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Tzotcho Boiadjiev, Georgi Kapriev und Andreas Speer

ИНСТИТУТ ЗА СРЕДНОВЕКОВНА ФИЛОСОФИЯ И КУЛТУРА

АРХИВ ЗА СРЕДНОВЕКОВНА ФИЛОСОФИЯ И КУЛТУРА

Свитък XVI

Издаван от
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Andreas Speer (Cologne)

FREE MINDS – AN ARCHEOLOGY OF THE IDEA OF THE UNIVERSITY*

1. The idea of the university arose in a situation of crisis and was the answer to that crisis. It was the a crisis especially of the institution of learning which had to face an enormous increase of new informations and mere facts, a paradigm shift in understanding the sciences, a confrontation with conflicting models of scientific explanations and beliefs and their impact on society, and finally a meeting of cultures in a more globalized world around the Mediterranean Sea, crossing even the boarders of that Mediterranean world.

I am speaking of the 12th and 13th century and I have chosen the perspective of the Latin West, where in fact in Bologna and Paris the idea of the university arose. In 1200 the founding charter of the university of Paris was issued[1]. The university – as we know from the collection of charters and documents, the

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1 * This paper was held in the plenary session in the Aula Magna on 24 November 2008 during the International conference *Ambiguous Future : The University in the Age of Globalization, Cultural Hybridization and Internet*, organized by the Sofia University *St. Kliment Ochridski* on the occasion of its 120th anniversary, 23–25. November 2008.

J. Verger, *Les universités aux Moyen Âge*, Paris 32007 ; id., L'essor des universités au XIIIe siècle, Paris 1997 ; A. L. Gabriel, *The Paris studium: Robert of Sorbonne and his legacy*. Selected studies (Texts and studies in the history of mediaeval education 19), Frankfurt a.M. 1992; M.J.F.M. Hoenen / J.H.J. Schneider / G. Wieland (eds.),

Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis[2] – was not a top down invention. Its origins lay in a movement of students and their teachers devoted to a striving for knowledge "causa studii", i.e. not for the sake of a career and a certain use or advantage, but e.g. because they wanted to understand the logic of syllogisms and to question authorities. Those studiosi – people striving for knowledge and being eager to learn – and their magistri, masters or teachers formed and modeled a new instituion of learning, the universitas magistrorum et scholarium, the community of teachers and students, as an independent coporation that was responsable for its own affairs.

The idea of the university arose together with a new conception of ordering knowledge. In fact I should better speak of a rediscovery of an ancient tradition that was lost in the Latin West and is attached to the name of Aristotle[3]. The early university connects itself to that mostly lost tradition and transforms it into a new idea of learning and science. The very same tradition was never absent in Byzantium and in the Arabic world[4], but did

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Philosophy and Learning. Universities in the Middle Ages, Leiden–New York–Köln 1995.

2 *Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis* sub auspiciis Consilii Generalis Facultatum Parisiensium ex diversis bibliothecis tabularisque collegit et cum authenticis chartis contulit Henricus Denifle auxiliante Aemilio Chatelain, vol. I, A.D. 1200–1286, Paris 1889 (530 original documents, with fifty-five from the preparatory period, 1163–1200).

3 Cf. A. Zimmermann / G. Vuillemin-Diem (eds.), *Aristotelisches Erbe im arabisch-lateinischen Mittelalter. Übersetzungen, Kommentare, Interpretationen* (Miscellanea Mediaevalia 18), Berlin-New York, 1986; B. G. Dod, *Aristoteles latinus*, in: *The CambridgeHistory for Later Medieval Philosophy*, edd. N. Kretzmann / A. Kenny / J. Pinborg, Cambridge 1982, 45–79; J. Brams, *La riscoperta di Aristotele in Occidente* (Eredità Medievale 03/22), Milano 2003.

4 A. Speer / L. Wegener (eds.), *Wissen über Grenzen. Arabisches Wissen und lateinisches Mittelalter* (Miscellanea Mediaevalia 33), Berlin-New York 2006; A. Speer with R. Arnzen, G. Guldentops, M. Trizio, D. Wirmer, *Philosophische Kommentare im Mittelal-*

not generate in those cultures the idea of an institution of learning like the university – an idea, which became a truely global reality influencing and shaping our understanding of the sciences and transforming our societies.

2. Why and how could this happen? Let us recall the key features and structural elements of Aristotle's epistemological ideas, which are still valid and part of the debates in the theory of sciences[5].

(i) The first and basic intuition is the unlimited dynamics of understanding which is deeply rooted in the natural desire of man to know. "All men by nature desire to know"[6]. This famous opening sentence of Aristotle's Metaphysics points to the generic nature of man as well as to the theoretically unlimited dynamics of our striving for knowledge and to the structure of knowledge formation[7]. Aristotle's intuition is proven by the further dynamics of scientific research, which in fact does not seem to have any limits that could not been overrun in short times. Let me just mention the human genom project, which achieved its goal far earlier than exspected, and the recent production of hybrids and clones. There seems to be no intrinsic theoretical boarder for the human mind and its curiosity that could not be overstepped.

(ii) This brings me to my second point: Knowledge is produced. Knowledge is not a shaddowy reflection of an ideal counter-

ter – Zugänge und Orientierungen. Erster Teil: I. Einführung – II. Sprachkreise (*AZP* 32.2 [2007], 157–177); Zweiter Teil: III. Platonica – IV.1&2 Aristotelica arabica et byzantina (*AZP* 32.3 [2007], 259–290); Dritter Teil: IV.3: Aristotelica latina – V. Hebraica – VI. Ausblick (*AZP* 33.1 [2008], 31–57.)

5 See e.g. P. K. Feyerabend, *Realism, Rationalism and Scientific Method* (Philosophical papers, Volume 1), Cambridge 1981; id., *Conquest of Abundance: A Tale of Abstraction versus the Richness of Being*, Chicago 2001.

6 Aristoteles, *Metaphysica* A 1 (980 a 21).

7 See A. Speer, *Die fragile Konvergenz. Felder metaphysischen Denkens*, in: *Allgemeine Zeitschrift für Philosophie (AZP)* 30.3 (2005), 229–252, esp. 232–239.

world or of some external truth, but knowledge is basically made by the minds of the knowers. This is even more true for scientific knowledge, which stands at the end of knowledge production.

Knowledge formation Aristotle understands as an inductive process starting from sense perception, followed by memory, experience and art and finally leads to knowledge in the strong sense of episteme or science, which thereby exceeds artistry and technique, because it always considers also the principles of the respectively identified regularity of an epistemic field[8].

(iii) Episteme or science – this is my third remark – covers all knowledge that fullfills the epistemological criteria briefly sketched, especially concerning the knowledge of the principles ot the respective epistemic field. This is true for all scientific enterprises following the methodological agenda and the epistemological criteria of what a science is. Therefore, the usual division of the sciences into the so-called "strong" sciences based on empirical evidence and quantitative analysis on the one side and into the arts and letters, which hardly could be called sciences, on the other side, is highly misleading, because in the end this division separates the empirical and natural sciences from their theoretical foundations and their contexts.

(iv) The fourth structural element points again to the dynamics of knowledge formation, which has to have an intrinsic end in order to avoid an infinite regress that would undermine the entire scientific enterprise. Because scientific knowledge is synthetic only on the basis of an evident knowledge of premisses and principles.

3. The farther our view should reach in the described operation of cognition, the more comprehensive the epistemic fields should be, the more general rules have to be found, the more we have to learn about the causes and how these are connected to each other, as Aristotle tried to show: for example in the form of conclusions. To gain access to more complex conclusions and ex-

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[8] *Metaphysica* A 1 (980 a 21–982 a 2); cf. A. Speer, *Die fragile Konvergenz* (nt. 7), 232–234.

tensive epistemic fields we need more general principles, which allow a linking of known and greater connections in the first place. For knowledge characterizes itself by the fact that we can always give the reasons on which our connection, our judgement is based upon.

In this context, Aristotle himself talks about a knowledge about "some principles and causes", to which he assigns an architectural function with regard to the genesis of knowledge[9]. This knowledge he calls wisdom, but not in an emphatic manner. Moreover, he extracts this concept following from the original meaning of sophia as efficiency based on competence and knowledge. The wise knows all, as far as possible, without having a knowledge about all things in detail[10].

We consider somebody wise, who is capable of comprehending what is difficult and of understanding what is not easy to understand for men, who is more exact and able to teach in any science, especially in relation to those sciences, which are chosen for the sake of themselves and, furthermore, only for the sake of knowledge, wherein their excellence can be found in particular compared to the "applied" sciences[11].

Yet, such knowlegde is most difficult to gain since it is farthest away from perception; it is more exact because it needs less qualifications; it enables to teach at most inasmuch as it enables us to tell the cause of everything, and particularly therein forms the precondition to recognize, more than any other knowledge, for what sake anything needs to be done; still it is knowledge not in search for a purpose and understanding for its own sake – not in the sense of a l'art pour l'art but as reflection upon those condi-

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9 *Metaphysica* A 1 (982 a 2).

10 Concerning the understanding of "knowing all" see A. Speer*, Die fragile Konvergenz* (nt. 7), 235; cf. id., *‚Scire infinita' – Vom Wissen des Inkommunikablen. Mit einer Bonaventura-Interpretation*, in: *Archiv für mittelalterliche Philosophie und Kultur* VIII (2002), 100–113.

11 *Metaphysica* A 2 (982 a 6–19); compare Thomas de Aquino, *In Metaph.* I, lect. 2 (ed. Cathala-Spiazzi), nn. 36–44.

tions and principles, “for by reason of these, and from these, all other things come to be known“[12].

4. The final reference point of the scientific undertaking is by its nature theoretical, because it is about the reflection on the final principles, which are underlying the scientific enterprise. This scientific endeavour is speculative by its character – if one is not willing to claim a will-to-power-approach as the core of sciences.

This conclusion does not mean that all sciences are theoretical or contemplative – quite the opposite. Aristotle did not only provide us with a variety of sciences based on very different objects and methodological approaches, which cannot be reduced with respect to their objects and methods to one unified deductive model of sciences, he also displays the heuristic power of such a diversity of epistemic and methodological tools[13].

And although the theoretical sciences seem to take the lead at least in epistemological and foundational matters, the aims for the sciences vary according to their character and methodological approach. This counts especially for the clear distinction between practical and theoretical sciences related to the equally clear distinction between theoretical and practical reasoning[14].

But even in pratical matters and for applied sciences the reflection on the principles at work is a theoretical habit. In this respect sciences have a theoretical core that comes from the epistemological structure of scientific knowledge as such, which by its definition includes the knowing of the principles of the relevant epistemic field and the giving of reasons for the conclusions and deductions taken from that principles. Without that theoretical

[12] *Metaphysica* A 1 (982 b 1–3).

[13] S. Mansion (ed.), *Aristote et les problèmes de la méthode*, 2ème éd., Louvain-la-Neuve 1980 ; J. Barnes (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*, Cambridge 1994 ; O. Höffe, *Aristoteles*, München 32006.

[14] P. Aubenque, *Politique et éthique chez Aristote*, in: *Ktema* 5 (1980), 211–221; O. Höffe, *Praktische Philosophie – Das Modell des Aristoteles*, Berlin 21996.

core sciences will loose their character as sciences, as an autonomous, reflective mode of thinking and understanding.

5. But why should all our effort aim on such a search? The motivation to set out for this, for nature, and the aim of this first science resulted – thus Aristotle – from the difficulties man consistently gets into when he wonders and arrives at the conclusion, that he basically does not know anything[15]. Yet, only he searches for this kind of insight, who possesses almost everything necessary and that, what serves for the lightening and organization of the spare time. Such a knowledge which man does not search for a purpose is free, as is the respective science the only one free – as we call the man free, "who exists for his own sake and not for another's"[16].

Already late antique commentators like Alexander of Aphrodisias pointed to the anthropological implications and revealed the references, especially to the tenth book of the Nicomachean Ethics[17]. There, Aristotle combines the problem of perfect felicity with the most complete activity of reason, such as the wise possesses. Because eudaimonia has always to be searched for in an activity corresponding the peculiar virtue. From this teleology derives the claim that thinking and acting have to occur according to the insights of reason. Yet, this primacy of the theoretical form of life stands with a reservation, because the aim expressed therein points beyond the limits of the human possible: Because human life is finite and the noblest activity, wherein felicity is, did not last the whole period of life. Moreover, life, in which these conditions are fulfilled, is higher than that of human as human. In this way, man could not live inasmuch as he is man, but only inasmuch as he contains something divine within him[18].

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15 *Metaphysica* A 2 (982 b 11–21).

16 *Metaphysica* A 2 (982 b 23–28).

17 Alexander of Aphrodisias, *Comm. In lib. Met. Aristotelis,* A 2. 982 b (ed. H. Bonitz, Berlin 1847), 15, 6–23; cf. Alexander of Aphrodisias, *On Aristotle's Metaphysics 1*, transl. by W. E. Dooley, Ithaca N. Y. 1989, 37, 6–23.

18 *Ethica Nicomachea* X, 7 (1177 b 24–31).

As "divine" Aristotle defines the hierarchically highest of sciences[19]. This is not about gaining a divine point of view, because it is impossible for man to pass the natural limits of cognition. "Divine", thus Alexander of Aphrodisias, here at first means "free from necessity", and at the same time the knowledge about the first causes and principles, which is the highest knowledge[20]. For Alexander, Aristotle's demand, that humans, although mortal, should not limit their striving to something human, as men, and to something mortal, as mortals, but that we should "make ourselves immortal, and strain every nerve to live in accordance with the best thing in us" as far as possible can be explained in this respect. Because this divine in us, as little its extent may be, is precisely the far pleasantest, or, in other words, our true self[21].

6. It was exactely this understanding and conception of what scientia is that stands at the cradle of the idea of the university. Saying this, I am speaking of the two parts: the epistemological and the anthropological, which from the two sides of one and the same coin: the coin of episteme / scientia.

So, it is not surprising that within the first three decades the entire curriculum of the new institution of learning – if one takes Paris as the example – was modeled after the corpus Aristotelicum. We have the historical evidence from the student's study guides and from the collections of questions for their examinations[22].

19 *Metaphysica* A 2 (983 a 6–10).

20 Alexander of Aphrodisias *Comm. In lib. Met. Aristotelis,* A 2. 982 b (ed. H. Bonitz, Berlin 1847), 15, 17–18; cf. Alexander of Aphrodisias, *On Aristotle's Metaphysics 1*, transl. by W. E. Dooley, Ithaca N. Y. 1989, 37, 19–20.

21 Alexander of Aphrodisias, *Comm. In lib. Met. Aristotelis,* A 2. 982 b (ed. H. Bonitz, Berlin 1847), p. 15, lin. 18–20; cf. Alexander of Aphrodisias, *On Aristotle's Metaphysics 1*, transl. by W. E. Dooley, Ithaca N. Y. 1989, 37, 20–24; cf. *Eth. Nic.* X, 7 (1177 b 31–34) and op. cit. (1178 a 2–3).

22 See C. Lafleur, *Les 'guides de l'étudiant' de la faculté des arts de l'université de Paris au XIIIe siècle*, in: *Philosophy and Learning. Universities in the Middle Ages* (see nt. 1), 137–185.

But this new scientific concet was not only a theoretical ideal, it became also a practical idea as a way of life, which brought to birth – as Jacques le Goff has stated – a new sociologically recongizable class: 'les intellectuels', the intellectuals[23]. For them the new scientific ideal became the magna charta for their self-understanding as magistri – scholars and professors – at the university and the university became the institutionalized habit of the new academic self-esteem[24].

Originating as an inductive enterprise that was driven by the mere curiosity to know and the striving for knowledge, the university transformed the ancient ideal of the free man, who had to be born free, into an universal idea of a free, independent corporation of free minds for the sake of study: causa studii! And we can see the enormous impact, that this democratisation of learning and education had on European societies[25]. It is not at least this powerful university movement, that gave Europe over centuries its hegemony crossing boarders and continents, but which also gave

[23] J. Le Goff, *Les intellectuels au Moyen Âge*, Paris 1957 (*Die Intellektuellen im Mittelalter*, Stuttgart 1986, 42001).

[24] Cf. A. de Libera, *Penser au Moyen Âge*, Paris 1991, 222–224; C. Steel, *Medieval Philosophy: an Impossible Project? Thomas Aquinas and the 'Averroistic' Ideal of Happiness*, in: J. A. Aertsen / A. Speer (eds.), *Was ist Philosophie im Mittelalter?* (Miscellanea Mediaevalia 26), Berlin/New York 1998 152–174, esp. 154sq.; J. A. Aertsen, *Mittelalterliche Philosophie ein unmögliches Projekt? Zur Wende des Philosophieverständnisses im 13. Jahrhundert*, in: J. A. Aertsen / A. Speer (eds.), *Geistesleben im 13. Jahrhundert* (Miscellanea Mediaevalia 27), Berlin/New York 2000, 12–27, esp. 13sq.; A. Speer, *Im Spannungsfeld der Weisheit. Anmerkungen zum Verhältnis von Metaphysik, Religion und Theologie*, in: M. Erler / T. Kobusch (eds.), *Metaphysik und Religion. Zur Signatur des spätantiken Denkens* (Beiträge zur Altertumskund 160), München/Leipzig 2002, 649–672, esp. 652–654.

[25] See A. L. Gabriel, *The Paris studium: Robert of Sorbonne and his legacy* (see nt. 1); W. Kluxen, *Geglückte Institution – Der mittelalterliche Ursprung der Universitäten*, in: id., *Moral – Vernunft – Natur. Beiträge zur Ethik* (edd. W. Korff / P. Mikat), Paderborn 1997, 301–309.

rise to the idea of a globalized world based on an universal concept of understanding.

7. We all know that such an idea of a free scientific enterprise based mainly on the efforts of free minds was always under suspicion. This is true even in the very beginning, as the well documented conflicts at the university of Paris in the 13th century reveal[26]. I cannot go into the details now nor pass over to the subsequent historical periods on obvious grunds, because the purpose of my paper is limited as is the time for its presentation and the space for its publication.

But the peril does not only come from outside, as the history shows and the present times do. More dangerous are the internal selfrestricting processes, which give priority to regulation and controlling over confidence and trust into the selfmotivated individual striving for knowledge, because this is the true human nature[27].

“All men by nature desire to know”. Do we still have this idea in mind – imprinted in this famous Aristotelian adagium – when we talk about the university? The implementation of the so-called Bologna process by an overwhelming bureaucratic control-system seems to point to the opposite vision of an agent, whose behaviour is conditioned by extrinsic needs and should be therefore totally

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26 F. Van Steenberghen, *La philosophie au XIIIème siècle*, 2ème éd. (Philosophes médiévaux XXVIII), Louvain-Paris 1991; R. Hissette, *Enquête sur le 219 articles condamnés à Paris le mars 1277* (Philosophes Médiévaux XXII), Louvain-Paris 1977; D. Piché, *La condamnation parisienne de 1277. Texte latin, traduction, introduction et commentaire*, Paris 1999 ; L. Bianchi, *Censure et liberté intellectuelle à l'université de Paris (XIIIe-XIVe siècles)*, Paris 1999; J. A. Aertsen / K. Emery, Jr. / A. Speer (eds.), *Nach der Verurteilung von 1277. Philosophie und Theologie an der Universität von Paris im letzten Viertel des 13. Jahrhunderts. Studien und Texte* (Miscellanea Mediaevalia 28), Berlin-New York 2000.

27 See A. Speer, *Freies Denken*, in: *Archiv für mittelalterliche Philosophie und Kultur* XI (2005), 7–19.

directed by a narrow all-inclusive system of extrinsic stimuli like credit points, etc.

Indeed, we all know lazy students and idle professors. But is there any bureaucratic control-system that could turn lazyness and idleness into self-motivation and engagement? On the other hand: creativity needs free minds, the virtue of understanding and wisdom. From those values the idea of the university arose. Why should we not trust this idea today? The archeology of the university – taken both in its historical and systematical dimension – shows that we have to take that risk if we will not give up the core idea of the university as a free corporation of free minds.

8. In this short paper I have undertaken an even shorter archeology of the idea of the university. I mainly focussed this archeology on the very beginnings of the university as an institutionally recognizable historical entity that took place in the Middle Ages in the Latin West in Bologna, Paris and other cities.

The founding of the university was highly motivated and driven by an idea of free sciences based on the enterprise of free minds. This idea has become highly successful: It was the first and may be the only universal idea developped by human civilization. And let us admit, all global and universal ideas developped from and through the habit of scientific reflection.

This institutional archeology is rooted in an even deeper epistemological archeology that links episteme not so much to a god-like, but to a human and anthropological point of view, which nevertheless refers to the interior dynamics of the unlimited search for understanding and moreover for wisdom, which is related to the best of our human nature, the free and divine in us[28]. Even if we know about the abuse of this faculty, there seems at least to me

[28] See *Ethica Nicomachea* X, 7 (1177 b 24–31) and *Metaphysica* A 2 (083 a 6–10); see further A. Speer, *Die fragile Konvergenz* (loc. cit.), 237–239. See also A. Speer, *Fragile Konvergenz. 3 Essays zu Fragen metaphysischen Denkens* (éditions questions Sonderband 7), Köln 2010.

enough evidence for this archeological reference point for the idea of the university.

Let me conclude with a final remark: The undertaking of archeology is not primarily linked to the mere understanding of the past, but to a better understanding of the present[29]. We should take this into consideration, when we think and speak about the future of the university.

[29] See G. Agamben, *Philosophische Archäologie*, in: id., *Signatura rerum. Zur Methode*, Frankfurt a.M. 2009, 101–138.

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ST. GREGORY OF NYSSA: *THE LIFE OF ST. MACRINA*

The life story of another remarkable woman, St. Macrina (327–380), has been preserved for us by her brother, St. Gregory of Nyssa (approx. 335 – after 394). She spent all her life in a very prosy environment, in the house of her parents. Her story, however, is far from boring. For not only did she attain the highest level of human perfection, but she was also able – by her love for God and her neighbours – to change this ordinary place into extraordinary. Her spiritual development and the changing human relationships are the main themes of this charming literary work.[1]

Macrina's biography

The *Life of St. Macrina* consists of five parts. First, there is a short prologue (chapter 1), where Gregory explains the reasons for its composition. Once, when he debated with his friend, the 'addressee' of this 'letter', they struck upon the question which way of life is worthy of praise. The personality of Macrina emeged as the best answer. In the end Gregory yielded to his friend's persuasion to write her remarkable life story down, so that in this way Macrina may be useful for the next generations even after her death.

Then there follows Macrina' biography (chapters 2–14). She was the first-born child in the respectable family of Basil the Elder

1 I work with the French critical edition Grégoire de Nysse: *Vie de sainte Macrine.* Introduction, texte critique, traduction, notes et index par Pierre Maraval. Sources Chrétiennes 178. Paris, 1971.

and Emmelia, who were settled in Neocaesarea in the province of Pontus. Officially, she was given the name of her paternal grandmother. But she had a second name, too. Her mother, shortly before giving birth, had a vision during which the name of the famous virgin St. Thecla was mentioned. Gregory, however, thinks it was aimed to presage not her name, but her future way of life.

The small girl was clever, so her parents provided for her education (at home, of course). In this work Gregory tells us that her education was exclusively Christian and that the profane literary works were excluded from her curriculum – they depict passions, so they were considered unsuitable for a girl. (But in the treatise On the Soul and Resurrection he gives us a different picture – I shall develop this point below.)

Macrina was not only clever, but beautiful as well, so her father had to deal with long queues of suitors. He chose one young and promising orator to become the husband of his first-born daughter and she agreed with his decision. But the wedding never took place – the young man unexpectedly died and Macrina refused to take anyone else instead of him. She argued that death is only a temporary separation and it would be dishonest not to be faithful to her fiancé during this short time of his absence. She decided never to get married and to stay in the house of her parents.

When the father died, the family moved from the city to their estate in the countryside, in Annisa near Ibora. Here Macrina spent the rest of her life. She helped her mother to look after their estates (which were situated in several provinces) and after her younger siblings. When her brothers finished their education and her sisters married (about 357), the family property was divided among them and Macrina and her mother were relieved from most of their former duties. Then she persuaded her mother to change their house into a monastery[2] and the whole of the family (in the ancient meaning of this word, both the masters and their slaves) became

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2 It was not an unusuall practice in that time – the same step was taken in Rome by Marcella, in Bethlehem by Paula, in Constantinople by Olympias. Cp. Quéré, F.: *La femme et les Péres de l'Église.* Paris, 1997, p. 74–75.

one monastic community – they prayed together, worked together and served each other irrespectively of their previous social status.

Then the focus turns to Macrina's spiritual development. We learn about her brother Naucratius who lived a monastic life in solitude for five years and unexpectedly died by an accident. On hearing this news the mother fainted. On the other hand Macrina – though she, too, felt excrutiating pain on the lost of her most beloved brother – used reason to raise herself above pain and helped her mother not to be overcome by grief, either. But this was not the last blow Macrina was to receive – the second one came when she lost her mother, the third one when her brother, Basil the Great, died. In all these spiritual battles she, like a noble athlete, held her ground.

The process of Macrina's spiritual perfection Gregory compares to the process of purification of gold:

> 'It is said that gold is being purified in various smelting furnaces, so that when something escapes in the first smelting, it may be separated in the second and finally in the last smelting the ore gets rid of all impure admixtures. The surest proof of pure gold is that is has come through the all smelting process, so that there are no impure particles in it. Something similar was happening with Macrina, too. Various misfortunes tested the sublimity of her mind and she, on every occassion, manifested the purity and stability of her soul.' (*Life of St. Macrina* 14)

Then there follows the central part of the work, the description of Macrina's last days (chapters 15–25). Not long after the death of Basil Macrina fell ill. Gregory, who was on his way to visit her, had a prophetic dream – he saw himself holding brighly shining relics of martyrs. He fully understood its meaning only later. The remaining days of Macrina's life Gregory spent in a philosophic debate with her. (Gregory's work On the Soul and Resurrection, known under the name Macrinia, too, developes the points of this debate in greater detail.)

But Macrina was losing strength quickly. Soon she was only able to pray and her attention was focused on God alone. In this place Gregory uses a very ancient symbolic image. He compares her attitude towards God to that of a bride towards her bride-

groom. However reasonable Macrina's life may have been, in the end it transpires that it has been her love (ἔρως) for God that has been motivating her all the time:

> 'She clearly showed the godly and pure love for the invisible bridegroom, which she has been hiding and cherishing in the depths of her soul, and she revealed her heart's desire to hurry to meet her beloved, to be with him as soon as possible, when she frees herself from the bonds of her body. Indeed, her way led directly to him who loved her, and not one of the pleasures of life could attract her attention to itself. (...) Her enthusiasm did not wane, but as the moment of her departure was nearing and she was perceiving the bridegroom's beauty better, she was more and more hastening to her beloved.' (*Life of St. Macrina* 22–23)

The wedding symbolism used by Gregory has its direct literary roots in the Bible – in the Old Testament we find frequent comparisons of the relationship between the Chosen People and God to the bond of marriage (e.g. Os 1–2, Es 16 and 23, Is 54,4–7 and 62,4–5). In the New Testament the relationship between the Church and Christ is depicted in similar way – either as marriage or as the time of engagement (cp. Mt 9,15; 25,1–13; Jn 3,29; 2 Cor 11,1–2; Eph 5,23–32; Rev 19,7–9; 21,9). In the Ancient Christian literature we find predominantly examples of women who liked to express their personal devotion in this way. From a symbolist point of view this metaphysical union of the male and the female principle may be considered to be an expresssion of human completeness or perfection (as we discussed in the previous article). Gregory's picture is, however, the most poetic description we find and a little below he comes to some other aspect of this imagery, as we shall shortly see.

But we should come back to the story line. When Macrina breathed her last, it fell on Gregory to organise the funeral. Its description forms the fouth part of the work (chapters 26–35), very closely studied by those who are interested in ancient Christian liturgy. When Macrina's body had been prepared for the funeral, dressed in soft white linen, one deaconess had an interesting remark: 'It would not be suitable for Macrina to come before the

eyes of the virgins clothed as a bride' (Life of St. Macrina 32). So they put a dark cloak over her.

This remark reveales a very archaic attitude, which can be found in folklore of many peoples all over the world. There was an ancient belief that life without marriage is not complete. So if a young unmarried person died, the funeral rites had many similar features with the wedding ceremony. It was thought that their life was not fulfilled and they might come back as ghosts, because they would not find peace among the shadows of the underworld. Such ritual substitute for wedding should have prevented that. This belief was still alive in Gregory's time – the deaconess warned him not to support this pagan idea.[3]

Macrina may have been veiled with a dark cloak, but Gregory had to remark:

> 'She was shining even in this dark dress. It was the power of God, I think, that added to her body this gift, too. So it seemed – exactly as in my visionary dream – as if her beauty emanated bright light.' (*Life of St. Macrina* 32)

In the morning, after the all-night vigil over Macrina's dead body, the bier with her was taken in a procession to the chapel of the forty martyrs of Sebastea, where her parents were burried, too. There, with her mother again, she found her final resting place.

The work ends with a description of one of Macrina's many miracles (chapters 36–38) – a healing of a girl with her powerful prayer. In the epilogue (39) Gregory states his reasons, why he does not mention any other miracle. He knows that some weaker people tend to disbelieve those things that exceed their personal experience and he does not want to do them any harm. But even if he does not mention any other miracle, that what has been written about the life of this extraordinary woman, suffices to give us a complete picture.

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[3] This imagery, however, was too strong to be completely suppressed. In a christianized form we find it in several accounts of young women martyrs, e.g. Blandina (Eusebius: *Historia Ecclesiastica* V.I.55) and Pelagia (John Chrysostome: *Homily in St. Pelagia* 2).

The form of the work

As regards the literary genres, it must be said that Gregory uses them quite freely. The beginning of this work looks like a letter – it has a subtitle with the name od the author ('sender') and the 'addressee', but in the very beginning Gregory warns, that his writing is longer than a letter.

In same of its parts the *Life of St. Macrina* resembles a laudatory speech, which has made some scholars believe that it is a funeral oration. This opinion was undoubtedly supported by the fact, that another of the Cappadocian Fathers, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, has written several funeral orations on his relatives (his father, brother Kaisarios, sister Gorgonia and his friend Basil) as well as some panegyrical and hagiographical sermons (on the Maccabeans, St. Cyprian of Carthage, St. Athanasius and Maximus the Philosopher).

It is obvious, however, that the work was ment to be read, not to be listened to. On the basis of its content it has been settled that it is a hagiography.

In the beginning of his story Gregory promises that he will narrate it simply and without any embellishments. This statement must not be understood literally, but as an obligatory expression of modesty of the educated rhetor. The work is not only carefully structured, but it is also rhetorically and philosophically honed to perfection. Next to Biblical quotations we hear Platonic and Stoic ideas resonating. All this, together with the rich Greek vocabulary in the hands of this extremely capable writer, makes this work a literary gem.

We may point out three superb passages – the hymnic description of the angelic life of Macrina and her companions (chapter 11), Macrina's prayer before her death (chapter 24), which is composed in the spirit of the best liturgical tradition stemming from the Bible, and the lamentation of the virgins after Macrina's death (chapter 26), which is a Christian form of ancient Greek threnody.

A testimony to the high appreciation of this work is the fact that already in the antiquity it was translated into the Georgian language.

The datation of the work

The *Life of St. Macrina* was composed shortly after her death. Gregory was induced to write it during his journey to Jerusalem (cp. chapter 1), which he undertook sometime in the course of the years 380–382. So the date of composition of this work may be placed somewhere in the period between the last months of the year 380 to the year 383.

The date of Macrina's death is not explicitly stated in the work, but Byzantine, Syrian and Georgian synaxaries, calendars and menologies concordly give the 19th of July as the day of the commemoration of St. Macrina.

A certain part of scholars, however, does not consider this testimony to be relevant and puts Macrina's death in the December 379 or January 380. This opinion is based on the interpretation of the data given by Gregory himself. In chapter 15 he says that nine months or a little later after Basil's death (1st January 379) he took part in the council in Antioch and from there he went to visit Macrina 'before a year passed'. If we take this expression as meaning a year according to the Julian calendar (which begins on the 1st of January and ends on the 31st of December) or as a year after Basil's death, and if we add approximately one month for the journey from Antioch to Annisa, we get the above mentioned winter date of Macrina's death.

However, between the lines Gregory himself speaks against this datation. In chapter 19 he mentions that after his first meeting with his dying sister he was sent to have rest and refresh himself in the shadow of a climbing grapevine. And the province of Pontus did not have so mild climate that in winter guests would be sent to have rest outside... So it is more probable that the described events took place in summer. (The advocates of the winter date reject this statement as a mere retorical styling to achieve contrasts.)

But even the chronological data given by Gregory may be interpreted in a different way – and then it aggrees with the date stated in the ancient liturgical books. It is not indisputable that Gregory did use the Julian calendar. It was generally accepted in the West, but in the East, in addition to it, there were local calen-

dars still in use, which had their beginning on a different day of the year. It is exactly this variety that makes us believe that Gregory did not use any official calendar, but he meant a year since some important event he had just mentioned. And it need not be only Basil's death, but the council in Antioch as well. According to Gregory's words it began in September/October 379 and before a year since this event had passed we have the high summer of 380, which exactly corresponds with the date preserved by the liturgy.[4]

'Philosophic' life

In the preceding article we spoke about the sources where the literary genre of Christian hagiography stemmed from. One of them was the 'philosophic' biography. In the Life of St. Macrina the theme of philosophy appeares quite often, so in the following pages we shall focus on this aspect.

We find here interesting expressions like these: thanks to 'philosophy' Macrina attained the highest level of perfection in virtue (chapter 1), the ideal she followed with her life was 'philosophy' (5), to which she has drawn her brother Basil, too (6), her brother Naucratius, living for five years as a monk, spent this time in a 'philosophic' way (9), the 'philosophic' life is non-material (11), 'philosophy' of Macrina and her companions was constantly growing (11), her brother Peter, choosing the monastic life, ascended to the noble ideal of 'philosophy' (12), constant development of Macrina and Peter is described as living in even more 'philosophic' way (13), when Peter became a priest his 'philosophy' grew greater because of increased piety (14), in monasteries in Annisa men and women lead 'philosophic' life (37). All these expressions do not agree with the classical notion of philosophy. (There is, however, one passage where Gregory uses 'philosophy' in its classical sense – that case I shall develop below. Now I would like to concentrate on this shifted meaning.)

In Christian literature the classical Greek word φιλοσοφία, originally 'love for wisdom' and 'wisdom' itself, acquired a spe-

[4] Cp. Grégoire de Nysse: *Vie de sainte Macrine*, p. 57–67.

cial meaning – it signified the real wisdom, which is the Christian teaching as compared with the preceding periods of less developed human thought.

Religion, however, is not just theory; practice – the application of this theory in real life – is also needed. For if people find answers to some existential questions, they are not satisfied with their verbal formulation alone, but they try to answer with all their personality, with their way of life, with their deeds. That is why in our writings the term 'philosophy' means 'Christian way of life'.

What Christian way of life should look like can be gleaned from some of Jesus' words. The basis is to love God above all and one's neighbour as oneself (cp. Mt 22,36–40, Mc 12,28–34, Lc 10,25–28). It seems simple, but it is not simple at all. For to love God above all means that a person should give up 'humanity' (in the bad sense of this word), i.e. the human tendency to prefer riches, comfort, family, security, power, status, honours etc. All these things are good as long as they are in their right place in the scale of a person's priorities, but if they ascend higher, that they belong, they enslave us. Love for God puts these created things into the right perspective and gives us freedom.

The same idea is expressed in other words in the statement: 'Seek first the God's kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well' (Mt 6,33, cp. Lc 12,31, Wis 7,11). In other places Jesus says more specifically how this Kingdom of Heaven may be found:

1. If people are not bound with material belongings: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven' (Mt 5,3, cp. Lc 6,20). 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God' (Mc 10,25, cp. Mt 19,24, Lc 18,25).

2. Not even the personal relationships should be placed above God – Jesus says: 'Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life' (Mt 19,29, cp. Mc 10,28–31, Lc 18,28–30). Some people 'who are able to receive it' even give up marriage (they 'have made themselves eunuchs') for the sake of the kingdom of heaven (Mt 19,12).

3. The last advice is to give up the desire for power: 'Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all' (Mc 10,43–44, cp. Mt 20,26–27, Lc 22,24–25).

This triple advice from Jesus how to acquire inner freedom is addressed to all Christians. With special attention, however, it was put into practice in the monastic environment.

In this light the above described 'philosophy' and 'philosophic life' of Macrina and her companions can be perfectly understood. The ideal she followed with her life was Jesus' teaching – thanks to it she attained the highest level of perfection in virtue. It was a long process, constant development – that is the meaning of the phrases 'their philosophy was growing', 'they were living in more philosophic way', or that 'the philosophy grew greater'. The words about the philosophic life being non-material obviously mean giving up material possessions. And from from the way of life of Naucratius, Peter and men and women in monasteries in Annisa it is clear that the author had the monastic way of life in his mind. The life-story of Macrina's brothers Basil and Naucratius, who gave up their splendid carriers, may be a model of the effort for giving up the desire for power.

The question of giving up power is closely connected with the attitude towards the education.

The power of knowledge

There are many temptations in the world and people may fall in many ways. For a gifted, capable and competent person it is pride that poses the greatest danger. That is probably why the Cappadocian Fathers made so much effort to attain its opposite, humility, which took form of giving up the power over other people. This effort may be observed in their attitude towards education and high social status it could secure (in antiquity).

As knowledge allways gives power (scientia potentia) and it may induce a false feeling of being self-sufficient, it may be dangerous. Therefore in Christian literature we can often find refusal of (profane) education – it is also named 'the outside education' (ἡ

ἔξω παιδεία).[5] So Basil, the graduate of the best schools of his era, turned away from it after his conversion. It is well described in the *Life of St. Macrina* 6:

> 'After a long period of time spent in schools, where he studies retorics, the great Basil returns home. (...) He came back full of conceit, because he was well aware of his great oratorial talent, he despised every class and because of his abilities he considered himself to be one grade better that the best personalities in the province. But Macrina has drawn him, too, to her ideal of philosophy, so that he gave up worldly glory, he did not value the admiration of his eloquence any longer and deserted to this way of life by the work of his own hands (...)'

Both Basil and Naucratius gave up the post of a rhetor, a high social status secured for them by their high education. Naucratius died shortly after, so we cannot follow his development, but we know about Basil that later he modified his attitude towards education – it is not bad in itself, it may be used for good ends, for the support of the Christian community, for the defence of the faith and the fight against heresies. [6] The same attitude may be observed in the case of Gregory, who never despised profane education, the 'riches of Egypt', as he calls it in the *Life of Moses*.

Macrina's education

This double attitude towards education we must bear in mind if we want to assess the case of Macrina correctly.

In the chapter 3 of the *Life of St. Macrina* it is said that Macrina was not given any kind of education in profane literature,

[5] Cp. Špidlík, T.: *Spiritualita křesťanského východu IV. Mnišství.* Velehrad – Roma, 2004, p. 223–227.

[6] A parallel development may be observed in the West in the case of St. Jerome – in his early years of manhood this highly educated man refused classical education, but after some more years he accepted it again, cp. *Epistolae* 22 *(Ad Eustochium)* and 70 *(Ad Magnum)*.

because is was considered to be a threat for morality. This attitude is in accordance not only with the above mentioned Christian circumspect attitude towards the 'outside' education, but also with the general view of the pagan antiquity which did not consider higher education to be suitable for women.

On the other hand, during the discourse Macrina had with Gregory in the few remaining days before her death – described in the chapter 17 of the Life and especially in the separate work *On the Soul and Resurrection* – she speaks philosophy in its ancient meaning of the word, she knows the thoughts of Plato, Stoics, Epicureans, she is capable of reasoned arguments. All this requires not only natural inteligence, but also some kind of formal education in these matters. Undoubtedly, Macrina did not get the complete rhetoric education like her brothers did and she only studied at home, but if she was able to discuss the high matters of philosophy, she must have been educated in them.[7]

However, the opponents of Macrina's profane education warn agains overvaluing the testimony of the dialogue *On the Soul and Resurrection*. It is also named 'Christian Phaedo' and like Plato's Socrates, Gregory's *Macrina* is modelled not according to historical reality, but to suit author's philosophical intent.

The question what Macrina's education was in reality remains open.

Woman in the role of a Teacher

Whatever the education of real Macrina may have been, it is a fact that in these two works she is depicted not only as educated, but even more – she appears in the role of a teacher of wisdom. This fact is significant, too.

[7] Higher education for women was certainly not common, but it was not impossible either. We know, for example, that in his catechetical school Origen taught not only men, but women as well – the name of one of them, Herais, has been preserved (Eusebius: *Historia Ecclesiastica* VI.4).

All three of the Cappadocian Fathers – Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus – were coming from families where women played a crucial role in passing the Christianity to the next generation. In their writings they openly express their respect and gratefulness towards their female relatives – Gregory of Nazianzus mentioned his mother Nonna and sister Gorgonia, Basil and his brother Gregory their mother Emmelia, grandmother Macrina and, of course, their sister named after her.

However, the respect for women in the family circle is one thing and the respect for women on a greater social scale is something very different. In the time of Ancient Christianity the first steps in this direction were made. In the previous article we mentioned several saint women who appeared in an unusual (in the language of that period 'manly') role of a teacher – Melania the Elder, Melania the Younger, Marcella, Paula, Syncletica, and, of course, St. Macrina.

The literary character of Macrina was undoubtedly modelled after a philosophic-literary pattern. In Plato's dialogue *Symposium* the wise Diotima teaches Plato on the matters of love. In the 4th century Christian literature this image of a woman as a Teacher reappeared. In the work of Methodius of Olympus, which is named *Symposium*, too, the well known Thecla appears as the acknowledged leader of a group of virgins who are dedicated to the devout life and pursue it with learning and wit. Thecla is the teacher who gains her leadership over the others not by her piety only, but through her learning which is acclaimed by the others, her ability to interpret Scripture, and her refutations pagan philosophy.[8]

This is exactly the role which Macrina has – as it is sketched out in the *Life of St. Macrina* and as it is fully developed in the dialogue On the Soul and Resurrection. She is the teacher of wis-

8 Cp. Clark, E. A.: The Lady Vanishes: Dilemmas of a Feminist Historian after the 'Linguistic Turn'. In: *Church History* 67, 1998 (1–2), p. 1–31, especially 24. Wilson-Kastner, P. – Kastner, G. R. – Millin, A. – Rader, R. – Reedy, J.: *A Lost Tradition. Women Writers of the Early Church.* Lanham – New York – London, 1981, p. XIV, XVII – XVIII.

dom and she instructs her brother the bishop in the same way as Diotima illuminated Plato. When we read (in the chapter 2) about Macrina's mother's vision about the name of St. Thecla, we should understand not the 'itinerant' Thecla of the apocryphal *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, but the 'philosophic' debater Thecla of *Symposium*.

Summary

In this article the *Life of St. Macrina* by St. Gregory of Nyssa is discussed, as regards its content, form and the question of dataion of Macrina's death. In the second part the imagery of 'philosophic' life is analysed in greater detail – the changed content of this word, the role of education in Christian life and, finally, the significance of a woman appearing in the role of a teacher.