities, upon leaving, like St. Gregory Palamas as archbishop of Thessaloniki.

The communities fulfil essential roles of transmitting the practical and theoretical tradition, initiating into Hesychasm, and providing guidance and spiritual counsel in the process. Different models of monastic organisation provide both for communal living and for the practise of solitary seclusion. This variety of settings indicates a hybrid origin of Hesychasm. The model of organisation is probably best represented by the loosely knit communities of Yogic shramanas reported of since Antiquity. Sociologically it is unlikely that Hesychasm, as the practice of small and loosely organised associations of ascetics, could have been introduced by Buddhism to the Mediterranean.

The religious imagery and symbolism of Hesychasm likewise disproves any Buddhist mediation of Yogic elements to Hesychasm. Vedāntic sources are confirmed by their agreement with central symbols of Hesychasm. For Vedic and Vedāntic theology the symbols and experience of 'divine light', and 'divine fire', is central. Gautama Buddha

rejected the central symbol of Hinduism, the divine fire, 'agni' and its ritual and symbolism. This is incompatible with the Yogic and the Hesychast affirmation of this divine fire and light. Vedānta scripture has reinterpreted the Vedic concept of 'divine fire', represented by the God of Fire, Agni, in a symbolic way as referring to a ubiquitous divine essence that became identified with Ātman, the divine intellect and essentially the divine principle in man. The important fire ritual, the Agni-hotram is thus reinterpreted as a sacramental nourishing of the Ātman in the individual.⁴⁴⁵

The concept of 'Ātman' symbolises the eternal and supremely divine core of embodied man and the essential identity with the divine Brahman. Since Gautama Buddha disputed the existence of an eternal soul and of a supreme divine, the symbol of the 'divine fire' was abolished by Gautama Buddha and replaced by his central metaphor: the 'extinction of the flame' as relinquishing the thirst for life and selfhood, as expression and fulfilment of liberation. This created a wholly different symbolism and orientation of meditation. In short: Hesychasm can certainly not be derived from Buddhist meditation.

The well-attested presence of Buddhist missionaries in the lands of the eastern Mediterranean are primarily of interest for the development of Christian monasticism. To the degree that Hesychasm exists in this setting it is of interest here too. The second point is that it demonstrates the degree of transfer of religious knowledge and practise in the Hellenistic and Roman world, in addition to the other venues, such as the presence of Yogis here and the reports of travellers to India. There were several elements in this stream of reception and transmission over the approximately 1000 years of close contact between the Greek and later also the Roman lands and India. The origins and development of Hesychasm are describable as a case study in religious drift and syncretism.

Apart from external factors, such as the presence of Yogic role models in the Hellenistic and Roman cultural realm, there is also a firm reason in Greek spiritual thought itself: While the Platonic (and Stoic) tradition accord a focal role to *pneuma*, along with the importance of the Holy Spirit in Christianity, none of these provide an embodied practise for the reception of such 'pneuma'. This feature of Hesychasm suggests that Yogic models were indeed at the origin here, especially since the Hindu concept of

⁴⁴⁵ Deussen, P. (1906). *Das System des Vedānta. Nach dem Brahma-Sūtras des Bādarāyana und dem Kommentare des Cankara über dieselben als ein Kompendium der Dogmatik des Brahmanismus vom Standpunkte des Cankara aus*, Leipzig: F. A Brockhaus, p. 167.

'Prāṇa',⁴⁴⁶ that is central to Yoga, corresponds closely to 'pneuma', and is readily translatable. It is the foundation for the practise of controlled breathing in meditation, called 'Prāṇāyāma',⁴⁴⁷ literally: "the way of the pneuma or breath", which is found in a similar, less elaborate version in Hesychasm.

As to conditions of reception, the Graeco-Egyptian magic practice of ritual inhaling for magic purpose provides a basis. It is based on the idea of drawing in divine 'breath of life' and its power. This is based on ancient Egyptian ideas of an all-pervading divine breath of life – also adopted into the *Old Testament*. It was believed to enable to perform acts of divine power, among which, according to ancient Egyptian thought, also acts of magic were included. It differs from the structured deliberate breathing of Hesychasm, but it may explain, why such practise was received as plausible in the realm of Graeco-Egyptian culture.

The metaphysical and religious concepts of divine 'pneuma' or 'breath of life' may account for the explication of the Hesychast practise of ritual or spiritually motivated breathing, but not for its origin. Likewise, this meditative controlled breathing is practised in a monastic context in Hesychasm. This is not the case Graeco-Egyptian culture nor in Hellenistic religious of spiritual practise, nor in Judaism or in Christianity outside of Hesychasm.

6.3. Cynicism: Asceticism, Critique of Society, and Spiritual Life, as Model for Christianity

Cynicism is important for the genealogy of Hesychasm. Ever since its origins and since the first encounters between Greeks and Indians affinities and agreements were perceived between Yoga or Shramanism and Cynicism. Onesicritus reports that these were a topic in the discussions of Alexander the Great with Yogins, when he had finally reached India. Cynicism has also been identified as a most influential model for Christian

⁴⁴⁶ Prāna. In: Huchzermeier, W. (2011). *Das Yoga-Lexikon. Sanskrit – Āsanas – Biographien*, Karlsruhe: Edition Sawitri, p. 217f.

⁴⁴⁷ Prāṇāyāma. In W. Huchzermeier. (2011). *Das Yoga-Lexikon. Sanskrit – Āsanas – Biographien*, Karlsruhe: Edition Sawitri, p. 218f.

wandering ascetics, such as St. Paul⁴⁴⁸ and possibly Jesus Christ and his disciples.⁴⁴⁹ For the reception of Yoga into nascent Hesychasm this trajectory is to be considered. It is supported by reports or Roman authors that Cynics have orientated themselves towards Yoga and Brahmanic beliefs.

The example of Peregrinus Proteus (100 in Parium, Hellespont – 165 C.E. in Olympia), a philosopher and public figure, who converted from Paganism to Christianity and finally to Cynicism, and who chose to die according to the model of Brahmanic Yogins, provides an example of such migration across boundaries of religions in Imperial Roman times.

Cynicism was primarily defined by its spiritual practice, mostly of wandering ascetics, and not by exclusive adherence to one philosophy. This it compatible with Pythagoreanism and Middle and Neo-Platonism. While the latter are eminently important for the reception of the Vedântic beliefs, which were associated with Yoga in Hellenistic and Roman awareness, Cynicism is essential as social ascetic formation and tradition for the reception of Yoga and Yogic Brahmanic beliefs and for their transmission into emergent Christian monasticism, where Hesychasm arose. Cynicism was not primarily a philosophy, but a spiritually grounded movement characterised by certain values and a characteristic mode of life. Epictetus (55 – 135 C.E.) emphasised the practical side of Cynicism in his description of Cynicism, of its doctrine and perhaps even more so, in the example of its foremost founder, Diogenes (400 – 323 B.C.E.) renowned for his 'philosophy in action'.⁴⁵⁰

Its roots go back to Pythagoreism and its ideas of living in accordance with nature, free of violence, refraining from meat, practising freedom of passions, freedom of desires, freedom of possessions, freedom of attachments, self-control and self-sufficiency. Accordingly Cynics were critical of society as such, and in particular of social stratification, conventions, power and wealth as well as luxury, which made them fierce critics of social life.⁴⁵¹ With simplicity and frugality being considered natural, Cynics deliberately lived according to those values. They also valued physical hardiness, health and physical fitness and would shun no hardships. Their ideal was one of an 'askesis' guided by these

⁴⁴⁸ Downing, F. G. (1988). *Cynics, Paul and the Pauline Churches*, London: Routledge, pp. 26ff.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibidem, pp. 187ff.

⁴⁵⁰ Döring, K. (2006). *Die Kyniker*, Bamberg: C. C. Buchners Verlag., p. 85.

⁴⁵¹ Piering, J. (2006). Cynics. *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (IEP)*. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/cynics/>

principles.⁴⁵² The first and foremost representative of this 'existential philosophy' is Diogenes. He remained an iconic figure for Cynicism for centuries, setting the example in many ways. Later Cynics varied considerably from his example, with changed attitudes as to social tact, religious vocation, sexual mores, spiritual practice, and philosophical ambit, like Epictetus and Democritus, his student, teacher of Cynicism, or Peregrinus Proteus, known as a public figure.

In spite of the ideal of a solitary, self-sufficient ascetic, they did not shun company. Living in the cities and preaching by word and example, they also subsisted by what was given to them as alms. They also formed associations, as brotherhoods of Cynics with transmission of tradition and initiation, as well as shared activities, as Lucian of Samosata describes. Sociologically they represented a critique of social stratification and cultural elaboration, of standards of hygiene and sophistication, of power differentiation and functional differentiation of roles, reminding of egalitarian values and simplicity. As such they formed a dialectical element in society and were valued as such, in particular to the degree that they lived according to these values. As a rule, though, they lived solitary lives with a minimum of possessions. Their public behaviour was often marked by a display of contempt for social norms and etiquette:

Social conventions, however, can hinder the good life by compromising freedom and setting up a code of conduct that is opposed to nature and reason. Conventions are not inherently bad; however, for the Cynic, conventions are often absurd and worthy of ridicule.⁴⁵³

Their asceticism and their demonstrative opposition to social norms are related:

As such, the Cynics advocate askēsis, or practice, over theory as the means to free oneself from convention, promote self-sufficiency, and live in accord with nature. Such askēsis leads the Cynic to live in poverty, embrace hardship and toil, and permits the Cynic to speak freely about the silly, and often vicious, way life is lived by his or her contemporaries.⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵² Idem

⁴⁵³ Piering, J. (2006). Cynics in: *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (IEP)*.

<http://www.iep.utm.edu/cynics/>

⁴⁵⁴ Idem

The relation between the Cynic's own demandingly ascetic way of life and their public recognition as teachers and examples of a life uncontaminated by luxuries and desires is discussed by Epictetus (55–135 A. D.) in his *Discourses*, in a chapter on the Cynics:

1 You, like the rest, must give the matter careful thought: it is not what you think. 'I wear a coarse cloak now and shall do so then, I sleep hard now and shall still do so, I shall take to myself a wallet and a staff and begin to go about begging and reviling those I meet, and if I see any one using pitch-plasters, or with his hair finely dressed, or walking in scarlet, I shall rebuke him.' If that is your impression of the Cynic's calling, give it a wide berth: do not come near it, for you have no concern with it; but if you have a true impression of it and still deem yourself not unworthy, then consider what a great enterprise you are taking in hand.

First, you must show a complete change in your conduct, and must cease to accuse God or man: you must utterly put away the will to get, and must will to avoid only what lies within the sphere of your will: you must harbour no anger, wrath, envy, pity: a fair maid, a fair name, favourites, or sweet cakes, must mean nothing to you. For you must know that other men, when they indulge in such things, have the protection of their walls and houses and darkness.

... But the Cynic, instead of all these, should have self-respect for his shelter: if he has not that, he will be naked and exposed and put to shame. This is his house, his door, this his chamber-guards, this his darkness: for he must not wish to conceal anything that is his: if he does, he disappears; he loses the true Cynic, the free open-air spirit, he has begun to fear outward things, he has begun to have need of concealment, and when he would hide himself he

cannot; for he has no place or means to hide himself. But if by chance the public teacher, the 'pedagogue' is caught erring what must be his feelings!⁴⁵⁵

This link shows clearly that the Cynics, ideally, did not seek asceticism merely as a path of salvation by renunciation and asceticism for themselves, separated wholly from society, possibly as recluses in the wilds, but that theirs was a calling to be an example with a definite function for society, as befitted the calling of a 'philosopher'. The Cynics thus fulfilled a dialectical function for society, and were appreciated for it, as representing counter-values cherished by many in society, even if few would choose to live wholly by these exigencies. Their role may be likened to those of monastic saints in Christianity. Epictetus underlines this idea, presenting the Cynic as a veritable 'divine messenger':

The true Cynic when he has ordered himself thus cannot be satisfied with this: he must know that he is sent as a messenger from God to men concerning things good and evil, to show them that they have gone astray and are seeking the true nature of good and evil where it is not to be found, and take no thought where it really is: he must realize, in the words of Diogenes when brought before Philip after the battle of Chaeronea, that he is sent 'to reconnoitre'. For indeed the Cynic has to discover what things are friendly to men and what are hostile: and when he has accurately made his observations he must return and report the truth, not driven by fear to point out enemies where there are none, nor in any other way disturbed or confounded by his impressions.⁴⁵⁶

This understanding is a motif common to Cynics and to Christian monks.

It is an important point to note that Cynicism, especially of the Roman era, was less defined by a set of doctrines and possibly by any school – Cynics did not maintain libraries, nor did they have the means to maintain any schools or academies, save for lineages of teachers, who taught by example and oral transmission. This fragility of

⁴⁵⁵ Epictetus. (Early 2nd century C.E.). *The Discourses*, chapt. 22. Ed. Matheson, P. E. (transl.). (1916). *Epictetus: The Discourses and Manual, Together With Fragments of His Writings*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, p. 377f. <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/dep/dep081.htm>

⁴⁵⁶ Epictetus, *The Discourses*, chapt. 22. Ed. Ibidem, p. 378. <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/dep/dep081.htm>

transmission has led to the question if even an unbroken tradition of Cynicism existed from its beginnings, especially from Diogenes onwards, or if Roman-era Cynicism may have perhaps been a revival based on mere literary reports about the early Cynics.⁴⁵⁷ M. Billerbeck suggests that Cynicism may have been absorbed into Stoicism doctrinally in imperial times. However, it has been perceived as a distinct tradition of beliefs, values and of codes of behaviour, as indicated by Lucian in the 2nd century C. E.⁴⁵⁸ Apparently Cynicism maintained some continuity in practise, by existing in varying combinations with Stoicism in particular while maintaining a distinct identity as a special mode of life⁴⁵⁹, which experienced 'revivals' from time to time.

The peculiar mode of life of Cynicism, whose example had been set by Diogenes, proved attractive in later social contexts too. In imperial Rome Cynicism adopted a marked element of social critique of Roman power and wealth. Cynics gave a voice to the discontent of lower classes and some of their socially offensive actions drew crowds. Cynicism was also regarded as a philosophy of the lower classes. This led to a number of Cynics being banned from Rome such as Epictetus, who taught Cynicism and defended it from a Stoic perspective, or Peregrinus Proteus.

This function of voicing popular social malcontent certainly assured the Cynics of public notoriety and saw to it that Cynicism had a strong presence in public awareness.⁴⁶⁰ Consequently the values of Cynicism were also on people's minds. Lucian of Samosata, for instance, describes his Cynic 'hero', Peregrinus Proteus, repeatedly engaging in popular and populist actions, such as criticising the donation of an aqueduct to Olympia. This seems to have been part of the social dynamics which supported Cynicism as a movement, and which saw to its regeneration.

As to the respect which some Cynics received in the upper classes this appears to have depended on their personal qualities, as characters of integrity, as philosophers and

⁴⁵⁷ Billerbeck, M. (1987). Greek Cynicism in Imperial Rome. In M. Billerbeck, Margarethe (Ed.). (1991). *Die Kyniker in der modernen Forschung – Aufsätze mit Einführung und Bibliographie*, (pp. 147–166). Amsterdam: B. R. Grüner, pp. 147ff.

⁴⁵⁸ Lucian of Samosata. (Ca. 160 – 175 C. E.). *The Sale of Creeds*. Ed. Fowler, H. W. and Fowler, F. G., (transl., eds.) (1905). *The Works of Lucian of Samosata*, Volume I, Oxford: The Clarendon Press. <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/luc/wl1/wl179.htm>

⁴⁵⁹ Billerbeck, M. (1987). Greek Cynicism in Imperial Rome. In M. Billerbeck (Ed.). (1991). *Die Kyniker in der modernen Forschung – Aufsätze mit Einführung und Bibliographie*, (pp. 147–166). Amsterdam: B. R. Grüner, pp. 149

⁴⁶⁰ Bernays, Jacob, *Lucian und die Kyniker*, Berlin, 1879: Hertz p.20

counsellors engaging in some form of spiritual and pastoral care.⁴⁶¹ Tension certainly existed between the role of a populist, voicing the sentiments and malcontents of the disadvantaged, and the role of a spiritual ascetic, embodying an ideal of freedom and retreat to 'nature' and the divine. It seems that the interplay between these two roles contributed much to the presence and recognition of Cynicism in Roman society. The presence of Cynicism in Roman society may have depended more on its social functions, including the credibility of its representatives, than on its persuasiveness as a philosophy.

Another feature of Cynicism is its 'culture of the *self*', in the sense of working with the *self*, including control of mind and passions. In this it resembles Yoga, as well as Christian and Buddhist monasticism: Epictetus writes:

First then you must make your Governing Principle pure, and hold fast this rule of life, 'Henceforth my mind is the material I have to work on, as the carpenter has his timber and the shoemaker his leather: my business is to deal with my impressions aright. My wretched body is nothing to me, its parts are nothing to me. Death? Let it come when it will, whether to my whole body or to a part of it. Exile? Can one be sent into exile beyond the Universe? One cannot. Wherever I go, there is the sun, there is the moon, there are the stars, dreams, auguries, conversation with the gods.'⁴⁶²

This 'culture of the *self*' also extends to physical exercise, by exercising and hardening the body.⁴⁶³ However the 'cult of the body' is subordinated to the ideals of training and forming the 'inner man', his mind and attitudes, i. e. to spiritual ideals and far from mere athletic ideals, as they were also held in the sports' cultures of Greece and Rome.

All of this indicates that Cynicism was primarily a spiritual-philosophical movement with a sociologically distinctive identity, as to the lifestyle of its representatives and as to

⁴⁶¹ Billerbeck, M. (1987). Greek Cynicism in Imperial Rome. In M. Billerbeck (ed.) (1991). *Die Kyniker in der modernen Forschung – Aufsätze mit Einführung und Bibliographie*, (pp. 147–166). Amsterdam: B. R. Grüner, pp. 156

⁴⁶² Epictetus. (Early 2nd century C.E.). *The Discourses*, chapt. 22. Ed. Matheson, P. E. (transl.). (1916). *Epictetus: The Discourses and Manual, Together With Fragments of His Writings*, Oxford The Clarendon Press, p. 378. <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/dep/dep081.htm>

⁴⁶³ Lucian of Samosata. (170-180 C. E.). *Life of Demonax.*, pts. 3-4. Ed. Fowler, H. W. and Fowler, F. G. (Transl., eds.). (1905). *The Works of Lucian of Samosata*, Volume III, Oxford: The Clarendon Press. <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/luc/wl3/wl302.htm>

its function in society. This allowed Cynicism a degree of philosophical indistinctness, open to various interpretations, such as of Stoicism. It made it flexible, open to adopting various philosophical and spiritual motifs and orientations. This worked in the direction of Christianity. Reports that the well-known Cynic Peregrinus Proteus styled himself in Cynic attire even while still a Christian, confirms recent research on influence of Cynicism on early Christian asceticism and habitus of itinerant preachers. (It may have worked in both ways in later times.)

This permeability has also worked in direction of Yogic influence. Thus, we find Lucian of Samosata describing Peregrinus as orienting himself to 'Brahmanic' (Yogic) models, while being a Cynic. This doctrinal permeability, based on a sharp-set social habitus, has obviously been a prime factor in facilitating the adoption of Yogic ascetic practices into Graeco-Roman culture. The affinity between Cynicism and Yoga as spiritual movements of distinctive sociological characteristics has been immediately recognised in Antiquity, as discussed in Onesicritus' report on Alexander's the Great encounter, with a community of Yogins near Taxila. Cynicism resembles Yoga in respects, of 'mind-control' and 'restraint of passions'. The exercise of the body and of body control serves the purpose of attaining supreme mastery of the *self*, up to the point of self-annihilation of the body. Both elements are central to the ascetic practise and life-style of Yogis and Cynics.

Unlike the Cynics, who were viewed with much ambiguity in Antiquity, due to their flouting and critique of cultural mores and social order, the (Brahmanic) Yogins were held in high esteem. Their critical distance to society was noted. However, their firm grounding in a religious philosophy which was recognised to resemble the cherished philosophies of Platonism and Pythagoreism, certainly contributed to their prestige in Hellenistic and Roman societies. The superiority of Yoga over Cynicism was thus a current view. Lucian picked it up in writings.

An example of Lucian's high esteem of Brahmanic spirituality and philosophy is given in his dialogue *The Runaways*, where he presents a discourse between Zeus and the hypostasis of 'philosophy' reporting about her descent to earth:

Zeus: I said that, and more. Yes? and how did they receive you at your first descent? and what is the trouble now?

Philosophy: My first flight was not directed towards Greece. I thought it best to begin with the hardest part of my task, which I took to be the instruction of the

barbarians. With the Greeks I anticipated no difficulty; I had supposed that they would accept my yoke without hesitation. First, then, I went to the Indians, the mightiest nation upon earth. I had little trouble in persuading them to descend from their elephants and follow me. The Brahmins, who dwell between Oxydracae and the country of the Nechrei, are mine to a man: they live according to my laws and are respected by all their neighbours; and the manner of their death is truly wonderful.

Zeus: Ah, to be sure: the Gymnosophists. I have heard a great deal of them.⁴⁶⁴

As playfully superficial as the dialogue is, Lucian sends a clear message here: he believes that the Brahmins and the 'gymnosophists' (Yogins) fulfil the divine commandment by all philosophical standards. Reference to Brahmins and Yogins serves Lucian as standard to all of Greece, and by implication to Roman society too – and to describe the deficits of Cynicism most critically. This is noteworthy, since it indicates that the acceptance of Brahman and Yogic teachings have not been limited to the Cynics. They were apparently unanimously respected in Imperial Roman society and probably adopted by various persons or circles that engaged in special spiritual practise.

Cynicism has exerted a formative influence on early Christianity, on ideas, norms of conduct, patterns of behaviour and even in attire, which lasted well over four centuries.⁴⁶⁵ The influence of Cynicism on Christian monasticism requires the inclusion of sociological aspects. J. Bernays describes how Cynicism participated in religious reform in Imperial times of Rome and how it colluded with other movements. He declared that Christianity and Judaism had a powerful ally in Cynicism, to spread their ideas of criticism of polytheism, towards a more interiorised monotheism, even though Cynicism as a movement and a spiritual-philosophical tradition was not organised coherently, but was of a rather 'sporadic' constitution, as Bernays aptly put it. Cynicism took part in the religious transformation of the Imperial period, due to the ubiquitous presence of its

⁴⁶⁴ Lucian of Samosata. (Ca 160 – 175 C. E.). *The Runaways*, 6f. Ed. Fowler, H. W. and Fowler, F. G. (Transl., eds.). (1905). *The Works of Lucian of Samosata*, Volume IV, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, pt. 6f. <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/luc/wl4/wl421.htm>

⁴⁶⁵ Downing, F. G. (1992). *Cynics and Christian Origins*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, p. 298f.

preacher-ascetics and to due to their broad appeal to the middle and lower classes. On Cynicism's role in this process Bernays wrote:

In this dispersed individualisation Cynicism has powerfully supported the religious transformation which ... had announced itself. In their fight against various forms of polytheism, Judaism and Christianity found hardly any more effective allies than the wandering Cynic preachers, who did not care about decency or reverence towards the official state cults. They gave the middle and lower classes an example of open disdain of mythological images of the gods, expressed in deft forms, which the Stoics had merely sought to ennoble by allegoric interpretation. ... The Cynics however have adhered to the belief in God with strict consequence ... Even Antisthenes wrote: 'the many gods are of convention, the true God is one.'⁴⁶⁶ [my translation]

Bernays supports his view by reference to Celsus' critique of Christianity and Origen's response, in which Christian preachers are compared to those of Cynicism. Their basic similarity is undisputed by Origen. Celsus had framed Christianity as attacking the established social and cultural order – a critique which is echoed by Lucian. Cynicism was compared to Christianity and perceived in the same way, though probably as less of a threat due to its individualised appearance and its failure to create any distinct order of followers. The religious and philosophical critique voiced and exemplified by Cynics who targeted the individual and its lifestyle it did not aim at creating any forms of structured alternative forms of social organisation. In this way Cynicism represented a spiritual protest whose call could be heeded at an individual level of lifestyle and value system, not however in the form of distinct communities grounded on distinct values. In this way Cynicism posed a lesser threat to the established order of Roman Imperial society, for all the harshness of its expression.

Taking Celsus and Origen as representatives, both Pagans and Christians agreed that Cynicism and Christianity had ideas and significant patterns of symbolic behaviour in common which constituted a fundamental critique of Roman Imperial socio-cultural and ideological order. The differences between the two movements are discussed by Origen

⁴⁶⁶ Bernays, J. (1879). *Lucian und die Kyniker*. Berlin: Hertz p. 31

on this basis of agreed commonalities.⁴⁶⁷ Origen defended the Christian practise of not only addressing the elites of power, wealth or philosophy, but of disclosing and preaching the Christian truth to people of all ranks, as in accordance with higher philosophical principles as Celsus could lay claim to.⁴⁶⁸ Thereby Origen is shaming Celsus on his own ground and discloses his critique as a veiled defence of a status quo of unjust distribution of power and learning – an argument that Cynics would have subscribed to readily, as they too preached to the same groups.

Cynicism and Christianity were felt to be similar by many in Antiquity. Conversions from Cynicism to Christianity,⁴⁶⁹ and from Christianity to Cynicism, as by Peregrinus Proteus, are documented. It is only at a rather late stage, in the 4th century, that Christian monks were advised to distinguish themselves in their attire from the Cynics' characteristic attire.⁴⁷⁰ These common traits were not limited to external paraphernalia but concerned central and intrinsic elements from the start. Downing has indicated that the common elements apparently were primary to the subsequent attempts at differentiation. He wrote:

If I am right, then, there are extensive and distinctive similarities in attitudes, life-style, expression between widely disseminated Cynic traditions and some of the earliest traditions of Jesus. Paul attempts to distance his congregations from most aspects of Cynic anarchism, but we find in other early strands of Christianity similar ideas and attitudes are encouraged with no signs of embarrassment. These similarities are clear enough to be obvious in the immediately succeeding centuries, both to careful outside observers and to fellow Christians.⁴⁷¹

We need not concern ourselves with Downing's assumption that the origin of this convergence may have been with Cynic presence in Galilee and with Jesus' adoption of

⁴⁶⁷ Origen of Alexandria. (248 C. E.). *Contra Celsus*, Book III, chs. 49f. Ed. Crombie, F. (transl.). Roberts, A., Donalson, J, and Coxe, A. C. (1885). *From Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 4. Buffalo, N.Y., 1885: Christian Literature Publishing Co. [Rev. and ed. for *New Advent* by K. Knight.].

<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/04163.htm>

⁴⁶⁸ Origen of Alexandria. *Contra Celsus*, Book III, chs. 18 and 48 – 50.

⁴⁶⁹ Bernays, J. (1879). *Lucian und die Kyniker*, Berlin: Hertz p. 37.

⁴⁷⁰ Downing, F.G. (1992). *Cynics and Christian Origins*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, p. 299.

⁴⁷¹ Ibidem, p. 150.

some of their ideas and actions either directly or mediated by preceding Jewish reception. This remains beyond our scope. What matters to us, is, that contemporary outside observers, including Christians, affirmed these common elements, as of a kindred spirit. Significantly in many of these accounts some reference to Indian, Yogic spirituality turns up. Origen does not fail to mention the Brahmans in his refutation of the critique of Celsus. Lucian mentions the Brahmanic and Yogic practices and teachings several times in the *Death of Peregrinus*, mostly with the judgement that although Peregrinus and the Cynics refer to their example and wish to adopt their practises they fail to achieve this.

6.4. Peregrinus Proteus: a Spiritual Wanderer between Christianity, Cynicism and Yoga

In the second century C. E. a 'spiritual wanderer'⁴⁷² converted from Graeco-Roman Paganism to Christianity, and then as a Cynic, towards the model of the Brahmans: Peregrinus Proteus, a prominent Cynic and public figure. He is of importance to our interest in the roots of Hesychasm because Christianity, Cynicism and Brahmanism are linked in his biography – and documented in the detailed reports of his 'biographer' Lucianus of Samosata, as a widely-read author. Peregrinus' peregrinations towards Yogic Brahmanism were thus received in public literate consciousness. This testifies to interest in Indian spirituality in Roman society, and appreciation for Yoga. Lucian of Samosata depicts him as a follower of the model of the Brahmans and discusses his deficits.

Lucian of Samosata (125 – 180 CE), a Syrian, trained as rhetorician and author of numerous works, including one on the Syrian Goddess,⁴⁷³ was interested in philosophy and in the various forms of religious life. His fame is based on his literary skills, which include novel techniques of fiction, with plots that laid the ground for what today is 'science fiction', and for his satires.

⁴⁷² Bochinger, C., Engelbrecht, M. and Gebhardt, W. (2005). Die Selbstermächtigung des religiösen Subjekts. Der 'spirituelle Wanderer' als Idealtypus spätmoderner Religiosität. *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft* 13 (2), (pp. 133–151). Marburg: De Gruyter.

⁴⁷³ Strong, H. A. and Garstang, J. (transl. and intr.). (1913). *The Syrian Goddess - De Dea Syria*, by Lucian of Samosata. London: Constable & Co. <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/luc/tsg/index.htm#contents>

In his work he treats Peregrinus Proteus and Christianity with derision. However in spite of this attitude he gives quite detailed information about his subject. Lucian's soundness, as far as Christianity is concerned, means reassurance that his reports about Peregrinus Proteus are likewise fairly accurate. Being a native of Syria he appears to be familiar with Christianity there. He came to know Peregrinus in person more closely when they travelled the on the same ship on one occasion.⁴⁷⁴ Lucian apparently had little liking for Peregrinus' pathos and religious passion about the world. He detested Peregrinus wholeheartedly, for his flashy style of a 'drama queen'. Peregrinus was a public figure and engaged in some demonstrative acts of 'social protest' or 'public theology'. Lucian's verdict on him as, an unprincipled attention-seeker, worth of nothing else but vicious satire, is however contradicted by the judgement of respected, established philosophers of the time, such as Aulus Gellius, who knew Peregrinus Proteus in person, and held him in high esteem. Nevertheless, Lucian's verdict stuck and has been recapitulated uncritically into modern times.

Peregrinus is of interest for the genesis of Hesychasm, for his itinerary of conversions, which led him to the lifestyle of a Cynic and to orientation to Yogic Brahmanism. Even if he may not have known much about Brahmanic doctrines or he details of Yoga, his orientation, as a 'public philosopher' nevertheless set an example. It may have been repeated and even preceded by many others who lived unrecorded. Lucian gives no indication of being astounded by this 'orientation' to Yogic Brahmanism, but criticises it as being imperfect. Given Peregrinus' public profile, Lucian must have played to the tastes of his readership here, who were well aware of him.

By the time Lucian had discovered him, Peregrinus was already a public figure in Roman and Hellenistic society. A degree of controversy surrounded him. On the one hand, Peregrinus was respected by serious philosophers, on the other hand, his style and themes violated mainstream conventions of the time, which made him a suitable target for ridicule by a best-selling author. Peregrinus Proteus was an entertaining subject. Lucian followed him right to his suicide in 'Brahmanic style' by self-immolation. Lucian clearly understood Peregrinus' proclaimed orientation to follow the example of Indian Shramanic spirituality and criticises him for not doing so in pure style. Apparently, Lucian could assume that his readers understood what he was writing about – and that they were

⁴⁷⁴ Lucian of Samosata. (165-180 C. E.). *The Death of Peregrinus*, pt. 43. Ed. Fowler, H. W. and Fowler, F. G., (transl., eds.). (1905). *The Works of Lucian of Samosata*, Volume IV, Oxford: The Clarendon Press. <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/luc/wl4/wl420.htm>

interested in it. Lucian claims to have been present at Peregrinus' self-immolation ceremony at Olympia.⁴⁷⁵

Lucian of Samosata's *The Death of Peregrinus* is a thoroughly literary work,⁴⁷⁶ in spite of its foundation in biographical fact, with many literary and philosophical motifs woven into the story, such as his expulsion from Rome.⁴⁷⁷ For Lucian Peregrinus' wandering from Christianity to Cynicism certainly showed the perceived kinship between both. This does not discount the biographical facts in any way, but it points at an element of meaning certainly intended by Lucian that he included into his narrative about the 'passing' or death of Peregrinus. Lucian could have omitted it at no loss for his main story. We thus have to read this text in the perspective that Lucian has included contemporary religious and cultural processes into this story which he condensed with the biographical elements in his account of Peregrinus Proteus. It would certainly be wrong to read this text as a description of an odd and highly singular individual. Lucian's interest certainly lay in a suitable presentation of Peregrinus as a paradigmatic figure, especially since the news of his carefully staged and highly symbolic suicide at Olympia had certainly spread through the whole of the Roman Empire.⁴⁷⁸

Peregrinus Proteus can be considered a representative of Graeco-Roman religion and philosophy, as a central figure, seeing that he was praised as a philosopher in Athens by an esteemed Roman philosophical author, Cornelius Aulus Gellius, in his *Noctes Atticae*.⁴⁷⁹ Aulus Gellius, a public figure and contemporary of Peregrinus, knew him in person. He confirmed Peregrinus' personal integrity. Aulus Gellius depicts Peregrinus as a model Cynic, as a man of integrity and of learning:

When I was at Athens, I met a philosopher named Peregrinus, who was later surnamed Proteus, a man of dignity and fortitude, living in a hut outside the

⁴⁷⁵ Lucian of Samosata, *The Death of Peregrinus*, pts. 34ff. Ed. Ibidem, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/luc/wl4/wl420.htm>

⁴⁷⁶ Harmon, A. M. (1936). *Lucian of Samosata – The Passing of Peregrinus*. Harvard: Harvard University Press, (Loeb Classical Library, 9 vols., Greek and English). [Republ. by R. Pearse, 2001]. <http://www.tertullian.org/rpearse/lucian/peregrinus.htm>

⁴⁷⁷ Bernays, J. (1879). *Lucian und die Kyniker*, Berlin: Hertz, p. 29.

⁴⁷⁸ Idem, p. 19

⁴⁷⁹ Aulus Cornelius Gellius, *Noctes Atticae (Attic Nights)*, Book XII. (ca. 170 C. E.). Ed. Rolfe, J. C. (Ed.). (1927). *The Attic Nights of Aulus Gellius*, 3 vols., London: Loeb Classical Library, vol. 2. http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Gellius/12*.html#11

city. And visiting him frequently, I heard him say many things that were in truth helpful and noble. [...] verses of Sophocles, the wisest of poets.⁴⁸⁰

Aulus Gellius' description reveal a counsellor who has psychological aspects in mind – role which Cynics often fulfilled – and a man of some learning.

Yet there is a persisting tendency, into modern times, to follow Lucian's shallow depiction of Peregrinus as being merely an unprincipled attention seeker, who would even sacrifice his life for the sake of applause.⁴⁸¹ Possibly a dislike for Peregrinus' conversions has motivated some authors to perpetuate Lucian's derision. The aggressive title of a book by P. Pilhofer, M. Baumbach, J. Gerlach and D. U. Hansen (in translation): "*Lucian, the Death of Peregrinus. A Charlatan on the Stake*" conveys an insidious subtextual message: The German word 'Scheiterhaufen' designates the burning pyre as a way of punishment for heretics, apostates and witches. Although etymologically unrelated, the word connotes 'failure' by assonance. Considering that Peregrinus chose to die voluntarily on the pyre – in the form of Yogins by autodafé – as a form of public protest, this title is tasteless – to say the least.

These authors fail to recognise his serious voyage of spiritual quest in the course of his life, which even Lucian has recognised. To Lucian Peregrinus' auto-dafé is merely embarrassing due to the personal drama and emotionalism with which Peregrinus performed it. In the early 20th century, Lucian's editor, A.M. Harmon, summed up the views of specialists on the issue:

Lucian believes himself to be exposing a sham, whose zeal was not at all for truth but only for applause and renown. Many notable modern critics, including Zeller, Bernays,⁴⁸² Croiset, and Wilamowitz, dissent from his interpretation, discerning in the man an earnest seeker after truth; for to them thirst for glory is not an adequate explanation of his final act.⁴⁸³

⁴⁸⁰ Idem p. 353. http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Gellius/12*.html#11

⁴⁸¹ Pilhofer, P., Baumbach, M., Gerlach, J. and Hansen, D. U. (Eds., transl.). (2005). *Lukian, Der Tod des Peregrinos. Ein Scharlatan auf dem Scheiterhaufen*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.

⁴⁸² Bernays, J. (1879). *Lucian und die Kyniker*, Berlin: Hertz.

⁴⁸³ Harmon, A. M. (1936). *Lucian of Samosata – The Passing of Peregrinus*, Harvard: Harvard University Press. (Loeb Classical Library, 9 vols., Greek and English). [Extract by Pearse, R. (2001)] <http://www.tertullian.org/rpearse/lucian/peregrinus.htm>

Possibly Peregrinus was a flamboyant character of sorts. Bernays however recognised the scope and seriousness of Peregrinus' religious quests.

Viewed in terms of Discourse Analysis it is quite likely that Lucian was not so much concerned with the character of Peregrinus, nor interested in the inner motifs guiding his development, but very much interested at discrediting the religious and spiritual options which Peregrinus had chosen and which he represented in the course of his life. As such Lucian writes as a spokesman of mainstream Graeco-Roman tastes and judgements.⁴⁸⁴ He disliked Cynicism in its fundamental critique of society, its lifestyle, hierarchy and mores, and Christianity in its rejection of Graeco-Roman religious universalism and polytheism as well as in its otherworldly insistence on altruistic love and basic human equality, which ran counter to the entrenched ideas of social stratification. However Indian, Yogic spirituality was respected. Accordingly, Lucian criticises Peregrinus for not following the Brahmanic example well enough.

Peregrinus' conversions provides an important case. It shows, first of all, that such conversions did happen, second, that they were a familiar phenomenon to the general public, thirdly, that they were made by public figures, by persons who were well initiated into their respective traditions – St. Paul being no exception in this respect – fourth, that some volatility existed with regard to religious affiliation, with multiple conversions being made in the course of a life, which, remarkably, neither Lucian nor his readers found strange or worth of any comment, and fifth, that Christianity, Cynicism and Yogic spirituality were apparently felt to be sufficiently similar in some respects to allow for gradual shifts of adherence between them. Cynicism appears to have had a special role in this respect. It was close to both and could accommodate multiple spiritual affiliations, i. e. one could be a Cynic and a practitioner of Yoga and Brahman spirituality, as Lucian attested Peregrinus to be,⁴⁸⁵ or before, of Christianity and Cynicism. Cynicism may thus have functioned as a pathway of adoption and transmission of Yogic ideas and practises to Christianity, even if it may not have been the only pathway. Peregrinus' self-immolation in Brahmanic style shows his identification with Indian spirituality⁴⁸⁶. As in many conversions, a degree of continuity may also be expected here, of maintaining elements of belief and spiritual practice which are felt to be fitting to the new faith too. If the ascetic

⁴⁸⁴ Lucian of Samosata, *The Passing of Peregrinus*, ch. 18.

<http://www.tertullian.org/rpearse/lucian/peregrinus.htm>

⁴⁸⁵ Ibidem, ch. 38.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibidem, chs. 26 and 27.

practice of the Cynics were a model for Christian mendicant monks,⁴⁸⁷ then Yogic practices may have entered the faith by way – as one pathway of reception.

6.5. Yoga and Hesychasm as Ars Moriendi

6.5.1. Peregrinus Proteus' Public Suicide in Brahmanic Style

To end his life Peregrinus went to Olympia, to protest the transformation of the site through a privately sponsored aquaeduct, which, he believed, diminished the rigours of pilgrimage to this site. His public protest was met with mixed reactions. He decided to end to his life here in true 'Brahmanic' fashion combining it with an act of civil protest. He drew on examples of public suicide of Brahmanic Yogins which had imprinted themselves firmly on the Hellenistic and Roman mind. The first was that of Calanos, who had accompanied Alexander the Great back from India. Fallen ill, he decided to end his life on a pyre in view of the Macedonian army:

Calanos, after having been disordered a little while with the bile, desired to have his funeral pyre erected. [...] before he ascended the pile, took leave of the Macedonians, desiring them to spend the day in joy and drinking with the king. 'For I shall see him' said he 'in a little time in Babylon'. So saying he stretched himself upon the pile and covered himself. Nor did he move at the approach of the flame, but remained in the same posture, till he had finished his sacrifice, according to the custom of the country.⁴⁸⁸

The event imprinted itself on collective memory both for the demonstration of overcoming the fear of death – and because Calanos' prophecy turned out to be true when Alexander did die a few months later in Babylon. The event came to symbolize the utter overcoming of worldly bonds. The motif of 'Brahmanic suicide' became thus firmly established in

⁴⁸⁷ Dudley, D. R. (1937). *A History of Cynicism from Diogenes to the 6th Century A.D.* Bristol: Bristol Classical Paperbacks, pp. 209-211.

⁴⁸⁸ Plutarch (Lucius Mestrius Plutarchus), *The Life of Alexander*, LXIX. Ed. Perrin, B. (1919). *The Parallel Lives by Plutarch*, Cambridge, MA.: The the Loeb Classical Library, Vol. VII, pp. 223-439, p. 419.
http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Lives/Alexander*/10.html

Graeco-Roman culture.⁴⁸⁹ Strabo described a similar public suicide by a Yogin in Athens who was member of a diplomatic delegation from a Tamil kingdom to Emperor Augustus. A memorial was erected in his honour.⁴⁹⁰ Peregrinus Proteus drew on it. That Peregrinus drew on these examples for his own public suicide which he committed at Olympia as a prominent sacred site of Greece, accompanied by fellow Cynics and staged as a solemn event of self-sacrifice, shows that he was aware of the power of this image and of the symbolism attached to it. The novel element certainly is that he connected a political aspect to it as an act of protest, against the commercial defilement of this sacred site. To frame this in the symbolism and example perceived as Brahmanic shows the degree to which (perceived) Yogic practice and its symbolism was received and held in esteem both by the Cynic community as well as by the general public for which Lucian wrote. Accordingly, Lucian contents himself with depicting Peregrinus' performance of his self-immolation, which he witnessed, as inferior to the Brahmanic example. He reports how the bystanders compared his suicide with those of the Brahmans:

Accordingly, at about midnight I got up (I had found lodgings with a friend), and set out for Harpine; for here was the pyre, just two miles and a half from Olympia, going East along the racecourse. [...] As soon as the moon had risen - for her presence too was required at the glorious spectacle - Proteus advanced, in his usual costume, accompanied by the chiefs of the Cynics; conspicuous among them came the pride of Patrae, torch in hand; nobly qualified for the part he was to play. Proteus too had his torch. They drew near to the pyre and kindled it at several points; as it contained nothing but torches and brushwood, a fine blaze was the result. Then Proteus ... demanded frankincense, to throw upon the fire; being supplied he first threw it on, then, turning to the South ... he exclaimed: 'Gods of my mother, Gods of my father,

⁴⁸⁹ Vassiliades, D. T. (2000). *The Greeks in India – A Survey in Philosophical Understanding*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publ., pp. 44f.

⁴⁹⁰ Strabo of Amasia, *The Geography*, XV.1.4.

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0239%3Abook%3D15%3Achapter%3D1%3Asection%3D4>

receive me with favour.' And with these words he leapt into the pyre. There was nothing more to be seen, however; the towering mass of flames enveloped him completely.⁴⁹¹

Lucian catches the character of a public ritual of this event, which was performed with the ritual assistance by the Cynics' community. This was not an act of personal imitation of the Brahmanic example, but was significant in terms of the philosophy, spirituality and traditions of the Cynics.

This may show to which degree Hindu ritual had been received by the Cynics at this time. It also shows that Peregrinus understood it as an act of transformation to become divinised in the company of the gods in the afterlife. Peregrinus' invocation to the south has been perceived as unorthodox by Lucian. It may have been directed towards Heliopolis. We also find Peregrinus with the club of Heracles as a Greek symbol of heroic spiritual struggle. The syncretism of this event is obvious. The 'example of the Brahmans and Yogins' was fused with with elements of Hellenistic religion, with new aspects attached, such as the motif of political protest by Peregrinus. For the reception of Yogic practices and symbolisms into nascent Hesychasm – or and into a pre-Christian form of it – a similar way of fusion may have happened. Lucian notes that this self-immolation was perceived as a religious act conveying a blessing to the bystanders:

At this point I met a number of people coming out to assist at the spectacle, thinking to find Proteus still alive; for among the various rumours of the preceding day, one had been, that before entering the fire he was to greet the rising sun, which to be sure is said to be the Brahmin practice. Most of them turned back when I told them that all was over; all but those enthusiasts who could not rest without seeing the identical spot and snatching some relic from the flames.⁴⁹²

Lucian's observation of the detail, that Peregrinus Proteus greeted the sun according to Brahmanic custom, is remarkably interesting. It reminds of the greeting of the sun as symbol of the Sun God Savitr in the *Gayatri Mantra*, which will be discussed further on.

⁴⁹¹ Ibidem

⁴⁹² Ibidem

This shows that both Peregrinus Proteus and Lucian had some knowledge of Hindu ritual. Considering the time, which Peregrinus had chosen for his ritual auto-dafé, at sunset, he probably had the Hindu ritual for 'Sandhya' in mind, the moments of transition for the sun, at sunrise, noon and at sunset, which are considered auspicious. At these times, believed to be spiritually powerful, a mandatory ritual is to be conducted, including the blessing of the body and the veneration of the Sun God.⁴⁹³ It is a most important liminal rite, performed thrice daily. The ritual and the veneration of the Sun God at these moments go back into early Vedic times. That Peregrinus followed this example shows how deeply his Brahmanic orientation went. That Lucian recognized it for what it was likewise indicates a fair degree of knowledge about Brahmanic ritual. Lucian does not fail to note several faults in Peregrinus' imitation of the Brahmanic example:

But what point is there in Proteus's throwing himself into the fire? Ah, of course: he wants to set an example of fortitude, like the Brahmins, to whom Theagenes thought it necessary to compare him. Well, I suppose there may be fools and empty-headed enthusiasts in India as elsewhere? Anyhow, he might stick to his models. The Brahmins never jump straight into the fire: Onesicritus, Alexander's pilot, saw Calanus burn himself, and according to him, when the pyre has been got ready, they stand quietly roasting in front of it, and when they do get on top, there they sit, smouldering away in a dignified manner, never budging an inch. I see nothing so great in Proteus's just jumping in and being swallowed by the flames.⁴⁹⁴

All of this does not prevent Lucian from mentioning, how little he personally thought of such a way to die. Yet he also reports that Peregrinus did not merely burn himself alive for his own sake, but to set an example of overcoming the fear of death.

⁴⁹³ Dubois, J. A. (2007). *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*, (transl. by Henry K. Beauchamp), New York: Cosimo, p. 266. [Original: 1905].

⁴⁹⁴ Lucian of Samosata: *The Passing of Peregrinus*, 25.
<http://www.tertullian.org/rpearse/lucian/peregrinus.htm>

... Thus much I heard, however. [...] He had lived like Heracles: like Heracles he must die, and mingle with the upper air. 'Tis my aim,' he continued, 'to benefit mankind; to teach them how contemptible a thing is death.'⁴⁹⁵

6.5.2. Relinquishing Embodiment in Yoga and Hesychasm

The classical commentary on the Yoga Sutra of Patañjali - the *Pātañjalayogaśāstra*, in which it is included (about 4th century C. E.) - discusses suicide in connection with the mastery of breath control. This could lead to final liberation from the body.⁴⁹⁶ By introducing consciousness into the body the Yogi should attain the power "to project the life-force out of the skull"⁴⁹⁷ Mallinson relates a section of the *Mahabharata* where "the spectacular, flaming exit of King Iksvāku and a Brahman through their palates and into union with Brahma"⁴⁹⁸ is told. This practice, documented by Greek historians, has also been criticised in the Yogic tradition. However ritual suicide is recommended in some texts as suitable when the powers of the body begin to fail.⁴⁹⁹ In the Greek reports the methods of terminating breathing or of expulsion of the life-force have not been recorded and have possibly eluded the observers. However, the impression is conveyed that these Yogins suiciding themselves were collected in deep meditation and detached from pain by the time the fire engulfed them. The motif of leaving the body to find union with the Divine or the Gods, as invoked by Peregrinus, is also firmly established in the history of Yoga, as expressed in the (-largely pre-Christian) *Mahabharata*.⁵⁰⁰

Hesychasm preserves the memory of visions of divine light in death. This may be related to a stage of 'Near Death Experiences' from which luminous perceptions of spiritual quality are reported.⁵⁰¹ Palamas explains, that in the moment of St. Stephen's vision⁵⁰² this light became visible on his body too – for those who had been capable or

⁴⁹⁵ Ibidem

⁴⁹⁶ Mallinson, J. and Singleton, M. (2017). *Roots of Yoga*, London: Penguin Classics, p. 133.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibidem, p. 361

⁴⁹⁸ Ibidem, p. 402

⁴⁹⁹ Ibidem, p. 425

⁵⁰⁰ Ibidem, p. 423

⁵⁰¹ Zaleski, C. (1993). *Nah-Toderlebnisse und Jenseitsreisen vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*, Frankfurt a. M.: Insel Verlag, p.188f. [Original: (1987). *Otherworld Journeys. Accounts of Near-Death Experience in Mediaeval and Modern Times*, New York.)

⁵⁰² Acts 6: 15

worthy of such perception – and it enveloped St. Stephen as it had shone from Moses⁵⁰³ before.⁵⁰⁴

Palamas speaks about death and dying in particular in his treatise *To the Most Reverend Nun Xenia*⁵⁰⁵ In a passage marked by 'inter-textuality' Palamas writes:

“As the death of Soul is authentic death, so the life of the soul is authentic life [13.] Life of the soul is union with God, as life of the body is its union with the soul [...] [14.] And this life is not only the life of the soul, it is also the life of the body.”⁵⁰⁶

Palamas inscribes this into the schema of Original Sin, the Fall, Redemption, and Resurrection:

[14.] Through resurrection the body is also rendered immortal. [...] On it, too, is bestowed everlasting life in Christ. [...]. [15.] The Son of God, who in his compassion became man, died so far as His body was concerned when His soul was separated from His divinity, and so He raised up His body once more and took it with Him to heaven in glory. Similarly, when those who have lived here in a godly manner are separated from their bodies, they are not separated from God, and in the resurrection they will take their bodies with them to God, and in their bodies will enter inexpressible joy there where Jesus has preceded us⁵⁰⁷ and in their bodies will enjoy the glory that will be revealed in Christ.⁵⁰⁸ Indeed they will share to only in resurrection, but also in the Lord's ascension and in all divine life.⁵⁰⁹

Here the idea of embodiment is taken to transcendent and eschatological consequences. In his letter to Xenia, he presents the Hesychasm as preparation for dying, and as anticipation of a future state of embodied participation in the state of Christ in Resurrection.

⁵⁰³ *Exodus* 34: 34f.

⁵⁰⁴ Palamas, *Triads*, I.3.31

⁵⁰⁵ Palamas, *To The Most Reverend Nun Xenia*, 62. Edition: (1995). *The Philokalia*, vol. 4 (pp. 293-322). London: Faber and Faber.

⁵⁰⁶ Palamas, *To The Most Reverend Nun Xenia*, 12–14. Ibidem, p. 297.

⁵⁰⁷ *Hebrews* 6: 20

⁵⁰⁸ 1. *Peter* 5:10

⁵⁰⁹ Ibidem, p. 297f.

The icon of the *Harrowing of Hell*, created by Dionisy the Wise (1444 – 1503) of Moscow for the Ferapontov Monastery on the White Lake in northern Russia symbolises this in terms of Hesychast theology and aesthetic codes.



Dionisy (Workshop), *Soshestvie vo ad* (Moscow, 1502). Russian State Museum, St. Petersburg. E. S. Stirnova, *Moskovskaya Ikona XIV-XVII vekov*. Leningrad (St. Petersburg), 1988: Izdatelstvo 'Avrora', nr. 145

The luminous blue sphere in the centre depicts the pervasive Pneumatic presence of the Divine on both sides of the margin of death. Its 'energetic' character is symbolised by the

angels acting from it. Here profane death is symbolised by the coffins from which Adam and Eve and all mankind arise. The spiritually significant process is however symbolised by the blue sphere of divine light, surrounding Christ who arises from the sphere of Hell, beneath his feet with its broken gates. He draws Adam and Eve into his sphere of divine light. Thus, Dionysy shows that the divinising resurrection exceeds the mere expectation of a post-mortal life, as a natural process, which was common belief and expectation before Christ already, as discussed in the New Testament. The inclusion of the *body* in the realm of the *transcendent*, envisioned in the image of Christ in Resurrection is connected to a post-mortal state of a 'pneumatic body', as St. Paul proposed.⁵¹⁰ The motif of 'eschatological' transformation of the body by Hesychasm as prelude to post-mortal resurrection gives the meditative practice of Hesychasm a 'trans-wordly' quality.

⁵¹⁰ 1. *Corinthians*, 15:44

III. The Common Features of the 'Eight Steps'

7. The Method of Hesychasm and its Yogic Correspondences

7.1. Palamas' Description of the Method of Hesychasm

In the three books of the *Triads in Defence of the Holy Hesychasts* Palamas devoted merely few paragraphs⁵¹¹ and passages⁵¹² to the explicit description of the method of Hesychast prayer. He rather spoke about Hesychasm as an established practice, referring to teachings of others, like Nikiphoros the Monk,⁵¹³ and highlighted some features. He may have wanted to shield these psycho-physical practices from view and from attack. He may also have felt obliged to adhere to some arcane discipline, not to disclose to outsiders what was only to be learnt in the Hesychast community by 'initiation'. Palamas' frequent usage of Mystery Cult terms suggests this may have been a motif. He may also have believed that the bodily aspects of Hesychasm were secondary to the spiritual processes, on whose descriptions he focussed.

As in most of Hesychast literature, his description of the method is rather brief. This supports the view that it was understood as an 'initiate practise' bound to its context and not to be divulged. From Barlaam's references to his encounter with Hesychast monks we can however tell that they did indeed discuss very details of the phenomena of the Hesychast experience⁵¹⁴ and did pay attention to detail – details which may be significant for the understanding of the method and for comparisons with other forms of meditation.

In *Triads I* Palamas gives the most coherent description of the method:

You see, brother, how John teaches us that it is enough to examine the matter in a human (let alone spiritual) matter, to see that it is absolutely necessary to recall or keep the intellect within the body, when one determines to be truly in

⁵¹¹ Palamas, *Triads*, I.2.7

⁵¹² Palamas, *Triads*, II.2.25; II.2.6-9 and 12-14

⁵¹³ Palamas, *Triads*, II.2.2-3

⁵¹⁴ Barlaam, *Epistola III*, 325ff., Ed. Schirò, G. (1954). *Barlaam Calabro. Epistole Greche – i primordi episodoci e dottrinari delle Lotte Esicaste*, Palermo: Istituto Siciliano di Studi Bizantini e Neogreci, p. 292f.

possession of oneself and to be a monk worthy of the name, according to the inner man.⁵¹⁵

Palamas refers here to St. John Climacus' *Ladder of Divine Ascent* who describes these elements as necessary to achieve 'hesychia' (stillness),⁵¹⁶ and ultimately the 'vision of God', in a spiritual ascent which is modelled on the ascent of Moses in Sinai. The idea of keeping the 'mind' or 'intellect', in the body, is justified by Palamas with reference to the incarnation of Christ, in which the divine intellect or 'logos' comes to be embodied.⁵¹⁷ The phrase "to be truly in possession of oneself" signifies both self-control and self-awareness. Palamas presents the practice of 'deliberate breathing' in connection with it, as follows:

On the other hand, it is not out of place to teach people, especially beginners, that they should look at themselves, and introduce their own mind (intellect) within themselves through control of breathing. A prudent man will not forbid someone who does not, as yet, contemplate himself to use certain methods to recall his mind (intellect) within himself, for those newly approaching this struggle find that their mind (intellect), when recollected, continually becomes dispersed again. It is thus necessary for such people constantly to bring it back once more, but in their inexperience they fail to grasp that nothing in the world is in fact more difficult to contemplate and more mobile and shifting than the mind (intellect).

This is why certain masters recommend them to control the movement inwards and outwards of the breath, and to hold it back a little; in this way they will also be able to control the mind together with the breath – this at any rate, until such time as they have made progress, with the aid of God, have

⁵¹⁵ Palamas, *Triads*, I.2.7.

⁵¹⁶ John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent (Scala Paradisi)*, ch. 27. Ed. Luibhéid, C. (transl.), Russell, N. (notes) and Ware, K. (intr.). (1982). *John Climacus: The ladder of divine ascent* New York: Paulist Press, p. 262

⁵¹⁷ Palamas, *Triads*, I.2.6

restrained the mind (intellect) from becoming distracted by what surrounds it, have purified it and truly become capable of leading to a 'unified recollection' (" ἡνωμένη ἀνάμνησις "). One can state that this recollection is a spontaneous effect of the attention of the mind, for the to-and-fro-movement of the breath becomes quietened during intensive reflection, especially with those who maintain inner quiet in body and soul.⁵¹⁸

Palamas introduces the element of 'breath control' albeit seemingly reluctantly, as a practice "especially [for] beginners". John Climacus had written: "Strange as it may seem, the Hesychast is a man who fights to keep his incorporeal 'self' shut up in the house of his body"⁵¹⁹ Palamas carries this further by describing 'breath control' as a means of focussing attention inwardly. In the preceding passage, *Triads* I 2 3, he describes the 'centre of the heart' as the 'vehicle of intellect', stating that intellect introduced here by means of deliberate breathing replaces the 'psychic spirit' or 'psychic breath' as Meyendorff translates the expression in:

ἡ δὲ ψυχὴ ἀναμνηστικῶς ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ καρδίᾳ κέντρον τοῦ νοῦ, ὡς ἡ ἀκρόπολις ἐν τῇ πόλει. ἡ δὲ ψυχὴ ἀναμνηστικῶς ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ καρδίᾳ κέντρον τοῦ νοῦ, ὡς ἡ ἀκρόπολις ἐν τῇ πόλει. ἡ δὲ ψυχὴ ἀναμνηστικῶς ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ καρδίᾳ κέντρον τοῦ νοῦ, ὡς ἡ ἀκρόπολις ἐν τῇ πόλει.⁵²⁰

[Some place the mind (*intellect*) in the head, as in an acropolis, others present the centre of the heart as its 'vehicle', and that which is within the *heart* is distinguished from the *spirit of the soul* ('psychic spirit').]

A concentric model of man appears here, in which the symbolic centre of man is situated in the innermost part of the 'heart'. This is understood as not merely a physical organ, but as a spiritual one too. Ideally the divine intellect resides in it, surrounded by the sphere of the soul, with its own spirit ('pneuma'). This is depicted in relation to 'deliberate

⁵¹⁸ Palamas, *Triads*, I.2.7. Cf. Gendle, N.(transl.) and Meyendorff, J. (ed. and intr.), *Gregory Palamas – The Triads*, Mahwah, N.J., 1983: Paulist Press, p. 45f.

⁵¹⁹ John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent (Scala Paradisi)*, ch. 27. Ed. Luibhéid, C., (transl.), Russell, N. (notes) and Ware, K. (intr.). (1982). *John Climacus, The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, p. 262.

⁵²⁰ Palamas, *Triads*, I.2.3

breathing' as means. With the bodily sphere surrounding the pneumatic and intellectual, deliberate breathing becomes a means of accessing the inner core – in a transcendent way by divinisation – or in terms of the meditative process: by introducing divine intellect into the heart as means of divinisation. Palamas joins this anthropological model to the idea of the indwelling of Christ in man,⁵²¹ and in man's heart. Palamas envisions it as a complex entity, comprising the divine Intellect and all the thoughts of the mind and the soul. He declares that it is deepest part of the 'body'.⁵²²

Palamas overtly discusses the external function of 'deliberate breathing', by introducing breath into the heart, and of retaining breath for a while as an external means of inducing one's mind and attention to focus inwardly and to stay concentrated in the body. This is understood as 'embodiment' of the Neoplatonic figure of procession and reversion of intellect – with breath as vehicle of the spirit. It motivates Palamas' connection between the Platonic figure of the 'circular movement of intellect', with the bodily practise of introducing intellect into the centre of man's person, the innermost heart. The focussing inward, to make the mind translucent to itself, is connected to the 'embodiment' of introducing the divine intellect into the heart. Palamas is aware of this connection, as his usage of the theurgic term 'vehicle' shows. He employs it in connection with the Hesychast method of 'deliberate breathing'

As to the specific method of 'breath control': In view of the Yogic and Hesychast understanding, it is an awkward expression, as to the values it conveys. It could rather be described as 'structured breathing', based on its three stages, of deliberately inhaling, then retaining breath and of exhaling. It is performed in conjunction with focussing the mind and attention inwards, avoiding all distraction by outwards stimuli and inner phantasies. This method is documented in Pseudo-Symeon's prescription.⁵²³ The method is described precisely in Yoga where it has been unfolded and explicated in detail.

The method of introducing the intellect (and the focus of the mind) into the spiritual centre of the body, the heart, as Palamas describes, has practical and theoretical, symbolic aspects. One of these is the link between breath and pneuma, in Patristic understanding the Holy Spirit, associated with the divine intellect of Platonic tradition. It

⁵²¹ Palamas, *Triads*, I.2.2

⁵²² Palamas, *Triads*, I.2.3

⁵²³ Meyendorff, J. (1959). *Grégoire Palamas: Défense des saints hésychastes – Introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes* (Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense, Études et Documents, vol. 1 fascicule 30), Louvain: Université Catholique, p. 88, fn. 1

governs the figure of 'circular motion', between God and man as described above. The fluidity and sometimes ambiguity of Palamas' terminology has annoyed many.⁵²⁴ It is the result of inter-textuality, of overlap between Platonic and Biblical terminologies. The connotations of the terms and the way Palamas uses them in philosophically and theologically identifiable figures of thought allows to relate them to the underlying ideas, even where the specific terminology does not fit precisely or according to the sources. The multivalence of the terms 'pneuma' and 'intellect' must be borne in mind.

With the idea that 'structured breathing' can be the vehicle of intellect Palamas introduces a figure which in Neoplatonism is rather associated with pneuma as the medium of introducing 'intellect' in a substantial form. To this inner process of mystical reversion of intellect towards divinisation the Yogic practice of structured breathing was obviously joined as its suitable 'embodiment', helping to enact it.

The method of structured breathing to introduce intellect into the body, and heart, is thus in no way merely motivated by pragmatic reasons of aiding concentration. Such views fail to grasp its philosophical rationale – in particular, that breath functions as vehicle of 'pneuma', in which the ontologically lower substance becomes the bearer of a higher element. This is the basis of 'theurgy,' – also of the Christian understanding of 'sacrament'. The method of structured breathing has a performative quality. Palamas continues in his description:

Such men, in effect, practise a spiritual Sabbath, and as far as is possible, cease from all personal activity. They strip the cognitive powers of the soul of every changing, mobile and diversified operation, of all the sense perceptions and, in general, of all corporal activity that is under our control: as to acts which are not entirely under our control, like breathing, they restrain these as far as possible.⁵²⁵

In this passage he describes the 'withdrawing of the senses', the 'quieting of all movements of body and soul', which are both familiar from Yogic forms of meditation. In

⁵²⁴ Timko, P. (1972). Toward a Re-Evaluation of the Theology of Gregory Palamas. *Diakonia* 7, New York, (pp. 326–328). p. 328. Loc. cit.: Flogaus, R. (1997). *Theosis bei Palamas und Luther – ein Beitrag zum ökumenischen Gespräch*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, p. 94, fn. 71.

⁵²⁵ Palamas, *Triads*, I.2.7. Cf. Gendle, N. (transl.) and Meyendorff, J. (ed. and intr.).(1983). *Gregory Palamas – The Triads*, Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, p. 45f.

Neoplatonism, the withdrawal of intellect from the senses to become inwardly aware of itself and its divine essence this is motivated by the attributed power of intellect to provide intuitive apophatic awareness of itself in a unified perception, beyond all conceptualised knowledge and perception. The understanding that the retraction of the mind from all outward stimuli and from all thoughts should lead not to a formless void, but to an inner perception of God, which Palamas presents emphatically, rests on this divine, transcendent quality of *intellect*. This is alluded to in Palamas' expression of a 'unified recollection' above. This will be discussed in detail.

Palamas then goes to present the idea of spiritualisation of Hesychast practice. This does not make the embodied practice a mere 'introductory exercise for beginners', as Palamas suggests, due to his emphasis on the interior aspects of the process of Hesychast divinisation, as is developed in Hesychast literature. Palamas' offhand remark should not be understood literally, but as a way of shielding its arcane meanings from ridicule and misinterpretation, as his extensive references to aspects of it show.

Palamas describes the transformation, experienced by the 'circular movement of intellect' into one of soul. This explicable in terms of the Neoplatonic idea of connection between different layers of 'being': soul as the instrument and 'vehicle' of the noetic intellect. Here soul is defined functionally, and by its intermediate position – sometimes imagined as being 'fine-mattered' or 'ethereal', between the body and intellect. Soul is conjoined to both. Thus, Hesychasm acts by means of bodily processes upon the intermediate medium of soul, and through soul on intellect. Palamas continues:

In the case of those who have made progress in Hesychasm, all this comes to pass without painful effort and without worrying about it, for the perfect entry of the soul within itself spontaneously produces such inner detachment. But with the beginners none of these things comes without toil. ... Thus, the man who seeks to make his mind return to itself needs to propel it not only in a straight line but also in a circular motion that is infallible. How should such a one not gain great profit of it, instead of letting his eye roam hither and thither, he should fix it on his breast or on his navel, as a point of concentration. For in this way he will not only gather himself together externally as far as possible to the inner movement he seeks for his mind (intellect). He will also, by

disposing his body in such a position, recall into the interior of the heart a power which is ever flowing outwards through the faculty of sight.⁵²⁶

In this passage the mentioning of the 'energetic' aspect of intellect is important. This refers to the Neoplatonic understanding that the emanation of the divine by intellect through the hierarchic levels of the ontologically differentiated reality, does not only have a cognitive aspect, conceptualised as 'ontic', as 'being', but also an energetic, dynamic aspect, which can become hypostatic in necessarily multiple forms. The idea of participation in these 'energies' as means of divinisation remained controversial in the reception of Palamism. This 'energetic', processual aspect is essential to the understanding of the dynamics of Hesychast meditation, as a performative, embodied spiritual action. The development of the method and theory of Hesychasm by authors of its tradition up to Palamas will be described in the following.

7.2. Hesychast Authors of Palamas' Era

7.2.1. Theoliptos of Philadelphia

Gregory Palamas calls Theoliptos of Philadelphia (1250-1322) an eminent master of Hesychasm of his time. He studied Hesychasm with him for some time. Palamas remembers him as an enlightened teacher and practitioner of Hesychasm in his time.⁵²⁷ He was a precursor of Palamas, also in the perception of monasticism as an initiatory path, comparable to the initiation provided by baptism.⁵²⁸ Some of his writings are contained in the *Philokalia*, the influential and representative collection of texts of Orthodox spirituality, dating from the 4th to the 15th centuries. It was compiled by Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain Athos and by Macarius of Corinth. The collection was first published in Venice in 1782.

⁵²⁶ Palamas, *Triads*, I.2.8. Ed. Gendle, N. (transl.) and Meyendorff, J. (ed. and intr.). (1983). *Gregory Palamas – The Triads*, Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, p. 46.

⁵²⁷ Palamas, *Triads*, I.2.12

⁵²⁸ *Theoliptos of Philadelphia – Introductory Note*. Ed. (1995). *The Philokalia*, vol. 4 (pp. 175-176). London: Faber and Faber, p. 175.

Theoliptos writes on concentration of the mind and attention in meditation and in prayer. The intellectual and aesthetic aspects are described in theoretical figures based on Neoplatonism.

Sitting in your cell, then be mindful of God, raising your intellect above all things and prostrating it wordlessly before Him, exposing your heart's state to Him and cleaving to Him in live. For mindfulness of God is the contemplation of God, who draws to Himself the intellect's vision and aspiration, and illumines the intellect with His own light. When the intellect turns toward God and stills all representations [and] images of created things, it perceives in an imageless way, and through an ignorance surpassing all knowledge its vision is illumined by God's unapproachable glory. Although not knowing, because what it perceives is beyond all knowledge, nevertheless the intellect does know through the truth of Him who is and who transcends all being. Nourishing its love on the wealth of goodness that pours forth from God, and fulfilling thereby its own nature, it is granted blessed and eternal repose.⁵²⁹

Theoliptos describes how the divine spirit leads a person to transcend discursive thinking and to arrive at a perception beyond all images, which can be experienced as illumination. The concept of God's 'glory' ("δόξα") is conceived eidetically as divine 'radiance'. Palamas interprets it as a synaesthetic perception. Theoliptos also mentions that the monastic practice must be accompanied by repeated prayer, and by the cleansing of passions:

Again, when you sit in your cell, cleave to this mental prayer with watchful intellect and contrite spirit. Then on account of your watchfulness the grace of contemplation will descend upon you, knowledge will dwell in you...⁵³⁰

Theoliptos also mentions the perception of divine light in this context:

⁵²⁹ Theoliptos of Philadelphia. (Ca. 1300). *On Inner Work in Christ and the Monastic Profession*. Ed.: (1995). *The Philokalia*, vol. 4, (p. 177-187). London: Faber & Faber, p. 181.

⁵³⁰ Ibidem p. 183.

heart is combined with the instruction that this should be done while sitting in quiet. This suggests extended periods of practice. The movement of exhalation is not mentioned. The description is incomplete, since only that movement which is seen as symbolically significant is discussed:

Some of the saints have called attentiveness ['nepsis'] the guarding of the intellect, others have called it the custody of the heart, or watchfulness, or noetic stillness, and others something else. All expressions indicate one and the same thing [...] You know that what we breathe is air. When we exhale it, it is for the heart's sake, for the heart is the source of life and warmth of the body. The heart draws towards itself the air inhaled when breathing, so that by discharging some of its heat when the air is exhaled, it may maintain an even temperature. The cause of this process or rather, its agents are the lungs....

Seat yourself then, concentrate your intellect, and lead it onto the respiratory passage through which your breath passes into your heart. Put pressure on your intellect and compel it to descend with your inhaled breath into your heart. Once it has entered there, what follows will be neither dismal nor glum. Just as a man, after being far away from home, on his return is overjoyed at being with his wife and children again, so the intellect, once it is united with the soul, is filled with indescribable delight. Therefore brother, train your intellect not to leave your heart quickly, for at first it is strongly disinclined to remain constrained and circumscribed in this way. But once it becomes accustomed to remaining there, it can no longer bear to be outside the heart. For the kingdom of heaven is within us.

Moreover, when your intellect is firmly established in your heart, it must not remain there silent and idle; it should constantly repeat and meditate on the

prayer, 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me' and should never stop doing this. For this prayer protects the intellect from distraction...⁵³⁵

In this description the movement of inhalation is presented as means to guide intellect and soul into the heart, as by the practise of focussing one's attention on certain points or movements within the body. Neoplatonic anthropology is the background here. The 'Prayer of the Heart' is introduced as means of binding attention here, reminiscent of the role of mantra Payer in Yoga.

Nikiphoros emphasises that the movements of the mind should be quietened and brought to a stand-still within the heart – an idea which emerges from the context, in which this practice is described as a method for attaining 'stillness', as he writes:

Some saints have called attentiveness the guarding of the intellect, others have called it the custody of the heart, or watchfulness, or noetic stillness, and others something else. All these expressions indicate one and the same thing...⁵³⁶

He affirms that all the designations refer to the same thing indicates that 'noetic stillness' is intended even when not expressly mentioned. He equates this state, in which the intellect (or focus of attention) is in the heart, in a state of cessation of thinking activity and distractions, with 'the kingdom of God', identifying it thus as a state of salvation. He also describes it a blissful, as a state of "indescribable delight."⁵³⁷ Likewise he describes it as a state of special insight which is attained through enduring practise: "Continually persevere in this practice and it will teach you what you do not know."⁵³⁸ 'Stillness' comprises:

- the required setting of an undisturbed place for meditation,
- an appropriate resting sitting position for meditation,
- the process of calming the passions by ascetic discipline and 'introspection'
- and the calming of the fluctuations or distractions of the mind with its incessant flow,

⁵³⁵ Nikiphoros the Monk. (Late 13th century). *On Watchfulness and the Guarding of the Heart – From Nikiphoros Himself*. Ed. (1995). *The Philokalia*, vol. 4, (pp. 204–206). London: Faber & Faber, p. 205.

⁵³⁶ Ibidem, p. 204.

⁵³⁷ Ibidem, p. 205.

⁵³⁸ Ibidem, p. 206.

- and finally, to that state in which the mind is wholly in the heart or the interior of itself, with no imaginative or reasoning activity going on anymore, when the utter stillness gives way to ecstatic experiences of absolute clarity, 'samadhi' in Yoga,
- or of experiences of divine light accompanying it, known in both meditation traditions, called 'Thaboric light' in Hesychasm
- and other miraculous or 'supernatural' effects and powers described in both doctrines.

This state converges in a phenomenological perspective with the state of bliss, lucidity and calm arising from complete cessation of thought and union of thinking with intuition, called 'samādhi'⁵³⁹ in Yoga, or of experiences of divine light accompanying it, known in both meditation traditions, called *Thaboric light* in Hesychasm and other miraculous or 'supernatural' effects and powers described in both doctrines.

A comparison between Hesychast practice to Yoga shows similar elements:

- the sitting posture of sustained meditation, as mentioned above,
- a posture of focussing one's attention or gaze onto the centre of the body ('navel gazing') or onto a spot close to it,
- the deliberate introduction of the intellect into the 'heart' in Hesychasm, or into the centre of the person, following the movement of inhalation,
- the repeated performance of this exercise with every breath,
- the idea of containing intellect within the heart with some compulsion, against the mind's inclination to escape from this bondage,
- the notion of 'stillness' which gave Hesychasm its name.
- the 'mantra prayer' of a continuously repeated short prayer, connected to every breath

If one compares these common features to the Egyptian tradition, differences are apparent: no continued meditative practise of sitting still and practising a drawing in of intellect in conjunction with regulated breathing is prescribed in ancient Egyptian *Magical Papyrus* and Hermetic texts. The element of regular, continued meditation accompanied by structured breathing is missing.

If one looks at the testimonies by Egyptian Desert Fathers who are claimed as part of their heritage by Hesychasts, the result is similar: Neither 'breath control' nor regular

⁵³⁹ Miller, Barbara Stoler, *Yoga – Discipline of Freedom. The Yoga Sūtra Attributed to Patañjali*. (transl., cmt., introd., and glossary), New York, 1998: Bantam Books, p. 34.

meditative breathing are described in the texts of the Egyptian monastic fathers. Of them the sayings of Abba Antonios gave quite precise descriptions of the practise of monastic 'stillness' (hesychia) in the desert, which was performed sitting alone in a hermit's cell (kellion).⁵⁴⁰ Here silence, quiet and meditation in solitude, and all its effects, experiences of inner and outer resistance and adverse forces, are discussed, which face the monk striving for this state of inner 'stillness', in which the kingdom of God is encountered. The inheritance of this Egyptian fathers' practice of hesychia in Hesychasm, is evident and conforms to the Hesychasts' own traditions about their origins. Yet the element of meditative breathing, which is part of mediaeval Hesychasm, is still lacking here. This indicates that this practice was adopted in a different setting, probably in the urban milieu of Alexandria in late Antiquity.

Nikiphoros must have had a sense of his own contribution to Hesychasm in depicting this method in some detail. The chapter on this practice in his treatise "*On Watchfulness and the Guarding of the Heart*" is entitled "From Nikiphoros Himself".⁵⁴¹ A florilegium of extracts from Egyptian and Syrian spiritual fathers, such as John Climacus, indicates continuity with them.

7.2.3. Gregory Siniaticus

St. Gregory of Sinai (1255 in Ionia, Asia Minor – 1346 in Paroria, Bulgaria) entered monasticism in St. Catherine's monastery on Sinai before moving to Mt. Athos.⁵⁴² Remarkably, Palamas does not mention as teacher of Hesychasm in the *Triads*, which are directed at the defence of this practice. Gregorios Sinaites, a native of Asia Minor, had gone to Sinai to receive full monastic initiation there. He is the living link between the spiritual traditions of Egyptian monasticism and Mt. Athos, having brought them, either alone or in a succession of a few others, to the Athonite community, where they became documented since the late 13th century, as by Niciphoros.

Gregory of Sinai was an important author and teacher of Hesychasm. As to the theory of Hesychasm, the tenet, that the light which appeared on Mt. Thabor, was divine

⁵⁴⁰ Schulz, G. and Ziemer, J. (2010). *Mit Wüstenvätern und Wüstenmüttern im Gespräch – Zugänge zur Welt des frühen Mönchtums in Ägypten*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, pp. 46-57.

⁵⁴¹ Nikiphoros the Monk, *On Watchfulness and the Guarding of the Heart*. Ed. (1995) *The Philokalia*, vol. 4, (pp. 194–206). London: Faber and Faber, pp. 204f.

⁵⁴² *St. Gregory of Sinai – Introductory Note*. In: (1995). *The Philokalia*, vol. 4, (pp. 207-211). London: Faber & Faber.

and uncreated, was proposed foremostly by him, in his *Discourse on the Transfiguration*.⁵⁴³ Furthermore he asserted that this light was the very same light which appeared in Hesychast meditation.⁵⁴⁴

Both Gregory Palamas and Gregory of Sinai lived contemporaneously for some years on Mt. Athos. Gregory of Sinai did not involve himself in the Hesychast controversy nor does he mention Palamas. The declaration of D. Balfour, that Palamas must have been his pupil,⁵⁴⁵ since the two men lived in communities not too distant from each other on Mt. Athos⁵⁴⁶ is merely a wild guess, to construct a genealogy. The differences in theology and in practise between the two men are quite marked. Furthermore, Palamas describes a far more complex method, than Gregory Sinaites'. The latter's description of the method of breathing and sitting is rudimentary and not well understood in its symbolism - quite unlike those of Palamas.

Constructions as that by D. Balfour to suggest that Palamas was Gregory of Sinai's pupil in Hesychasm, ignoring their differences, often serve to patch over perceived differences. In this case it amounts to ignoring Palamas' unique theory of Hesychasm and to reduce it to Gregory of Sinai's quite different statements on the Hesychast method. These do not contain essential points which gave rise to the Hesychast Struggle in the 14th century, such as Palamas' doctrinal statements about the *uncreated energies*. By Gregory of Sinai's writings this controversy would never have arisen. D. Balfour's suggestions may thus represent an attempt at reduction, and at elimination of Palamas' salient statements.

The differences between Gregory Palamas and Gregory of Sinai advise us to perceive Hesychasm not as a unified entity, but rather as a bundle of forms, which draw on common motifs – which allow to speak of 'Hesychasm' as an ideal-typical entity existing over the time of centuries to the present. The different strands of Hesychasm however appear to have arisen by selective drawing from the common tradition. The lineage of St. Gregory of Sinai lacks important features, as is evident in his description of the bodily posture of Hesychasm, and in the absence of description and theory about the

⁵⁴³ Ibidem, p. 208

⁵⁴⁴ Hisamatsu, E. (1994). *Gregorios Sinaites als Lehrer des Gebetes*, (Münsteraner Theologische Abhandlungen 34), Altenberge: Oros Verlag, pp. 72f.

⁵⁴⁵ Balfour, D. (1984). Was St. Gregory Palamas St. Gregory of Sinai's pupil?. *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* XXVII, pp. 115 – 130. Loc. cit.: *St. Gregory of Sinai – Introductory Note*. in: *The Philokalia*, vol. 4, (pp. 207–211). London: Faber and Faber, p. 208.

⁵⁴⁶ Hisamatsu, E. (1994). *Gregorios Sinaites als Lehrer des Gebetes*, Altenberge: Oros Verlag, p. 51.

movements of intellect and soul, and about deliberate breathing in conjunction with them, which are essential to Palamas. M. Tamcke suggests that a diversity of forms of Hesychasm may exist, as to St. Gregory of Sinai.⁵⁴⁷

The mutual silence of their respective biographers, and their lack of reference to each other, are significant. This points at the substantial differences on theology and method of Hesychasm between them, especially since Palamas is otherwise intent on claiming support by referring to recognised theological and spiritual masters. Since he kept up reading theology and philosophy even as a hermit, Palamas certainly knew of Gregorios Sinaites' writings, since he refers to those of other contemporary or recent teachers of Hesychasm, like those of Niciphoros the Monk. Among their differences are also those about the role of the 'Jesus Prayer', which will be discussed later.

The fact that Gregorios Sinaites left Mt. Athos at about the onset of the Hesychast Controversy, to set up his own monastic community on the Bulgarian-Byzantine border, indicates that he preferred to stay his own master instead of being letting himself be drawn into the affairs of the younger, more philosophically minded competitor for the title of the leading theologian of Hesychasm. The debate between Palamas and Barlaam must have appeared to him as that between two ambitious philosophers, and as a threat to his peace of mind. Instead, he settled here with the support of the Bulgarian Tsar John Alexander and a large following of Slavic monks, who became influential in Slavic lands.

St. Gregory Sinaite's avoidance of participating in the Hesychast controversy was based on disagreement with Palamas on theology. To attack Palamas, the defender of Hesychasm, might not have been well received in the Hesychast community. So, he rather remained silent. Although he speaks about divine energies, he does so to refer to God's graceful effectiveness in which we can participate to a greater or lesser degree,⁵⁴⁸ he does not identify the divine light with the energies of God. Likewise, he does not frame the divine light in a metaphysical conception, in which the divine energies go forth from God and manifest God in their hypostatic state. Although he draws on much the same spiritual traditions, he avoids philosophical conceptualisations of Hesychast practice and experience⁵⁴⁹ which gave Palamas' theory of Hesychasm its far-ranging systematic

⁵⁴⁷ Tamcke, M. (2012). Das Herzensgebet von seinen Ursprüngen in der Orthodoxie bis zu seiner Rezeption im Westen, in: Ebert, A. and Lupu, C. (eds.). (2012). *Hesychia – das Geheimnis des Herzensgebets*, (pp. 126-169), Munich: Claudius Verlag. p. 146f.

⁵⁴⁸ Hisamatsu, E. (1994). *Gregorios Sinaites als Lehrer des Gebetes*, Altenberge: Oros Verlag, pp. 332ff.

⁵⁴⁹ Podskalsky, G. (1985). Gregorios Sinaites. In: *Theologische Realenzyklopädie (TRE)* Vol. XIV, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, pp. 206–209, p. 207.

significance, in terms of theology and anthropology. However, he was influential by his detailed description of the practice, affirming the union of the physical technique, of drawing in attention and watchfulness, with structured breathing, and with the 'mantra element' of repeated invocation, "Lord Jesus Christ have mercy upon me!"⁵⁵⁰ as Nikiphoros had taught.⁵⁵¹ It has become the standard formula for Hesychast prayer since.

Through Gregorios Sinaites' disciples and fellow monks, Hesychasm reached Russia quite early, in the realm of church hierarchy, and in monasticism. The first Slavic metropolitan of Kiev, Kyprian, was among his disciples,⁵⁵² as well as the future Byzantine patriarchs Isidoros and Kallistos.⁵⁵³ However direct links with Byzantium, and with Palamite Hesychasm, also existed. Thus, characteristic phenomena of spiritual light have been reported from the vita of St. Sergius of Radonezh,⁵⁵⁴ from the late 14th century. (G. P. Fedotov tells them in a perceptibly Neo-Palamite spirit.⁵⁵⁵) They testify to the rapid spread of Hesychast ideas in this realm. By Gregory Sinaites' influential disciples in the Slavic lands, the way was paved for the reception of Palamas' doctrine, beginning in the 14th century, and renewed from the late 18th century on.

7.3. Hesychast Sources from the Age of the Macedonian Renaissance

7.3.1. Symeon the New Theologian

The last author of Hesychasm whom Niciphoros refers to is Symeon the New Theologian (949 in Galatia, northern Anatolia – 1022 in Asia Minor). He is an eminent spiritual teacher of Orthodoxy, who practiced his mystical theology as a hermit. He describes the vision and perception of spiritual light, understood as the 'Light of Tabor',⁵⁵⁶ which he connects

⁵⁵⁰ Hisamatsu, E. (1994). *Gregorios Sinaites als Lehrer des Gebetes*, Altenberge: Oros Verlag, p. 377.

⁵⁵¹ Nikiphoros the Monk, *On Watchfulness and the Guarding of the Heart*. Ed. (1995). *The Philokalia*, vol. 4, (pp. 194–206). London: Faber and Faber, p. 206.

⁵⁵² Hisamatsu, E. (1994). *Gregorios Sinaites als Lehrer des Gebetes*, Altenberge: Oros Verlag, p. 448.

⁵⁵³ Podskalsky, G. (1985). Gregorios Sinaites. In: *Theologische Realenzyklopädie (TRE)*, Vol. XIV, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, pp. 206–209, p. 207.

⁵⁵⁴ Fedotov, G. P. (1975). *The Russian Religious Mind, vol. 2: The Middle Ages: The 13th to the 15th Centuries*, Belmont: Nordland Publ. Co., p. 218.

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 192ff.

⁵⁵⁶ Symeon the New Theologian, *The Discourses, IV*. Ed. De Catanzaro, C. J. und Maloney, G. (transl. and ed.). (1980). *Symeon the New Theologian, The Discourses*, Mahwah: Paulist Press, p. 71.

with the symbolism attached to this light. He firmly declares that constant and disciplined ascetic practice can lead to this spiritual aisthesis. Palamas refers to his biography.

Symeon the New Theologian paid special attention to the bodily and emotional aspects of Orthodox monastic practice. He mentions the 'gift of tears' as a spiritual endowment of compunction and of compassion:

In every way, unless one takes the trouble every day and night to weep before Christ [our] God, even when he wishes to partake of the divine Mysteries he will be unable in any way to mourn or weep or shed tears in a godly manner. How could he, unless it were to come upon him by some ineffable divine dispensation or some rare chance? To me it does not seem strange, since many at the very moment of the departure of their souls have wept and shed tears.⁵⁵⁷

Palamas discusses the 'charism of tears' in response to a statement by Barlaam, who refers to Maximus Confessor⁵⁵⁸ to describe the state of prayer as one of detachment from the body. Palamas replies by acknowledging this as an exceptional state of ecstasy, but insists, that the interaction between the body and the soul is far more important. Embodiment as the regular state of the body transforms the body too. Palamas refers to the emotional transformation with the gift of tears as an example.⁵⁵⁹ Time and again Palamas insists on the transformation of the body, of its perceptions, its emotional state, its well-being, and its faculties, due to participation in the divine energies.⁵⁶⁰ Even in a state of ecstatic rapture, as experienced by St. Paul,⁵⁶¹ Palamas insists on the resonance of the body and the body's participation.

It is not just the rapture which is given [by Hesychast prayer], a rapture up to the third heaven, but all the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The diversity of languages [speaking in tongues] and their interpretation, which Paul advises to acquire

⁵⁵⁷ Idem

⁵⁵⁸ Maximus Confessor. (626 C. E.). *Centuria de charitate*, I, 10. Ed.: (1981). *The Philokalia*, vol. 2, *Four Hundred Texts on Love* (pp. 48 – 113). London: Faber & Faber, p. 54.

⁵⁵⁹ Palamas, *Triads*, II.2.17

⁵⁶⁰ Palamas, *Triads*, II.2.13

⁵⁶¹ 2. *Corinthians* 12:1-4

by prayer, shows that certain charism work by mediation of the body.... It is the same for the gift of teaching, the powers of healing and of performance of miracles and the laying on of hands, which the Holy Spirit gives.⁵⁶² [...] The healings and miracles never come about without the soul of someone who possesses the one or other gift, is intensive prayer and with the body resonating with it.⁵⁶³

Symeon the New Theologian gives a vivid account of the experience of the divine light:

So I entered the place where I usually prayed and ... I began to say. 'Holy God'. At once I was so greatly moved to tears and loving desire for God that I would be unable to describe in words the joy and delight I then felt. I fell prostrate on the ground, and at once I saw, and behold, a great light was immaterially shining on me and seized hold of my whole mind and soul, so that I was ... as it were, in ecstasy. [...] I conversed with this Light. The Light itself knows it; it scattered whatever mist there was in my soul and cast out every earthly care. It expelled from me all material denseness and bodily heaviness that made my members sluggish and numb. It so invigorated and strengthened my limbs and muscles, which had been faint through great weariness, that it seemed to me as though I was stripping myself of the garment of corruption. Besides, there was poured into my soul in unutterable fashion a great joy and perception and a sweetness surpassing every taste of visible objects [...] In a marvellous way there was granted to me and revealed to me the manner if the

⁵⁶² 1. *Corinthians* 12:1-11

⁵⁶³ Palamas, *Triads*, II.2.13

departure from this present life. Thus, all the perceptions of my mind and my soul were wholly concentrated on the ineffable joy of that Light.⁵⁶⁴

This detailed report with its manifold synaesthetic and proprioceptive perceptions, its description of mental, cognitive, perceptual, intuitive, and intellectual aspects, its emotional, sensory, and bodily perceptions, and experienced transformations, gives a rich and vivid description which resonates with those depicted by Palamas more briefly. The details reported convey a fuller idea of what is implied with the Hesychast concepts of divine light – conceptualized as epiphanies of the uncreated energies by Palamas.

7.3.2. Symeon Metaphrastis

Another author whose philosophical outlook resembles Palamas' was Symeon Metaphrastis (died before 1015). He was a civil servant at the court of Byzantium and an author of hagiography. Among his extensive compilation of lives of saints, he also summarised and reformulated the teachings of Macarius of Egypt (300-390 in Upper Egypt), framing and interpreting them in Neoplatonic terms. This is an important creative achievement of systematic theology. Palamas quoted extensively from this source. These testimonies show Hesychasm to reach back to the 4th century. The Hesychast community's sense of tradition reflects it, both as to the core set of motifs of theory and practice as well as to a continuous and uninterrupted chain of transmission in monasticism. Migrations from the monastic communities on the Sinai Peninsula to Mt. Athos affirm this genealogy

Symeon Metaphrastis is close to Palamas by his combination of a Neoplatonic frame of thought about spiritual ascent, the role of intellect and of divinisation, with an emphasis on the aesthetic and experiential aspects of Hesychasm. Thus, Palamas concludes a chapter on the hypostatic character of the divine energies⁵⁶⁵ with long quotes from him:

The blessed Moses, by the glory of the Spirit resplendent on his face which no one could stand to look at, showed by this sign how at the resurrection of the

⁵⁶⁴ Symeon the New Theologian. (1998). *The Discourses*. XVI, 3. Ed. De Catanzaro, C. J. und Maloney, G. (transl. and ed.). (1980). *Symeon the New Theologian, The Discourses*, Mahwah: Paulist Press, p. 200f.

⁵⁶⁵ Palamas, *Triads*, III.1.9

righteous, the bodies of the saints will be glorified, this glory, the faithful souls of the saints are found worthy to receive as of now already inwardly.⁵⁶⁶

Characteristically, Palamas however insists, that this is not to be read as a theological imagination, expected to happen at the end of times as an eschatological event – and thus, implicitly beyond the realm of accessible experience - but as description of luminous transformations of the bodily state and spiritual aesthetic perceptions in Hesychasm. The luminous hypostatic manifestation of the Spirit is explained as an internal as well as external phenomenon accessible to the senses.

7.3.3. Pseudo-Symeon the New Theologian

Pseudo-Symeon is an author whose texts have been attributed to St. Symeon the New Theologian (944 – 1022 A.D.), but who may not be identical with him.⁵⁶⁷ He gave a detailed account of the use of controlled breathing in Hesychast literature. The author of this passage, included in some texts on prayer, may have lived some time before 1300. The attribution of these texts to Symeon the New Theologian attests to an awareness of a continuity of Hesychast tradition. A. Louth cautions that his inclusion in the Hesychast tradition may have been in innovation, in its emphasis on the motif of 'transfiguration' and of aesthetic experience, that is echoed, however, in several accounts of contemporary monasticism of his time.⁵⁶⁸ The inclusion of sayings of the Egyptian desert fathers of the 3rd century, may thus express a desire to legitimation. The description of this method may be understood as expressive of sense of tradition in the Hesychast community, that relates to living spiritual aisthesis in the present. Pseudo-Symeon the New Theologian writes:

In short, if you do not guard your intellect you cannot attain purity of heart, so as to be counted worthy to see God.⁵⁶⁹ Without such watchfulness you cannot

⁵⁶⁶ Symeon Metaphrasis. (Early 11th century C. E.). *De elevatio mentis*, 1, ch. 62. Loc cit, Palamas, *Triads*, III.1.10

⁵⁶⁷ Hausherr, I. (1927). La Méthode d'Oraison Hésychaste. *Orientalia Christiana* vol. IX–2, (36), 101–209. (Pont. Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, Rome), p. 164.

⁵⁶⁸ Louth, A. (2004). Light, vision and religious experience in Byzantium. In: Kapstein, M. T. (Ed.), *The presence of light: divine radiance and religious experience*, (pp. 85-103). Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p.18f. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/66671.pdf>

⁵⁶⁹ *St. Matthew* 5:18

become poor in spirit, or grieve, or hunger and thirst after righteousness, or be merciful or pure in heart, or a peacemaker, or be persecuted for the sake of justice.⁵⁷⁰ To speak generally, it is impossible to acquire all the other virtues except through watchfulness. . . . Now if you would like to learn about the method of prayer, with God's help I will tell you about this too, in so far as I can.

Above all else you should strive to acquire three things, and so begin to attain what you seek. The first is freedom from anxiety with respect to everything, whether reasonable or senseless – in other words, you should be dead to everything. Secondly, you should be completely detached, so that your thoughts incline towards nothing worldly, not even your own body.

Then sit down in a quiet cell, in a corner by yourself, and do what I tell you. Close the door and withdraw your intellect from everything worthless and transient. Rest your beard on your chest, and focus your physical gaze, together with the whole of your intellect, upon the centre of your belly or your navel. Restrain the drawing in of breath through your nostril, so as not to breathe easily, and search inside yourself with your intellect, to find the place of the heart, where all the powers of the soul reside. To start with, you will find there darkness, and an impenetrable density. Later, when you persist and practise this task day and night, you will find, as though miraculously, an unceasing joy. For as soon as the intellect attains the place of the heart, at once it sees things of which it previously knew nothing. It sees an open space within the heart, and it beholds itself entirely luminous and full of discrimination. From then on, from whatever side a distractive thought may appear, before it

⁵⁷⁰ *St. Matthew* 5:3-10

has come to completion and assumed a form, the intellect immediately drives it away and destroys it with the invocation of Jesus Christ. ... The rest you will learn for yourself, with God's help, by keeping guard over your intellect and by retaining Jesus in your heart. As the saying goes, 'Sit in your cell and it will teach you everything.'⁵⁷¹⁵⁷²

This instruction is illuminating, not only as source for the origins of the method of deliberate breathing in Hesychasm⁵⁷³, but also in view of the sequence in which it has its place.

Here we find significant motifs in union:

- 1) The monastic setting
- 2) The ideal of 'purification of the heart' – to be understood as deifying transformation of the inner man
- 3) A claim to tradition by the references to the Benedictions from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, that this meditative practice will lead the practitioner to a fulfilment of these benedictions, that by this method *intellect* will enter 'the place of the heart'
- 4) The monastic ideal of mortification of all desires, fears, and passions, apatheia
- 5) The relinquishing of all sensory and imaginative attachments to the outer world and to the images of the inner world
- 6) Hesychasm as solitary meditation, secluded in one's cell
- 7) Hesychast practise as 'sitting meditation'
- 8) The focus of the gaze on the navel, or the 'centre of your belly', i.e., the centre of the physical body
- 9) The practise of 'restrained breathing' through the nostril
- 10) Interiorization of attention and of intellect: to search with one's intellect for "the place of the heart where all the powers of the soul reside": i.e., to the centre and core of *soul* (imagined as being in the *heart*), at the nexus of the intellectual and the psychic spheres

⁵⁷¹ *Apophthegmata Patrum. Moses 6. E.T. Ed.: Ward, B. (ed.). (1981). The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection, (2nd rev. ed.), London: Liturgical Press, p. 139*

⁵⁷² St. Symeon the New Theologian, Attributed to St. Symeon the New Theologian, *The Three Methods of Prayer*, Ed. (1995). *The Philokalia*, vol. 4, (pp. 67-75). London: Faber & Faber, p. 72f.

⁵⁷³ Meyendorff, J. (1959). *Grégoire Palamas: Défense des saints hésychastes – Introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes* Louvain: Université Catholique, p. 88, fn. 1.

- 11) Entering the formless realm of 'darkness' (-a motif associated with the spiritual reading of Moses' ascent before attaining the vision of the divine)
- 12) Persisting for days and nights in meditation: an indication of the long duration
- 13) Experience of transformation: joy sets in
- 14) Access to spiritual visions
- 15) Experience of luminosity and of illumination, of a divine light, and of 'being in the light'
- 16) Attainment of extraordinary powers of discrimination
- 17) Attainment of a stable state of bliss where external stimuli are warded off automatically
- 18) Persistence in this state with the aid of the invocation of Jesus Christ

The sequence of steps enlisted and described here is striking in a comparison with those of Yoga, as codified in Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra*. A brief comparison will be made in the next section.

7.4. Spiritual Authors of the Eastern Mediterranean: 6th-8th Century

7.4.1. John Climacus

Legend has it that St. John Climacus entered monastic life at the age of sixteen. This has fortunately been revised, since this would not explain the degree of sophistication in his writings, which could hardly have been attained in a monastery at Mt. Sinai, even under learned tutors there. The legend probably intends to convey that he had nothing to do with worldly learning at all – and had remained untainted by the world, as if to assure of the saint's intellectual virginity. This early dating of entry into monasticism can be found in other vitae as well, such as of St. Gregory Palamas. Scholarship has been able to revise this legend and to arrive at a more historical biography. Thus John M. Duffy explains in his review of Henrik Rydell Johnsén's dissertation:

We know next to nothing for certain about Climacus' life, but if one is to judge by the content and quality of his writing, there can be little doubt that he was highly educated, at the very least in rhetoric.

A report in one contemporary source suggests the possibility that he had been a married man and embarked on the religious path only after the death of his wife. The scenario is not out of the question and must have been a not uncommon occurrence. One good example, from precisely the early seventh century, is provided by the case of the famous patriarch of Alexandria, John the Almsgiver.⁵⁷⁴

This is important for our quest, since it supports the assumption that the genesis of Hesychasm has indeed happened in learned milieus, and that the understanding of its salient features, as by St. John Climacus, should be assessed with reference to religious-philosophical texts and systems of this age. Besides all spiritual inspiration there is nothing culturally naïve about these texts. An attempt at historical identification, proposed by L. Petit in 1920⁵⁷⁵ in looks probable. Thus, Johnsén explains:

Petit suggested ... that John Climacus is perhaps identical with a certain John the scholastic mentioned by Sophronios of Jerusalem ... John Climacus is almost exclusively mentioned as Joh the Scholastic (scholastikos) in the extant manuscripts. Another argument is ... his meeting with Sophronius in Alexandria [...] What the title meant in the early Byzantine period was basically either that a person was a scholar well versed in grammar and rhetoric, and perhaps a teacher I the schools, or that he was a lawyer or teacher of law, a privileged person in the Justinian legislative system. ... there is perhaps no reason to doubt that John Climacus actually was a scholar or a lawyer before he entered monastic life. That John was scholarly trained has also been suggested by several scholars.⁵⁷⁶

⁵⁷⁴ Duffy, J. (2010). Reading John Climacus: Rhetorical Argumentation, Literary Convention and the Tradition of Monastic Formation (review). *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 18 (1), 145–146.

[doi:10.1353/earl.0.0303](https://doi.org/10.1353/earl.0.0303)

⁵⁷⁵ Petit, L., (1924). Jean Climaque (Saint). *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique (DThC)* 8.1, p. 691-2

⁵⁷⁶ Johnsén, H. R. (2007). *Reading John Climacus. Rhetorical Argumentation, Literary Convention and the Tradition of Monastic Formation*, Lund: Lund Univ. Pr., p. 7f.

This lends support to the view that Hesychasm emerged indeed out of a sophisticated, philosophically well-trained milieu, in which centuries of philosophical discourses and of spiritual practices were fused, on a chiefly Neoplatonic basis with integration of other traditions – and that this rich complex came to be (consciously) introduced into Christianity, in a long process facilitated by cultural continuity, up to the 7th century.

By the time of the major disruptions, through the closing of the Neoplatonic Academies, especially in Athens, the prohibition of Paganism and the closure of its institutions, as well as by the Muslim conquest of Egypt and the Levante, the essential body of meditation form and its doctrine, emerging out of this long process, had already passed successfully into Christianity. This process is evidenced in the sphere of philosophical theology at the beginning of the 6th century by the works of Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita. In the sphere of meditation, we find its first testimonies in the writings of St. John Climacus, and of others in the refuges of Sinaitic monasticism. The intellectual milieu feeding and framing it persisted up to the demise of Byzantium in the 15th century. From St. John Climacus up to St. Gregory Palamas we find a continuity of education in this intellectual tradition – with its institutional continuity – and of meditation in spiritual, monastic communities emerging from this root-bed.

St. John Climacus (about 579 in Syria or Palestine – 649 in Sinai) wrote his *Ladder of Divine Ascent* (*Scala Paradisi*) probably at St. Catherine's monastery on the Sinai Peninsula. It is one of the most important works of Orthodox spirituality.⁵⁷⁷ This monastery was founded in 550 and owns among the eldest manuscripts of the Bible in its fine library, which may indicate a long 'pre-history' of this monastic community.

Chapter 27 of the *Ladder of Divine Ascent* is entitled: "On silence" (Περί ησυχίας / On Hesychia") has two sections: 1. "About sacred silence. The psychic and the bodily" (Δια την ιεράν "ησυχίαν", την ψυχικήν και την σωματικήν) and 2. "About different types of silence and their distinction" (Περί διαφοράς και διακρίσεως ησυχιών). In the first section Climacus writes:

Stillness of the body is the accurate knowledge and management of one's feelings and perceptions. Stillness of the soul is the accurate knowledge of one's thoughts and is an unassailable mind. [...] A shrewd hesychast requires

⁵⁷⁷ John Climacus. (ca 600 C. E.). *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. Ed.: Luibheid, C. and Russel, N. (transl.). (1982). *John Climacus – The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Mahwah: Paulist Press.

no words. He is enlightened by deeds rather than by words. The start of stillness is the rejection of all noisiness that will trouble the depths of the soul. [...] Strange as it may seem, the hesychast is a man who fights to keep his incorporeal self [in the original: *soul*] shut up in the house of his body. [...] A solitary life is suitable for someone who is fighting his clay, provided the time is right and provided he has a spiritual director. The fact is that you need the strength of an angel if you are to live a solitary life.⁵⁷⁸

Here we already find the technical term 'hesychia' for solitary meditation in silence, and some of its features: the calming of the thoughts to a standstill, the containment of the soul or intellect in the body, the surveillance and watchfulness over the feelings and passions, the preference for solitude and the instruction by a spiritual master. In the second passage John Climacus writes: "Let the remembrance of Jesus be present with your every breath. Then indeed will you appreciate the value of stillness."⁵⁷⁹

John Climacus mentions the 'Jesus-Prayer'. He does not describe it as invocation, but as constant keeping in mind, with every breath. The term 'Jesus-Prayer' goes back to him, the form as invocation probably to a vita of Abba Philemon, written at this time.⁵⁸⁰ It was to become the standard form. The importance of breathing as means of maintaining a presence of Jesus Christ in mind is evident.

Both texts show the body to be the site of what might be called the Hesychast experience: The body is not merely an instrument, as to enhance a dialogue of the soul with God, or a means to attain clarity of mind, but the site of experience of such union with God, in whichever way it is conceived conceptually. The return of the soul or intellect to itself – in the body – is essential to this process, as in the Platonic figure of procession and reversion of the divine intellect.

John Climacus may have combined two strands: the Neoplatonic 'recollection of intellect' into itself, and to God, in stillness, with motifs and practices from elder monasticism of the hermits of the Egyptian desert, especially of 'watchfulness' ('nepsis'). This is reflected later, by Niciphoros, who adopts the motifs of introversion, of attention to

⁵⁷⁸ John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, ch. 27. Ed. Ibidem, p. 261f.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibidem.p. 270.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibidem. p. 47.

one's impulses, feelings, emotions, and desires. 'Nepsis' resembles psychoanalytic introspection. The monk is encouraged not only to take note of acceptably ideas and emotions, but also of those deemed evil or embarrassing. Only if these are taken note of and are accepted to exist, can transformation happen, as these masters declare. Nikephoros quotes a letter of Abba Markos to Nicolas:

If, my son, you wish to acquire within yourself your own lamp of noetic light and spiritual knowledge, so as to walk without stumbling in the dark night of this age ... then I will show you a wonderful spiritual method to help you achieve this. It does not require bodily exertion, but requires spiritual effort, control of the intellect, and an attentive understanding assisted by the fear and love of God. [...] Descend into the depths of your heart, and search out three powerful giants – forgetfulness, sloth, and ignorance – which enable all the rest of the evil passions to infiltrate into the self-indulgent soul, and to live, energize and flourish there. Then through strict attentiveness and control of the intellect, together with help from above, you will track down these evil giants, about which most people are ignorant; and so you will be able to free yourself from them by means of strict attentiveness and prayer.⁵⁸¹

This aspect of Hesychasm, known as 'watchfulness' (ἡσυχία) is firmly part of Palamas' presentation of Hesychasm. Although this element does not feature centrally in the debate, since it was not controversial, Palamas nevertheless points out that it is important for the effectiveness of the actual method of Hesychasm and the foundation on which it rests. This is not unimportant, since it shows that the practice of Hesychasm is part of a comprehensive development of the person towards transformation, from which it cannot be isolated as a 'technique'. This process is related to the 'heart' as the psycho-somatic and affective nexus and central organ of Egyptian and Biblical anthropology. Concepts like the 'noetic light' point to a knowledge of Neoplatonic imagery and concepts, especially of Proclus and Damascius. Quite possibly the shared concept and imagery indicate traces

⁵⁸¹ Nikephoros the Monk, *On Watchfulness and the Guarding of the Heart*, Ed. (1995). *The Philokalia*, vol. 4, (pp.194-206). London: Faber & Faber, p. 199.

of a close relationship already which connects an early stage of Hesychast literature to late Neoplatonic spiritual philosophy. This is important to the thesis of the reception of Yoga - as the set of eight steps discussed in the Vedântic commentaries - into Hesychasm. If the reception of Yoga, with its Vedântic interpretation, was made possible by the close metaphysical agreements to (spiritual engaged) Middle- and Neoplatonism – that made Yoga significant, in all of its steps – then the firm basis of St. John Climacus, in Neoplatonism, in its Christian reception, provided a sound basis for the understanding of the eight steps of Yoga and their religious-philosophical symbolism – and for their reformulation in Hesychast theological metaphysics, of which he is the first eminent author.

7.4.2. Isaac the Syrian

From the Syrian tradition Nikephoros cites Isaac the Syrian (Isaac of Niniveh) (7th century):

Strive to enter the shrine within you and you will see the shrine of heaven for one is the same as the other and a single entrance permits you to contemplate both.⁵⁸²

Here we find the theme of the pathway to the interior as leading to the vision of the divine. It is 'enshrined' in the Jewish image of the tabernacle, which is also said to have been seen by Moses.

St. Isaac was born in the early 7th century on the Persian Gulf, and died about 700 C. E. near Nineveh. After a brief spell as bishop of Niniveh he retired to a secluded monastery and became a foremost spiritual author of the Syrian and Persian church. He wrote in Aramaic. He was formed by the Christological idea of the indwelling of the divine in Christ, according to the Syrian tradition, rather than the Chalcedonian Greek definition of two 'natures' of Christ in one 'hypostasis'.⁵⁸³ This definition can be understood as prefiguring Isaac's teaching about spiritual perception and transformation. Palamas praises St. Isaac as teacher of 'spiritual vision' which he describes as a faculty distinct from that of ordinary sensory perception as well as of intellectual understanding and

⁵⁸² Nikephoros the Monk, *On Watchfulness and the Guarding of the Heart*, Ibidem, p. 203.

⁵⁸³ Alfeyev, H. (2000). *The Spiritual World of Isaac the Syrian*, Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, p. 19f.

imagination.⁵⁸⁴ The *spiritual light* thus perceived is called 'light of grace' or 'glory of God' (ⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓ ⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓ). It is understood as a distinct phenomenon which becomes perceptible in a unique mode through diligent spiritual practice. Isaac states clearly that this is not to be understood as an imaginative representation of theological concepts but as a unique phenomenon which supports them.

He declares that the Thaboric light is not confined to Christ alone as manifesting his divine nature but to all disciples, interpreting a declaration of Christ in the *Gospel of St. John*⁵⁸⁵ accordingly. The experience and perception of such spiritual light is understood as manifestation of divinisation and of participation in the divine. It is thus to be distinguished from any metaphorical use of 'illumination' as intellectual understanding. The issue of language and culture is relevant here. St. Isaac gave the Greek concept of 'theory' (ⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓⲁⲓ) a less cognitive and more aesthetical meaning. He adopted the concept used to describe the perception of the divine through introspection probably from Pseudo-Dionysius' the Areopagite⁵⁸⁶ – whose writings were first published in Damascus.

Isaac of Niniveh does not teach a method of Hesychasm proper. Yet Palamas rightly included him as spiritual teacher because of his theory of spiritual perception which he lays out as one of three forms of perception in his treatise *On the Three Degrees of Knowledge and the Discrimination between their Service and Impulses and on the Faith of the Soul and on the Mysteries Hidden in it and to what Extend Worldly Knowledge and its Means is opposed to the Simplicity of Faith* (Treatise 51).⁵⁸⁷ His contribution to Hesychasm lies very much in the field of spiritual aisthesis, writing about its experience, its conditions and conceptualization.

As a widely read author, he represents Syrian monasticism and spiritual culture, whose influence on the formation of Hesychasm, as it emerged in the Sinai Peninsula in St. Catherine's monastery, should be acknowledged. Here monks from Egypt and from the Levante met and fused their traditions. On a conceptual level, this was certainly

⁵⁸⁴ Palamas, *Triads* II.3.15

⁵⁸⁵ *St. John* 17:22f.

⁵⁸⁶ Vesa, V.-C. (2015). *The Doctrine of Knowledge in Isaac of Niniveh and the East Syriac Theology of the 7-8th Century*, Padova: Università Degli Studi di Padova (Diss.).

http://paduaresearch.cab.unipd.it/8965/1/Valentin_Vesa_thesis.pdf

⁵⁸⁷ Wensinck, J. A. (1923). (ed.), *Mystic Treatises by Isaac of Nineveh*, (translated from Bedjan's Syriac Text with an introduction and register), Amsterdam, 1923: Uitgave der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen. <https://archive.org/details/IsaacOfNinevehMysticTreatises>

facilitated by the common influence of Neoplatonic concepts and patterns of thought. It is on this background that Isaac of Nineveh's contribution is to be understood.

Palamas shows to be aware of this lineage, showing that the discourse of Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, presenting spiritual light as a metaphor for supra-discursive intuitive perception of the Divine, was carried further by spiritual fathers after him – especially by Isaac of Nineveh - to the assertion of aisthesis of 'spiritual light' as a unique and self-evident form of perception.⁵⁸⁸ Palamas declares this form of perception to be already described by St. Paul: "... whether in the body, I cannot tell, or whether out of the body...".⁵⁸⁹

Isaac describes three forms of knowledge: The first, he says, is based on ordinary sensory perception. The second is based on meditation and 'psychic love'. In this process the soul becomes involved in perception and experience. A person is transformed through spiritual practice and attention to the affective impulses, towards love. In the third stage, Isaac explains, the perceptions become subtle; transformed by faith and imagination, and "the inner senses awake to spiritual service, as the order of things which will be in the state of immortality, and incorruptibility."⁵⁹⁰ Spiritual practice belongs to the second realm. Here Isaac declares that stillness (*hesychia*), is important, besides prayer, reading, asceticism, vegetarian food, and other means of spirituality. He ascribes transformative power to stillness: the withdrawal from outer sensory stimuli and thoughts awakens the inner person, and leads to deepened intuitive understanding, to "endless pleasure" and "ineffable astonishment".⁵⁹¹ In Isaac's thought, 'faith' and 'spiritual light' are equivalent in 'ascetic faith'. D. Shlenov explains that St. Isaac:

... writes about two kinds of faith: the theoretical faith in the dogmatic truths, and the ascetic faith that is 'radiant in the soul with the light of grace' (in the

⁵⁸⁸ Palamas, *Triads* I.3.21

⁵⁸⁹ 2. *Corinthians* 12:2

⁵⁹⁰ Isaac of Nineveh. (late 7th century C. E.). Treatise 51: *On the three degrees of knowledge and the discrimination between their service and impulses and on the faith of the soul and on the mysteries hidden in it and to what extent worldly knowledge and its means is opposed to the simplicity of faith*. Ed. Wensinck, J. A. (ed.), (1923). *Mystic Treatises by Isaac of Nineveh*, (translated from Bedjan's Syriac text with an introduction and register), Amsterdam: Uitgave der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen, p. 373f. <https://archive.org/details/IsaacOfNinevehMysticTreatises>

⁵⁹¹ Shlenov, D. (Hegumen), (2015). Isaac the Syria and Symeon the New Theologian as Teachers of Stillness. In H. Alfeyev (ed.), *Saint Isaac the Syrian and His Spiritual Legacy*, (Proceedings of the International Patristic Conference, 10th – 11th October 2013, St. Cyril and Methodius Institute for Postgraduate Studies), (pp. 211-222). New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, p. 217

Syrian text, the very faith is called 'light'.⁵⁹²). Attaining the second faith goes with the full transfiguration of the senses: hearing and sight ... and also taste, and other senses which are implied. Thus, the ascetic begins to see the hidden and Divine treasure⁵⁹³ which cannot be seen by the children of flesh...⁵⁹⁴

With this emphasis on the aesthetic and experiential aspects, including the transformative effects of the monastic practice on body, soul, mind and spiritual perception, St. Isaac exerted a lasting and continuous formative influence on the Hesychast movement. The description of St. Isaac of the 'spiritual light' and its importance in Syrian Orthodox spirituality, resonates with the motif of divine light, and of its perception, in the last step of Yoga, and also in Vedânta – as described in a commentary on the divine light, and its perception, in the *Chandogya Upanishad*:

7. Now the light which shines above this heaven, above all, above everything, in the highest worlds beyond which there are no higher, verily, that is the same as this light which is here within the person.

8 There is this seeing of it, as when, in this body, one perceives the warmth by touch There is this hearing of it, as when, on closing the ears, one hears as it were a sound, as it were a noise, as of a fire blazing One should meditate on this that has been seen and heard One who knows this becomes one beautiful to see and heard of in renown, yea, one who knows this.⁵⁹⁵

The combination of the theological and metaphysical definition of the 'light' as manifestation of God, and its perception with the senses of body and soul, inwardly and outwardly, is deeply Hesychastic too.

⁵⁹² Isaac of Nineveh, *Treatise* 42, 387. Loc cit: Ibidem, p. 217

⁵⁹³ Isaac of Nineveh, *Treatise* 42, 415-418. Loc cit: Ibidem, p. 217

⁵⁹⁴ Shlenov, D. (Hegumen), (2015). Isaac the Syria and Symeon the New Theologian as Teachers of Stillness, In H. Alfeyev, (ed.). *Saint Isaac the Syrian and His Spiritual Legacy* (Proceedings of the International Patristic Conference, 10th – 11th October 2013, St. Cyril and Methodius Institute for Postgraduate Studies), (pp. 211-222). New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, p. 217.

⁵⁹⁵ *Chandogya Upanishad* 3.13.7. ed.: Radhakrishnan, S. (1953). *The Principal Upanishads*. London: Allen & Unwin, pp. 336 – 512. p. 390.

<https://archive.org/details/PrincipalUpanishads/page/n393/mode/2up?view=theater>

7.4.3. Hesychius the Priest (of Sinai)

Hesychius, abbot of the monastery of the Burning Bush (Vatos) on the Sinai Peninsula, in the 7th or 8th century, is important for Hesychasm by his teachings on watchfulness (ἡσυχία ἡσυχία), 'inner watchfulness' (ἡσυχία ἡσυχία) and the 'guarding of the heart'.⁵⁹⁶ In his writings a combination of characteristic features of Hesychasm are to be found. Thus, he writes:

(5) Attentiveness is the heart's stillness, unbroken by any thought. In this stillness the heart breathes and invokes, endlessly and without ceasing, only Jesus Christ who is the Son of God and himself God. [...] (6) Watchfulness is a continual fixing and halting of thoughts at the entrance of the heart. In this way predatory and murderous thoughts are marked down as they approach and what they say and do is noted.⁵⁹⁷

One may observe the following core features:

- 'Attentiveness', defined as 'stillness of the heart', understood as the site of emotions
- 'Breathing of the heart': this may be an abbreviation of what is described more fully as 'drawing breath into the heart' – and with it, divine Spirit, as explained by Palamas and others.
- 'Unceasing prayer' and 'invocation of Christ'
- 'Halting of all thoughts'
- This is combined with the observation of emotions – in a way of uncensored observation reminiscent of psychoanalysis – as means to become aware of all impulses and emotions, regardless of their quality, and thus not to be driven by them unconsciously

If one looks at the logic and reasons for each element the following appears:

- The 'focussing of awareness on the heart', the site of emotions, is well justified by the impulses which are to be observed here, by the calming of the passions and the attentiveness to them in order not to be driven by them.
- The 'invocation of Christ' has its role here, as Hesychius explains:

⁵⁹⁶ St. Hesychius the Priest – Introductory Note, In (1979): *The Philokalia*, vol. 1, London: Faber & Faber., p.161

⁵⁹⁷ Ibidem, p. 163

“When the mind, taking refuge in Christ and calling upon Him, stands firm and repels its unseen enemies ... then it inwardly anticipates their ambushes well in advance. Through continually invoking Jesus the peacemaker against them, it remains invulnerable.”⁵⁹⁸

- The motif of ‘breathing towards the heart’ is not explained.
- No reason for ‘stillness’ is given, except to enhance the perception of the impulses and passions in concentrated attention.

This means that these two features of the method of Hesychasm described by Hesychius should be regarded as blind motifs, i.e., as motifs which are continued in practice but whose rationale is lost or unknown to the author.

As to the feature of stillness it is highly interesting that Hesychius enlists four reasons which are given for it – apparently in the wider Hesychast community, as of his knowledge:

(14) One type of watchfulness consists in closely scrutinizing every mental image or provocation; for only by means of a mental image can Satan fabricate an evil thought and insinuate this into the intellect, in order to lead it astray.

(15) A second type of watchfulness consists in freeing the heart from all thoughts, keeping it profoundly silent and still, and in praying.

(16) A third type consists in continually and humbly calling upon the Lord Jesus Christ for help.

(17) A fourth type is always to have the thought of death in one’s mind.

(18) These types of watchfulness, my child, act like doorkeepers and bar entry to evil thoughts.⁵⁹⁹

This list confirms the impression that Hesychasm is also be understood as a bundle of traditions, united by a common matrix of practises and motifs, which can be realised differently, influenced in part by the philosophical and theological reference systems of individual authors and practitioners. Hesychius’ discernment of distinct traditions is interesting. It indicates a certain variety of preferred methods and motifs. these should be

⁵⁹⁸ Ibidem, p. 163f.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibidem, p. 164f.

viewed in conspectus. Thus, the identification of Hesychasm with one of these, as with a form focussing on the 'Jesus Prayer' or 'Prayer of the Heart',⁶⁰⁰ is not justified. This specific tradition is named by Hesychius as the third on his list. (Considering that this step, of incessant invocation of the personal Lord, is not part of the Yoga Sûtra, nor of the eightfold or sixfold systems preceding it,⁶⁰¹ - it is to be assumed that this is of a different origin, presumably in Tantra.), The second type is motivated by the Neoplatonic movement of self-reversion of intellect, in transcending the realm of discursive thought, as explained by Palamas and other authors. The first type is explained and represented by Hesychius himself. The fourth type may have preserved a Brahmanic, and especially, Yogic tradition, which was represented in the Graeco-Roman by meditating in preparation for death.⁶⁰²

7.4.4. John of Carpathos

For links of Hesychasm to India, brief texts which have been included in the *Philokalia* are interesting. Their author is John of Carpathos (7th century). He is a native of Greece proper. Their titles are: *For the Encouragement of the Monks in India who had Written to Him: One Hundred Texts*⁶⁰³ and *Ascetic Discourse Sent at the Request of the Same Monks in India*.⁶⁰⁴ These texts do not contain any references to Indian scripture, but they show that a memory of connections to "monks in India" who practice Hesychasm is preserved by the *Philokalia*, for the collective memory of the Hesychast community. At the time of writing the Christian (Syriac) Church was already well established. This church traces its origins to the apostle Thomas as its founder. The apocryphal Acts of Thomas (2nd century) tell of the mission of Thomas Didymus (the twin) in India. However, the region and the names of Indian rulers given, locate his mission work in north-western India, in the dominion of a king Gondophares – in all likelihood Gondophar I (21 – 40

⁶⁰⁰ Tamcke, M. (2012). Das Herzensgebet von seinen Ursprüngen in der Orthodoxie bis zu seiner Rezeption im Westen", in: Ebert, A. and Lupu, C. (eds.), *Hesychia – das Geheimnis des Herzensgebets*. 2 vols., vol.1., (pp. 126-169). Munich: Claudius Vig, pp 140ff.

⁶⁰¹ Mallinson, J. and Singleton, M. (2017). *Roots of Yoga*, London: Penguin Classics, p 9f.

⁶⁰² Lacrosse, J. (2014). Plotin, Porphyre et l'Inde : un ré-examen, in : *Le Philosophoire* 2014/1 (n° 41), pp. 87 – 104. § 36. <https://www.cairn.info/revue-le-philosophoire-2014-1-page-87.htm>

⁶⁰³ St. John of Karpathos. (late 7th century C. E.). *For the Encouragement of the Monks in India who had Written to Him: One Hundred Texts*, Ed.: (1979). *The Philokalia*, vol. 1, (pp. 298-321). London: Faber & Faber,

⁶⁰⁴ St. John of Karpathos, *Ascetic Discourse Sent at the Request of the Same Monks in India*. Ed.: (1979). *The Philokalia*, vol. 1, (pp. 322-326). London: Faber & Faber.

A.D.). Both regions of India were connected to the Hellenistic and Roman empires, either by land route to the northwest, or by sea, to the south.

7.5. Earliest Testimonies from the Realm of the Egyptian Desert Fathers and Mothers

7.5.1. Evagrius Ponticus

Evagrius Ponticus (345 in Ivora, Pontus – 399 in Egypt) is a key figure for the connection between Egyptian monasticism and Byzantine philosophical theology. He combined the seclusion, sought by hermits in the Egyptian desert, and their quest for purification of the passions with Neoplatonic metaphysics of intellect. Facilitated by the Neoplatonic concept of the trifold soul, encompassing the vital impulses, passions, and desires and the intellectual, he defined the purpose of 'hesychia' in meditation.⁶⁰⁵ This, he states, does not only consist in the achievement of peace of mind before God by inner transformation, but also in the divinisation of soul by recollection of intellect towards God. He relates the motif of 'dispassion' (ἀπάθεια), to that of 'hesychia' and to the intellectual processes, as condition for a clear understanding of the own soul as well as of other beings and of the Divine. Palamas refers to it, quoting Evagrius:

The Intellect which is recollected in itself... does not contemplate anything sensory or rational anymore, but the naked intellects and divine luminous phenomena, from which peace and joy come forth.⁶⁰⁶

Thus, he combines the idea of clairvoyant insight into the essential nature of intellectual beings by means of meditation – also described in the Yoga tradition – with the recollection of intellect and with luminous perception in a common theological-philosophical frame. Evagrius combines the purificatory self-explorations of the Egyptian monks with the self-awareness and recollection of intellect, towards union with God. He explains that 'incessant prayer' serves to dispel

⁶⁰⁵ Guillaumont, A. (1982). Evagrius Ponticus. *Theologische Realenzyklopädie (TRE)*, vol. 10, (pp. 565–570). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter), p. 566.

⁶⁰⁶ Evagrius Ponticus, *De mal. cog.*, XVIII. Loc. cit. Palamas, *Triads*, I.3.40

intrusive thoughts.⁶⁰⁷ Thus he connects the 'Jesus-Prayer' with the figure of divinising self-recollection of intellect. This is important for the understanding of the development of Hesychasm, integrating traditions of Egyptian monasticism. Evagrius also presents the idea that in meditation the prayer of the Hesychast could fuse with the 'divine prayer' by which illumination would be achieved.⁶⁰⁸ In his reports about Egyptian monasticism he does not mention any method of breathing meditation. However, he mentions luminous phenomena, which he interprets as illuminations of the spheres which surround the Soul, during meditation.⁶⁰⁹

7.5.2. Isaiah the Solitary

He is a representative of the Egyptian Desert monastic tradition, moving from here to Gaza where he died in the late 5th century.⁶¹⁰ He has the motifs of disengaging the senses from all external stimuli and of a recollection of all senses in a clear perception of a unified state. Of this, he declares that it is close to God:

The monk should shut all the gates of his soul, that is, the senses, so that he is not lured astray. When the intellect sees that it is not dominated by anything, it prepares itself for immortality, gathering its senses together and forming them into one body. [...] If your intellect is freed, the breach between it and God is eliminated.⁶¹¹

This idea is similarly expressed by Evagrius Ponticus. Two reasons for this instruction are given here. The one is that the senses inevitably connect a person to distractions and desired objects, thus making a person susceptible to sin. The idea is expanded in the texts and is common to the thought of Egyptian monasticism. However, this does not explain why the inner collection of the senses and the withdrawal of the mind should in any way unite a person with God. This is quite different from the instruction to keep the

⁶⁰⁷ Spanu, N., (2015). The Method of Unceasing Prayer in Evagrius Ponticus and John Cassian. *E-Patrolagos*, 2015, 1/2, (pp. 47-60), p. 53

⁶⁰⁸ Evagrius Ponticus, *De Oratione*, 149. Loc. cit. Palamas, *Triads*, I.3.40

⁶⁰⁹ Evagrius Ponticus, *Deo oration*. Ed. Evagrius the Solitary, *On Prayer: One Hundred and Fifty-Three Texts*. In: (1979). *The Philokalia*, vol. 1, (pp. 55-71). London: Faber & Faber.

⁶¹⁰ *Saint Isaiah the Solitary – Introductory note*. In: (1979). *The Philokalia*, vol. 1, p. 21. London: Faber & Faber.

⁶¹¹ Saint Isaiah the Solitary, *On Guarding the Intellect: Twenty-Seven Texts*. Ed.: (1979). *The Philokalia*, vol. 1, (pp. 22-28). London: Faber & Faber, p. 22.

memory of Jesus permanent in mind. The advice here does not imply an 'I-Thou-relation', but an inner closeness, as expressive of an inner unity. This agrees with the Neoplatonic idea of ascent to God by withdrawal of the senses and of any figurative, discursive thought, to transcend towards God inwardly by the movement of intellect to its divine source. The figure of thought also coincides with Vedāntic thought of a unity between Brahman, i.e., the supreme Divine and Ātman, its presence in the innermost core of man.⁶¹² Now there are no indications that Isaiah adheres to these beliefs or shares them consciously. However, their presence in his texts, coupled to instructions about meditation, may well point to motifs adopted directly or indirectly, from Indian sources in the realm of Alexandria and introduced to nascent Hesychasm, to be reinterpreted on a Neoplatonic basis by writers such as Evagrius Ponticus and several authors after him.

7.5.3. St. Mary of Egypt

An important paradigmatic saint whom Palamas refers to as an early example of a Hesychast life is St. Mary of Egypt (344 – 421 A.D.). Palamas calls her: "Mary the Egyptian or rather: the heavenly Mary"⁶¹³ indicating his high esteem for her and her extraordinary spiritual powers and experiences which he discusses for Hesychasm. It is to the honour of Palamas that he does not present her as a converted harlot – in the image in which she was soon depicted – callously misrepresenting her wildly sensuous life as prostitution and deliberately ignoring her emphasis that this was not the case, that she was not a venal person. The image of her as a harlot unfortunately persists to this day, from mediaeval hagiography to representations of her on several Orthodox and Catholic websites, as a brief search readily shows. It conveys a posthumous insult of her noble character. Unfortunately, the confusion of sensuality with venality does not only betray the mindset of those who do so but misunderstands the dynamics of the conversion of St. Mary at about the age of 30 to an ascetic life of solitary meditation. These appear from her description of her life as recorded by St. Zosimos of Caesarea (4th century) who met her several times before her death by the river Jordan.⁶¹⁴ He became

⁶¹² Deussen, P. (1906). *Das System des Vedānta: nach den Brahma-Sūtra's des Bādarāyaṇa und dem Kommentare des Ṣaṅkara über dieselben als ein Compendium der Dogmatik des Brahmanismus vom Standpunkte des Ṣaṅkara aus*, (2. ed.). Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, p. 165.

⁶¹³ Palamas, *Triads* I.3.31

⁶¹⁴ Orthodox Church in America (eds.). (2015). *[The Orthodox Faith / Lives of the Saints]. Venerable Mary of Egypt*. <https://oca.org/saints/lives/2015/04/01/100963-venerable-mary-of-egypt>

her biographer. Conscientiously Zosimos describes her life before she became a hermit in Jordan valley:

I was born in Egypt and when I was twelve years old, I left my parents and went to Alexandria. There I lost my chastity and gave myself to unrestrained and insatiable sensuality. For more than seventeen years I lived like that and I did it all for free. Do not think that I refused the money because I was rich. I lived in poverty and worked at spinning flax. To me, life consisted in the satisfaction of my fleshly lust.⁶¹⁵

After a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, she embarked on the life of a hermit, living in the form of a 'naked sage', as traditional with the shramanas. Zosimas conscientiously records this trait. Looking back on a life of 47 years as a recluse she describes her experience of the spiritual light. She told him her development and the spiritual transformation her passionate state:

'Believe me, Abba Zosimas,' the woman said, 'I spent seventeen years in this wilderness [...], fighting wild beasts: mad desires and passions. When I began to eat bread, I thought of the meat and fish which I had in abundance in Egypt. I also missed the wine that I loved so much when I was in the world, while here I did not even have water. I suffered from thirst and hunger. I also had a mad desire for lewd songs. I seemed to hear them, disturbing my heart and my hearing. Weeping and striking myself on the breast, I remembered the vow I had made. At last I beheld a radiant Light shining on me from everywhere. After a violent tempest, a lasting calm ensued.'⁶¹⁶

This is one of the very earliest records of the experience of divine light and of its transformative effect from the context of Christian asceticism. Palamas rightly refers to her as a paragon for the Hesychast spiritual perception and transformation. She may well be regarded as one of the earliest recorded representatives of the Hesychast experience.

⁶¹⁵ Idem

⁶¹⁶ Idem.



Festal Icon of St. Mary of Egypt with scenes of her life. Bely Gorod, 17th century.

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/49/Mary_of_egypt2.jpg

In her commemoration female Hesychasts are encoded. They reappeared in Modernity. Of women in Hesychasm in Palamas' time, only traces exist. Considering however, that some women are remembered among the hermits of the Egyptian desert, of the 4th century,⁶¹⁷ and, that women engaged in spiritual practice are also remembered in the tradition of Yoga, Pythagoreanism, and Neoplatonism, it is likely that there have also been women engaging in Hesychasm from early on.

⁶¹⁷ Schulz, G. and Ziemer, J. (2010). *Mit Wüstenvätern und Wüstenmüttern im Gespräch – Zugänge zur Welt des frühen Mönchtums in Ägypten*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, p. 78.

8. The Eight Steps of Yoga, Hesychasm, and the Contribution of Tantra

8.1. The Eight Steps of Yoga (Ashtānga) according to Patañjali, and Hesychasm

The sequence of steps that Pseudo-Symeon describes as Hesychast method are very similar to those of Yoga, as a comparison with the 'eight steps of Yoga' shows. They are enlisted in the classical handbook of Yoga by Patañjali (written before 400 C. E.), the *Yoga-Sūtra*. It is the "earliest extant codification of Yogic analysis and practice"⁶¹⁸ The exact historical identification of its author, Patañjali, is difficult. Legend fused him with Patañjali the Grammarian, who lived in the 2nd century B.C. The language of Patañjali the Grammarian differs from that of the *Yoga Sūtra*. The author 'Patañjali' who composed the *Yoga Sūtra* lived in the 3rd century C. E.⁶¹⁹ according to elder views, or in the 4th century, according to recent scholarship.⁶²⁰

The eight steps, 'Ashtānga', of Yoga are:

1. 'Yama': the 'disciplines', to follow ethical commandments, to purify one's life, in non-violence, and truthfulness, and to abstain from greed and desire, to. This step is represented by Ps.-Symeon the New Theologian by the requirement to follow the commandments in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.
2. 'Niyama': the 'restraints', five rules comprising purity of body and mind', contentment, spiritual practise, study of sacred scripture, devotion to God
3. 'Āsanas': the bodily postures, and figures of movement, in meditation, especially the posture of being seated upright, motionless, as in the 'lotus-seat', depicted in numerous classical representations. Yoga has numerous postures, āsanas, which are related to the body and its energies ('nādis'). In the Middle Ages, hundreds of forms of āsanas, and more variations, have been developed in Hatha-Yoga, as from the 9th century onwards. However, scholars

⁶¹⁸ Miller, B. S. (1998). *Yoga – Discipline of Freedom. The Yoga Sūtra Attributed to Patañjali*. (transl., cmt., introd., and glossary). New York: Bantam Books, p.6f.

⁶¹⁹ Ibidem, p.6.

⁶²⁰ Nakamura, H. (2004). *A History of Early Vedanta Philosophy*. Part Two, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, p. 678f. [Original: (1950). *Shoki No Vedanta Tetsugaku, Iwanami Shoten*. Tokyo.]

in the staff of Alexander the Great describe Yogis enacting different āsanas, remaining in these postures for hours.

4. 'Prāṇāyāma': structured breathing. It comprises deliberate inhalation, as means of drawing in 'spirit', 'prāṇa', understood as 'breath of life which pervades all things', into the body, retention of breath, and of 'prāṇa', to allow it to take effect there, and deliberate exhalation.⁶²¹
5. 'Pratyāhāra': the 'withdrawal' of all sensory and intellectual attention from outward objects, and from all distractions⁶²²
6. 'Dhāranā': 'binding' and focussing the mind on one point, in calm concentration,
7. 'Dhyāna': 'meditation', in stillness. It may be to attain a state of 'non-dual' awareness, in union with the Divine, or may be focussed on God, or on manifold manifestations of the Divine in the form of different deities, or on aspects of them, in apophatic or kataphatic contemplation.
8. 'Samādhi': the state of blissful union in which the meditating person becomes one with the Divine.⁶²³ It can manifest itself as 'spiritual light', inwardly or outwardly, and in other forms and modes of perception. It is experienced as 'divinisation'.

Further details are restrained breathing in Hesychasm, mentioned e.g., by Gregorios Sinaites, manifold luminous phenomena, specific intense sensations at the 'energetic centres', the 'chakras', and the 'Mantra Prayer', of continuously repeated invocation of Jesus Christ, in conjunction with breathing. They probably derive from Tantra and are to be included here. The very idea of introducing the 'mind' or intellect into the body, is far more Tantric than Yogic.

The attainment of extraordinary powers of knowledge, discrimination, and clairvoyance, which are reported in Yogic literature, are considered as effects of successful meditation of Yoga.⁶²⁴ The luminous phenomena are part of these. Further motifs in Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra* are the heart as focal point of meditation, the self-translucent intellect, the transformation from embodied practice into a perennial state of

⁶²¹ Iyengar, B. K. S. (2013). *Light on Prāṇāyāma*. London: Harper Thorsons, p. 114f. [1st ed. 1981].

⁶²² Pratyāhāra. (2011). In W. Huchzermeyer, *Das Yoga-Lexikon*, Karlsruhe: Edition Sawitri, p. 230f.

⁶²³ Rāja-Yoga. (2011). In: W. Huchzermeyer, *Das Yoga-Lexikon. Sanskrit – Āsanas – Biographien – Hinduismus – Mythologie*, Karlsruhe: Edition Sawitri, p. 227.

⁶²⁴ Siddhi. (2011). In: W. Huchzermeyer, *Das Yoga-Lexikon. Sanskrit – Āsanas – Biographien – Hinduismus – Mythologie*, Karlsruhe: Edition Sawitri, p. 272f.

mind-control, its interiorisation, the experience of a transfiguring light, and the development of extra-sensory and paranormal knowledge.⁶²⁵

These numerous equivalences in details and in the overall sequence of the descriptions of Hesychast and Yogic practice extend to the whole range of the eight limbs, the 'ashtanga' of Yoga. To limit them to the one to four elements commonly received as 'Yoga' abroad of India, especially in the West, would be fallacious. The 'Āsanās' of 'postural Yoga', often labelled as 'Yoga', cannot be fully understood without their context in 'ashtanga'. This applies even more to 'Prāṇāyāma', 'Pratyāhāra', and 'Dhāranā', that are all most important for comparison with Hesychasm, and for the understanding of 'Yoga'. This extends to all eight limbs.

For comparisons, the instructions on the setting of meditation and the required preparations, must be included. The theoretical reasons and explanations given for all eight steps must be included too. These comprise reasons for the need of reducing attachment to any images of form and shape, both to external and internal stimuli, that cause distraction, the element of self-translucent intellect, the description of the experienced transcendental, luminous experiences, of transformation of awareness and consciousness and the development of special faculties and manifestations. All of these show such correspondence in detail – despite some differences – that formative influence of Yoga on Hesychasm is firmly supported. The pathways of commerce, and the intensive spiritual exchange between the Graeco-Roman and the Indian realms over a millennium, indicate that a sound basis for such reception existed, in many ways.

A core feature of similarity to Yoga is given by the defining feature of Hesychasm's symbolic practice: the figure of drawing in the Holy Spirit (pneuma), or of intellect (nous), into the body, as described by Palamas, by breathing as the vehicle of the Holy Spirit.⁶²⁶ This complex contains distinctly philosophical notions about the relations between these realms, and about the role of performance, that it is inconceivable that it could have arisen merely for the pragmatic reason of aiding concentration in prayer, as is sometimes maintained. The concepts corresponding to 'pneuma', and its practice, are 'prāṇa' and 'Prāṇāyāma'. Prāṇa has several meanings which are associated with one another: 'air', 'life-force' and 'breath of life'. It can signify the air that one breathes, but also, in Yoga

⁶²⁵ Patañjali, (400 C. E. latest). *The Yoga Sūtra*. Ed. Swami Vivekananda (Sanskrit text, transl., and cmt.), (1896). *Patañjali Yoga Sūtras* [First publ. as: *Raja Yoga*. New York: Brentano].

<http://www.yogaincentro.it/uploads/file/PatañjaliYogaSūtraSwamiVivekanandaSanEng.pdf>

⁶²⁶ Palamas, *Triads*, I.2.7

scripture, the all-pervasive cosmic energy, which is introduced into the body by deliberate breathing.⁶²⁷ The Yogic practice which is associated with this complex of meanings is Prāṇāyāma. It motivates the structured breathing with deliberate, slow, and deep inhalation, retention of breath and exhalation. Thus, transcendent prāṇa is spread in the body.⁶²⁸ It is an essential element of Yoga.

The concept of 'prāṇa' with its physical, and its transcendent meaning, supports Prāṇāyāma. It is mirrored in Hesychasm, in theory and practice. By deliberate inhalation, 'transcendent energy' of divine quality is spread through the body, and into specific sites of it. It is understood as means of 'incorporating' this transcendent, all-pervasive energy. In Orthodox understanding, the Holy Spirit is likewise believed to be pervasive in the world. In Neoplatonism intellect likewise is attributed energetic aspects, beyond consciousness.

8.2. Self-Awareness, Compassion and Purification: Transformation in Yoga and Hesychasm

Aspects of transformation of the person through meditation shall be considered first for Hesychasm, then for Yoga. Transformation by Hesychasm affects the person and the relations with the environment, as Palamas reports. Among these are natural and supernatural phenomena. Although he does not deal extensively with the issue, Palamas gives serious attention to the supernatural gifts reported of some saints. He does not set these phenomena aside as a class of their own but regards them as results of the spiritual transformation effected. He presents a continuum of what are called 'natural' and 'supernatural' phenomena in modern terms. The common denominator is the effectiveness of the Holy Spirit in man and beyond. The transformative effects of the divine Pneuma cover a wide range. To deal with the supernatural phenomena separately is justified due to their separate and disputed epistemological status in modern times.⁶²⁹

⁶²⁷ Prāṇa. (2011). In W. Huchzermeyer, *Das Yoga-Lexikon. Sanskrit – Āsanās – Biographien – Hinduismus – Mythologie*, Karlsruhe: Edition Sawitri, p.217f.

⁶²⁸ Prāṇāyāma, in: Ibidem, p.218f.

⁶²⁹ Hammer, O. (2001). *Claiming Knowledge – Strategies of Epistemology*, Leiden, Boston: E.J. Brill, pp. 303ff.

These phenomena are not peripheral to Hesychasm, and to Palamas, or to Yoga. They need to be included here.

An important step in Hesychast practise is the 'purification of the passions', since the soul is central to the experience of Hesychasm as the organ which connects body and mind, the mundane and the divine. It is of an essentially ambiguous and mediating nature. Plato coined the *Allegory of the Chariot*⁶³⁰ with two horses as image for the soul, by which the person, represented by the charioteer, is either drawn upwards to the divine, by the one horse, or downwards into the realm of passions and desires, by the other:

First the charioteer of the human soul drives a pair, and secondly one of the horses is noble and of noble breed, but the other quite the opposite in breed and character. Therefore, in our case the driving is necessarily difficult and troublesome.⁶³¹

This image conveys the view of the soul as a composite entity. Palamas alludes to it.⁶³² The 'care of the soul', in particular attention to desires and emotions, and persistent watchfulness are essential to Hesychast practise. Time and again Palamas underscores that Hesychasm is not solely a matter of enhanced awareness and an extension of the range of perception, but the fruit of a psychophysical transformation which he describes as purification.⁶³³

Palamas discusses the relation of Hesychasm to passions and emotions. He cherishes them and despises Barlaam for his omission of this dimension of being a human:

But the philosopher [Barlaam], it seems, has heard, and imagined much about dispassion, but he has not understood that insensitivity is something bad, which is despised by the Church Fathers. There is a good suffering: that which is the opposition of such callousness. There are also common activities of the soul and the body which are useful, or which even lead to a perfection of the

⁶³⁰ Plato. (late 5th century B. C. E.). *Phaedrus*, 246a–254e. <http://www.ellopos.net/elpenor/greek-texts/ancient-greece/plato/plato-phaedrus.asp>

⁶³¹ Idem

⁶³² Palamas, *Triads*, I.3.45

⁶³³ Palamas, *Triads*, II.2.20

soul, if it is true that this perfection come from obeisance to the divine commandments. But if such actions come from the body, how much more do they stem from the passionate part of soul, which is immediately connected to the Spirit, because the body is only attached to the Spirit by means of the passionate part of Soul.⁶³⁴

This argument is fundamental to the anthropology of Hesychasm. Together with the positive appraisal of the body, passions as such are appreciated, as natural energies of the soul. This includes the lower, vital passions. Their eminent role is acknowledged in the framework of Neoplatonic anthropology as being expressions of soul, the element that connects body and both the human and divine intellect. This argument shows that the theory of Hesychasm cannot be understood well in the perspective of the mind-body-dualism, in which feelings are regarded as utterances of pleasure or displeasure of the body.

Palamas' criticism of Barlaam as being heartless and disinterested in feeling, is reinforced by his reminder that the realm of emotions is essential to the Church Fathers. Now Palamas does not base his argument on Christ's command, to love one's neighbour, but on systematic considerations of anthropology. The perspective on emotions and the body here is not that of the 'body of desires' – which is acknowledged nevertheless – but of the 'body of emotions', comprising their whole range. The image of a transformation of the body through luminous transfiguration is also applied to the realm of passions. They are recognised as expressions of the 'energies of the soul', which are to be included in transfiguration. The ideal is that of common actions of body and soul, or of a fusion of the energies of body and soul towards Hesychast luminous transformation. Divinisation of soul includes the passions. This agrees well with the psychoanalytic understanding of man. Hesychasm does not strive for a repression of passions but for their transformation, as Palamas explains.⁶³⁵ The appreciation of emotions, exemplified in the expression of the 'gift of tears'⁶³⁶, attests to this emotionalism of Hesychasm, which has been its hallmark ever since.

⁶³⁴ Palamas, *Triads*, II.2.22

⁶³⁵ Palamas, *Triads*, II.2.19

⁶³⁶ Palamas, *Triads*, II.2.17

Palamas describes the emotional processes of self-reflection before God, thus the emotional side of divinisation, as a veritable catharsis. He is adamant about the inclusion of emotions and passions in this process:

There is a type of experiences which is not only sacred but natural: the feelings which we have teach us, in the encounter with things outside. They are for us like images of divinising perfection, which the Spirit gives us and whose principle is the fear of God, by which the passionate part of the soul – not being mortified in its attachments, as the philosopher believed and taught us – transforms itself into a God-loving energy, and gives rise to a salvific and happy ruefulness, which brings along the 'ablution of forgiveness' and a call to divinisation, which are the tears of penitence or change. These God-beloved cathartic tears ... illuminate the eyes of the soul.⁶³⁷

This emotional process accompanies the development and transformation of the Hesychast. In a Psychoanalytic view, it is important that Palamas stresses that this development is not brought about by suppression of evil and illicit emotions or passions, but by recognising and acknowledging them for what they are – in the perspective of God. They are to be relived, remembered, and let loose, possibly in ruefulness and even sorrow. Only then will catharsis set in. This process is perfectly analogous to the cathartic procedure of Psychoanalysis,⁶³⁸ where the attention to all passions, regardless of their quality, often leads to a rueful self-acceptance, also to a relinquishing of some passions, and to a breakthrough to a new identity and self-acceptance, which is quite often a tearful process, as repressed or mortified feelings and passions emerge to consciousness and acceptance. Palamas shows a keen understanding of this process of emotional catharsis by attention to the repressed and unacceptable feelings and impulses.

This element of dedication to the emotions, desires and impulses and the art of transforming them surpasses what Neoplatonic strove for. The Christian emphasis on love, compassion, purity of heart is evident. In a theoretical perspective it may be found

⁶³⁷ Idem

⁶³⁸ Kathartische Methode oder kathartisches Heilverfahren. In J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis. (1977). *Das Vokabular der Psychoanalyse*, 2. Vols. Frankfurt a. M. : Suhrkamp, vol. 1, pp. 247–249. [original title: *Vocabulaire de la Psychoanalyse*. (1967). Paris: Presses Universitaires de France].

to be the continuation of the idea of 'incarnation' and the exploration of the interior aspects of embodied man. Hesychast culture is embedded in a communal setting, with periods of seclusion to promote self-exploration and self-encounter in the context of spiritual search for God but accommodating long periods of solitary life as hermits. It is a pattern that was developed in early Christianity with the fathers and mothers of the Egyptian desert, to whom Hesychasm traces its origins.⁶³⁹ The processes of formation of the soul, the encounter with its light and dark emotions, their recognition and transformation belong to a communal setting where the novices receive instructions by their spiritual guides.

The exploration and guidance of the soul in Christian monasticism, especially in Hesychasm, was rediscovered in Pietism.⁶⁴⁰ Pietists were avid readers of Orthodox spiritual literature, adopting the culture of emotional introspection and dedication to transformation. It is a movement which has shaped late 18th century culture too. Some literary and philosophical authors of Romanticism were rooted in Pietism. Together with Roman Catholics, formed in the tradition of introspection they have laid the groundwork for Psychoanalysis.⁶⁴¹ The agreements are not coincidental.

The prescription for meditation in Hesychasm begins with this element. Pseudo-Symeon the New Theologian (12th century) writes:

In short, if you do not guard your intellect you cannot attain purity of heart, so as to be counted worthy to see God [cf. *Mt.* 5:18]. Without such watchfulness you cannot become poor in spirit, or grieve, or hunger and thirst after righteousness, or be mercifully or pure in heart, or a peacemaker, or be persecuted for the sake of justice [cf. *Mt.* 5: 3 – 10]. To speak generally, it is impossible to acquire all the other virtues except through watchfulness.⁶⁴²

This combination of meditation and inner ethical transformation is also taught in Yoga. Patañjali states the requirement for emotional and ethical transformation in sūtra I, 33:

⁶³⁹ Schulz, G. and Ziemer, J. (2010). *Mit Wüstenvätern und Wüstenmüttern im Gespräch – Zugänge zur Welt des frühen Mönchtums in Ägypten*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, pp. 27ff.

⁶⁴⁰ Ellenberger, H. F. (1994). *The Discovery of the Unconscious – The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry*, (1st Ed. 1970). London: Harper Collins, pp. 18ff.

⁶⁴¹ Ibidem, pp. 55ff.

⁶⁴² St. Symeon the New Theologian, Attributed to St. Symeon the New Theologian, *The Three Methods of Prayer*, Ed.: (1995). *The Philokalia*, vol. 4, (pp. 67-75). London: Faber & Faber, p. 72f.

The mind is made clear by meditation on friendliness towards the happy, compassion for the suffering, goodwill towards the virtuous, and disinterest in the sinful.⁶⁴³

Śaṅkara (8th century) comments on this:

Practice of this all the time produces pure dharma, which does no injury to living beings; in this dharma makes the mind clear. When it is clear, it attains steadiness in one-pointedness; ... it is concentrated in samadhi, as the *Gita* says...⁶⁴⁴

What the sūtra and its commentator affirm – and presuppose – is an intrinsic link between dharma, i.e., righteousness, and the success of meditation. G. Feuerstein comments on this link with reference to pre-classical Yoga and the *Upanishads*:

Why is there this connection between ethics or morality (dharma) and spirituality (yoga)? According to an old Brahmanical model ... morality and the quest for ... spiritual freedom stand in a special relationship to each other...for the higher spiritual life can blossom only when it is securely founded on morality. Thus, it is not surprising that we should find many references to Yoga in the manuals on ethics and law which also regard liberation as the highest possible virtue, just as the Yoga scriptures mention all kinds of moral virtues in which the Yogi must be established or which he must cultivate.⁶⁴⁵

This link is likewise fundamental for Hesychasm. The desired aisthesis of divine light, as fruit of meditation, is held to be impossible without a spiritual and ethical transformation of the Hesychast. Georg Feuerstein's affirmation that the connection between meditation and ethical purification was also a taught in Yoga during the centuries of Greek and Roman contacts with India in Antiquity, supports the assumption that Yoga was not only

⁶⁴³ Śaṅkara, Adi, *On the Yoga Sūtras*. Ed. Leggett, Trevor (transl.). (1990). *Śaṅkara On the Yoga Sūtras – A Full Translation of the Newly Discovered Text*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publ, p. 146.

⁶⁴⁴ Ibidem, p. 147

⁶⁴⁵ Feuerstein, G. (1998). *The Yoga Tradition - Its History, Literature, Philosophy and Practice*, Prescott:: Hohm Press, p.207f.

received as a set of bodily practices, but that these were understood to part of an integral spiritual practice of which emotional introspection, purification and ethical development were indispensable parts. John Mallinson and Mark Singleton however point out that in later Tantric texts of Yoga the sections on ethics, the 'yamas' (the disciplines of ethical commandments) and 'niyamas' (self-control, involving ethics), tend to become dropped from the eight limbs of Yoga.⁶⁴⁶ It is a development which certainly influenced Western perceptions of Yoga, where its ethical aspects tend to be eclipsed from awareness and detached from the embodied practice.

Adi Śaṅkara (probably between 700 in Kerala and 750 C. E., possibly somewhat later), the great philosopher of Advaita Vedānta, discusses this development of reduction in Yoga treatises to omit the first two limbs of Yoga dedicated to ethics. Commenting on the eight methods listed in Patañjali's sūtra II, 29:

moral principles (yama), observances (niyama), posture (āsana), breath control (prānāyāma), withdrawal of the senses (pratyāhāra), concentration (dhāranā), meditation (dhyāna), and pure contemplation (samādhi).⁶⁴⁷

he writes:

(Opponent) But in other yoga scriptures there are only six methods – the ones from posture onwards.... For posture and those which follow it do directly help towards samādhi; not so restraints and observances.

(Answer) The objection does not hold, because following the restraints and observances is the basic qualification to practise yoga. The qualification is not simply that one wants to do yoga, for the holy text says: 'But he who has not first turned away from his wickedness, who is not tranquil and subdued, or whose mind is not at rest, he can never obtain the Self [Ātman, the divine core of soul] (even) by knowledge' (*Katha [Upanishad]* I, 2, 24).⁶⁴⁸

⁶⁴⁶ Mallinson, J. and Singleton, M. (2017). *Roots of Yoga*, London: Penguin Classics, p. 51

⁶⁴⁷ Patañjali. (400 C. E. latest). *Yoga Sūtra*, II.29, in: Miller, B. S. (1998). *Yoga – Discipline of Freedom. The Yoga Sūtra Attributed to Patañjali*. (transl., comm., introd., and glossary), New York: Bantam Books, p. 52.

⁶⁴⁸ Śaṅkara, Adi. (8th century C. E.). *On the Yoga Sūtras*. Ed. Leggett, T. (trans). (1990). *Śaṅkara On the Yoga Sūtras – A Full Translation of the Newly Discovered Text*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publ, p. 260.

Śaṅkara's explanation is in perfect agreement with Hesychasm. These eight steps correspond to Hesychast motifs. Moral principles ('yama') are named: "The moral principles are non-violence, truthfulness, abjuration of stealing, celibacy and absence of greed".⁶⁴⁹ Patañjali calls them universal principles that "are the great vow of Yoga"⁶⁵⁰. The same holds for Hesychasm. Here too meditation is bound to a life of monasticism, with celibacy, renunciation of possession and moral righteousness. This is a new development, which differs from the set of spiritual practices presented in the Bible, despite the agreement in some motifs. This specific combination, expressed in the eight limbs of Yoga, also marks Hesychasm. It supports its origins in Yoga.

On the observances ('niyama') Patañjali states: "The observances are bodily purification, contentment, ascetic practise, study of the sacred lore, and dedication to the Lord of Yoga"⁶⁵¹ The emphasis on these ascetic virtues, of ethical purification, study of Holy scripture and of devotion is also found in this combination in Palamas' treatise in defence of Hesychasm, even if the emphasis is slightly more on purity of the soul from passions than physical purity of the body. The two are however considered to be interrelated in Hesychasm. The contrast between a soiled and a pure condition is depicted in the contrast between the original 'beauty' of man's created state and his fallen condition which the Hesychast strives to overcome. Palamas writes:

However, as they also acknowledge, there are within us images of the demiurgic Nous, but what renders these images useless in the beginning, if not sin, and also ignorance, and misinterpretations of the commandments? ... Isn't it because the passionate part of the soul, arising to do evil, has corrupted them? Isn't it because it has distorted the perceptual faculty of the soul? ... For without purity, even if you study all of natural philosophy, since Adam up to the end, you will remain a fool no less and no sage.⁶⁵²

Some motifs, such as the restoration of original beauty and clear perception of the soul, have no direct correlation in Yoga. They can be translated however: if the motif of restoring the pure perceptual faculty of the soul to behold the divine 'demiurgic' intellect

⁶⁴⁹ Patañjali, *Yoga Sūtra*, II.30, in: Idem, p. 52.

⁶⁵⁰ Patañjali, *Yoga Sūtra*, II.31, in: Idem, p. 53.

⁶⁵¹ Patañjali, *Yoga Sūtra*, II.32, in: Idem, p. 53.

⁶⁵² Palamas, *Triads*, I.1.3

and its images ('icons') is detached from its temporal framing and related to the Yogic ideal of attaining perfect perception of divine intellect, 'purusha' by Yoga. In the idea that the perception of the divine intellect also comprises 'demiurgic' – i.e., transformative - properties, an uncanny resemblance between the Yoga of Patañjali and Palamas' Hesychasm emerges. For all their differences about what 'purification' might entail, both agree that the moral, ethical, psychic, and physical elements, with control of the passions and pursuit of ascetic life without greed are essential. This is so detailed, that a comprehensive reception of theory and method from Yoga to Hesychasm – most likely through Neoplatonism – must be assumed.

8.3. Āsanas and Chakras in Hesychasm and Tantra: 'Sitting Meditation' and 'Navel-Gazing'

The Hesychast posture of sitting in stillness and seclusion is described already by Evagrius Ponticus (345 – 399 C.E.) who lived as a monk (partly as hermit) in Egypt from 383 onwards, after theological studies with St Basil the Great and St. Gregory of Nazianzus, whom he accompanied to the Council of Constantinople in 381 as a theologian.⁶⁵³ His description of method is thus informed by theology and by monastic experience. After discussing the dissolution of bonds of attachment to friends, family, society, status, and social obligations, and the ascetic diet, a life in simplicity, poverty, and seclusion, he deals briefly with posture: "... you should consider now other lessons which the way of stillness teaches and do what I tell you. Sit in your cell and concentrate your intellect"⁶⁵⁴ Here the combination of sitting still and of focussing of the mind is significant, which he introduces as core features of 'the way of stillness' (of 'hesychia').

The feature of 'navel gazing', of focussing the gaze onto the centre of the belly, in conjunction with detachment of intellect and with a special technique of controlled breathing, is described by Pseudo-Symeon the New Theologian (12th century). He writes:

⁶⁵³ *Evagrius the Solitary – Introductory Note*. In (1979). *The Philokalia*, vol. 1, (pp. 29-30). London: Faber & Faber.

⁶⁵⁴ Evagrius the Solitary, *Outline Teaching on Asceticism and Stillness in the Solitary Life*. Ed.: (1979). *The Philokalia*, vol. 1, (pp. 31 – 37). London: Faber & Faber, p. 35.

Now if you would like to learn about the method of prayer, with God's help I will tell you about this too, in so far as I can. Above all else you should strive to acquire three things, and so begin to attain what you seek. The first is freedom from anxiety with respect to everything, whether reasonable or senseless – in other words, you should be dead to everything. Secondly, you should be completely detached, so that your thoughts incline towards nothing worldly, not even your own body. [...] persist and practise this task day and night. [...] Then sit down in a quiet cell, in a corner by yourself, and do what I tell you. Close the door and withdraw your intellect from everything worthless and transient. Rest your beard on your chest, and focus your physical gaze, together with the whole of your intellect, upon the centre of your belly or your navel. Restrain the drawing in of breath through your nostril, so as not to breathe easily, and search inside yourself with your intellect, so as to find the place of the heart, where all the powers of the soul reside.⁶⁵⁵

This instruction is remarkable in view of the question of origins of Hesychasm in Yoga by its combination of elements. The elements of Hesychasm here described have close equivalents in Yoga – even in their sequence and interrelations.

This instruction is illuminating, not only as source for the origins of the method of deliberate breathing in Hesychasm⁶⁵⁶, but also in view of the sequence in which it has its place:

- The first is detachment and dispassion, including freedom from fear. The Yogic tradition this is already described in the *Bhagavadgita*⁶⁵⁷ as feature of the Yogi.⁶⁵⁸

⁶⁵⁵ St. Symeon the New Theologian, Attributed to St. Symeon the New Theologian, *The Three Methods of Prayer*. Ed.: (1995). *The Philokalia*, vol. 4, (pp. 67-75). London: Faber & Faber. p. 72f.

⁶⁵⁶ Meyendorff, J. (1959). *Grégoire Palamas: Défense des saints hésychastes – Introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes*. Louvain: Université Catholique, p. 88, fn. 1

⁶⁵⁷ *Bhagavadgita*, 6.3–18

⁶⁵⁸ Feuerstein, G. (1998). *The Yoga Tradition - Its History, Literature, Philosophy and Practice*, Prescott: Hohm Press, p.7f.

- The second is the cessation of all thoughts and images. In Yoga it is called *prātyāhāra*.⁶⁵⁹
- The third then is the posture of sitting meditation. A firm sitting position is mentioned by A. Śaṅkara as basis for Yogic meditation.⁶⁶⁰ He describes several postures (*āsanas*), mentioned in Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra* II, 46. The first one, also depicted frequently, is the sitting posture the 'lotus seat', which serves as basis for breath control and meditation.⁶⁶¹
- As fourth element the fixation of the gaze on the belly and the navel region is described. This is a very specific posture, which developed in Hatha Yoga, called *Jālandhara bandha*. The regular posture in Yogic sitting meditation is to sit upright and to keep the gaze on the tip of the nose. In this posture, however, the chin is bowed down and the chin is pressed to the chest. The function of a 'lock' (*bandha*) is also applied in Hesychasm. Both in Hesychasm and in Yoga this posture is related to the region of the solar plexus, which is regarded as seat of vital energies. The reason for fixing one's gaze on this place, around the navel is not expressly motivated in Hesychast literature. It may not have been understood in the energetic aspect which Hatha Yoga ascribes to it. B. K. S. Iyengar explains it as follows: "The *jālandhara bandha* clears the nasal passage and regulates the flow of blood and *prāṇa* (energy) to the heart ...It also relaxes the brain and humbles the intellect..."⁶⁶² The elements of enabling a focus on the vital centre of the body and the connection of this practice to paving a way for *pneuma* – here understood as equivalent of *prāṇa* – to the heart, however been preserved.
- The fifth is the focus of intellect and attention here. This element is sometimes combined with the practice of fixation of attention or even images – as in Tantra – on special sites of the body, such as the heart. (In Yoga, as in Hesychasm, a development from imageless meditation to a visualization of the deity in the heart – such as of Christ - can be observed. (This may be another indication that some early Tantric Yogic features have been adopted into Hesychasm, supporting the

⁶⁵⁹ Mallinson, J. and Singleton, M. (2017). *Roots of Yoga*, London: Penguin Classics, p. 284f.

⁶⁶⁰ Śaṅkara, Adi, *On the Yoga Sūtras*. Ed. Leggett, T.(transl.). (1990). *Śaṅkara On the Yoga Sūtras – A Full Translation of the Newly Discovered Text*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publ., p. 261.

⁶⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 273

⁶⁶² Iyengar, B. K. S. (2013). *Light on Prāṇāyāma – The Definitive Guide to the Art of Breathing*, London: Harper Thorsons, [1st ed. 1981], p. 105.

idea that this 'flow' lasted up to the early 7th century and to the disruption of Byzantine trade and cultural exchange with India.)

- The sixth is is restrained breathing. This feature is connected to the posture of 'navel gazing' here in Hesychasm as in Hatha Yoga.

Patañjali mentions fixing one's concentration on the navel region. He discusses the method of 'dhāranā' – "binding the mind to one place"⁶⁶³ - as one of the inner methods of Yoga. The commentator Vyasa (5th – 6th century C. E.) adds: "Dhāranā is binding the mind to a place. It is binding the mind as a purely mental process to the navel circle, the heart lotus, the light in the head ...and to external objects".⁶⁶⁴

In the navel circle all the vital currents meet, as Śaṅkara explains.⁶⁶⁵ From here the plan of the body can be known, as Patañjali declares.⁶⁶⁶ In Tantric theory of 'chakras', the (seven) 'psycho-energetic centres', the navel chakra ('Manipura chakra') is associated with fiery vital energies.⁶⁶⁷ Some of this subtle physiology of 'energetic centres', with specific spiritual effects, appears to be preserved in Hesychasm at the time of Palamas, as a highly significant detail of Hesychast method evidences, that Barlaam reports. It was told to him by Hesychast monks:

They told me about their teachings concerning ... some kind of palpitations which occur around the navel, and finally about the union of our Lord with the soul which comes to pass within the navel in a manner perceived by the senses with full certitude of heart.⁶⁶⁸

The idea of unification with Christ in the navel region resonates with Tantric ideas about the 'navel chakra', the Manipura Chakra, and its spiritual, energetic, and physiological roles. Hesychasm has retained the 'āsana' of sitting meditation, with the gaze fixed on the navel region. Its symbolic meaning has been adapted to Christianity. The subtle

⁶⁶³ Patañjali, *Yoga Sūtra*, III.1

⁶⁶⁴ Idem

⁶⁶⁵ Leggett, T. (transl.). (1990). *Śaṅkara On the Yoga Sūtras – A Full Translation of the Newly Discovered Text*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publ., p.282.

⁶⁶⁶ Patañjali, *Yoga Sūtra*, III.29

⁶⁶⁷ Feuerstein, G. (1998). *The Yoga Tradition - Its History, Literature, Philosophy and Practise*, Prescott: Hohm Press, p.353.

⁶⁶⁸ Barlaam of Calabria, *Letter 5*. Ed. Giuseppe Schirò (ed.). (1954). *Barlaam Calabro. Epistole greche. I primordi episodici e dottrinari delle lotte esicaste*. Palermo, pp.323-4. Loc. cit: Ware, K. (2011). *Praying with the body: the Hesychast method and non-Christian parallels*. .

http://www.bogoslov.ru/en/text/2671134.html#_ftn15

physiology of Tantric Yoga however, is fundamentally preserved, with specific 'meanings' perceptions and method. The connection of this posture to the breathing method may have preserved the posture. Palamas omitted this detail in his depiction of Hesychast method. Therefore, Barlaam's documentation of this structurally most important element of method and conceptualisation is most important. It evidences the deeply Tantric character and internal logic of the Yogic complex received and preserved in Hesychasm at the time of Barlaam and Palamas. This adds significant detail to what Palamas describes of Hesychast method. (Barlaam recorded other significant details too, such as that of different colours of spiritual light, discussed further on.)

From Barlaam's report emerges, that the Hesychast monks did not only draw the 'mind' and awareness into the 'heart', but further down, into the 'navel region'. This is confirmed by their nickname as 'omphalo-psychai', as 'navel gazers'. The following Tantric features show up:

- 'intellect', i.e., 'awareness', is sent 'down', from the mind into the body. (It is not solely recollected in itself, in the organ of thought, or without bodily reference, in itself.)
- This process is conjoined with structured breathing. Breath becomes a medium for the drawing of awareness into the body, even beyond the lungs.
- It is conjoined with silence and cessation of thought.
- Besides other focal points of the body, such as the 'heart', the navel region is focussed on here, with awareness concentrated here.
- This focus gives rise to specific energetic experiences ('palpitations') of a distinct sensorily perceptible quality.
- It is experienced as union of the soul with Christ, in the navel region.
- Thus, the 'soul' is experienced to be present here too.
- This process is related to one of the 'heart', as a distinct centre of perception.
- This is perceived sensorily, beyond 'imagination'.

The 'axis' of ascent and descent implied here, resembles that of Tantra, the 'sushumnā'. On it the movements of 'awareness', 'breathing' and 'energy' go upwards and downwards.⁶⁶⁹ The 'physiological processes' of breathing and focus of attention 'downwards', into the body, correlate and coincide with an 'upward movement', towards

⁶⁶⁹ Feuerstein, G. (1998). *The Yoga Tradition - Its History, Literature, Philosophy and Practice*, Prescott: Hohm Press, p.352.

union with the 'transcendent', that can be experienced in different energetic centres ('chakras'), with distinct sensory and aesthetic qualities. This is experienced as intense, enlightening, with luminous perceptions.⁶⁷⁰ This detailed report confirms that Yogic Tantra must be regarded as source for Hesychasm too.

8.4. The Breath of God: Drawing the Spirit into the Heart in Hesychasm, and Prāṇāyāma in Yoga

In his brief description of elements of the method of Hesychasm, and of the understandings associated with them, Barlaam mentioned:

I was initiated by them [the Hesychast monks] into ... their teachings ... about certain noetic entries and exits through the nostrils in conjunction with the respiration....⁶⁷¹

Here again, significant details are reported by Barlaam, as 'Hesychast teachings', thus as theoretically conceptualised practices and experiences. The figure of "noetic entries and exits, through the nostrils, in conjunction with respiration", designates a meditation practice of structured breathing, by which the 'noetic, which connotes 'intellect' as well as the 'divine' (in Platonic understanding) is conjoined to breath, as its 'vehicle', and is introduced into the body and released, by passing through the nostrils, which refers to the specific technique of Tantric Yoga, as will be explained here. The idea is expressed clearly that by deliberate meditative breathing, something 'noetic', to be understood as 'divine pneuma', is introduced by the Hesychast and released. (Of the meaning of this 'release' we have no explanations by Barlaam. It might be reconstructed systematically.) This corresponds to the Yogic ideas of its connection to Prāṇā. The renowned teacher of Hatha Yoga, B. K. S. Iyengar, explains:

The art of inhalation (pūraka) and exhalation (rechaka):

1. Inhalation (pūraka) is the intake of cosmic energy by the individual for his growth and progress. ... It is the infinite uniting with the finite. It draws in the

⁶⁷⁰ Silburn, L. (1988). *Kuṇḍalinī. The Energy of the Depths. A Comprehensive Study Based on the Scriptures of Nondualistic Kashmir Shaivism* (transl. by J. Gontier), New York: SUNY Press, p. 64f.

⁶⁷¹ Idem

breath of life as carefully and as gently as the fragrance of a flower might be indrawn and distributes it evenly throughout the body. [...]

3. To understand this art, it is essential to know its methodology, what is right and wrong and what is gross and subtle. Then one can experience the essence of prāṇāyāma. It is helpful to note that the relationship between consciousness (chitta) and breath (prāṇa) should be like that between a mother and her child. But before this can happen the lungs, the diaphragm and the intercostal muscles must be trained and disciplined by āsana so that the breath moves rhythmically. [...]

7. In inhalation, the sādḥaka attempts to transform his brain into a receiving and distributing centre for the flow of energy (prāṇa). [...]

9. Exhalation (rechaka) is the breath that goes out after inhalation. [...]

10. Exhalation is the outflow of the individual energy (jivātmā) to unite with the cosmic energy (Paramātmā). It quietens and silences the brain. It is the surrender of the sādḥaka's ego to and immersion in the Self [Ātman].

11. Exhalation is the process by which the energy of the body gradually unites with that of the mind, merges into the soul of the sādḥaka and dissolves into cosmic energy. It is the path of return from the peripheries of the body towards the source of consciousness known as the path of renunciation (nivr̥tti mārga).⁶⁷²

This passage contains a configuration of motifs which are also characteristic for Hesychasm. Specific theological differences between Patañjali's, Śaṅkara's, and Iyengar's interpretations of some concepts of Vedāntic philosophy may be left aside here, for a comparison of essential features with Hesychasm. Details such as rhythmic breathing, as necessary auxiliary for the calming of the fluctuations of the mind, are

⁶⁷² Iyengar, B. K. S. (2013). *Light on Prāṇāyāma – The Definitive Guide to the Art of Breathing*, London: Harper Thorsons, [1st ed. 1981], pp. 114-116.

mentioned, likewise the necessity of diligent exercise. The conviction that the gross physical processes are related to subtle (pneumatic) ones is affirmed in Hesychasm. The recollection of the individual intellect as means of attaining union with the divine – and thus as pathway for divinisation – are described in relation to the breathing method, which is likewise essential for Hesychasm. The node in this practice is the connection between breath and *prāṇa*, and its introduction by deliberate inhalation and retention of breath, to distribute it. This is also important to Hesychasm, transferred to 'pneuma'.

The Yogic teachings about special breathing techniques in spiritual practise, *Prāṇāyāma*, have been mentioned by Patañjali (after 4th century C.E.).⁶⁷³ Their origins are however much earlier, with first traces in the Vedic texts, from 1500 B.C. onwards.⁶⁷⁴ The *Upanishads* (from the 8th century B.C. onwards) describe the link between quietening of the senses and of breathing, and mention the effect of 'siddhis' which can happen through such meditation.⁶⁷⁵

The *Yoga Sūtra*, 1, 33f. teaches about the breathing of 'prāṇa', which means both 'breath' and an all-pervading energy, which can best be translated as 'pneuma': "Tranquillity of thought comes through ... the measured exhalation and retention of breath. Or when the mind's activity, arisen in the sense world, is held still."⁶⁷⁶ At the beginning of the first series on method in the *Yoga Sūtra*, this notion is important, and corresponds to the concept of 'hesychia'. The instruction, to breathe with a moment of breath retention as means to achieve this state of mind, is quite specific. It is combined with the calming of activity of the mind, and inhibition of its sensory or imaginative connection to the world by 'stillness'. Patañjali describes the role of breathing technique thus:

Once harmony with the physical body has been achieved, through interruption of the movement engendered by inhaling and exhaling you attempt to harmonize your energy (*Prāṇāyāma*). Exhalation, inhalation, retention,

⁶⁷³ von Glasenapp, H. (1974). *Die Philosophie der Inder – eine Einführung in ihre Geschichte und Lehre*, 3rd. ed., Stuttgart: A. Kröner Verlag, p. 221.

⁶⁷⁴ Trökes, A. (2009). Hatha – Yoga. In C. Fuchs (ed.). *Der Weg des Yoga – Handbuch für Übende und Lehrende, hrsg. vom Berufsverband Deutscher Yoga-Lehrer*, (6th ed.), (pp. 97–218). Petersberg: Verlag Via Nova, p. 182f.

⁶⁷⁵ Ibidem, p. 184

⁶⁷⁶ Patañjali, *Yoga Sūtra*, I.33-35, in: Miller, B. S. (1998). *Yoga – Discipline of Freedom. The Yoga Sūtra Attributed to Patañjali*. (transl., cmt., introd., and glossary), New York: Bantam Books, p. 38.

technique, time, and number must be very precisely regulated over a lengthy period. The fourth Prāṇāyāma technique ultimately transcends breath retention after exhaling or inhaling. The veil covering the light of the true self then vanishes. And the mind develops the capacity for harmony with thoughts (dharana).⁶⁷⁷

Patañjali's instructions are more specific in the second chapter of the *Yoga Sūtra*:

(49) When the posture of Yoga is steady, then breath is controlled by regulation of the course of exhalation and inhalation.

(50) The modification of breath is exhalation, inhalation, and retention is perceptible as deep and shallow breathing, regulated by where the breath is held, for how long and for how many cycles.

(51) A fourth type of breath control goes beyond the range of exhalation and inhalation.

(52) Then the cover over the light of truth dissolves.

(53) And the mind is fit for concentration.

(54) When each sense organ severs contact with its objects, withdrawal of the senses corresponds to the intrinsic form of thought.

(55) from this comes complete control of the senses.⁶⁷⁸

This famed passage has several points of convergence with Palamas' instructions: Firstly, a steady and relaxed posture of Yoga is required, which equals that of sitting meditation with the focus inwards. Then breath control is prescribed, by modifying inhalation, exhalation, and the retention of breath – the peculiar feature also prescribed in Hesychasm. This is to be performed over many cycles, as Palamas likewise indicates. Barbara Stoler Miller comments this instruction:

⁶⁷⁷ Patañjali, *Yoga Sūtra*, II.49-53: Sadhana Pada (About the Practise). Loc. cit:

<http://www.ashtangayoga.info/philosophy/yoga-sūtra-Patañjali/chapter-2/>

⁶⁷⁸ Patañjali, *Yoga Sūtra*, II.49-55, in: Miller, B. S. (1998). *Yoga – Discipline of Freedom. The Yoga Sūtra Attributed to Patañjali*, pp. 57-59.

Breath control (prāṇayāma) involves the precise regulation of the rhythm of inhalation, retention, and exhalation of breath (prāna). The ability to control this vital force directs consciousness inward and concentrates it for meditation. ... According to Patañjali, in order to control breathing one must focus on the place within the body where breath is held...⁶⁷⁹

This echoes the connection Palamas sees between the goal of drawing intellect and attention inwards, into the body, to keep it there, and the movement of conscious and controlled inhalation, retention of breath and deliberate exhalation. Both, the movement of the mind, being directed inwards, and the movement of the body, in the control of breath, are seen as correlated and as influencing each other. In this exercise the movement of the body appears not only as instrumental for a mental process, but as immediately effective on it. Patañjali then mentions a fourth stage of controlled breathing. Stoler Miller comments on it:

Patañjali suggests that there is a fourth mode of breathing, which transcends the three processes of exhalation, inhalation and retention. This mode allows one to breathe effortlessly, thus dissipating the veil that obscures the true nature of things.⁶⁸⁰

The first three movements coincide with Palamas' report that the masters of Hesychasm: recommend them to control the movement inwards and outwards of the breath, and to hold it back a little; in this way, they will also be able to control the mind together with the breath until, with the aid of God, they have progressed to the point of having restrained the mind from becoming distracted by what surrounds it and have purified it and have led it to a 'unified recollection'.⁶⁸¹

This reflects unambiguously the 'structured breathing' of Yoga with its three stages. Not only the intake of breath, as means of introducing the Spirit (Pneuma) into the body, is

⁶⁷⁹ Miller, B. S. (1998). *Yoga – Discipline of Freedom. The Yoga Sūtra Attributed to Patañjali*. (transl., cmt., introd., and glossary), New York Bantam Books, p. 58.

⁶⁸⁰ Ibidem, p. 58

⁶⁸¹ Palamas, *Triads*, I.2.7. Ed. Gendle, N. (transl.) and Meyendorff, J. (ed. and intr.). (1933). *Gregory Palamas – The Triads*, Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, pp. 45f.

important, but also the retention of breath. Palamas explains that this leads the mind and intellect to a unified self-recollection, and to self-awareness, by which the divine shines through, and unfolds itself, within the body, the heart, the soul, or, as Barlaam's Hesychast informers told him, in the navel region.

The three movements of breathing in meditation should be practised for as long as necessary, according to Śaṅkara:

One can state that this recollection is a spontaneous effect of the attention of the mind, for the to-and-fro movement of the breath becomes quietened during intensive reflection, especially with those who maintain inner quiet in body and soul.⁶⁸²

The fourth state goes along with a state of mind, which Patañjali describes as removal of the veil of delusion about the true nature of things. This is a technical expression that does not denote an increase in denotative knowledge, but a holistic spiritual grasp of the essence of things, which reflects Palamas' expression of "unified recollection". It reminds of the Platonic motif of true and essential cognition by 'anamnesis'. Both Palamas and Śaṅkara declare that breath control becomes less important due to the mental transformation going on.

In Yogic tradition, greatly reduced breathing, achieved by advanced Yogic practise,⁶⁸³ is also mentioned, as evidence of transformation. Patañjali does not mention it but points out at the altered breathing and consciousness achieved by the inner transformation in meditation. About the effects of this structured breathing in Yogic meditation, he states at the end of this section: "Thereby is destroyed the covering of the light"⁶⁸⁴

The retention of breath, called 'kumbhaka' in the Yogic scriptures, is distinguished for its two moments, the retention of breath after inhalation: "antara or pūraka kumbhaka" and after exhalation: "bāhya or rechaka kumbhaka". B.K.S. Iyengar sums up the instructions of Yogic traditions on this very important element:

⁶⁸² Palamas, *Triads*, I.2.7. Ed. Idem

⁶⁸³ Miller, B. S. (1998). *Yoga – Discipline of Freedom. The Yoga Sūtra Attributed to Patañjali*. (transl., cmt., introd., and glossary), New York: Bantam Books, p. 58

⁶⁸⁴ Patañjali, *Yoga Sūtra*, II.52

1. Kumbhaka ... is the art of retaining the breath in a state of suspense. 2. It also means the withdrawal of the intellect from the organs of perception and action to focus on the seat of Ātman (purusa [i.e., the personal Lord]), of consciousness. It also keeps the sādḥaka [i.e., the meditating person] silent at the physical, moral, mental, and spiritual levels. 3. Retention of breath in kumbhaka should not be misinterpreted as re-tension of the brain, the nerves, and the body to hold the breath. Re-tensioning leads to hyper-tension. Kumbhaka has to be done with the brain relaxed so as to re-vitalise the nervous system. 4. When the breath is stilled in kumbhaka, the senses are stilled, and the mind becomes silent.⁶⁸⁵

Iyengar combines the description of certain physiological aspects in modern terms with elements from ancient Yogic scripture, as present e.g., in Śaṅkara's commentary on the (commented version of the) *Yoga Sūtra*.⁶⁸⁶ Iyengar unfolds aspects of experience attached to two forms of kumbhaka:

5. Kumbhakas are performed in two ways: sahita and kevala. When the breath is held intentionally and deliberately, this is sahita. Sahita kumbhaka is the pause in breathing (a) after full inhalation before commencing exhalation (antara or pūruka kumbhaka), or (b) after complete exhalation prior to starting inhalation (bāhya or rechaka kumbhaka). Kevala means 'by itself' or 'absolute'. Kevala kumbhaka is the pause in breathing ... as when an artist is totally absorbed in his art or a devotee is breathless with adoration. ... In this state one is completely absorbed in the object of one's devotion and isolated from

⁶⁸⁵ Iyengar, B. K. S. (2013). *Light on Prāṇāyāma— The Definitive Guide to the Art of Breathing*, London: Harper Thorsons, p. 121. (1st ed. 1981).

⁶⁸⁶ Śaṅkara, Adi, *On the Yoga Sūtras*, on Sūtra II.5.1. Ed. Leggett, Trevor (transl.). (1990). *Śaṅkara On the Yoga Sūtras – A Full Translation of the Newly Discovered Text*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publ., p. 277.

the world, experiencing a feeling of joy and peace which surpasses understanding...

6. Antara kumbhaka is the holding of the Lord in the form of cosmic or universal energy, which is merged into individual energy. It is the state where the Lord (Paramātmā) is united with the individual soul (jīvatmā).

7. Bāhya kumbaka is the state in which the yogi surrenders his very self, in the form of breath, to the Lord and merges with the Universal Breath.⁶⁸⁷

This elaboration contains experiential and theological statements which closely echo those of the Hesychast descriptions and the significance of this seemingly minor detail. It is thus more than likely that the agreement between Hesychasm and Yoga on such a significant detail of the breathing method of meditation is not coincidental, but the result of transmission.

8.5. The Place of the Heart in Hesychasm and Yoga

The 'heart' is unanimously understood as the ultimate centre of the human person in the *Bible*. Its functions unite the emotional and the intellectual. Yet no meditative practice has developed here, which involve the *heart* apart from the introspection and feeling inwards which are demanded. Hesychasm however has a distinct method of drawing breath – and with it, attention, intellect, and the Holy Spirit into the 'heart'. The origin of this method needs explanation. The reception of this method certainly needed no justification.

Pseudo-Symeon the New Theologian presents the 'heart' as realm of experience in his description of method after a shift of perspective from the method to the characteristic experiences. A section from his (above quoted) presentation of the Hesychast method and experience may be looked at in this perspective:

To start with you will find there darkness and an impenetrable density. Later, when you persist and practise this task day and night, you will find, as though

⁶⁸⁷ Iyengar, B. K. S. (2013). *Light on Prāṇāyāma– The Definitive Guide to the Art of Breathing*, London: Harper Thorsons, (1st ed. 1981), p. 121f.

miraculously, an unceasing joy. For as soon as the intellect attains the place of the heart, at once it sees things of which it previously knew nothing. It sees an open space within the heart, and it beholds itself entirely luminous and full of discrimination. From then on, from whatever side a distractive thought may appear, before it has come to completion and assumed a form, the intellect immediately drives it away and destroys it with the invocation of Jesus Christ. ... The rest you will learn for yourself, with God's help, by keeping guard over your intellect and by retaining Jesus in your heart.⁶⁸⁸

Here the connection between the 'heart' and 'intellect' is important. In Hesychasm the entry of intellect into the heart is linked to intellect's return into itself leading to divinisation of the whole person. When that is achieved, luminous perception of the inner self and realm is said to begin.

In Yoga too, the heart has a special role. It is perceived as the psychophysical centre and as the site of consciousness and self-awareness. The *Yoga Sūtra* mentions it only briefly: "On the heart, awareness of the mind".⁶⁸⁹ The first commentator, Vyāsa (5th – 6th century C. E.) expands it imaginatively: "In this city of Brahman is the small lotus which is the palace; in it is the consciousness. From samyāma [concentration, recollection leading to the transcendent] on it, awareness of the mind."⁶⁹⁰

Śaṅkara explains the image in the physiology of Yoga:

... a palace in that it is the many-channelled meeting-place of the various nerves. In it is the consciousness (vijñāna) the mind (citta). From samyama on it, on the lotus ... in the lake of the breast, ... which is the meeting-place of the life currents (prāṇa), comes awareness of the mind, the sattva.⁶⁹¹

⁶⁸⁸ St. Symeon the New Theologian, Attributed to St. Symeon the New Theologian, *The Three Methods of Prayer*. Ed.: (1995). *The Philokalia*, vol. 4, (pp. 67-75). London: Faber and Faber, p. 72f.

⁶⁸⁹ Patañjali, *Yoga Sūtra*, III.34

⁶⁹⁰ Leggett, Trevor (transl.), *Śaṅkara On the Yoga Sūtras – A Full Translation of the Newly Discovered Text*, Delhi, 1990: Motilal Banarsidass Publ., p. 337

⁶⁹¹ Ibidem, p. 337.

'Sattva' ('realness') is defined as "the luminous aspect of Nature. It is one of the three primary constituents of phenomenal existence".⁶⁹² As a state of consciousness, it is regarded as a form of manifestation of the divine, as experienced in meditation, according to the next sūtra (III, 35).⁶⁹³

In the development of Tantric Yoga, the 'heart' became ever more important. (It is a tendency also observable in Hesychasm.) Thus, the foremost author of Kashmir Shaivism, Abhinavagupta (950 – 1020 C. E.) writes on Tantric meditation:

Now as for the Supreme, as it is called here, there is meditation on it. The light, the freedom, whose essential nature is consciousness, contains within it all principles, realities, things. This light abides in the Heart. It has been described in this way in the *Trisiromata*: 'The knower of truth sees that reality within the Heart like a flower within which are all external and internal things, a flower shaped like a plantain bloom. He should meditate there with undistracted mind on the union there in the Heart...'.⁶⁹⁴

Here the experience of the divine, as luminous manifestation of all outer and inner things, of subject and object, is wholly located in meditation in the heart. This, in turn, is in the heart of the deity (of Shiva Bhairava), providing for the union of the mystic with the divine. For all the obvious theological differences to the Christian Orthodox conception of God, the phenomenological similarities and agreements in motifs are striking. They would merit further detailed comparison. They confirm our assumption, that Hesychasm has indeed been influenced by Yogic ideas and practices of early Tantra which came to be exposed in the Tantric literature of the same period in which Hesychasm came to be described and explained.

The 'heart' has been important in India as organ of communication with the Divine since Vedic times. Jan Gonda enlisted as meanings of the Heart in the *R̥g Veda*:

⁶⁹² Feuerstein, G. (1998). *The Yoga Tradition - Its History, Literature, Philosophy and Practise*, Prescott: Hohm Press, p. 273

⁶⁹³ Leggett, T. (transl.). (1990). *Śaṅkara On the Yoga Sūtras – A Full Translation of the Newly Discovered Text*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publ., p. 337.

⁶⁹⁴ Abhinavagupta, *Tantraloka*, 5.19b ff. Loc. cit.: Muller-Ortega, P. E. (2004). Luminous Consciousness: Light in the Tantric Mysticism of Abhinavagupta. In M. B. Kapstein, (ed.). (2004). *The Presence of Light – Divine Radiance and Experience*, (pp. 45–79). London: Chicago Univ. Pr., p.66.

1. 'the heart is the organ with which one is able to see what is denied to the physical eye.'
2. 'the heart is the organ by means of which one comes into touch with the Gods.'
3. it is the heart which enables a human being to penetrate into deep secrets and mysteries.' [...]
7. By finding, with or in the heart, the light of higher insight and contact with the transcendent one becomes an all-seeing ṛṣi.⁶⁹⁵

The concept of the 'heart' developed a range of meanings in the *Upanishads*. Its connection to the Divine was expanded. The very early *Bṛhad-Āraṇyaka-Upaniṣad* declares: "The heart (hṛdayam) that is Prajāpati [the Creator], that is Brahman, that is the universe."⁶⁹⁶ And: "This intellect (*puruṣa*) whose substance is mind, whose nature is light, dwells here inside the heart, as a grain of rice or a barley grain, - and the selfsame is the Lord of the universe ..."⁶⁹⁷ Here we find the motifs of spiritual light and intellect combined with the indwelling of God in the heart – a set of core motifs of Hesychasm and of its meditative process. (The *Bṛhad-Āraṇyaka-Upaniṣad* predates the time of Gautama Buddha.⁶⁹⁸)

The motif of 'breath' appears in connection with the *heart* in the *Chandogya Upanishad*,⁶⁹⁹ which is an old (8th – 7th century B. C.) and important text of Vedānta - the most relevant philosophy for the interpretation of Yoga in the period of its reception in Graeco-Roman Antiquity. It was probably known through the library of Alexandria with its store of translations commissioned by the Ptolemies.

In Tantric Yoga, the 'heart' became integrated in the system of 'chakras', of psycho-physical nodes in the body, including subtle, fine-mattered aspects. Thus P. E. Muller-Ortega explains for Kashmiric Tantra:

⁶⁹⁵ Muller-Ortega, P. E. (1989). *The Triadic Heart of Shiva. Kaula Tantricism of Abhinavagupta in the Non-Dual Shaivism of Kashmir*, Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, Indian Books Centre, p. 65.

⁶⁹⁶ *Bṛhad-Āraṇyaka-Upaniṣad* 5.3. Loc. cit: Deussen, P. (1921). *Sechzig Upanishad's des Veda*, (3rd ed.). Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, p. 490.

⁶⁹⁷ *Bṛhad-Āraṇyaka-Upaniṣad* 5.6.1. Loc. cit.: Ibidem, p. 429

⁶⁹⁸ Nakamura, H. (1983). *A History of Early Vedānta Philosophy*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, (Leggett, T., Mayeda, S., Unno, S., et al., transl.), p. 41.

⁶⁹⁹ *Chandogya Upanishad*, 3.12.4

...the term *hrdaya* refers most directly to the concepts of the Heart chakra that emerged from the Upanishadic and Yogic formulations. As a chakra the Heart functions as a precise locale within the subtle physiology of Yoga. This important nexus of the vital breaths, sensory perceptions and underlying consciousness is located in the general area of the physical heart. The chakra forms part of the subtle physiology perceived by the Yogis...⁷⁰⁰

Something similar may be stated for Hesychasm. While it has not developed a spiritual physiology to the degree of Tantra, it nevertheless has elements of it, adopted from the Neoplatonic system with its correspondence of cosmology and anthropology, as well as by Biblical motifs. On this basis the concepts of Yoga appear to have been intelligible and the meditation practice based on it receivable.

Apart from the topological aspects the dynamic features of the Heart are important in Yoga as in Hesychasm. The Heart is not only conceived as 'seat' of the divine (*Ātman*), but that it is understood as centre of (vital) 'channels', by which what is active in it spreads through the whole body, transforming it. This is reflected in Palamas' description of the 'heart' as 'hegemonikon' of the body. Speaking about intellect, with its role in divinisation, Palamas writes that some (Hesychasts) "hold its 'vehicle' to be the very innermost of the heart, and that which is itself distinct from the psychic soul".⁷⁰¹ The phrase: "the innermost of the heart" echoes the description of the divine *Ātman* as innermost within the soul. In Vedānta *Ātman* is understood as the divine trans-individual divine core⁷⁰² which echoes Palamas' distinction.

⁷⁰⁰ Muller-Ortega, P. E. (1989). *The Triadic Heart of Shiva. Kaula Tantricism of Abhinavagupta in the Non-Dual Shaivism of Kashmir*, Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, Indian Books Centre, p. 75.

⁷⁰¹ Palamas, *Triads* I.2.3

⁷⁰² Deussen, P. (1906). *Das System des Vedānta. Nach dem Brahma-Sūtras des Bādarāyana und dem Kommentare des Cankara über dieselben als ein Kompendium der Dogmatik des Brahmanismus vom Standpunkte des Cankara aus*, Leipzig: F. A Brockhaus, p. 189.

8.6. Prāṇa in Vedānta and Prāṇāyāma in Yoga

In the ancient *Upanishads*, the Vedic *Kaushītaki (Brāmana) -Upanishad* a long discourse on “Prāṇa” is contained. Here it is identified with the god Indra, who presents himself as Prāṇa.

Indra said: ‘I am prāṇa, meditate on me as the conscious self (prajñātman), as life, as immortality. Life is prāṇa, prāṇa is life. Immortality is prāṇa, prāṇa is immortality. As long as prāṇa dwells in this body, so long surely there is life. By prāṇa he obtains immortality in the other world, by knowledge true conception. He who meditates on me as life and immortality, gains his full life in this world, and obtains in the Svarga world immortality and indestructibility.’⁷⁰³

Inhaling prāṇa is mentioned in the next passage. This corresponds to the understanding of the Holy Spirit (‘divine pneuma’ as one of the three hypostases of God in Christian theology. (This certainly facilitated the reception of these Yogic concepts and practices into Hesychasm)

In the *Bhagavadgita*, composed about 5th -2nd century B. C. E., Prāṇayāma is referred to repeatedly. The concept of ‘Prāṇa’ covers a range of meanings. The differentiation goes far back in the *Upanishads*. It was unfolded in mediaeval Tantra. Thus G. Flood states: “... the precise meaning of the term Prāṇa varies with the levels of the cosmos and could be rendered as ‘consciousness’, ‘life’, ‘energy’, ‘breath’, ‘inhalation’ and ‘exhalation’ depending. Gross breath gives way to subtle breath...”⁷⁰⁴

This description converges with Hesychast instructions in practical and experiential regards.

As to the important concepts of ‘duality’ of subject and object in cognition and thought, and of ‘non-duality’, this may be translated into Neoplatonic concepts, where the notion that God is above all ‘difference’, defining the created, unfolded realm of existence.

⁷⁰³ The *Kaushītaki-Brāhmana Upanishad*. (6th century B. C. E.). III.2. Ed.: Müller, M., (transl., ed.). (1879). *The Upanishads*, pt.1. (pp. 271–311). Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 294.

<https://archive.org/stream/upanishads01ml#page/n13/mode/2up>

⁷⁰⁴ Flood, G. D. (1993). *Body and Cosmology in Kashmir Saivism*, San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, p.262.

This corresponds to the Advaitic idea of Brahman as being above 'being', as origin and creator of the unfolded reality.⁷⁰⁵ The concepts of Vedānta and of Neoplatonism are quite close. Since the differentiation of 'subject' and 'object' belongs to the world of 'being', it is of spiritual value to arrive at a 'unified perception', an intuition of the unity of reality which is conceived as self-awareness of the divine intellect⁷⁰⁶ and which is beyond words and concepts. The Advaitic idea that the supreme Brahman is present as Ātman in the human consciousness, is the basis for such perception. Palamas' idea that the divine Spirit turns towards itself in meditation, is close to these concepts. This idea of achieving unity with the divine by elimination of the barriers of multiplicity in a process of increasing 'unification' (henosis) converges with Neoplatonic ideas.

The link between meditative breathing, and drawing in of prāṇa, and unified intuition of the divine – as in Advaitic metaphysics – is provided by the identification of Brahman with prāṇa in Vedāntic tradition, as expressed in the *Chandogya Upanishad*: "Which then is that deity?' He said: 'Breath (prāṇa)'. For all these beings merge into breath and from breath alone they arise."⁷⁰⁷ Meditation is based hereon. Thus, in the *Yoga Sūtra* the idea is that by quietening breathing and calming the senses, the difference between object and subject can be eliminated:

Practicing Yoga with strength and in a relaxed manner gives rise to harmony with the physical body (āsana). The key to success in this regard is practice with effort, which becomes progressively easier, combined with deep contemplation (samapatti). This results in a victory over the duality of life.⁷⁰⁸

Affinity and difference of Yoga and Hesychasm may be observed here. The ascent to the divine by overcoming the duality of perception in the experience of a fundamental unity of Ātman and Brahman, experienced in in meditation,⁷⁰⁹ culminates in the realisation of

⁷⁰⁵ Deussen, P. (1906). *Das System des Vedānta. Nach dem Brahma-Sūtras des Bādarāyana und dem Kommentare des Cankara über dieselben als ein Kompendium der Dogmatik des Brahmanismus vom Standpunkte des Cankara aus*, Leipzig: F. A Brockhaus, pp. 139ff.

⁷⁰⁶ cf. Palamas, *Triads* I.2.7

⁷⁰⁷ *Chandogya Upanishad* I.11.5. Loc. cit: Deussen, P. (1906). *Das System des Vedānta. Nach dem Brahma-Sūtras des Bādarāyana und dem Kommentare des Cankara über dieselben als ein Kompendium der Dogmatik des Brahmanismus vom Standpunkte des Cankara aus*, Leipzig: F. A Brockhaus, p. 159.

⁷⁰⁸ Patañjali, *Yoga Sūtra* II.48. <http://www.ashtangayoga.info/philosophy/yoga-sūtra-Patañjali/chapter-2/item/tato-dvandva-an-abhighatah-48/>

⁷⁰⁹ von Glasenapp, H. (1974). *Die Philosophie der Inder – eine Einführung in ihre Geschichte und Lehre*, 3rd. ed., Stuttgart: A. Kröner Verlag, p. 149f.

the famous Vedāntic formula 'tat tvam asi' (this art thou) of Uddālaka Āruni.⁷¹⁰ In Hesychasm this is connected to the idea of 'eschatological restoration' of 'fallen' man and world by the transcendent divine reality. This gives Hesychasm its strong emphasis on ethics, and moral transformation of the person, as condition for the luminous vision, to the purification of the sinner and his transformation. Yoga and Hesychasm meet in the understanding that the (luminous) experience of the divine is one of a transcendent unity with the divine.

The Middle Ages brought a shift of focus in Yoga from the image and experience of the transcendent to its presence in the body, by the rise of Tantrism. From here Hatha Yoga arose. The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* by Svātmarama, composed in the 14th century is its most important work. It describes techniques for the purification of the physical and the subtle body. Hesychasm implicitly also assumes a 'subtle body', although the concept is not developed theoretically. 'Subtle perceptions' occur in relation to pneumatic phenomena of Hesychasm.

The most prominent teacher of Hatha Yoga, B.K.S Iyengar, describes prana in his manual *Light on Prāṇāyāma*,⁷¹¹ in a conspectus of traditions:

- 1.) Prāṇa is the energy permeating the universe at all levels. It is physical, mental, intellectual, sexual, spiritual, and cosmic energy. All vibrating energies are prāṇa. All physical energies ... are also prāṇa. It is the hidden or potential energy in all beings. ... Vigour, power, vitality, life and spirit are all forms of prāṇa.⁷¹²
- 2.) "Prāṇa is usually translated as breath, yet this is only one of its many manifestations in the human body."⁷¹³
- 3.) ... [On the types of prāṇa and associated breaths]
- 4.) "Prāṇāyāma. 'Prāṇa' means breath, respiration, life, vitality, energy, or strength. When used in the plural, it denotes certain vital breaths or currents

⁷¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 151.

⁷¹¹ Iyengar, B. K. S. (1981). *Light on Prāṇāyāma – The Definitive Guide to the Art of Breathing*, London: Harper Thorsons.

⁷¹² Ibidem, p. 14.

⁷¹³ Ibidem, p. 14.

of energy (prāṇa-vayus). 'Ayama' means stretch, extension, expansion, length, breadth, regulation, prolongation, restraint, or control. 'Prāṇāyāma' thus means the prolongation of breath and its restraint. The *Shiva Samhita*⁷¹⁴ calls it *vayu sadhana* (vayu = breath; sadhana = practise, quest). Patañjali in his *Yoga Sūtras* (Ch. 2, Sūtras 49 – 51) describes Prāṇāyāma as the controlled intake and outflow of breath in a firmly established posture⁷¹⁵

In Iyengar's definitions we find that combination of concepts which is similarly characteristic of Palamas' theory of Hesychasm too: *Prāṇa* as 'breath', 'breathing', individual and cosmic energy, 'life' and 'vital power'. The list could be extended to Palamas' understanding of Pneuma in all its divine and mediating aspects, as well as the *uncreated energies*. The affinity between both systems is close enough. They are connected to similar mediation practices. This warrants the assumption of a common source or of intensive exchange in the formative period.

In the following passage Iyengar describes the posture to be taken in meditation and the breathing meditation "Prāṇāyāma":

The second chapter of the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* deals with Prāṇāyāma. The first three theses state: 'Being firmly established in the practise of āsanās with his senses under control the yogi should practise Prāṇāyāma as taught by his Guru observing moderate and nutritious diet. When the breath is irregular the mind wavers, when the breath is steady so is the mind. To attain steadiness the yogi should restrain his breath.'⁷¹⁶

The next stage is also represented by Palamas' description of Hesychast meditation, though less elaborated as to the anthropology – but in essence very similar. Palamas describes how the divine pneuma is to be introduced into the heart and to be spread from there throughout the body.⁷¹⁷ Iyengar relates the breathing meditation to the spreading of

⁷¹⁴ Mallinson, J. (ed. & transl.). (2007). *The Shiva Samhita*, Woodstock: YogaVidya.com LLC.

<http://www.yogavidya.com/Yoga/ShivaSamhita.pdf>

⁷¹⁵ Iyengar, B. K. S. (1981). *Light on Prāṇāyāma – The Definitive Guide to the Art of Breathing*, London: Harper Thorsons, p. 16.

⁷¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 18.

⁷¹⁷ Palamas, *Triads* I.2.7f.

the *prāṇa* throughout the body – expressly: through the subtle body and its energetic conduits and nodes, the *nadis*:

The practise of Prāṇāyāma helps to cleanse the nadis which are the tubular organs of the subtle body through which the energy flows. There are several thousand nadis in the body and most of them start from the areas of the heart and the navel. Prāṇāyāma keeps the nadis in a healthy condition and prevents their decay.⁷¹⁸

The shift of emphasis from the experience of the transcendent in the mind to the sphere of the body is evident. The emphasis on spiritual enlightenment remains. Prāṇāyāma remains a vehicle for attainment of enlightenment, as Iyengar emphasises, citing the *Shiva Samhita* on the sequence of four stages of prāṇāyāma and their result. The second is regarded as a transformative stage: "... Like an unbaked earthen pot, the physical body wears away. Bake it hard in the fire of Prāṇāyāma to gain stability."⁷¹⁹ In the final stage the Yogi reaches enlightenment "by the knowledge of the Supreme Spirit. He experiences the state of ecstasy (ananda)."⁷²⁰

Finally, the practise of prāṇāyāma also has a relation to the heart which is closely reminiscent of Hesychasm. B.K.S Iyengar explains the connection between the heart and the divine intellect in a person, ātman, and the meditative Yogic breathing, as follows:

In the *Chandogyopanishad* (III,12,4) it is said that as the outer cover of man is his physical body, his inner core (hrdayam) is the heart (VIII,3,3), wherein abides the Atman. [...] Here the heart stands for both the physical and the spiritual one. All the vital breaths or winds (vayus) are established there and do not go beyond it. It is here that the prāṇa stimulates actions and activates intelligence (prajna). The intelligence become the source of thinking

⁷¹⁸ Iyengar, B. K. S. (1981). *Light on Prāṇāyāma – The Definitive Guide to the Art of Breathing*, London: Harper Thorsons, p. 18.

⁷¹⁹ Idem

⁷²⁰ Idem

imagination and will. When the mind is controlled, and the intellect and heart are united the self is revealed. (*Shvetashvataropanishad* IV,17)⁷²¹

The agreement between the teachings of the *Upanishads* and Hesychasm is evident. The reception of Yoga in the Alexandrian realm may have been aided by affinities with ancient Egyptian and *Old Testament* notions about the heart, and about divine breath. This will be discussed further on.

8.7. Inducing Spiritual Energy, Awakening Radiance, and Chakras, in Tantra and Hesychasm

Barlaam of Calabria reports interesting details of Hesychast method, told to him by monks, of introducing divine light imaginatively into the body, enacted by inhalation, and of leading it through the body into the navel region, the 'solar plexus'. Barlaam's report is highly significant, in that the method depicted here closely resembles Tantric practice. The idea that the 'luminous hypostasis' 'increases' in the navel region, when held there during breath stops, to unfold, reflects Tantric teachings closely.

The perception of the 'energetic centre' of the navel region, the solar plexus, in Tantra is described thus: "Manipura ... Situated at the navel and also called nābhi-chakra ('navel wheel'), this psycho-energetic centre is associated with the fire element."⁷²² In Tantric Yoga it is activated by the upwards and downwards movements of pneumatic energy 'kundalini', and awareness in meditation, along a central axis. In this process all the energetic centres of the body, 'chakras' are activated to union with the divine, in reciprocal movements, through the different centres, such as crown of the head, the brain, and the heart,⁷²³ and, as Barlaam reports, the solar plexus, the navel area.

In Tantra, the notion of spiritual energy, 'kundalini' is important. It appears as a vital energy in man, which is believed to reside at the bottom of the spinal column, which is also regarded as the base of an energetic axis leading through specific nodes, the

⁷²¹ Ibidem, p. 39.

⁷²² Feuerstein, G. (1998). *The Yoga Tradition - Its History, Literature, Philosophy and Practice*, Prescott: Hohm Press, p. 353.

⁷²³ Kundalinī, Kundalinī-Shakti.(2011). In W. Huchzermeyer, *Das Yoga-Lexikon. Sanskrit – Āsanās – Biographien, Hinduismus – Mythologie*, (4th ed.), Karlsruhe: Edition Sawitri, pp. 157f.

'chakras', to the crown of the head, where the point of entry of a transcendent divine energy outside of man is believed to be. Of this divine energy in man and of its encounter and union with the transcendent divine energy, represented as *prāṇa* in the cosmos through *prāṇāyāma*, Iyengar explains:

Kundalini is divine cosmic energy. ... According to Tantric texts, the object of *Prāṇāyāma* is to arouse the latent power (shakti) called *kundalini* the divine cosmic energy in our bodies, lying at the base of the spinal column in *muladhara chakra* ... This energy has to be aroused and made to ascend through the *susumna* from the *muladhara chakra* to the thousand-petalled lotus (*sahasrara*) in the head. ... After piercing the intervening chakras it finally unites with the Supreme Soul.⁷²⁴

Note that Hesychasm has a similar idea of an 'axis' which is traced from the head down to the heart and further on to the bowels, where the seat of vital energies is, according to Palamas.

On this background, it is well worth to look at Barlaam's report closely, and to attend to the concepts and figures in it. Barlaam writes, that Hesychast monks told him about:

... some kind of luminous hypostasis, which is interwoven ... with the soul, [...] or [according] to what some say, is introduced to a human being through the nose and enters into the navel; and which, having increased, flows outwards again, and which, as if it happened to be night, illuminates the whole dwelling....⁷²⁵

This resonates with the description given by Lilian Silburn, about the Tantric process here:

Kundalinī, lower as she is in *mūlādhāra* ... converts into intermediate energy in the navel, then into subtle energy in the heart, in the *anāhata* center. And in

⁷²⁴ Iyengar, B. K. S. (1981). *Light on Prāṇāyāma – The Definitive Guide to the Art of Breathing*, London: Harper Thorsons, p. 42f.

⁷²⁵ Barlaam of Calabria, *Epistola* III.33. Loc. cit: Fryrgos, A. (2005). *Dalla Controversia Palamitica alla Polemica Esiciastica (con un' edizione critica delle Epistole greche di Barlaam)*, Roma: Antonianum, p. 325.

the throat (vishudhicakra), and finally into superior energy (ūrdhvakundalinī) when she reaches the brahmarandhra [the chakra at the top of the head] As the ascent progresses the centers light up: the breath (pavana), is now purified, illuminates the median way, the mind (manas), now omniscient, reveals the effulgence of the supreme Self, the sun (tapana) makes the navel and eyebrow centers shine; Life (jiva), at first illumined by the rays of Kundalinī, in its turn illuminates the heart...⁷²⁶

The correlation of the 'luminous hypostasis' of Barlaam's Hesychast informants with the 'kundalini' is of course open for debate. However, it is defensible, since it is conceived as transcendent spiritual energy too, in complementary upward and downward movements. The sequence of energetic centres mentioned by the Hesychast monks, its relation to 'soul' and to the meditation practice of structured breathing, and finally the phenomenology of energetic and luminous manifestations, are so close, as to the elements, and the logic and structure of this complex, that a genetic connection of this Hesychasm with Tantra is beyond doubt. The conceptual differences perceptible indicate the difficulties of 'translation' in the process of reception from Tantric Yoga to Neoplatonism and to Orthodox Hesychasm. At this point the theoretical importance of the 'Embodiment' perspective, and of the inclusion of bodily experience, habitus and aisthesis, becomes evident: the phenomenological similarities between this Hesychasm and Tantra perceptibly exceed even the closeness of the respective systems of spiritual philosophies in which they are conceptualised. The 'embodied meanings' exceed the conceptual agreements, in closeness.

As to the role of structured breathing in meditation, and its foundational concepts, both Hesychasm and Tantric Yoga agree that it leads to an ecstatic experience of the Divine, after the divine pneuma or prāṇa has been led downwards through the central axis in the body and upwards again, after unfolding its effect in the body, soul, mind, and encompassing space.

⁷²⁶ Silburn, L. (1988). *Kuṇḍalinī. The Energy of the Depths. A Comprehensive Study Based on the Scriptures of Nondualistic Kashmir Shaivism* (transl. by J. Gontier), New York: SUNY Press, p. 131.

The special role of the navel area in Tantric Kundalinī-Yoga is described by an author of northern Shaivism, Somānanda (9th century C. E.), for the final stage of this movement:

26. When the energy arising from the navel center fully awakes at once, all the outward-directed organs are gone, while the supreme energy dissolves in the supreme abode. 27. When the subject no longer discovers any other object to be known [apart from himself] and when his energy rests in Shiva, that is called 'repose'.⁷²⁷

This coincides with an interesting detail that Barlaam has noted: "enters into the navel; and which, having increased, flows outwards again".⁷²⁸ It is the belief – told to him by Hesychast monks – that the spiritual energy, that manifests itself in a luminous way, 'grows' when it is introduced and collected in the navel region. This idea of 'spiritual energy' being collected in the body – especially in the 'solar' navel chakra, is deeply Tantric. The element of fire is associated with this chakra.⁷²⁹ This description of method should not be side-lined.

The phenomenon reported at the end of this quote, that the 'illumination' experienced by the Hesychast monks, is not confined to their interiority (and imagination) but is visible as a light illuminating the whole room, is significant too. Such 'photistic' manifestations are also reported from Tantra.⁷³⁰ They have become a standard motif, and phenomenon, reported in Hesychast tradition. It is reported from the 11th century *Patericon of the Kievan Monastery of the Caves*, up to the Vita of St. Seraphim of

⁷²⁷ Somānanda, *Shaktavijñāna*, XI.26f. Loc. cit.: Silburn, L.(1988). *Kuṇḍalinī. The Energy of the Depths. A Comprehensive Study Based on the Scriptures of Nondualistic Kashmir Shaivism* (transl. by Jacques Gontier), New York: State Univ. of N. Y. Press, p. 110 [Original ed.: (1983). *La Kuṇḍalinī ou l'Énergie des profondeurs: étude d'ensemble d'après les textes du Śivaïsme non dualiste du Kaśmir*, Paris: les Deux Océans]

⁷²⁸ Barlaam of Calabria, *Epistola* III.33. Loc. cit: Fryrgos, A. (2005). *Dalla Controversia Palamitica alla Polemica Esicistica (con un' edizione critica delle Epistole greche di Barlaam)*, Roma: Antonianum, p. 325.

⁷²⁹ Feuerstein, G. (1998). *The Yoga Tradition - Its History, Literature, Philosophy and Practice*, Prescott: Hohm Press, p. 413.

⁷³⁰ Feuerstein, G. (1998). *The Yoga Tradition - Its History, Literature, Philosophy and Practice*, Prescott: Hohm Press, p. 320.

Sarov.⁷³¹ That spiritual light radiates from a saint, to illuminate the building, is described often in the *Kievan Patericon*. An impressive example is the following:

There is a small hill, above this monastery, and that man rode there by night and saw a miracle that filled him with fear. For the night was dark, but a most wondrous light lay solely on the monastery of the Blessed One. And when he looked up, he saw the venerable Feodosi standing in the middle of this light in the monastery, the hands raised to heaven and praying to God intently. While he was still looking in wonderment, see, another miracle appeared to him: A very great flame emerged from the cupola of the church, bent over in an arc up to another hill, ending at the site that our blessed father Feodossi had determined for the church that he would begin to build later.⁷³²

This report is remarkable by its combination of features:

- 1) the luminosity radiating from St. Feodossi by his prayer
- 2) the envelopment of St. Feodossi himself by this spiritual light
- 3) the filling of the church with this spiritual light
- 4) the luminosity of this church perceived by an outsider, described as a pious man,
- 5) the connection of this luminous phenomenon to intentions of the saint,
- 6) and to the site of his planned new church (whose site had been revealed to him by prayer)

Combinations of these motifs recur in other reports of perceptions of spiritual luminosity in Orthodox spiritual literature and beyond. Further features appear there too. Such luminosity is also a central feature of Yoga: "The enlightened are bathed in light. Likewise,

⁷³¹ Seraphim of Sarov, *Spiritual Instructions*. Ed.: Rose, S. (compiled and transl. from Russian). (1996). *The Little Russian Philokalia, vol. 1: St. Seraphim of Sarov – Spiritual Instructions*. (4th ed.). Platina, CA.: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, p. 103.

⁷³² *Das Väterbuch des Kiewer Höhlenklosters* 8.44. (11th century C.E.). Ed. Freydank, D., Sturm, G. and Harney, J. (eds.) (1988). *Das Väterbuch des Kiewer Höhlenklosters* (transl. by Förster, W., Freydank, D. and Sturm, G.), Leipzig: Koehler und Amelang, p. 8ff. [Original: (1661). *Киево-Печерский патерик*. Kiev.].

they irradiate light [...] There is a subtle form of light that strikes the inward eye and suffuses the body. Enlightenment is no metaphoric term.”⁷³³

The inward and outward perceptions of intense and multi-hued spiritual light, that can occur in Yoga, are described in the *Advayataraka Upanishad* (100 B.C.E. – 300 C.E.):

In the middle of the body there exists the sushumnā, the ‘channel of the Absolute’, of the form of the sun and of the luminosity of the full moon. [...] In the center of that [sushumnā] is the famous kundalini, with a radiance equal to myriads of lightning flashes ... Having beheld it with the mind, a person is liberated ... if he instantly beholds the splendour (tejas) [of the kundalini] by virtue of the flashing-forth of Tāraka-Yoga in a specific area (mandala) on the forehead (lalāta), he is an adept.⁷³⁴

This Upanishad highlights the connection between the inner perceptions of spiritual light and the outer forms, appearing on the body and beyond. It also relates this to the specific form of meditative induction of spiritual energy into the centre of the body and to union with the divine.

8.8. Divine Radiance, its Colours, and Self-Translucent Consciousness, in Vedānta and Hesychasm

While radiant or luminous mystical perceptions are also essential elements of Yoga, as described by A. Śaṅkara, they differ somewhat from Hesychasm, as to the phenomena, and in their theological significance. This needs to be considered for this thesis of common ground, as to the relation between the respective theologies, and the meditative methods. A passage from the classical texts of Patañjali’s *Yoga Sūtra*, (ca. 300 A.D.) with Vyasa’s comment (600 A.D.), and Adi Śaṅkara’s sub-commentary, on this

⁷³³ Cohen, J. M. and Fibbs, J.-F. (1979). *The Common Experience*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, p. 141. Loc. cit.: Feuerstein, G., (1998). *The Yoga Tradition - Its History, Literature, Philosophy and Practice*, Prescott: Hohm Press, p. 320.

⁷³⁴ *Advaya-Tāraka Upanishad* 5. Loc. cit.: Feuerstein, G. (1998). *The Yoga Tradition - Its History, Literature, Philosophy and Practice*, (pp. 321-324). Prescott: Hohm Press, p. 321.

phenomenon can illustrate the difference. The quote is on the phenomena of luminous manifestations in 'samadhi', the eighth and final stage of Yoga.

Sūtra 1, 36: Or a radiant perception beyond sorrow. [title]. [...]. [Patañjali:]. ...

The sūtra has to be completed from the context, so that it runs: 'Or where a radiant perception beyond sorrow, is attained, it brings the mind to steadiness.'

As a perception in which light is experienced, it is called radiant, and as it causes sorrow to pass away, it is beyond sorrow. How is it produced? *When one concentrates on the heart-lotus, there is a direct awareness of the buddhi* ['consciousness' as the first principle emanating from the Absolute Divine, Brahma] an experience of its true nature. What then is the nature of the buddhi-sattva [state of consciousness]? *Like shining space, ever radiant and all-pervading.* But because there in that buddhi-sattva there is *still wavering (vaiṣamyā) in the stability*, because the concentration has not come to complete likeness of the buddhi-sattva as it is in itself, *the radiant perception of the yogic concentration on the heart-lotus takes the luminous form of a sun or moon, planet or gems.*

When the mind reaches samadhi on I-am-ness, [the mystic attainment of inner union of the self, Ātman, with God, Brahman, as supreme divine reality] [...] which happens when the buddhi-sattva approximates to its own true nature, *it is like a still ocean, serene and infinite, I-am alone...* There are these two sorrowless perceptions, one of divine objects and one of the self alone...⁷³⁵

There is a striking similarity in motifs with Hesychasm, as described by Palamas, and by the Hesychast authors of tradition, whom he refers to: of turning of focus inwards, of detachment, stillness, to a state beyond concepts, that leads to an experience of complete lucidity, and clarity. Śaṅkara describes this state as a union of clear consciousness,

⁷³⁵ Śaṅkara, Adi, *On the Yoga Sūtras*. Ed. Leggett, T. (transl.). (1990). *Śaṅkara On the Yoga Sūtras – A Full Translation of the Newly Discovered Text*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publ., p. 149f.

conjoined with luminosity. The notion of a 'luminous experience of divine light' agrees with Palamas's explanation, that the divine light is both the object and subject of this experience.⁷³⁶

As to the subject of such luminous, radiant vision, there too is an uncanny resemblance: both agree that this subject is 'transpersonal', that it is a higher agent, which is beyond the confines of the individual person. Śaṅkara's exegesis indicates a possible common 'ground' for Palamas and Barlaam. He declares that the spiritual light observed, is a manifestation of the Divine. He agrees with Palamas, that it is of an objective quality, perceptible in various 'layers'.

In Vedānta the five 'koshas', the 'sheaths' around the transcendent Divine are: the 'material', the 'subtle', 'fine-mattered', the mental and sensory, the 'intellectual', and the 'emotional'. Since Brahman is conceived both cosmologically and anthropologically, the inter-relation of these five 'sheaths' and their degrees of participation and perception of the Divine, comprises both the interior and exterior realms of phenomena. 'Brahman' is conceptualised as cosmic and intra-psychic 'principle'.⁷³⁷ On this basis, Barlaam's insistence, that perceptions of 'spiritual light', are purely interior 'imaginings' of the mind ('intellect'), as forms of intellectual perceptions of the Divine, is pointless. The Divine 'Self', Ātman - comparable to the Neoplatonic concept of transcendent 'intellect' as emanation of God – supports, that manifestations of 'spiritual light' are to be understood as interior and as exterior phenomena, perceptible in all five layers (koshas). While this is not wholly identical with Palamas' theology and cosmology, it is close to it – and it supports the Hesychast insistence on the interior and exterior manifestations of 'spiritual light' and of its perceptibility in different 'layers' of the person. The Vedāntic conceptualisation of this phenomenon agrees with the intrinsic logic of the Hesychasts' phenomenal experience and its interpretation. This supports the assumption, that this 'complex' has been received from Vedāntic Yoga – not merely as a set of practices, and of their theory, but also of 'aisthesis'- in the attained and documented perceptions of inner and outer luminous phenomena. (At this point it might be necessary to remind, that according to modern cosmology, the phenomenal world, and perception, are conditioned

⁷³⁶ Palamas, *Triads* I.3.35

⁷³⁷ Deussen, P. D. (1906). *Das System des Vedānta: nach den Brahma-Sūtra's des Bādarāyaṇa und dem Kommentare des Ṣaṅkara über dieselben als ein Kompendium der Dogmatik des Brahmanismus vom Standpunkte des Ṣaṅkara aus* (2nd ed.). Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus. [Reprint: Elibron Classics, 2005], pp.163.

by consciousness, in various realms. The notion of 'detached objectivity', being 'outmoded', in principle, is not very suited to phenomenological analysis.)

Śaṅkara's exegesis of Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra* I.36 also provides a key to the phenomenon, that the manifestations of spiritual are reported to appear in different colours and intensities of luminosity. Iamblichus classified the phenomena of spiritual light in these aspects, according to his theological system. The subtle differences and range of manifestations do not fit the stark contrast between 'divine' and 'demonic', by which the Hesychast monks tried to conceptualise the phenomena. In practice this may have created heated- and fruitless - debate in many instances. Literature of early monasticism reports of many cases of 'doubt'.

Palamas avoids the topic, by concentrating on the ideal-typical definition of 'spiritual light' as divine manifestation of 'uncreated energies' of God. Considering his firm statement, that the 'substance matter' of the hypostasis of the Holy Spirit, is the human being, or in a wider sense, the cosmos, and its elements, animate and inanimate, - the Vedāntic interpretation of the phenomenon of 'colour' and differing intensity of 'spiritual light', may also be considered for Christian Pneumatology. A differentiated evaluation of the phenomenal diversity of spiritual light, documented in Hesychast tradition, may thus be possible. Śaṅkara interprets coloured manifestations of the spiritual light as 'tainting', caused by outer objects or inner factors of individuality, as of passions and images, beyond the full experience and state of identity with the luminous Divine. Śaṅkara states that the pure spiritual light manifests the 'Atman'.

This can be applied to Palamas. In distinction to Advaitic Vedāntic theory, he emphasises the distinction between God and human 'intellect' while affirming the latter's transcendent capacities. The difference may rather be one of degree, since Vedānta also acknowledges such difference. Palamas declares:

Viewed in a theoretical perspective, Intellect is not only 'light', even if it is to be found the last of these, but also the organ of perception, like an eye of the Soul.

... Like the eye, as sense organ, cannot work without external light, so the Spirit cannot manifest itself as organ of the Intellectual sense and cannot enter into action through it, if the divine light does not illuminate it.⁷³⁸

⁷³⁸ Palamas, *Triads* I.3.9

Palamas explains that individual intellect needs to be enlightened by divine intellect, in its aspect and manifest form of divine light, to enable perceptions and experience of the divine that surpass conceptual understanding. It can be applied to other 'sheaths' of the person, and of reality too. Keeping in mind, that to Palamas, 'spiritual light', and the capacity of its perception, is a manifestation of the 'uncreated energies' of God, this concept must likewise be regarded as an 'ideal-typical' distinction. This does not diminish its validity as perceptual category, nor its importance for theology, and for spiritual aesthetics, but it can be understood as application of the principle of 'incarnation' to this realm too: the 'divine light' illuminates and transfigures man and creation in its epiphany. One may add with Śaṅkara, that it also 'colours' it.

The resemblance of phenomena, of their aisthesis, and of their theory, between Yoga, especially in its Vedāntic interpretation, Neoplatonism, and Hesychasm, assures that the understanding, the communication across boundaries of culture and religion, and the reception of this complex, comprised all three aspects. The interpretation of these by different analytic theories, has been laid out in chapter 1 here. Together, they reveal the significance of the various features of this complex, to which the aspects of practice, habitus, social setting, psycho-physical transformation by initiation, etc., can be added, and applied.

8.9. Cessation of Thought, Recollection of Intellect: and Divinisation – Samādhi

Theoliptos of Philadelphia (1250-1322) advises to concentrate the mind and to focus attention:

Sitting in your cell, then be mindful of God, raising your intellect above all things and prostrating it wordlessly before Him, exposing your heart's state to Him and cleaving to Him in love. For mindfulness of God is the contemplation of God, who draws to Himself the intellect's vision and aspiration, and illumines the intellect with His own light. When the intellect turns toward God and stills all representations images of created things, it perceives in an imageless way, and through an ignorance surpassing all knowledge its vision is illumined by

God's unapproachable glory. Although not knowing, because what it perceives is beyond all knowledge, nevertheless the intellect does know through the truth of Him who is and who transcends all being. Nourishing its love on the wealth of goodness that pours forth from God, and fulfilling thereby its own nature, it is granted blessed and eternal repose.⁷³⁹

In this quote the figure of 'reversion of intellect' to God is first described from the position of the Hesychast, then of God, complementing each other. The elements include:

- detachment from all images and thoughts, the 'withdrawal of the senses' (pratyāhāra), 'fixation' (dhāraṇa) and 'meditation' (dhyāna),
- imageless contemplation of God
- illumination and enrapture

Interestingly, this proceeds without words. This means, that (even) at this late stage of development of Hesychasm, it is not defined by a spoken prayer – even less by a standard formula of spoken prayer, but explicitly by the “world-less prostration of the heart before God”. The formula merits attention since it combines the ‘stilling all representations’ and ‘imageless perception’. This is deeply Yogic, while also reflecting the Orthodox concept of the apophatic essence and non-conceptual epiphanies of God. It is imbued with a sense of love common to both as well. The meditation is not devoid of emotion. The relation of love reflects feelings of communion, attraction, and adoration. These reflect the conceptually determined relations in the realm of emotion, complementing both the intellectual and the bodily processes.

The Yogic elements here are explained by J. Mallinson and M. Singleton as follows:

... we can say that withdrawal (pratyāhāra), fixation (dhāraṇā) and meditation (dhyāna) are concerned, respectively, with the retraction of the mind from phenomenal objects, the concentration and the placement of the mind, and the

⁷³⁹ Theoliptos of Philadelphia, *On Inner Work in Christ and the Monastic Profession*, Ed.: (1995). *The Philokalia*, vol. 4, (pp. 177-187), London: Faber & Faber, p. 181.

cultivation of advanced mental and ontological states. They can be seen as a continuum of practice which moves the yogi towards liberation⁷⁴⁰

Of these three, withdrawal of senses is a core feature, which is described in the oldest extant definition of Yoga in the *Katha Upanishad* (5th cent. B. C. E.):

(10) When the five senses ... along with the mind, remain still and the intellect is not active, that is known as the highest state. (11) They consider yoga to be firm restraint of the senses. Then one becomes undistracted for yoga is the arising and passing away.⁷⁴¹

It continues about the position of these three elements among the 'eight-auxiliary schema' (ashtāṅga) of Patañjali withdrawal' (pratyāhāra) is classed as the last of the 'outer' practices (which includes rules, observances, posture and breath-extension) before the 'inner auxiliaries' ... of fixation, meditation and samādhi [...] Prāyāhāra is closely related to breath-control (Prāṇāyāma) and is indeed sometimes categorized as one of its stages rather than as distinct auxiliary.⁷⁴²

The relations of these means ('auxiliaries') of Yoga to each other facilitate the understanding of the connections of the corresponding elements of Hesychasm with each other – and to the theological-philosophical ideas which they embody. They build on St. Paul's idea of a divinized and eschatologically transformed body. Palamas defines the participation and transformation of the body in Hesychasm as 'eschatological' process.⁷⁴³

As to the first of these elements, Patañjali, places it at the beginning of this treatise on Yoga, with this definition: "Yoga is the suppression of the activities of the mind"⁷⁴⁴ This calming of all activities off the mind and of the senses is to lead to a state in which the mind transcends all differentiation and comes to rest in in its own essence in the

⁷⁴⁰ Mallinson, J. and Singleton, M. (2017). *Roots of Yoga*, London: Penguin Classics, p. 283.

⁷⁴¹ *Katha Upanishad*. (5th century B. C. E.). 6.10–11. Loc. cit. Ibidem, p. 17.

⁷⁴² Mallinson, J. and Singleton, M. (2017). *Roots of Yoga*, London: Penguin Classics, p. 284.

⁷⁴³ Harper, R. D., (2015). Becoming Homotheos: St. Gregory Palamas' Eschatology of Body. In C. Athanasopoulos (ed.), *The Triune God. Incomprehensible but Knowable— The Philosophical and Theological Significance of St Gregory Palamas for Contemporary Philosophy and Theology*, , (pp. 235–47). Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars.

⁷⁴⁴ Patañjali, (400 C. E. latest). *Yoga Sūtra* I. 2

Divine – a state called 'samādhi', which is experienced as a state of concentration, clarity, unification and of extasy. A description of the state is discussed by Śaṅkara: "Pleasure and pain arise from contact of senses and mind with objects; when that contact is not formed, when the mind abides in self (ātman)...Yoga is the inner union (samyoga) arising from control of Prāṇa and mind."⁷⁴⁵

Śaṅkara declares that ultimately the mind already rests in the Divine, the ātman, as essence of self. About the latter definition he points out at an inherent contradiction between the goal of effortless recollection of intellect and of the intentional discipline of meditation practices:

Again, the statement about controlling Prāṇa ... and mind is not right. The restraining effort of will is supposed to be inherent in the self, even without any activity of the mind, but without some contact with the senses it cannot effect control of mind and Prāṇa. [...] The Prāṇa cannot be held fast without contact of senses and vital airs, and without holding fast the Prāṇa there is no yoga.⁷⁴⁶

Two stages of samādhi are accordingly distinguished. The first, 'sabīja' involves an object of meditation, in the second, 'nirbīja', the differentiation of subject and object ceases.⁷⁴⁷ The two states describe polar distinctions on a continuum. In Hesychasm the description of this state rests with the 'I-Thou-distinction', although features of the latter are observable. A resolution of the tension appears in a concluding definition of the *Yoga Sūtra*: "That same (meditation – dhyāna), when it comes to shine forth as the object alone, apparently empty of its own nature as knowledge, is called samādhi."⁷⁴⁸

This converges with the direction of the meditation towards God – more specifically towards Christ in some descriptions of Hesychasm – which is understood to be intrinsically connected to the reversion of intellect into itself and thus to God in the process of divinisation: The object of meditation fuses with the subject in this movement, and the Hesychast becomes one with Christ.

⁷⁴⁵ Śaṅkara, *On the Yoga Sūtra* I.1. Ed. Leggett, T. (transl.). (1990). *Śaṅkara On the Yoga Sūtras – A Full Translation of the Newly Discovered Text*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publ., p.56.

⁷⁴⁶ Ibidem, p. 58

⁷⁴⁷ Samādhi (2011). In: Huchzermeyer, W., *Das Yoga-Lexikon. Sanskrit – Āsanās – Biographien – Hinduismus – Mythologie*, (pp. 243-244). Karlsruhe: Edition Sawitri,

⁷⁴⁸ Patañjali, *Yoga Sūtra* III.3

8.10. Invoking the Lord: the Jesus Prayer and Tantric Mantra

8.10.1. The Origins of the Prayer of the Heart in Hesychasm, and its Role

A view at the history of Hesychasm shows that the Jesus Prayer is not, or hardly, mentioned in several Hesychast texts. Its integration into this complex thus needs to be traced.

In Palamas' definition of Hesychast method,⁷⁴⁹ no specific formula of prayer is given. He determined the relation between 'meditation' and 'prayer' as 'opposites in a continuum':

... some are uplifted by divine passion to really unite with the Lord of the universe; these ones persist in prayer, without eating, nor breathing, according to the instructions of the Fathers; they make their intellect turn towards itself and thus, ready for the divine union, they receive the mystical and spiritual gift of prayer which accompanies them all the time; now he trains himself with the Spirit which he has received towards a mysterious union and makes a spiritual joy rise, now he sings quietly and prays with the Spirit which turns towards God in prayer.⁷⁵⁰

Palamas describes the turning inward of intellect upon itself as the core of Hesychast practise, from which results a union with the divine and the 'gift of prayer'. He describes the 'mystical prayer' as fruit of 'meditation', by the 'turning inwards of intellect'. His expression: "without breathing" likely refer to the slowing of breathing, also reported in Yoga.

Considering the image of Hesychasm as incessantly repeated Jesus Prayer, it may surprise that Palamas hardly mentions it. Even in those chapters, where he refers to St. Nikiphoros the Monk, whom he calls one of the masters of Hesychast prayer, he merely discusses it briefly. Nikiphoros was a convert from the Roman Catholic Church who went to Mt. Athos, "situated on the border between the world (κόσμος) and the supernatural

⁷⁴⁹ Palamas, *Triads* I.2.5

⁷⁵⁰ Palamas, *Triads* II.1.30

of the named in it. An interesting feature of this passage is that he regards the persistent repetition of the Jesus Prayer as means to avoid discursive thought. He thereby combines two motifs of theory and genesis of Hesychasm: the recollection of intellect by cessation of thought and the entrance of Christ (or the Divine) into the 'heart'. These two features indicate different sources.

A rather different concept of 'Hesychasm' is presented by Kallistos Ware. He traces a genealogy, that assiduously constructs a 'Jesus Prayer' that is devoid of the essential features of the structured complex of meditation, that Palamas documented, conceptualised theoretically, and motivated theologically. In essence, Ware sets out to purge Hesychasm of Palamism.

Ware constructs a lineage that goes from the earliest recordings of the formula of the Jesus Prayer in early Egyptian monasticism to Nikiphoros the Monk and to St. Gregory of Sinai:

The previous history of these different formulae may be briefly noted. What we have termed Gregory's 'standard form' – 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me' (without 'a sinner') - is first found, to my knowledge, in the Life of Abba Philemon, a work of the 6th–7th century, emanating from Egypt. It recurs in the treatise of Nicephorus the Hesychast, *On Vigilance and the Guarding of the Heart* (late 13th–early 14th century). During the intervening period of 700 years between these two texts, I cannot recall any other source in which it appears. The life of St Gregory of Sinai is, so far as I am aware, the earliest occasion on which the Prayer is given with the words 'a sinner' at the end.⁷⁵⁴

Egyptian monasticism has possibly derived this form of prayer of invocation of a 'Holy Name', from notions of Graeco-Egyptian syncretism. To ancient Egyptian understanding, the invocation of a divine name was a means of attaining divine power, especially if the supplicant merged with the deity in the process. The invocation of the deity to grant its

⁷⁵⁴ Ware, K. (1972). *The Jesus Prayer in St Gregory of Sinai - teachings of St Gregory of Sinai (1255-1346) on the Jesus Prayer*. (A paper read at the Sixth International Conference of Patristic Studies, Oxford, 10 September 1971). Kallistos Ware and Sobornost/ECR.
<http://www.bogoslov.ru/en/text/2588738.html>

'divine breath' is focal. The idea is documented in the Graeco-Egyptian *Magic Papyrus*, as will be discussed chapter 13.

The effects attributed by Nikiphoros to the mantra-like recitation of the Jesus Prayer, resonate with what is described for mantras in Tantra. It is recognised as a feature of Hesychasm and Tantric Yoga. Referring explicitly to Hesychasm, the German dictionary of Yoga explains:

The mantra has the function to stabilise the mind. It creates, first of all in the subtle physical body, which, in the opinion of Yoga, exists along with the [bodily] physical body, a sort of fine trance, as if a path were laid, which finally shows effects on the material level too. In the course of time the mind becomes refined through the constant contact with the spiritual contents of the holy words and becomes receptive for inner stillness. Thus Mantra-Yoga is a transformative practice, which, as a rule, only becomes fruitful when one is open to the meaning of the mantra.⁷⁵⁵

Despite the insight into the Tantric features of the form and effects of the Prayer of the Heart, Ware dismisses them, declaring, 'con brio', the method and 'technique' in Hesychasm to be irrelevant 'accompaniment', for Gregory, and Palamas too:

It is absolutely clear that for Gregory [of Sinai] the primary factor is always the actual invocation of the Name of Jesus and not the accompanying technique. His approach agrees here with that of Gregory Palamas, who defends the legitimacy of the physical method, but treats it as no more than an optional accessory suitable mainly for beginners.⁷⁵⁶

By claiming that for Palamas, "physical method" was no more than an "optional accessory", he ignores the systematics of Palamas' argument about the intrinsic meaning of Hesychast meditation. Palamas' idea of bodily participation in Christ, necessarily includes the embodied elements of the method. This is clearly not understood. This

⁷⁵⁵ Mantra-Yoga. In: Huchzermeyer, W. (2011). *Das Yoga-Lexikon. Sanskrit – Āsanas – Biographien, Hinduismus – Mythologie*, (4th ed.). Karlsruhe: Edition Sawitri, p. 174f.

⁷⁵⁶ Ibidem, cf. Palamas, *Triads* I.2.7

superficial view of the role of the 'body' in enactment and experience in Hesychasm is quite widespread. Thus, however, the systematics and the genesis of Hesychasm are not understood.

Ware recognises that the Jesus Prayer is not mentioned, or hardly at all, by authors of Hesychasm up to St. Nikiphoros the Monk and St. Gregory of Sinai:

There is no mention of the Jesus Prayer in the authentic works of Symeon the New Theologian⁷⁵⁷ The Jesus Prayer is nowhere mentioned in another text of the 11th century, the vast and systematic *Synagoge* of Paul Evergetinos ... All this shows how careful we must be not to assume a universal employment of the Jesus Prayer in Byzantine spirituality; there were many authors who did not assign to it the centrality which it possesses with Gregory of Sinai.⁷⁵⁸

Despite of this, Ware does not consider, what this might mean for the concept and logic of Hesychasm if this prayer formula is not mentioned in so much of Hesychast literature.

In St. Gregory of Sinai's texts we find a systematically reduced form. He writes:

Sometimes – and most often – you should sit on a stool because it is more arduous; but sometimes, for a break, you should sit for a while on a mattress. As you sit, be patient and assiduous in accordance with St. Paul's precept 'Cleave patiently to prayer' (*Col.* 4:2). Do not grow discouraged and do not rise again quickly because of the strain and effort to keep your intellect concentrated on its inner invocation. ... You must bend down and gather your intellect into your heart – provided it has been opened – and call on the Lord Jesus to help you. Should you feel pain in the shoulders or in your head – as you often will – endure it patiently and fervently, seeking the Lord in your heart.

⁷⁵⁷ Krivochéine, B. (1963). Introduction to the *Catecheses* of Symeon. Paris: *Sources Chrétiennes*, 96. p. 54, fn. 1.

⁷⁵⁸ Ware, K. (1972). *The Jesus Prayer in St Gregory of Sinai - teachings of St Gregory of Sinai (1255-1346) on the Jesus Prayer*. (A paper read at the Sixth International Conference of Patristic Studies, Oxford, 10 September 1971.). Kallistos Ware and Sobornost/ECR.
<http://www.bogoslov.ru/en/text/2588738.html>

For the kingdom of God is entered forcibly and those who force themselves take possession of it (*Mt. 11:12*).⁷⁵⁹

In this explication of the method the external features, such as the bowing of the head towards the centre of the body, the navel region, are preserved. However, they are interpreted negatively, as means of penitence and coercion. The positive and symbolic meanings that were conveyed in the descriptions, reported by Barlaam, is lost. The breathing technique which sustains the movement of introspection, and recollection of the mind into the heart, by means of the vehicle of breath, and by structured breathing, is not mentioned at all. This means that the essential elements of the Hesychast meditation practice, and their philosophical logic are lost here.

A reason may be that St. Gregory of Sinai learnt his practice in Crete, not in the monastery of the Sinai Peninsula, as he had desired. After he moved to Mt. Athos, he found no one who could properly teach him Hesychasm, as he complained. His biographer Kallistos wrote:

After long searching, Gregory eventually discovered three monks at the skete of Magoula, not far from the monastery of Philotheou, who possessed some knowledge of contemplation and inner prayer; all others whom he encountered were absorbed exclusively with the active life. Here, at Magoula, he himself settled.⁷⁶⁰

Evidently, he obtained only fragmentary knowledge of Hesychast mediation, and of its embodied meanings. Possibly he lacked philosophical education too. These deficits did not prevent St. Gregory of Sinai to become a formidable spiritual counsellor.

The form of the 'Prayer of the Heart' is peculiar. Although liturgical prayer in the Church has many features of repetition, such as its Litanies, the constant repetition of a single formula of prayer is singular. This points to a distinct origin. The suggestion, that it

⁷⁵⁹ St. Gregory of Sinai, *Quomodo oporteat sedere*, 1(1329A). Cf. St. Gregory of Sinai, *On Prayer – Seven Texts*, ch.1. Ed.: (1995). *The Philokalia*, vol. 4, (pp. 275 – 286), London: Faber & Faber, p. 275

⁷⁶⁰ Ware, K. (1972). *The Jesus Prayer in St Gregory of Sinai - teachings of St Gregory of Sinai (1255-1346) on the Jesus Prayer*. Kallistos Ware and Sobornost/ECR.

<http://www.bogoslov.ru/en/text/2588738.html>

might be a form of 'mantra' can be supported. They are a characteristic feature of Tantra.

G. Feuerstein explains:

As the tantras emphasise, mantras are not arbitrary inventions. They are revealed ... and their effectiveness depends entirely on proper initiation. [...] The recitation (japa) of mantras can be done aloud ..., whispered ..., or mentally ..., which is deemed the best, because it is the most potent. They should be carefully enunciated and never sloppily performed.⁷⁶¹

Mantras have a metaphysical foundation. A mantra is regarded as a 'seed', that unfolds a transcendental power. Abhinavagupta (905 -1016) writes about the mantra of the divine 'Heart':

The Heart is the seed of the universe ... because it is a seed, it expands into the form of the All [...] He should constantly meditate on this seed of the Heart as having penetrated into his own heart, into his consciousness ...⁷⁶²

Here the connection of several motifs is interesting in view of Hesychasm: the idea that the Deity is represented and invoked by the mantra in the heart, to unfold the divine power here, and thus to bring about a union between the person praying the mantra and the Deity. In terms of Hesychasm this means that the recitation of the Jesus Prayer becomes a vehicle for the presence of Christ and for a mystical union with Christ, experienced in the heart, and in all levels of the soul. The idea of a transformative power of the prayer of the mantra is a common feature too.

The connection between Hesychasm and Yoga, established so far, may provide a key. In Tantra, 'Mantra Prayer' is an essential feature. It is the incessant invocation of the personal deity in a brief prayer, during meditation. This distinguishes Tantra from classic Yoga, that is performed in silence, to overcome any discursive thought and conceptualisations, thus also the 'I-Thou' – relation, or 'dualism', to arrive at an 'advaitic', 'non-dual' state of consciousness and awareness, as form of union with the divine. The

⁷⁶¹ Feuerstein, G. (1998). *The Yoga Tradition - Its History, Literature, Philosophy and Practice*. Prescott: Hohm Press, p. 358.

⁷⁶² Abhinavagupta, *PTiv [Parātrīshikā Laghuvrittī]*, comment on verses 33-34, p. 25. Loc. cit: Muller-Ortega, P. E. (1989). *The Triadic Heart of Shiva. Kaula Tantricism of Abhinavagupta in the Non-Dual Shaivism of Kashmir*. Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, Indian Books Centre, p.173.

development to continuous recitation, 'japa', of mantras is a Tantric feature.⁷⁶³ In brief: the 'Jesus Prayer' is a Tantric feature of Hesychasm.

On this background one may evaluate K. Ware's opinion on the relation of Hesychasm to Yoga, as to Gregory of Sinai: "...as far as Gregory goes in his directions about bodily posture and control of the breath. It can scarcely be termed a 'psycho-somatic technique', far less an instance of 'Christian Yoga'."⁷⁶⁴ Ware might be right as to the loss of sophistication of method in St. Gregory's instructions. As to the notions of the effectiveness of the invocation of the Holy Name, he is certainly wrong.

Characteristic of Tantric thought and practice is, that the precise wording of the mantra is very important. Ware narrows his attention to this aspect in Gregory of Sinai's teachings. The Prayer of the Heart and the mode of its use resonate soundly with mantras in Tantra Yoga. The incessant, ardent repetition of the mantra as prayer formula evokes the powers and presence of the invoked deity. In the full standard form of this prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, the sinner!" the theology of redemption by forgiveness of sins by the salvific works of Christ is included in the prayer for his presence and effect.

If one looks at how mantras are embedded in Tantra Yoga, the affinity is confirmed. The *Mantra-Yoga-Samhita* (17th century) enlists as elements of Mantra-Yoga:

- 1) devotion, 2) purification, 3) posture (Āsanas), 4) daily adoration and worship, reciting hymns of praise with the holy names, and opening the heart,
- 5) proper conduct, 6) concentration, 7) serving the divine space, 8) breathing ritual, 9) performing meaningful hand gestures (Mudras), 10) offering libations to the gods, invocations of the gods, 11) invocations of the deity by means of mantras, 12) offering gifts of worship, 13) performing 'sacrifice', preferably as self-sacrifice of the heart to the deity, 14) recitations and 15) meditation.⁷⁶⁵

⁷⁶³ Feuerstein, G. (1998). *The Yoga Tradition - Its History, Literature, Philosophy and Practice*, Prescott: Hohm Press, p. 358ff.

⁷⁶⁴ Ware, K. (1972). *The Jesus Prayer in St Gregory of Sinai - teachings of St Gregory of Sinai (1255-1346) on the Jesus Prayer*. A paper read at the Sixth International Conference of Patristic Studies, Oxford, 10 September 1971. Kallistos Ware and Sobornost/ECR..
<http://www.bogoslov.ru/en/text/2588738.html>

⁷⁶⁵ Feuerstein, G. (1998). *The Yoga Tradition - Its History, Literature, Philosophy and Practice*. Prescott, p. 53.

In view of these detailed instructions the correspondences to a form of Hesychasm focussed on the Jesus Prayer are still apparent. If K. Ware limited his judgment, that the form of Hesychasm taught by St. Gregory of Sinai is no 'Christian Yoga' it may hold, as to the paucity of detail on method. For Hesychast literature up to Palamas he had rightly observed that the Jesus Prayer is not mentioned, so that it cannot be regarded as the defining element here. The issue of Yogic origins however must be referred to these sources. The question of integration of Hesychasm with the liturgical life of the Church, indicating distinct origins, remains. Thus, St. Gregory of Sinai instructed his monks to firmly embed the Prayer of the Heart in the daily monastic routine of the Prayer of the Hours.

The Tantric features of the Prayer of the Heart, discussed here, indicate the process of reception of Yoga must have lasted up to the disruption of connections to India in the early 7th century. By this time Tantra had emerged in Yoga. The tensions in theory and method, between classical Yoga and Tantra Yoga, accounting for their differences, evidently also shows up in Hesychasm. Their different dynamics have apparently unfolded in distinct developments in Hesychasm too. While the reception of classical Yoga, based on Neoplatonism (and Middle Platonism), is supported by many reasons of theory and practice, as well as historiography, the Tantric elements, such as the mantra-like Jesus Prayer, and the subtle physiology with its energetic nodes, the chakras, and their luminous and energetic manifestations, indicate a powerful influence of Tantra, that became essential to Hesychasm. The subsequent predominance of the mantra-like Prayer of the Heart, leading to the decline of other features, indicates a continued dynamic, that may only in part be due to factors, like the loss of a philosophical frame of understanding of the symbolism of Hesychasm's Yogic features of structured practice, and theological reasons.

8.10.2. Hesychast Prayer of the Heart, Supported by Breathing: Mantra-Yoga and Prāṇāyāma

The method of Hesychasm, which St. Gregory of Sinai knew, and taught in his last seat, the monastery of Praoria in Bulgaria, where he became abbot,⁷⁶⁶ is rudimentary. Through his students, who became monastic leaders in Slavic lands this version of Hesychasm

⁷⁶⁶ Idem

was spread. It is focussed on the invocation of the name of Jesus. As late as the 19th century it gave rise to a movement of 'Name Praisers' (Имяславие) in Russian monasticism, concentrating solely on the invocation of the Holy Name as theurgic (quasi-sacramental) means. The comprehensive system that St. Gregory Palamas taught, was lost in the reduction of Hesychasm to a constant prayer of the Holy Name, supported by rudiments of its structured method.

The form of Hesychasm transmitted by Gregory of Sinai to the Slavic countries led to a decline of awareness of the symbolism and differentiated method of Hesychast meditation documented by Gregory Palamas. It was certainly accelerated once Hesychasm moved out of the realm of Byzantine learning and its fusion of Christian Orthodoxy with Neoplatonic philosophy. The symbolism of the embodied meditation practice, as expounded by Palamas, thereby became illegible, subject to misconceptions, and ultimately discarded as irrelevant. It has shaped an opinion that identifies 'Hesychasm' with what developed from here.

Meyendorff thus likewise tended to consider Palamas' explication of the method of Hesychast meditation as peripheral. Following developments in Russian Orthodox piety, emerging in the 19th century, he reinterprets Palamas' statements on interiorisation as recommending a transition from meditation to prayer:

It would seem to be a common experience of Eastern Christian contemplatives that initially one has to exercise persistence and real effort and force the lips to repeat the Jesus prayer; but in time the prayer becomes gradually internalised, and finally self-activating as an unceasing rhythm.⁷⁶⁷

In this passage Meyendorff apparently had the practice in mind which is portrayed by in the *Russian Pilgrim*. At the beginning of his journey, the spiritual wanderer is introduced by a monk to the *Philokalia* and to the practise of 'unceasing prayer':

As we entered his cell he began to speak again: 'The constant inner Prayer of Jesus is an unbroken, perpetual calling upon the Divine Name of Jesus with the lips, the mind, and the heart, while picturing His lasting presence in one's imagination and imploring His lasting grace wherever one is, in whatever one

⁷⁶⁷ Gendle, N. (transl.) and Meyendorff, J. (ed. and intr.). (1983). *Gregory Palamas – The Triads*, Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, p. 127, fn. 55.

does, even while one sleeps. This Prayer consists of the following words: - 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me!' Those who use this prayer constantly are so greatly comforted that they are moved to say it at all times, for they can no longer live without it. And the prayer will keep on ringing in their hearts of its own accord. Now do you understand what unceasing prayer is?' 'Yes, I do Father. In the Name of God explain to me how to achieve the mastery of it,' I said, feeling overwhelmed with joy. 'You will learn how to master it by reading this book, which is called the *Philokalia*.... He opened the book, and after having found the instruction by St. Simeon the New Theologian, he began to read: 'Take a seat in solitude and silence. Bend your head, close your eyes, and breathing softly, in your imagination, look into your own heart. Let your mind, or rather your thoughts, flow from your head down to your heart and say, while breathing: 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me.' Whisper these words gently or say them in your mind. Discard all other thoughts. Be serene, persevering and repeat them, over and over again.' ... When the elder dismissed me with his blessings, he told me that while I was learning the ways of the prayer I must return and relate to him my experiences in a full and sincere Confession; for this work cannot be crowned with success except with the attentive guidance of a teacher.⁷⁶⁸

This instruction is striking when compared to the description of Hesychast method which Palamas gave. The method of deliberate breathing is reduced to mere 'breathing softly' without any further significance. The idea of bringing all mental activity to a standstill is reduced to "dismissing other thoughts". The idea of ceasing of discursive activity is absent. The idea of a reversion and recollection of intellect appears nowhere. Even the

⁷⁶⁸ *The Way of a Pilgrim and The Pilgrim Continues His Way*. Ed. Fedotov, G. P. and French, R. M. (trans). (1997). Blanco, Texas, 1997: New Sarov Press, pp. 27–29. [Original: (1884). Kazan.].

idea of introducing intellect into the heart appears in a somewhat modified form of “looking in imagination into the heart”.

It is remarkable that five hundred years after Gregory Palamas developed a comprehensive and philosophically sophisticated doctrine of Hesychasm, including in it the recent teachings on the method, which surfaced in the 13th and 14th centuries, the further course of Hesychasm seems to have resulted in a reduction to a simpler form, both practically and conceptually. The systematic meaning, and coherence, of the elements of Hesychasm presented by Palamas are lost. The elements of method retained, attained a new function and meaning.

Understood on its own terms, the ‘constant prayer’ presented in the *Russian Pilgrim* is a coherent and time-tested practice, with specific spiritual, emotional, physical, unconscious, and conscious effects, as described vividly in this book. It is associated with a rich and interiorised culture of Russian Orthodox piety.

8.10.3. The Personal Lord in Yoga, and Christ in Hesychasm: Deification by Union

Early on in Hesychasm, in the period of Sinaitic Hesychasm, the central Neoplatonic figure of the reversion of purified intellect to itself and to God has been combined with another defining motif of Hesychasm, the presence of Christ in the heart. In Orthodox view this is fitting. God is understood as the transcendent agent in Hesychast meditation – as conceptualized by Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, in reception of Neoplatonic theory of theurgy. (‘Theurgy’ is defined as ‘embodied enactment and performance of transcendent divine agency’.) In Trinitarian theology mediates between the formless and utterly transcendent aspects of God and the manifestation in personal form in Christ incarnate. The epiphanies of ‘divine light’ are associated as manifesting energetic and illuminative aspects of the divine.

Allowance is made in all philosophical-theological systems considered for the genesis of Hesychasm – Christian Orthodoxy, Theurgic Neoplatonism, and Vedāntic and Tantric Yoga - for both ‘personalistic’ and ‘apophatic’ perceptions of the Divine. Variations in practices and in emphasis have developed in their meditation doctrines. We find theistic invocation of the personal divine Lord in Yoga as well as in Hesychasm. In Hesychasm the invocation of Christ in the uninterrupted Prayer of the Heart is emphasized in this tradition, with the indwelling of Christ in the heart as goal. In others, as represented by

Palamas, the focus is on the experience of the energies of the triune God during the reversion of intellect, beyond 'form and name', conceptualised theologically as by participation in Christ. Palamas describes this relation between soul and God as follows:

The triadic nature posterior to the supreme Trinity ... made by it in its image ...namely the human soul, ought to ... look at him alone and adorn itself with perpetual remembrance and contemplation of him and with the most fervent and ardent love for him. By these it is marvellously drawn to itself, or rather, it would eventually attract to itself the mysterious and ineffable radiance of that nature.⁷⁶⁹

Here Palamas emphasizes the relation between *soul* (encompassing a trinity herself) and the Holy Trinity. It is qualified by love to God, and by attraction to the divine luminous radiance, and by reversion of soul to itself. This Neoplatonic figure is also present in Yogic literature. Palamas has been criticised from 'personalistic' theological positions, prevalent in the middle and late 20th century,⁷⁷⁰ in for his doctrine of the common energies of the triune God. Palamas refuted exclusively personalistic approaches in theology. Thus, he responded to a contemporary critic, Akindynos, who proposed to limit the concept of 'divine energies' exclusively to the three hypostases (persons) of the Holy Trinity. Palamas objected that this negated the concept of one Godhead in essence. The divine energies are "contemplated in not one but three persons."⁷⁷¹ Palamas conceives the reflexive and participatory mode of access to God and the inter-personal relation as complementary aspects of Hesychasm. The endorsement of his doctrines of the 'uncreated energies' by the Orthodox Church affirms the validity of his conception of Hesychasm, as pathway to divinisation.

The polarity – and tension - between the theistic element of devotion to the personal Lord ('Īshvara') and the Advaitic concept of God also marks Yoga. In both, the personalistic element is expressed by mantra prayer as persistent prayer – as in the Prayer of the Heart. The 'Lord of Yoga' is defined in *Yoga Sūtra*, part 1, for Yoga:

⁷⁶⁹ Palamas, *Capita* 40

⁷⁷⁰ Williams, T. D. and Bengtsson, J. O. (2018). Personalism. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (winter 2018 edition). (Zalta, E. N. (ed.)). <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2018/entries/personalism/>

⁷⁷¹ Palamas, *Capita* 137

The Lord of Yoga is a distinct form of spirit unaffected by the forces of corruption, by actions, by the fruits of action, or by substantial intentions. (24)

The Lord of Yoga is the incomparable seed of omniscience. (25) Being unconditioned by time, he is the teacher of even the ancient teachers. (26)⁷⁷²

B. Stoler Miller explains: The identification of the role of the Lord

(Īśvara) in Yoga varies according to schools of practise and philosophical interpretation. For Patañjali, the Lord is ... a representation of the omniscient spirit (purusha) as the archetypal yogi (yogeśvara). The definition of Īśvara as a 'distinct form of the spirit' (purusha) (24) identifies it with the primary spiritual principle of sankhya.⁷⁷³

Both Īśvara and purusha have anthropomorphic origins in the Vedas. They became intellectualised. In Sankhya philosophy purusha designates pure intellect as the principle opposed to matter. It includes human intellect as faculty of thought and the processes of thought. Īśvara designates the first emanation of the formless first principle, or reality, of Brahma. Patañjali's reference to Īśvara and its identification with purusha indicates that he has moved away from the ultimately atheistic, dualistic world view of Sāṅkhya – with its assumptions of 'mind' and 'matter' as ultimate principles, including the belief in a multitude of 'intelligences', both human and divine - towards the monistic perceptions of Vedāntic, that proposes a supreme intellectual reality, manifesting itself, in many beings, in all of reality, thus also within the Yogi. Statements in Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra* that reflect views of Sāṅkhya, or seek to accommodate them in terminology, have subsequently been reinterpreted in the sense of Vedānta, and later in an Advaitic sense as by Śaṅkara. It is this line of Vedāntic Yoga' that has perceptibly been received by theurgic Neoplatonism.

This concept of 'Īśvara' means a supreme 'Lord of creation' who is both transcendent and immanent. The concept varies between an understanding of a supreme personal being as a mere transcendent ideal, realised to some extent in every contemplative person, and a truly transcendent entity. Since Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra*

⁷⁷² Patañjali, *Yoga Sūtra* I.2.25. Ed. Miller, B. S. (1998). *Yoga – Discipline of Freedom. The Yoga Sūtra Attributed to Patañjali*. (transl., cmt., introd., and glossary), (pp. 35-36). New York: Bantam Books.

⁷⁷³ Miller, B. S. (1998). *Yoga – Discipline of Freedom. The Yoga Sūtra Attributed to Patañjali*. (transl., cmt., introd., and glossary), New York: Bantam Books, p. 36.

reflects a transition towards a monistic perspective, as developed in Vedānta, the concept of 'Īśvara' acquires theistic significance, designating a supreme personal God. This was adopted in the Vedāntic reception and reinterpretation, that forms the basis of Śaṅkara's comment, also a panentheistic sense. (The Vedāntic reinterpretation and reception of yoga is an epochal process, fundamental to the reception by the Platonic-Pythagorean tradition, and by Hesychasm too.) Accordingly, the *Taittiriya Upanishad* defines Īśvara as the personal emanation of the supreme divine principle or reality, of Brahman:

He desired: "Would I that I were many! Let me procreate myself!" he performed austerity. Having performed austerity, he created this whole world, whatever there is here. Having created it, into it indeed he entered. Having entered it, he became both the actual [here] and the yonder, both the defined and he undefined, both the based and the non-based, both the conscious (vijñāna) and the unconscious, both the real and the false. As the real he became whatever there is here.⁷⁷⁴

This vision permits to unify the two principles of Sāṅkhya, that are also present in Yoga: the pure Spirit, and the diverse realm of matter, by which the perception of the pure Spirit in the state of embodied mediation, becomes the attainment of a supreme reality. The dedication to the Lord of Yoga thus has an objective and a subjective aspect, of performing such devotion to the Lord of Yoga in Yoga, by which the devotee seeks to become one with him.

This dual approach relevant to comparison with Hesychasm. Palamas' interpretation of the basic figure of Hesychast practice - of Pseudo-Dionysius' figure emanation and return of divine intellect - comprises such a double relation: of object-related invocation and of participatory inspiration by the transcendent divine. The synergetic notion of cooperation between the Holy Spirit and man, implies a degree of identification. Like the devotee who 'enacts' the Lord of Yoga the Hesychast 'enacts' the work of the Holy Spirit in his meditation. Hesychasm is thus not only a mode of invoking

⁷⁷⁴ *Taittiriya Upanishad* II.6. Ed. Radhakrishnan, S. and Moore, C. A. (eds.). (1957). *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, p. 60.

the Holy Spirit, nor is it a merely physical preparation of the inner reception, but an actual performance of the Holy Spirit's work.

Whereas Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra* is somewhat vague about the understanding of the purusha, the elder *Bhagavadgīta* is more pronounced in a theistic sense. For our purpose of comparison with Hesychasm, the age and status of the *Bhagavadgīta* is important. It is a work which was written and compiled from the 5th century B.C. onwards. Archaisms of language and some references point at this early age. In the 2nd century B.C., the *Bhagavadgīta* was brought into its present form. It was augmented in the 2nd century A.D., possibly by an adherent of Vedānta.⁷⁷⁵ In this way the original theological and philosophical basis in Yoga and Sāṅkhya was aligned with the theology of Vedānta. The *Bhagavadgīta* is grouped with the *Upanishads*.

This body of scriptures, beginning from the middle of the first millennium B.C., presents monistic conceptions, either of an impersonal supreme divine reality, of Brahma, which pervades all as supreme reality, as in the elder *Upanishads*, or of a personal supreme divine Lord as in the later *Upanishads*.⁷⁷⁶ In one of these, the *Katha-Upanishad*, the soteriological conception, that is developed in relation to Brahma, is combined with the practice of Yoga. The quieting of the 'fluctuations' or impulses of the *mind* and the *body*, within the 'personal self', is said to lead to the recognition of a 'great self' (mahān ātman), which finds itself resting in the supreme divine being, the transcendent 'purusha'. This concept can mean a 'personal god', or a 'transcendent pure spirit', as in the dualism of Sāṅkhya, where it is represented by a 'personal' divine image as object of devotion. Yoga acquires a theistic interpretation here for the first time.⁷⁷⁷

The *Bhagavadgīta* is significant by its range of distribution, by its universal recognition as inspired scripture from early on, and by the comprehensive reference to various current systems of Indian philosophy, theology, and spiritual practice. It comprises a range of systems which were current in its time of origin: The sacrificial cult of the *Vedas*, the doctrine of the *Upanishads* about the transcendent Brahman, the theism and piety of the *Bhagavatas*, the dualism of the Sāṅkhya, and the meditation doctrine of

⁷⁷⁵ Radhakrishnan, S. (intr. and cmt.). (1950?). *Die Bhagavadgīta – Sanskrittext mit Einleitung und Kommentar von S. Radhakrishnan, mit dem indischen Urtext verglichen und ins Deutsche übersetzt von Siegfried Lienhard*, Wiesbaden: R. Löwit, p. 18f. [Original: Radhakrishnan, S. (1948). *The Bhagavadgīta*, London: Allen Unwin].

⁷⁷⁶ von Glasenapp, H. (1974). *Die Philosophie der Inder*, Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, pp. 162 – 165.

⁷⁷⁷ Ibidem, p. 165.

Yoga. All of these are integrated in the epic, as a comprehensive work of scripture.⁷⁷⁸ The *Bhagavadgita* was widely read during that period when the most intense exchange occurred between India and the Hellenistic lands.

As to the integration of invocation of the 'personal Lord', Yoga and Hesychasm appear to have undergone similar developments. In both, the 'mantra prayer' of personal invocation becomes prevalent at a late stage: in Mediaeval Tantra in India and in post-Palamite Hesychasm.

Both in Hesychasm and in Yoga the 'mantra' element is somewhat secondary, in the logic of the respective technique and their explications by Patañjali and his major commentators, especially Śaṅkara, and Palamas. The mantra element is complementary to the breathing technique (Prāṇāyāma), as the bearer of the meditative and cognitive process. Both seem to supplement these respective primary processes. The idea is that these invocations contribute to the success of the primary figure of technique. An explication involves the relation between Christ and the Holy Spirit in Hesychasm, and between Īśvara and puruṣa in Yoga.

Patañjali explains the role of the Lord of Yoga: "Cessation of thought may also come from the dedication to the Lord of Yoga (23)"⁷⁷⁹ Devotion to the transcendent Lord leads to identification with him. Devotion serves to attain a mystical union. In it the doings of the Yogi become permeated by the divine Lord as if performed by Himself. The devotion to the personal Lord (Īśvara) also belongs to the ethical principles and obligations ("niyama") to be observed by the Yogi. They have a preparatory role, as in Hesychasm.

Patañjali was ambivalent in his description of the Īśvara, oscillating between dualistic world view of Sāṅkhya which assumed a multitude of divine intelligences as 'supreme Lords' and the panentheistic concept of one supreme divine Being, Brahman.⁷⁸⁰ This has led to modern interpretations of the concept in Yoga as designating the 'higher self' of every individual Yogi, without connoting a personal god. Vedānta teaches that the 'personal God' (Īśvara), as object of devotion, represents the anthropomorphic aspect

⁷⁷⁸ Radhakrishnan, S. (intr. and cmt.). (1950?). *Die Bhagavadgita – Sanskrittext mit Einleitung und Kommentar von S. Radhakrishnan, mit dem indischen Urtext verglichen und ins Deutsche übersetzt von Siegfried Lienhard*, Wiesbaden: R. Löwit, p. 17f.

⁷⁷⁹ Patañjali, *Yoga Sūtra* I.23. Ed. Miller, B. S. (1998). *Yoga – Discipline of Freedom. The Yoga Sūtra Attributed to Patañjali*. (transl., commen., introd., and glossary), New York: Bantam Books, pp. 35.

⁷⁸⁰ Feuerstein, G. (1998). *The Yoga Tradition - Its History, Literature, Philosophy and Practice*, Prescott: Hohm Press, p. 249.

of the supreme divine consciousness, (Brahman), in the realm of the objectified world, as in exoteric theology.⁷⁸¹

In this line the invocation of Īshvara, made by the chanting of the syllable 'Om' (Aum), which represents the supreme divine consciousness or Brahman, at the beginning and conclusion of the meditation, while meditating on it during the breathing meditation. In Tantra, the name of the personally revered deity is invoked in continuous mantra-recital.⁷⁸² The 'Lord of Yoga' is invoked as divine agent by chanting of 'Aum', as Patañjali explains:

His sound is the reverberating syllable AUM. (27) Repetition of this syllable reveals its meaning. (28) When AUM reveals itself, introspection is attained, and obstacles fall away. (29) ... distractions are accompanied by ... irregular breathing... (31)⁷⁸³

Palamas' explanation of Hesychasm resembles the Advaitic form.

The form of Hesychasm focussed on the mantric invocation "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me, the sinner!" is to accompany Hesychast meditation, according to the 18th century Athonite Nikodimos the Hagiorite.⁷⁸⁴ Irenée Hausherr proposes an integration of this prayer with the trinitarian emphasis in Palamas' theory of Hesychasm, by the argument, that the divine 'Nous' ('transcendent 'intellect', also the 'Holy Spirit'), is invoked through each person of the Holy Trinity.⁷⁸⁵ In some developments in Hesychasm the metaphysics involved in Palamas' theory, of the self-translucent 'intellect' as pathway to divinisation has evaporated. The spiritual literature of Hesychast tradition has repeatedly reflected how this aspect is to be connected to the invocation of Christ in a mutually enhancing way.

The tension between the Neoplatonic figure of divinising return of intellect into itself in stillness, and imageless recollection, and the 'personalistic' invocation of Jesus Christ

⁷⁸¹ Deussen, P. (1906). *Das System des Vedānta. Nach dem Brahma-Sūtras des Bādarāyana und dem Kommentare des Cankara über dieselben als ein Kompendium der Dogmatik des Brahmanismus vom Standpunkte des Cankara aus*, Leipzig: F. A Brockhaus (reprint: Elibrin Classics, 2005), p. 292f.

⁷⁸² Feuerstein, G. (1998). *The Yoga Tradition - Its History, Literature, Philosophy and Practice*, Prescott: p. 53.

⁷⁸³ Patañjali, *Yoga Sūtra*, I.26-31. Ed. Miller, B. S. (1998). *Yoga – Discipline of Freedom. The Yoga Sūtra Attributed to Patañjali*. (transl., cmt., introd., and glossary), New York: Bantam Books, pp. 36 -37.

⁷⁸⁴ Hausherr, I. (1927). La Méthode d'Oraison Hésychaste. *Orientalia Christiana* vol. IX-2, (36). pp. 10–209. (ed. Pont. Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, Rome), p. 106.

⁷⁸⁵ Ibidem, p.108f.

in Hesychast Mantra Prayer, has perceptibly been felt in Hesychast tradition. St. Seraphim of Sarov (1759 – 1833) presents a resolution, that is based on his readings of Patristic authors, including those in the *Philokalia*, that he read from 1794 on:

To receive and behold in the heart the light of Christ, one must, as far as possible, divert one's attention away from visible objects. Having purified the soul beforehand by repentance and good deeds, and with faith in the Crucified, having closed the bodily eyes, immerse the mind within the heart, in which place cry out with the invocation of the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; and then, to the measure of one's zeal and warmth of spirit towards the Beloved, a man finds in the invoked name a delight which awakens the desire to seek higher illumination. When through such a practice the mind enters into the heart, the light of Christ shines, illuminating the chamber of the soul by its Divine radiance [...] When a man beholds the eternal light interiorly, his mind is pure and has in it no sensory representations, but, being totally immersed in contemplation of uncreated goodness, he forgets everything sensorily and wishes not even to see himself; he rather desires to hide himself in the hearth of the earth, if only he is not deprived of this true good – God.⁷⁸⁶

Thus St. Seraphim explains, how the inner understanding of Jesus Christ, leads from the interpersonal invocation of his holy name to a participation in the Divine Light, which is perceived interiorly. This is based, theologically on the hypostatic union in Christ and on the hesychasts participation in it. It is noteworthy, that St. Seraphim enlists all the 'eight steps of Yoga' as constituents of Hesychasm here, including the Neoplatonic figure of reversion of intellect into itself, in stillness, beyond concepts and objects.

⁷⁸⁶ Serafim of Sarov (1837). *The Spiritual Instructions to Laymen and Monks*, no. 28. Ed. Rose, S. (transl.). (1996). *The Little Russian Philokalia, vol 1: St. Seraphim of Sarov*. (pp.21 – 62). Platina Ca.: St. Hermann of Alaska Brotherhood, p. 47.

8.11. Illumination in Yoga and in Hesychasm

Palamas discusses the ultimate state of meditation with Barlaam of Calabria:

Elsewhere you claim that the mind contemplates God 'not in some other hypostasis, but when purified at once of passions and ignorance, in beholding itself, it sees God in itself, since it is made in His image.' You also believe that those who claim to see in this way the very essence of the mind under the form of light are in accord with the most mystical Christian tradition. But Hesychasts know that the purified and illuminated mind, when clearly participating in the grace of God, also beholds other mystical and supernatural visions – for in seeing itself, it sees more than itself: It does not simply contemplate some other object or simply its own image, but rather the glory impressed on its own image by the grace of God. This radiance reinforces the mind to transcend itself, and to accomplish that union with those better things which is beyond understanding. By this union, the mind sees God in the Spirit in a manner transcending human powers.⁷⁸⁷

This passage contains several motifs that are of special importance in comparison with Yoga:

The motif of the self-perception of the mind as leading to the experience of God, is central to the Christian Neoplatonism of Pseudo-Dionysius, and the Pagan Neoplatonism of Proclus. Palamas and Barlaam share this heritage. This proposition is undisputed between the two of them and needs no explication. It derives from the idea that the Absolute Divine unfolds itself, according to Plato in the *Phaidros* in a primary triad of 'beauty', 'wisdom', and 'goodness'.⁷⁸⁸ Developing on the idea of divine emanation, Proclus adds a second triad of these three. Of these, 'beauty' discloses what is hidden about Goodness as intelligible and divine light.

⁷⁸⁷ Palamas, *Triads* II.3.11. Ed. Gendle, N. (transl.) and Meyendorff, J. (ed. and intr.). (1983). *Gregory Palamas – The Triads*, Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, p. 58.

⁷⁸⁸ Plato, *Phaidros* 246 d,8–247 c,1. Loc. cit: Beierwaltes, W. (1998). *Platonismus im Christentum*, Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, p. 68.

Participation in these leads the mystic to the perception of the divine Goodness, and thereby of the supreme Divinity.⁷⁸⁹ This is an aesthetic and intellectual process. In its course the divine energy which manifests itself as 'Eros', which Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita uses interchangeably with 'Agape', for reasons beyond our consideration here. It leads the mystic to retrace the path of divine self-unfolding, or 'proodos' - by striving to collect awareness from multitude to unity in a process of increased concentration. This leads to the perception of the common ground and coherence of all. Thus, the mystic strives to transcend all discursive differentiation in the awareness of the ground of union beyond all multitude, above it and underlying it. Thus, the reasoning mind comes to its limits and arrives at silent contemplation of the transcendent ground of all in the unfathomable. Beierwaltes describes it beautifully:

Der zwischen Sinnlichem und Geistigem, zwischen Vielem auf das Eine hin vermittelnde und sammelnd-einigende Eros treibt also die durch diese Bewegung Geist gewordene Seele noch über sich selbst hinaus und eint sie ,in einem Leben das höher ist als Denken, nur der ursprunghaften und verborgenen Schönheit'⁷⁹⁰ Nicht nur das Sehen des Schönen, sondern gerade die Einung mit ihm und letztlich mit dem Einen selbst ist für Proklos, wie schon für Plotin, der Zielpunkt jeder denkenden, sich in sich selbst zurückwendenden und in sich selbst aufsteigenden Bewegung, die in den eigenen, nicht mehr denkenden Grund zu gelangen sucht.⁷⁹¹

[Eros, that mediates between the sensory and the intellectual, unifying and recollecting them, drives the soul that became intellectual, to transcend itself, and unites it with a lie that is above all thinking, in mere original and secluded beauty.' Not only the beholding of the beautiful, but union with it, and hereby with the One, is - according to Proclus and to Plotinus, before - the goal of all

⁷⁸⁹ Beierwaltes, W. (1998). *Platonismus im Christentum*, Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, p. 68.

⁷⁹⁰ Proclus, *In Alcibiadem* 64.14–17. Loc. cit: Beierwaltes, W. (1998). *Platonismus im Christentum*, Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, p. 70.

⁷⁹¹ Beierwaltes, W. (1998). *Platonismus im Christentum*, Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann, p. 70f.

movement of reversion of the soul, into itself, by which it strives for ascent into itself, towards its proper foundation that is beyond all thinking.]

This movement of ascent can be pursued intellectually, until one arrives at the ground which is beyond all discursive intellectual comprehension – a conviction which Barlaam firmly held.

Against Barlaam's criticism, Palamas defended that this includes embodied meditation of Hesychasm – and the inclusion of the body, as even superior to a merely 'intellectual' process. In this path of embodied ascent all bondage by passions and desires, save for the divine of clarity, divine illumination and beauty occur – and the sensoriform experience of the divine energy manifesting itself as light, as Palamas adds. The latter point is controversial between them, especially in view of the Hesychast mystics' experiences, for which Barlaam held no sympathy and whose intellectual basis apparently escaped him, since it was not taught explicitly but rather transmitted as a form of implicit knowledge in the Athonite community.

In view of the agreement between Proclus' and Pseudo-Dionysius' religious philosophy with the Vedāntic interpretation of the *Yoga Sūtra*, the affinities in the perception of a supreme intellectual reality beyond all discursive thought, attributed to 'samadhi' and to Hesychast illumination become significant. They indicate that the exchange between (Neo-)platonist and Advaitic Yogic mystics was probably very meaningful Antiquity, as sources in India and in Hellenistic-Roman literature suggests. Both parties will have understood each other well.

The illumination of the 'purified soul', central to Yoga, has been illustrated by the 'mirror image' in Hesychasm.⁷⁹² Meyendorff comments on the patristic reception.

The vision of God in the mirror of the purified soul is a commonplace of patristic spiritual teaching. The doctrine stems from the biblical view of man as created in the divine image and therefore capable of reflecting the divine splendour of God Himself... Barlaam ... shows himself perfectly familiar with traditional (especially Evagrian) teaching on this point.⁷⁹³

⁷⁹² Palamas, *Triads* II.3.11

⁷⁹³ Gendle, N. (transl.) and Meyendorff, J. (ed. and intr.). (1983). *Gregory Palamas – The Triads*, Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, p. 112.

Meyendorff gracefully omits that the mirror image does not occur in the *Genesis* account of the creation of man, but is of Platonic origin, as is its usage in conjunction with the idea of ascending to the unmediated vision of the divine light, described in the *Parable of the Cave*.⁷⁹⁴ Palamas and Barlaam were certainly familiar with the parable.

The transition from the mirror images of the divine archetypes to the perception of the divine itself, is mediated by the double nature of the intellect in man. This is evoked by Barlaam and underwritten in principle by Palamas too. Meyendorff continues, intent on 'difference':

There would seem to be little at issue between Palamas and Barlaam here.

Barlaam states, 'The mind (nous) when purified of passion and ignorance, sees God in His own image' (II.3.7). But Palamas is at pains to emphasise the crucial point that this vision is the fruit of grace, not some merely natural and self-generated illumination of the mind, as claimed by Barlaam.⁷⁹⁵

Apparently, he chose not to look closely at what Palamas wrote here, nor what Barlaam stated consistently, who did not dispute the effectiveness of 'grace' in the perception of the divine. Meyendorff engages in a polemical game here, of setting up Barlaam as the (humanistic) 'philosopher' in conflict with the Palamas the 'monk'. In doing so, he ignored the monk in the philosopher and the philosopher in the monk – in both.

Palamas firmly acknowledges Barlaam's position: "You also believe that those who claim to see in this way the very essence of the mind under the form of light are in accord with the most mystical Christian tradition."⁷⁹⁶ The point Palamas is making is not to dispute his, referring to Barlaam's explications in *Triads*, II.3.7 but to add that the divine light perceived by the Hesychasts was not only a mode of manifestation of the light of the divine intellect. Barlaam had stated, in perfect Pseudo-Dionysian tradition, that this mirror image of God was to be perceived in the purified intellect of man himself. Palamas insisted that it was accompanied by manifestations of the 'energies' of God. Their differences on 'aisthesis' and 'embodiment' in Hesychasm result here from. Palamas declared:

⁷⁹⁴ Plato. (375 B. C. E.). *Politeia* VII.514a–518b. <http://www.ellopos.net/elpenor/greek-texts/ancient-greece/plato/plato-politeia.asp>

⁷⁹⁵ Gendle, N. (transl.) and Meyendorff, J. (ed. and intr.). (1983). *Gregory Palamas – The Triads*, Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, p. 112.

⁷⁹⁶ Palamas, *Triads* II.3.11. Ed. Ibidem, p. 58.

But Hesychasts know that the purified and illuminated mind, when clearly participating in the grace of God, also beholds other mystical and supernatural visions – for in seeing itself, it sees more than itself.⁷⁹⁷

Again, Palamas affirms that the purified and illuminated mind is the site of the revelatory experience, which is interpreted as participating in the grace of God – a point that Barlaam did not dispute⁷⁹⁸. Palamas also affirms that the illuminated mind “sees itself”, an essential point of both Platonic and Pseudo-Dionysian inspiration, which rests on the dual nature of the *intellect*, in its incarnated state in man, while remaining essentially divine. Thus, it is accessible to self-perception in a condition purified by meditation. This point is important for the comparison of Hesychast illumination with Yogic enlightenment.

The experience of spiritual light is an essential element in the Yogic tradition. Some treatises on Yoga unfold the visions and distinguish between different luminous experiences. Thus, the *Advayataraka Upanishad* (100 B.C. – 300 A.D.) states:

...by means of Tāraka-[Yoga], through vision of that which abides beyond [the senses] with a yoked mind and through introspection (antarīkshana) [the Yogi discovers] Being-Consciousness-Bliss, the Absolute in its innate form (sva-rūpa). Hence [at first] the Absolute formed of white effulgence becomes manifest. That Absolute is known by the eye aided by the mind in introspection. Thus, also the ‘formless’ Deliverer [is realized].⁷⁹⁹

G. Feuerstein comments on the description of minor internal lights, as in the *Advaya-Tāraka-Upanishad*, the internal photistic experiences are known as ‘visions of the inner sign... the external photistic experiences ‘visions of the outer sign’. ... We can only guess at the experiential significance of these luminous spaces. ... This Upanishad [the *Mandala-Brāhmana-Upanishad*] moreover, makes a distinction between two types of photistic experience. First

⁷⁹⁷ Idem

⁷⁹⁸ Palamas, *Triads* II.3.7

⁷⁹⁹ *Advayataraka Upanishad* v.10. Loc. cit.: Feuerstein, G. (1998). *The Yoga Tradition - Its History, Literature, Philosophy and Practice*, Prescott: Hohm Press, p.322f.

there is the 'deliverer with form'(murti-tāraka), which is within the range of the senses and consists in manifestations of light in the space between the eyebrows. The second type is the 'formless deliverer' (amurti-tāraka), which is the transcendental Light itself.⁸⁰⁰

The experiential knowledge on the phenomena of spiritual light and their differentiated distinction in relation to the meditative process, indicate, that from the first century C. E., when Christ's Transfiguration was described, up to the emergence of the first writing on Hesychasm, the phenomena and experiences of spiritual light received special attention in contemporary Yoga, as evidenced by Hindu Scripture. They certainly belonged to the type of Yoga, that persons from the Roman Empire were introduced to in their time. This means, that the vision of spiritual light too, must be identified as Yogic. It was part of this Yogic complex of meditation.

8.12.Special Powers in Yoga and in Hesychasm

Hagiography of Hesychast saints emphasises their special paranormal powers, as documented for St. Mary of Egypt and St. Serafim of Sarov. They are also described in Scripture of Yoga, as 'siddhis'. They comprise knowledge not limited by time and space, attained by Yogic meditation, through purification of the 'thinking substance', 'citta', in meditation, by which it is believed to become 'transpersonal', or 'suprapersonal'.⁸⁰¹ Śaṅkara discusses these faculties of clairvoyance, past-life memories,⁸⁰² foreknowledge and telepathy.⁸⁰³ He states, that these powers, 'siddhis,' are attained by 'tapas'. These are defined thus:

Tapas is the endurance of the opposites. the opposites are hunger and thirst, heat and cold, standing and sitting, complete silence and merely verbal

⁸⁰⁰ Ibidem, p.325.

⁸⁰¹ von Glasenapp, H. (1974). *Die Philosophie der Inder – eine Einführung in ihre Geschichte und Lehre*, 3rd. ed., Stuttgart: A. Kröner Verlag, p. 229.

⁸⁰² Śaṅkara, Adi, *On the Yoga Sūtras* III.18. Ed. Leggett, T. (transl.). (1990). *Śaṅkara On the Yoga Sūtras – A Full Translation of the Newly Discovered Text*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publ., p. 327.

⁸⁰³ Śaṅkara, Adi, *On the Yoga Sūtras* III.19., Ed. Ibidem, p. 328f.

silence. Vows are undertaken by them in accordance with their circumstances.⁸⁰⁴

This indicates, that the 'stylites' among the Christian ascetics in Late Antiquity, such as Simeon Stylites (5th century) in Syria, practiced a specific form of Yogic 'tapas'. The other forms of 'tapas', enlisted by Śaṅkara here, remained common practices in Hesychasm. Commentating, he explains that these facilitate the attainment of 'siddhis': supernatural powers and perceptions:

*The perfections [siddhis] from birth [spiritual rebirth] are in a different body, being attainment of another body in heaven or some similar region, by yoga or by other means. [...] by mantra-s being murmured are attained levitation, etc.; by tapas (are attained) such abilities as taking on any form and going anywhere at will.*⁸⁰⁵

Palamas confirms them, insisting repeatedly that the visions of Hesychasts are not perceived by natural faculty of vision⁸⁰⁶ but by a supernatural power of perception that surpasses the self.⁸⁰⁷ Palamas extends this to 'spiritual perception', of the energies or grace of God in their hypostatic, luminous manifestations,⁸⁰⁸ but does not limit it to that, pointing out at the supernatural perceptions of saints. The agreement in concepts and in phenomenology certainly provided a basis for exchange and adoption of Yogic practices for the attainment of 'spiritual vision'.

⁸⁰⁴ Śaṅkara, *On the Yoga Sūtra* II.32. Ed. Ibidem, p.265.

⁸⁰⁵ Śaṅkara, *On the Yoga Sūtra* IV.1. Ed. Ibidem, p. 366.

⁸⁰⁶ Palamas, *Triads* II.3.9

⁸⁰⁷ Palamas, *Triads* III.3.10

⁸⁰⁸ Palamas, *Triads* III.3.10

IV. Conclusion

9. Conclusions and Outlook

9.1. Reviewing the Reception in Context

This quest for the origins of Hesychasm led to sources in Antiquity: to a millennium of trade and encounter between the Eastern Mediterranean and India. Spirituality and philosophy were important in this exchange, from the beginning to the end. In the earliest documented talks, between Alexander the Great and Brahman Yogis, at the western fringes of India, Platonism, Pythagoreanism, and Cynicism were discussed, as being close to Indian religious philosophy and practice. As spiritually engaged philosophic communities, they were foremost in the reception of Indian religious-philosophical thought, of Vedanta, and of Yoga, even of Tantra, as shown here. In this long process, different strains became joined in Theurgic Neoplatonism, that emerged as the philosophically, academically, and socially most powerful formation. This reception included mutual visits, to India, to the eastern Mediterranean, including, for example, the hosting of Brahmans in the Neoplatonic academia of Alexandria, for talks and lectures.

The focal region of this reception was Alexandria, the hub of Hellenistic and Roman trade with India. Its features that facilitated the reception of Yoga, have been shown. A permanent Indian merchants' colony here, is documented; a syncretistic culture existed, that brought forth Judaism's engagement with Greek language and philosophy, and the religious Graeco-Egyptian syncretism that spread across the Roman Empire. Early Christianity, with its Jewish and Hellenistic roots, thrived here. Academic institutions, in which Middle Platonism flourished, contributed to the formation of Christian theology. Here, a Neoplatonic school (academy) existed, in which Christian and Pagan students studied together, during the 4th and 5th centuries C. E. Its community engaged in meditation, in theurgy, and in active exchange with India. Here, Christian theologians - connected to Alexandria - wrote knowledgably and sympathetically about Brahmanism and Yoga, with references to early Christian monasticism and spirituality.

In the city's environment spiritual communities existed, such as the 'therapeutae', described by Philo of Alexandria, who were of a presumably Buddhist character, Neo-

Pythagorean communities, described by Philostratus for the second century C. E., Cynics, early Christian anchoretic monks of the Egyptian Desert, and Neoplatonists engaging in mediation. While sociologically, religiously, and philosophically apart, they reflect a common culture of spiritual and meditative practices, often with initiations of transformative effect. They all contributed to the emergence of Hesychasm, as shown. Here we have the cultural, philosophical, religious, spiritual, and institutional conditions for the reception of Yoga, and its Vedāntic theory, including elements of Tantra. For this reception the spiritual communities - including those of philosophers – was shown to be important, as they could learn, practice, understand and teach this set of Yoga and its conceptualisation. In this setting, the initiations to arduous ascetic practices, to transformation of aisthesis by meditation, could take place - as documented from early anchoretic monasticism too.

Thus, I could show, that all the components are to be found here, that emerged in Hesychasm in the adjacent realm of Sinai, at the end of Antiquity. The philosophical interpretation and reception by Neoplatonism, that shines up all through the Hesychast tradition, attests to continued familiarity with its spiritual philosophy. The continuity of monastic communities practising and teaching Hesychasm, describing and interpreting it theologically and philosophically, was supported by the continued teaching of Neoplatonism, including Theurgy, in the academic institutions of Byzantium up to the end of the empire.

The present study shows this reception to have proceeded through this pathway, and to have been preserved on the same basis. Arguments are:

- The affinity between Neoplatonism and Vedānta, that has been noticed already in Antiquity, and that led to special interest and to personal exchange
- the agreement between forms of spiritual practice, including asceticism, in Neoplatonic and associated formations, like Neo-Pythagoreanism and Cynicism, with Yoga, discussed in Antiquity,
- the common features of Tantra and Hesychasm:
 - o the 'mantra prayer' as key method. As in the 'Jesus Prayer', with its form of incessant repetition, its somatic aspect, by attachment to deliberate and to unconscious breathing, and its attributed effects,
 - o the system of the 'chakras', present in Hesychasm not conceptually, but in the focus on the 'navel region', and the 'heart', with their specific 'energetic'

and luminous sensations, corresponding to the theory and phenomenology of 'chakras',

- the attention to the interior, and bodily, effects of the meditation, supported theologically by the concept of 'incarnation', and its phenomenology of interior and exterior luminosity,
- the knowledge of the theory and practices of Yoga (and Tantra), as well as of Vedānta pertaining hereto, by early Christian authors of Late Antiquity, as by Palladius, Pseudo-Hippolytus, and Clement of Alexandria, who compare Christian asceticism to these, and who endorse the reception of these, often with reference to the Pythagorean and the Platonic traditions too,
- the universalist attitude to religious revelation, prevalent in Hellenism, and in Roman times, which was adopted by some Christian authors who endorsed trans-religious inheritance and syncretistic adoption,
- the syncretistic and multi-cultural society of Alexandria, existing here for eight centuries, that fostered reception from Yoga, Tantra, and Vedānta, by sustained contact and encounter with Brahman Yogis,
- the long and sustained coexistence and common study of Christian and Pagan students and scholars at academic institutions in Alexandria, promoted exchange and adoption of ideas and practices across religious and cultural boundaries, up to the end of Antiquity,
- the reinforcement of the adopted Yogic complex (of 'eight steps') by the agreements between Vedāntic Yoga and Neoplatonism and their 'readability' in both systems,
- the preservation of this complex in Hesychasm, by the understanding of its symbolism in the philosophical frame of Christian Neoplatonism, taught in Byzantium.
- the re-affirmation of the Yogic and Tantric complex in Hesychasm, especially the perceptions of 'luminosity', the psycho-somatic transformations, and the special faculties, documented by the Hesychast community, throughout its history.

By the set of methods, theory and hermeneutical approaches here applied, the assumption is supported, that Yoga did not enter Hesychasm directly, but through its reception into the spiritual practice of Neoplatonists, with contributions of Neo-Pythagoreanism and Cynicism. Its early Tantric features support that this reception lasted up to the end of Antiquity.

9.2. Theoretical Foundations of this Study

Section I comprises the presentation and discussion of the theoretical tools of this study. An integration between complementary approaches is pursued and proposed.

The analytical framework of this study, with its integration of different theoretical perspectives, combined for complementary views, allowed us to assemble the manifold historical testimonies – as depicted briefly here above – into a coherent picture. Thus, the pathways of reception of the constituent elements of Hesychasm, from Yoga, could be retraced. The mechanisms of this syncretistic (and trans-cultural) fusion were identified.

This set of method is organised around the core of a semiotic understanding of religions and spiritualities as dynamic, living systems. It is the basis for such Theory of Syncretism. It includes approaches as Semiotics, as by Eco, of 'closed' or 'open' systems, of their dynamics of autopoiesis, self-referentiality, of their powers of delimitation and integration, as factors in systemic development, productivity, and adaptation.

Embodiment Theory is applied to the 'body' as medium of religious performance, aisthesis, and experience. The concept of 'habitus' is applied to the significant bodily enactments in Hesychasm and Yoga, like posture (*Āsanas*), deliberate breathing (*Prāṇāyāma*), the withdrawal from distractions in stillness (*Pratyāhāra*), the concentration and focussing of awareness in one point (*Dhāranā*). These elements of practice - the third to sixth step of Yoga - reappear in Hesychasm, where the final two steps, and the attainment of union with God (*Dhyāna*), and divinisation or theosis corresponds to the ecstatic, 'non-dualist' experience of transcendent (*Samādhi*).

The systemic Theory of Syncretism was applied to philosophical and theological doctrine, and to the cultural, economic, and political factors that enabled, promoted, and sustained the syncretistic reception of Yoga into the spirituality of Hellenistic and Roman Antiquity. The compatibility of Brahman Yogic doctrines and practices with those of Cynicism, Neo-Pythagoreism and the Platonic traditions, observed from the beginnings of the intense Graeco-Indian encounters up to the end of Antiquity, by Christian authors, supported this reception. The latter discussed affinities to Orthodox Christian asceticism. Thus, Yogic ideas and practices seeped into Egyptian and Levantine monasticism, percolating here through Neoplatonic and Neopythagorean spiritual groups, mentioned by authors, such as Philostratus, Clement of Alexandria, Pseudo-Hippolytos (of Rome),

and Damascius. Following Theory of Syncretism, the structural complex of Yoga was shown to have remained intact, because it could be understood, re-interpreted and re-enacted. This was presented in sections II and III. Applied to the process of reception, this meant that the elements of meditation of Yoga, recognised in Hesychasm, were not introduced singly and randomly, but as meaningful elements of a whole. The mutual intelligibility and compatibility between the original and the receiving formations in this transfer lead to the formation of Hesychasm.

The theoretical concept of 'Inter-Textuality' was applied to identify how 'texts' of Vedāntic theory of Yoga, were re-reread, leading to the Orthodox presentations in Hesychast literature. The embodied semiotic formations, the reported aesthetic perceptions, and phenomena, were thus adopted intact, with some reinterpretations and modifications.

The perspective of Discourse Theory contributed to the explanation of the genesis of Hesychasm, by identifying the discourse of 'India's spiritual wisdom, meditation, and philosophy, as meaningful and often superior to that of Graeco-Roman tradition'. It is a leitmotif of Hellenistic and Roman culture, up to the end of Antiquity, and re-emerged in Modernity. Authors of Graeco-Roman Antiquity, from Megasthenes and Onesicritus' reports on the encounter and talks of Alexander the Great and his entourage, with Brahman Yogis in India, onwards, up to the discussions of Indian spiritual practices and teachings by Christian authors of late Antiquity, as by Palladius show the power of this motif of cultural discourse. The latter consciously integrated this literary and historiographic tradition into his report on a pilgrimage to India, giving an assessment of common features between Indian, Pagan Greek and Christian asceticism and spirituality. In the perspective of Discourse Theory, these reports, distributed over some eight centuries, could be identified as forming one corpus, reinforced by the regular references of its authors to previous authors. This sense of continuity, and of sharing in a meaningful endeavour of spiritually, ethically, and philosophically motivated encounter with India, and of reception from its Brahman Yogis, could thus be identified as a powerful perennial motif in the Graeco-Roman 'discourse'. Its influence, fostering this reception, is discernible in many, even brief reports, including those by noted early Christian authors. The recognition that the scattered texts belong to one Graeco-Roman 'discourse', described here, reveals its high significance, to understand the cultural support for such reception by Pagans and Christians, towards the formation of Hesychasm. It is a vital factor, as shown here, and discussed in chapters 4 and 5.

A perspective of historiography is added: the identification of phenomena of 'longue durée'. This applies, especially, to embodied practices, rituals, and structural features. It supports the assumption of consistency of the 'Yogic complex' in Hesychasm, through the various stations and contexts in its process of 'migration'. It even applies where elements are no longer understood, or not appropriately so, and thus have become deformed or reduced, when the philosophic frame of reference is no longer known.

By this set of theory, the process of reception and integration that lead to Hesychasm can be traced and well accounted for. Facilitating factors in Hellenistic culture that persisted into the Roman era, were:

- 1.) *Similarity and mutual intelligibility*: They are constated already in the reports of the first encounter of Alexander the Great and his entourage with Yogis, for Platonism, Pythagoreanism, and Cynicism.
- 2.) *Perceived deficits of the own system(s) motivating interest in adopting a suitable complement* from another (similar) system: The Neoplatonic system had similar core motifs in its spiritual philosophy but lacked comparable meditative practice to enact them. This created immediate interest in Yoga.
- 3.) *Attractiveness of another system, motivating reception*: Indian spiritual culture, practice and philosophy were admired by the Greeks, and felt to be superior to their own, from the beginning to the end of their relationship with India up to the end of Antiquity. This high prestige was even confirmed by Christian authors of Antiquity.
- 4.) *A culture promoting transcultural and inter-religious reception*: Hellenistic universalism and its culture of learning from others and integrating their ideas and practices into the own religious, cultural, and philosophic systems was a strong factor here, as evidenced by Clement of Alexandria and the formation of Graeco-Egyptian Syncretism.
- 5.) *Societal formations capable of studying and adopting foreign spiritual doctrines and practices*: these were present in the realm of Alexandria, especially by the spiritual-philosophic Neoplatonic communities, that are also documented from Syria and Greece. Philostratos mentions Neopythagorean communities, likewise, interested in India.
- 6.) *Continuity of contact and sustained infrastructure of exchange and encounter*: this existed by the massive trade network between Egypt and India, by which infrastructure for encounter, travel, mutual familiarity, and associated cultural,

religious, political, and academic contacts were facilitated and maintained. This infrastructure existed from the early Ptolemaian Age up to the end of Antiquity. The establishment of Christianity in India took place by through this network.

- 7.) *Institutional and organisational continuity for the sustenance of adopted spiritual practices and concepts:* This existed initially by the social establishment of Neoplatonic academies and associations of scholars and their students, by organised spiritual groups, such as described by Philo of Alexandria, and then by Christian monasticism, which had the power to create and establish tradition. Thus, the acquired Yogic spiritual practices could be retaught, and practiced, in Orthodox monasticism, in the form of Hesychasm.
- 8.) *Full acceptance by the receiving body, practical integration, and assimilation:* This assimilation and integration happened early, in Late Antiquity, by which Hesychasm arose. The rich spiritual literature of the Hesychast tradition – referred to here - attests to its further vitality. This included further theological integration, up to the formal endorsement of Hesychast theology by the Orthodox Church in the 14th century. (Its presentation and analysis lie outside the scope of this dissertation.)

9.3. Greek and Roman Relations with India, and Yogic Features of Hesychasm

The section II: “Hellenistic and Roman Relations with India – Hesychasm and Yoga” comprises chapters 4 – 6.

In chapter 4, the Graeco-Indian and Roman-Indian encounters and exchange were investigated. Several features emerged, that were propitious to a long and thorough reception of Yoga and of the religious philosophy connected to it in the Eastern Mediterranean realm. In Antiquity this regular exchange lasted for almost a millennium. Despite the distance it was upheld and restored repeatedly. It comprised trade, political relations, diplomatic ties, visits of scholars, historiographers, philosophers, pilgrims and of Brahman Yogis. This ancient exchange has been taken into view here from the time of Alexander the Great. His eagerness to encounter Yogis, when he arrived at the borderlands of India, after his conquest of the Persian Empire, attests to a firm awareness

in Greece about the spiritual philosophy and practice of Yoga. Alexander's care to take along his staff of philosophically educated historiographers to his meetings with Brahman Yogis, secured a good documentation of these talks, in which the Brahmans showed themselves to be well informed about Greek spiritual philosophy too. Specific affinities with different Greek philosophies were discussed, especially with the Cynics and the Platonists. They and the Neo-Pythagoreans became the chief 'counterparts' for Brahmans, and for Yoga and its reception, in the Hellenistic realm of the following centuries. Their interest lay with Yoga in its Vedântic interpretation, as a complementary spiritual practice, that was based on this religious philosophy, that was so similar to their own in many tenets. This agreement formed the basis for 8th (eight steps of) Yoga to be adopted into Christian Orthodox spirituality, to emerge as Hesychasm (after some integration with forms of monastic spirituality, meditation and prayer already practiced in the eastern Mediterranean.). Whereas the Cynics emulated some Yogic practices, and were recognised to do so in Roman times, the Platonic tradition became the main body for an in-depth reception of theory and practice of (Vedântically interpreted) Yoga, especially after the demise of Cynicism, and after the integration of Neo-Pythagoreanism into Neoplatonism. They integrated psychology and cosmology, in a religious-metaphysical system that provided theoretical significance to all of the 'eight steps' of Yoga, with its different elements of practice, singly and in conjunction. This theological-philosophical interpretation, and integrated them theologically.

For such reception to happen, the intensive trade and traffic between India and the Hellenistic kingdoms, and later, the Roman Empire, as well as the cultural factors are important. Syncretism Theory helps to understand, why and how reception of Yoga could happen. Familiarity, by itself, would not explain such adoption. Specific conditions had to be fulfilled too, besides the elements of trade and encounter, identified by historiography. These are:

- Knowledge and understanding of the spiritual practice to be received,
- Understanding of it as compatible with the own spiritual philosophy and practices,
- Prestige of the 'formation' to be received,
- Assessment as suitable complement and addition, capable of expressing and enacting own spiritual goals and convictions,
- A consistent social formation able to study, to learn, to practice, to teach and to transmit, the adopted spiritual practices and doctrines as a set in a consistent way,

- Reinterpretation and assimilation of the adopted 'formation' as expressive of the own convictions.

This evidently goes beyond studying religious-philosophical texts or listening to lectures. It implies learning by example over a sustained period, by a group of 'recipients', possibly by several individuals or groups at different times, connected by a common tradition. This means that the long duration and broad range of Graeco-Indian exchange is relevant here. The high prestige of Yoga and Brahmanism, frequently associated or identified in Graeco-Roman mind, promoted such studies and reception from the beginning, with Alexander's 'iconic encounters' setting a norm and example, up to the end of Graeco-Roman exchange with India due to Islamic conquests in the Middle East, and the demise of Paganism, with its syncretistic ideals and its universalist religious outlook, that defined Brahmanism as a complementary spiritual wisdom.

I have highlighted the role of Alexandria as the node of this exchange, by maritime trade, with its resident Indian merchant colonies, the counter-piece to the Greek and Syrian merchant communities on the south coast of India, the promotion of Indian studies by the Ptolemaian rulers of Egypt, and with the role of the Neoplatonic academic community in Alexandria with their ties with Brahmans.

The brief remark in the *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea* about an ashram at Cape Coromandel, in which men and women engaged in spiritual practices, displays interest in religious matters too, that the author expected to be shared by his readers. It is noteworthy for the role of women in this reception, possibly reflecting engagement of women in this regard in Graeco-Roman society too.

The historian Dion Chrysostomos told of a numerous and well-established Indian community of merchants, with their associates and families, resident in Alexandria, alongside other expatriate communities. One can assume that their religious needs were serviced. This may have facilitated encounter and exchange with Brahmans and Yogis by the Neoplatonic spiritual academic community in Alexandria that took lively interest in them.

The ardent desire of Plotinus, who originated from Egypt and who studied in Alexandria for a decade, to visit India, indicates that he must have had a clear idea of the outlines of Vedāntic philosophy. This assumption supported by the close affinities of both systems, that have been discussed in recent decades. Flavius Philostratos' novelistic biography of the Neo-Pythagorean sage Apollonius of Tyana (2nd century), and of his travels to India, commissioned by the Roman Empress, indicates that such 'pilgrimage'

and exchange was endorsed as exemplary 'discourse' in the age of the Severan dynasty that descended from Syria. Interestingly, Philostratus tells that Apollonius visited 'naked sages', 'gymnosophists' - which also designated Yogis – in Eritrea and upper Egypt, questioning them about the Indian roots of their practices, and encouraging them to retrieve them. In terms of 'discourse analysis' I interpreted this as a programmatic story, applicable to the reception of Yoga.

In his *Philosophical History* Damascius, the last rector of the Platonic Academy in Athens, gives a vivid report on a visit by Brahmans to the mansion of a wealthy student of philosophy in Alexandria, and on their lectures to the Neoplatonic community there. Damascius also describes a form of meditative prayer with Yogic features, practiced by Neoplatonists there, in which 'stillness' is the key concept. Even though he does not use the standard word of 'hesychia', he describes it with a maritime image, conveying its outward and inward aspects, that reappears the writings of St. John Climacus.

I discussed the scope of Greek and Roman exchange with India, with special cases of visits, encounters, and their literary documentation, with a view to salient features in the perspective of Syncretism Theory. The special affinity between Neoplatonism and Vedānta, that has been noted in Late Antiquity by Neoplatonists themselves, and that has been researched anew since the late 20th century, is important here. The social organisation of Neoplatonists, their living tradition, and their engagement in spiritual practice, is essential for the reception of Yoga as practice. Neo-Pythagorean contributions to this reception are also noted.

In chapter 5, I discussed early Christian testimonies on India, Yoga and Brahmanism. The appreciative statements of Clement of Alexandria on India's contribution to spiritual wisdom in general, and to Christianity in particular, resonate with the culture of this city, and with its ties to India. Pseudo-Hippolytus took interest in Brahman religious philosophy, and in Yogic ascetic spiritual practice, as to their views on divinisation. An excursus on two ancient hymns, the *Gayatri Mantra* and the *Phos Hilaron*, shows striking similarities of motifs, that indicate that mutual religious understanding was indeed possible.

Palladius' statements on Pythagoreanism and Brahmanism show that he was aware of their affinities, suggesting a Christian inheritance of both. These authors indicate that they had quite sound knowledge of Indian Brahman and Yogic thought and practice, that enabled them to arrive at positive assessments of both.

The travels of Cosmas Indicopleustes show that Christians did indeed travel to India, visiting Christian communities there, and to present Sri Lanka, also visiting Hindu temples and Buddhist stupas, as late as the 6th century. This does not mean that Christian monks studied Yoga directly, of which we have no testimony, but that they were aware of Indian religions and cultures.

The reception of Yogic spiritual practices certainly went by the pathway of Neoplatonic spiritual communities, as concepts used for the interpretation of Hesychasm in Orthodox literature shows. The pathway went through Orthodox monks who were educated in philosophy, in the realm of Alexandria. From here it emerged in the writings of St. John Climacus, who was educated in this academic culture. Here features of Hesychast practice and their philosophically sophisticated symbolism, show up in a Christian Neoplatonic interpretation and description. Nevertheless, traces of connections to India are also preserved in Hesychast literature.

In chapter 6, I discussed the different social forms of Yoga, as known to Hellenistic and Roman historiographers, including early Christian reports on them. This is relevant to the roots of Hesychasm, since it comprises a variation of social forms that resemble those of Yoga, both communal and solitary forms. This distinguishes both from the model of monasteries dominant in Buddhism and in Latin Christianity.

In this chapter, I also discussed Cynicism, as the earliest spiritual 'tradition' in Graeco-Roman society known to have followed the example of Yogis. A prominent Cynic of the 2nd century, Peregrinus Proteus, who was critically portrayed by the popular author Lucian of Samosata, documents both this orientation, and the general awareness, of it in Roman times. The common feature of asceticism as token of liberation from society, of renunciation of social bonds, and even of social critique, expressed by the wandering ascetics of Yoga and of Cynicism also became a feature of early Christian ascetics. Here a broad basis for transfer and reception of Yogic practices appears, which complement the more elitist spiritual practices of the Neoplatonic communities.

In section III: "The Common Features of the 'Eight Steps', in chapter 7, these are identified in their descriptions of method of Hesychasm, and related motifs, from Hesychast authors from the beginning up to St. Gregory Palamas, with a view to their common features with Yoga.

In 7.1. I discuss the terseness of Palamas about the method of Hesychasm, of which he mentions only the most salient features. It may be attributed to its status as

'arcane knowledge', not to be divulged to the un-initiated. The salient features however emerge clearly. The 'recollection of the mind into itself' and into the 'body' are important here. Likewise, the mention of 'stillness' ('hesychia'), with reference to St. John Climacus. Palamas mentions the method of 'structured breathing' as supportive means, and the 'breath stops' – an important detail, supporting the thesis of Yogic origins. Here, in Prānāyāma, these are essential, fulfilling a function for the recollection of intellect, as affirmed by Palamas. He mentions it as a method taught by several masters, i.e., as authoritative tradition. He also describes the 'heart' as centre, and as 'vehicle', which is a Tantric feature

In section 7.2. Hesychast authors of the 13th and 14th centuries, in Byzantium, are presented. Theoliptos of Philadelphia describes detachment, the 'stillness of mind', and the attainment of 'non-dual' (advaitic) perception, beyond concepts and images, as mode of attaining illumination and union with God. He mentions aisthesis of divine light too. (These elements converge with steps five to eight of Yoga.)

Nikiphoros the Monk is regarded as teacher of the 'breathing method', by which the process of 'recollection of the mind', and of its 'embodiment' in the 'heart' are attained, as "the kingdom of God within". He also emphasises the 'remaining in the heart' of awareness, and the connection of these processed with the 'Prayer of the heart' as means of binding attention, as in Yogic Dhāraṇa. This is connected to 'stillness', to attain 'indescribable joy'.

St. Gregory of Sinai presented the union of the method of structured breathing, the focus and drawing inwards of attention, and the Mantra prayer 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me, the sinner' as the 'bundle' of method of Hesychasm. This has remained so in his tradition, ever since.

In 7.3. I presented somewhat earlier authors of Hesychasm, from the Macedonian Renaissance: Symon the New Theologian is important for his description of the perception of 'divine light' by meditation. He also describes the emotional effect of introspective meditation, with the 'gift of tears', a special feature of Orthodox meditation, that shows its attention to the emotional transformation of the Hesychast.

Symeon Metaphrastis gave Neoplatonic interpretations of teachings of the 'father of the Egyptian Desert monks', Macarius (5th century). By his paraphrases Symeon Metaphrastis joined these spiritual traditions, integrating early anchoretic monasticism into a Neoplatonic theoretical framework. This process is important for genesis of Hesychasm presented here. Palamas' reference to him supports this view.

Pseudo-Symeon (the New Theologian), who lived considerably later, adds a detailed description of 'drawing down of intellect', into the heart, and into the navel region. He also describes compressed inhalation by the nostrils. These details of method support Tantric influences. The details of method that he describes as a complex, are discussed here.

In 7.4. I presented Hesychast authors of the 6th – 8th century, especially St. John Climacus. His profound literary and philosophical education is important for the interpretation of his mystical writings. It supports the assumption here, that his description of the method of 'stillness' derives from similar Neoplatonic forms and theories of meditation, especially in the region of Alexandria. He describes the figure of divinising recollection of intellect. He may have combined a practice of 'watchfulness' of Egyptian monasticism with it. Important among the heritage of Egyptian monasticism is the practice of 'watchfulness', of 'nepsis'. It resembles psychoanalytic introspection, directed at recognising the darker aspect of one's soul too. Compared to Yoga and Neoplatonic mysticism, this appears as a specific Christian feature. It remained important for Hesychasm. Palamas endorses it too

From Isaac of Niniveh the motif of interiorisation of Heaven, and the 'indwelling of Christ' are important. He describes the manifestation of 'divine light' as its fruit. 'Theoria' is depicted in its aesthetic aspect here. St. Isaac describes emotional understanding by 'inner senses', as by love, as important features of such aisthesis, as enhanced about by meditation. His emphasis on the transformation of the aesthetic and the emotional states and capacities of the monk, St. Isaac deeply influenced Hesychasm.

The depiction that Hesychius the Priest gives of Hesychasm is interesting, since he distinguishes between different strands, focussing on different methods and spiritual motifs of 'watchfulness'. This indicates that Hesychasm should not be understood as wholly uniform, but rather as a complex of methods and motifs that could be realised in different combinations and emphases individually. Different traditions of Hesychasm may have developed from them. Major elements of Hesychasm are presented in his writings already.

John of Carpathos may be mentioned for his reference to monks in India, to whom he sends instructions on asceticism, at their request. This indicates continuing contacts to India and awareness of such in the early Hesychast community.

In 7.5. I discussed testimonies from monasticism of Late Antiquity. Evagrius Ponticus defined the purpose of 'hesychia', for the purification and transformation of the

soul, applying a differentiated philosophical concept of the aspects of 'soul'. He combines this with the Neoplatonic motif of divinising 'recollection of intellect', thus indicating proximity to Neoplatonic spirituality. The motif of disengagement of the senses as condition for meditation and recollection of awareness to God is described by Isaiah the Solitary, as representative of early Egyptian monasticism.

St. Mary of Egypt is enlisted here as representative of women in Hesychast tradition. Her closeness to nature, the paranormal manifestations surrounding her, and her transformation from a life of free-spirited sensuality to severe asceticism, are most remarkable. She also gives one of the earliest reports of the experience and perception of divine light surrounding her and transforming her. She is commemorated as paragon of spiritual transformation.

Chapter 8 presents a comparison between the 'eight steps of Yoga' and Hesychasm. These eight 'limbs' are recognised as the standard set, since over two millennia. They were codified by Patañjali. These eight 'limbs of Yoga', understood as a 'living body', the 'ashtānga', are:

- (1.) 'Yama': the 'disciplines', of ethical purification, asceticism, abstention from greed and desire.
- (2.) 'Niyama': the 'restraints', rules comprising purity of body and mind', contentment, spiritual practise, study of sacred scripture, and devotion to God
- (3.) 'Āsanas': the bodily postures in meditation, and figures of movement. These comprise the posture of 'lotus seat', of sitting upright in meditation, but also figures of movement, already described by scholars accompanying Alexander the Great to India. Yoga has numerous āsanas, that are related to the energy centres 'chakras', and channels, 'nādis', of the body.
- (4.) 'Prāṇāyāma': structured breathing, comprising the retention of breath, the restraint of breath, deliberate exhalation, and the understanding, that by deliberate inhalation, 'spirit', 'prāṇa', the 'breath of life which pervades all things' is drawn into the body.⁸⁰⁹
- (5.) 'Pratyāhāra': the withdrawal of attention from outward objects, and from all distractions
- (6.) 'Dhāranā': 'binding' and focussing the mind and attention on one point,

⁸⁰⁹ Iyengar, Bellur Krishnamachar Sundararaja, *Light on Prāṇāyāma*, London, 2013: Harper Thorsons, (1st ed. 1981), p. 114f.

- (7.) 'Dhyāna': 'meditation' on the Divine, as by a state of non-dual awareness, and of apophatic union with the Divine, or on manifestations of the Divine, as on deities, or on aspects of them.
- (8.) 'Samādhi': the state of blissful union in which the meditating person becomes one with the object of meditation.⁸¹⁰ It can be experienced as 'divinisation', manifest in perceptions of inner or outer 'divine light', as well as in other forms, inwardly and outwardly.

All these eight steps are described in Hesychast literature, many of the by Pseudo-Symeon (the New Theologian), leaving little doubt for reception from Yoga.

The agreements and similarities extend even beyond these eight 'limbs of Yoga', to features and elements of theory, practice, aisthesis, and phenomenal manifestations, that go beyond them, or are developed from them, especially in Tantra, as discussed here too. The Tantric features are enlisted, in view of their importance and distinctness:

- 1) The idea of introducing the 'mind', consciousness, or 'intellect' into the body. This is fundamental to Hesychasm too.
- 2) The introduction of consciousness into specific places like the 'heart' or the 'navel region'
- 3) reports about special perceptions at these 'energetic' centres, the chakras, attested in Hesychasm too
- 4) the notion of 'energetic channels', and their perception in meditation. This too is traceable in hesychast reports.
- 5) The idea of bodily and emotional transformation by this meditative practice. The emphasis on psycho-physical transformation is especially Tantric and Hesychast.
- 6) The differentiated phenomenology of 'spiritual light' is particularly Tantric and Hesychast in parts.
- 7) Differentiated forms of 'Prāṇāyāma', such as forced breathing mentioned in Hesychast literature too, by St. Gregory of Sinai.
- 8) The importance of Mantra Prayer, and the emphasis on it. Whereas in Advaitic Yoga, the emphasis is on recollection of intellect into itself, as pathway to union with the divine (of Atman with Brahman), as in Neoplatonic mysticism of

⁸¹⁰ "Rāja-Yoga", in: Huchzermeyer, Wilfried, *Das Yoga-Lexikon. Sanskrit – Āsanas – Biographien – Hinduismus – Mythologie*, Karlsruhe, 2011: Edition Sawitri, p. 227

Plotinus, Tantra prefers meditation on theistic manifestations of the divine, as in Kashmiric Shaivism. Similar in Hesychasm or in Theurgic Neoplatonism.

- 9) the role of iconic 'images', which reflects the role of icons and of archetypal iconic images in Hesychasm, beyond its actual meditative practice.

The reference to the 'eight limbs' is important, because much of what is taught and understood as 'Yoga' outside of India, at present comprises only the 'āsanas', as in so-called 'Postural Yoga', then 'Prāṇāyāma', the 'breathing practices', and sometimes 'Pratyāhāra' and 'Dhāranā', the withdrawal from distractions in stillness, and meditation proper. What remains is often a superficial reduction of 'Yoga' to one, or possibly up to four of these eight 'limbs'. To limit comparison of Hesychasm to Yoga to these few elements would be fallacious. It can be assumed that at the time of reception, the full set of 'ashtanga' Yoga was prevalent – and understood, in Neoplatonism, and in Orthodoxy, as Hesychasm shows.

The correspondences between the 'eight limbs of Yoga', and of elements of Tantra, with those of Hesychasm, are presented in the following sections of chapter 8.

Section 8.2. discusses the first two steps of Yoga and their Hesychast correlations. A common understanding exists in Yoga and in Hesychasm, that transformation by meditation extends beyond the person, into the environment. This has a philosophical base in both, extending into Platonism, based on the relation between anthropology and cosmology. The issue of 'siddhis' is thus not one of miraculous 'irregularities'. The transformation of the 'person', including the feelings is emphasised. The transformation by Hesychast initiation comprises the emotions. This has roots in Yoga.

Section 8.3. discusses the next 'limb', the āsanās', with the chakras. Early testimonies to 'sitting in stillness' as posture of meditation, with focus of intellect, are found in Evagrius Ponticus (4th century), designated as 'way of stillness'. This combination already points at Yogic origin because it cannot be derived from elsewhere in the Eastern Mediterranean. This appears in elaborated form in the 12th century, connected to other formal features of the Yogic complex, with Pseudo-Symeon. His depiction of Hesychast method, especially of the aspects of 'posture', and their details, of 'setting', and of 'centres of focus', agrees closely with that of Yoga, even as to the sequence of the eight steps and of the chakras.

Section 8.4. discusses the convergence between Prāṇāyāma of Yoga and the breathing method and its significance in Hesychasm. This is a most important element in both. It connects the bodily and intellectual processes with the cosmological, in a

spiritually and theologically significant way. The details of the method, and the correspondences between Yoga and Hesychasm are presented here. The corresponding notions of 'prāṇa' and 'pneuma' support the thesis of mutual intelligibility between these systems and their theological-philosophical foundations, which includes Neoplatonism.

Section 8.5. describes the role of the 'heart' in Yoga and Hesychasm. Its immense importance in Hesychasm come from different sources, that apparently compounded it. However, it is also important in Yoga, as 'meeting point' between consciousness and the body, with its 'life currents'. The 'heart' is especially important in Tantra, as place of union with the divine, and as abode of 'divine light' that becomes perceptible here. The special role of the heart as site of communication with the Divine is deeply rooted in Indian tradition, going back to the Vedas. It is affirmed throughout the Upanishads.

Section 8.6. further explores the relation between the philosophy of prāṇa in Vedānta, and the practice of prāṇāyāma in Yoga, with regard to analogies in Hesychasm. The role of prāṇa as mediating element between the Divine and the human being, corresponds to the notions about 'pneuma' in Neoplatonism and in Yoga. This may explain why the practice of prāṇāyāma could be readily adopted, as a suitable and necessary complement into Christian Orthodox meditation - and probably into Neoplatonic spiritual practice as well.

Section 8.7. Hesychast literature reflects 'energetic' experiences and processes, such as correspondences in the experience of the divine in centres of the body (chakras'), and the phenomena of spiritual luminescence. Testimonies from Hesychasm indicate that notions of 'chakras' and of 'nadis' were known here too. They appear as related to perceptions of luminosity in ways similar to Tantra.

Section 8.8. discusses the differentiation of spiritual light into colours, and in degrees of intensity. It is noted in Yoga, in Tantra, in theurgic Neoplatonism, and in Hesychasm. It is regarded as aesthetic manifestation of the divine translucent consciousness in mediation.

Section 8.9. is dedicated to the last steps of Yoga, to (5.) 'Pratyāhāra', the withdrawal of attention from outward objects, and from all distractions, (6.) 'Dhāranā', the 'binding' and focussing the mind and attention on one point, (7.) 'Dhyāna', the meditation on the Divine, and attainment of union with the Divine, leading to (8.) 'Samādhi': the ecstatic experience of it, with its special manifestations. These are closely connected to each other.

Section 8.10. deals with the Mantra, and the 'Jesus Prayer'. Its place within the complex of meditation explains some observations. It has been noted that the 'Jesus Prayer' is mentioned rather marginally in descriptions of Hesychast practice over centuries. This contrasts strongly with views prevalent in Modernity, that perceive 'Hesychasm' as a sort of 'Jesus Prayer' with bodily 'auxiliaries' of no intrinsic importance. Realising, that the Jesus Prayer is a form of 'mantra', allows to determine its place and role in the 'ashtanga' complex of the eight limbs of Yoga, where it is mentioned as one means of Dhāranā', of focussing attention, and as a means of Dhyāna', of attaining union with the Divine. Correlations to the role of 'Īśvara', the 'personal Lord' in Patañjali's Yoga Sūtra, that is deliberately vague here, to accommodate a philosophy of Sāṅkhya, as well as theologies of 'personalistic' emphasis, different from the Advaitic, allow to assume that the spectrum of possible interpretations opened hereby, also influenced the reception of Yoga in the Mediterranean.

Section 8.11. presents 'illumination', the central 'aisthesis' by spiritual perception, in Hesychasm, and in Yoga. The agreement between both that it is attained by purification and by meditation, also supports the role 'initiation. The latter has developed in significance in bot. Palamas emphasises it. Considering the eminent role that the manifestation of spiritual light on Neoplatonic 'masters', such as Plotinus, Proclus, or Iamblichus, and its (aesthetic) perception, had, the reception of this element from Yoga into Neoplatonism as common conviction and phenomenon certainly faced no difficulty. Neither its reception into Orthodox Christianity. The understanding that 'spiritual light' manifests the (emanation) of the Divine in a hypostatic form, is shared. This also affirms the common conviction that the inner process of participation in the divine, of 'divinisation' forms a necessary basis for such aisthesis (as a rule), thus, that the inner and outer aspects of its manifestation are connected.

Section 8.12. treats the 'special powers' in Hesychasm, and the analogical 'siddhis' in Yoga, as common ground. They are acknowledged, well documented, and important for the self-concept of Hesychasm and of Yoga. There is, however, also a common understanding that they are not an aim as such and are to be treated accordingly. On this understanding, their manifestations are highly appreciated, as signs of spiritual progress and degree of perfection. Various forms of such 'special powers' are documented in both traditions. The 'yogic complex' of method and of all eight 'limbs, was thus shown to have been received and retained in Hesychasm, throughout, even where the interpretation of its elements changed and the understanding of some diminished.

9.4. Outlook for Further Research

The limitations of this study also show gates for further research. Some issues of interest arise. Although referred to repeatedly, the convergences and the differences between the Vedântic theory of Yoga, with its core motif of ascent to the supreme Divine by introspection and self-knowledge has deep agreement with the metaphysics of the Platonic tradition. It includes the aspects of ethical purification, and of aesthetics, of beauty. Meditation, in stillness, beyond the limits of conceptual knowledge and thought, towards divine ascent and participation in the Divine, or the realisation of inner unity, is a core idea, for the reception and integration of Yoga in both philosophies.

The reception of this complex, with some differences and nuances, into Christian Orthodox theology, as of Hesychasm, is a complex process, that extends into the 14th century, where it emerges fully, in a systematic way. This also impacts on the Orthodox theological reinterpretation of the eight steps of Yoga, - with their Vedântic interpretations and associated metaphysics – in Hesychasm.

The integration of the Tantric features discernible in Hesychasm, with the complex adopted from Vedântic Yoga by pathway of the Platonic tradition, happened partly there, in its subsequent developments. In Hesychasm, this integration happened partly on the basis of Theurgic theory in late Neoplatonism, and partly by integration within Hesychasm on the basis of the Orthodox theology of incarnation, based on its Christology, and also in its doctrine of the Holy Spirit, that adopts notions of 'Pneuma' and 'Prâna', with their practical applications in these forms of Hesychast practice adopted from Yoga. Here, Tantric ideas appear clearly. Their spread into the Eastern Mediterranean, in the 6th and 7th centuries, is hardly traceable. It is the time of emergence of early Tantra. Therefore, these features were identified primarily systematically here, with reference to Tantric ideas and practices. It was observed here, that the assumed Tantric influences on the formation of Hesychasm remain, in some tension to the complex of eight steps Yoga of the Yoga Sûtra and its Vedântic commentaries. This tension, created by the difference between Tantric and Vedântic systems, can be observed in Hesychasm to this day. It is marked in different conceptualisations of Hesychasm, even in the 14th century, when its theology, strongly based on late Neoplatonism, received official endorsement by the Orthodox Church. The development of Hesychasm towards a focus on the mantra

practice of the Jesus Prayer, at the expense of the forms of ascent to the Divine by introspection, self-knowledge, and inner silence, to an apophatic perception of the divine and divinisation – at the core of Vedântic and Neoplatonic thought and mysticism – can however only in part be attributed to Tantra. The Tantric influence, with its focus on the body, and its elaboration of the processes of the material and subtle body (of 'bodies'), extends further, and can be observed in the 'classic' form too. This is subject matter for further research. What emerges too, is that Hesychasm has the theoretical potential for the reception of further elements and forms of practice, from the traditions of Yoga, that developed in the meantime, and from Tantra. This may be based on the theological-philosophical synthesis of theory of Hesychasm, that emerged out of the Orthodox reception of Neoplatonic ideas – and of the associated complex of Yoga – by the 14th century. Merely the outlines of this further investigation may be drawn here. The limitations of this study are thereby also drawn.

In further research, an experiential approach might also be considered: to investigate testimonials on the Hesychast practice and experience from its literature could be compared with sources from Yoga and Tantra. This applies to details of the breathing practice, and its connection with other features of the 'eight steps' of Yoga' in Hesychasm too. Its transformative effect could be compared with that of Yoga in observations of experience, also in a phenomenological approach. The social organisation of Hesychasm, from monastic communities, through loose associations with monasteries, up to existence as hermit, and to the practices of lay people, especially in modern times, can be compared with the social forms of Yoga. The therapeutic effects of both could be compared, in the emotional and the physiological aspects. The role of Hesychasts as spiritual advisors and counsellors to others, as 'startsy' (spiritual elders), could be compared to that of Yogins. The therapeutic dimension of both has shaped their image in public awareness and could be explored. The aspect of 'siddhis', including the perceptions of spiritual light, could be further investigated from hagiographic literature and testimonials, in both. Recent developments in the forms of practice, including their temporal, spatial and social organisation could be compared.

In a wider horizon, the reception of Yoga in non-Indian societies, especially since the 19th century, could be investigated similarly, as to its conditions and as to its transformations. The theoretical approach followed here, could be applied to other realms of inter-cultural and inter-religious reception as well, that happened, as by the transatlantic trade from the colonial period onwards.

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