

Evagrius and Gregory: Nazianzen or Nyssen? Cappadocian (and Origenian) Influence on Evagrius

Ilaria L. E. Ramelli

EVAGRIUS PONTICUS (345/6–399) is one of the most outstanding Greek Patristic thinkers and ascetics in the Origenian tradition. His intellectual figure and his thought are undergoing a reassessment,¹ and rightly so. However, most of this reassessment still remains to be done, especially with regard to a unitary vision of his production that overcomes the unfortunate split between his ascetic and his philosophical works (the former easily accepted, the latter deemed daringly and dangerously ‘Origenistic’), and with regard to his (too often misunderstood) ‘Origenism’. In order to address both questions, which are closely interrelated, it is necessary to tackle the thorny issue of Origen’s true thought—as opposed to the false reconstruction of it that was made in the course of the Origenist controversy and that partially still holds today—and its exact impact on Evagrius’ system, as well as to investigate the possible role of the Cappadocians in the transmission of Origen’s authentic ideas to Evagrius.

Gregory of Nyssa is, among the Cappadocians and among all

¹ At the very least see A. Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus* (New York 2006); J. Konstantinovsky, *Evagrius Ponticus: The Making of a Gnostic* (Burlington 2009); K. Corrigan, *Evagrius and Gregory: Mind, Soul and Body in the 4th Century* (Farnham/Burlington 2009). Corrigan’s attention to the *Kephalaia Gnostica* and the *Letter to Melania* or *Great Letter*, and his holistic approach to Evagrius’ thought, are commendable. The same holistic approach (i.e. without the inveterate fracture between Evagrius’ ascetic and philosophical works) is also used, with good reason, by Konstantinovsky and, albeit briefly, by Casiday.

Patristic thinkers, the most insightful and faithful follower of Origen.² The problem of which of the Cappadocians transmitted Origen's thought and its interpretation to Evagrius—who surely had also a direct acquaintance with the ideas of the great Alexandrian—is most relevant to the overall assessment of Evagrius' intellectual heritage. For now I am primarily concerned with a biographical point, but, as will become obvious, this point bears directly on that core issue.

Indeed, some aspects of Evagrius' life³ so far have not received from scholars the consideration they deserve. Since, however, they bear on his thought and his relationship to the thought of the Cappadocians and consequently to that of Origen himself, which is one of the most important problems in Greek Patristics, they are worth investigating. In order to do so, it will be necessary to analyse the sources critically, and when they are controversial or ambiguous to suggest interpretations that are not usually taken into account but can open up interesting perspectives for the reassessment of Evagrius' intellectual configuration. The main sources on his life are Palladius *H. Laus.* 38, Socrates *HE* 4.23, and Sozomen *HE* 6.30, plus a fifth-century Coptic biography.⁴ As I will point out, there is one major point on which they disagree. But let us see what can be

² A full demonstration is projected in the form of a systematic study of Gregory's close dependence on, and creative and intelligent reception of, Origen's ideas. I suspect more and more that Gregory is the Patristic philosopher and theologian who understood Origen's true thought best of all and misunderstood it least of all.

³ See on his biography A. and C. Guillaumont, "Evagre le Pontique," *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* IV (Paris 1961) 1731–1744, and their "Evagrius Ponticus," *ReallexAntChrist* 6 (1965) 1088–1107; biographical details also in Konstantinovsky, *Evagrius* 11–26. Further references in the discussion below.

⁴ Other ancient sources, of less importance for Evagrius' life, are Gregory Nazianzen's testament (see below); the anonymous end-fourth-century *Historia Monachorum* 20.15 (p.123 Festugière); the anonymous fourth-fifth-century *Apophthegmata, Alphabetical Collection* s.v. "Evagrius" (*PG* 65.173); Genadius *Vir.ill.* 11 and 17; and Jerome *Ep.* 133, *Dial. adv. Pel.* praef., *Comm. in Ier.* 4 praef.

gathered from them.

According to our available sources, Evagrius was born in Iborra in Pontus. As a son of a presbyter and χωρεπίσκοπος, he received a good education in rhetoric, philosophy, and the liberal arts. He soon came into contact with Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus, who, according to tradition and in all probability, were the compilers of the *Philocalia*, the Greek anthology of key passages from Origen's works.⁵ Evagrius is likely to have become acquainted with Origen's ideas first thanks to them. He was ordained a reader by Basil. After the death of Basil, and after the death of the presbyter who was Evagrius' "father according to God"⁶ and was ordained a presbyter in Arkeus by

⁵ Nazianzen, in his letter to Theodore (*Ep.* 115) that prefaces the *Philocalia*, does not state explicitly that this work was written by himself and Basil; what the letter says is that it is a ὑπόμνημα of Gregory and Basil for the use of those who study the Bible, the φιλόλογοι, those who love the Logos (or the Word). The attribution to Basil and Nazianzen is found in the anonymous prologue that follows the letter, probably posterior to the condemnation of Origenism in the fifth century. See E. Junod, "Remarques sur la composition de la *Philocalie* d'Origène par Basile de Césarée et Grégoire de Nazianze," *RHPPhR* 52 (1972) 149–156; M. Harl and N. de Lange, *Origène, Philocalie, 1–20, sur les Écritures / La Lettre à Africanus sur l'histoire de Suzanne* (Paris 1983) 20–24. It is very probable that the tradition according to which Basil and Nazianzen were the redactors of the *Philocalia* is reliable, even though doubts have been raised: see E. Junod, "Basile de Césarée et Grégoire de Nazianze sont-ils les compilateurs de la *Philocalie* d'Origène?" in *Mémorial Dom Jean Gribomont* (Rome 1988) 349–360; but in his previous works Junod too accepted the traditional attribution, until his introduction to *Origène: Philocalie 21–27* (Paris 1976). Most scholars accept Basil and Nazianzen's paternity of the *Philocalia*, e.g. W. Löhr, "Christianity as Philosophy: Problems and Perspectives of an Ancient Intellectual Project," *VChr* 64 (2010) 160–188, at 185.

⁶ Pallad. *H.Laus.* 38.2 Bartelink: οὗτος τῷ μὲν γένει ἦν Ποντικὸς πόλεως Ἰβωρῶν, υἱὸς χωρεπισκόπου· ἀναγνώστης κεχειροτόνηται παρὰ τοῦ ἁγίου Βασιλείου τοῦ ἐπισκόπου τῆς ἐκκλησίας Καισαρέων; 38.13: τούτῳ ἐμηνύθη ἡ τελευτὴ τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ λέγει τῷ ἀναγγέιλαντι· παῦσαι βλασφημιῶν· ὁ γὰρ ἐμὸς πατὴρ ἀθάνατός ἐστιν. This makes it possible that the *chorepiscopus* was not Evagrius' *biological* father, but his *spiritual* father. This point is usually not noticed or discussed in scholarship on Evagrius' biography. However,

Basil himself, Evagrius then went to Constantinople to study, according to Socrates and Sozomen, with Gregory Nazianzen: “He studied philosophy and was educated in sacred Scripture under the direction of Gregory, bishop of Nazianzus” (Soz. *HE* 6.30.8). Evagrius stayed there in 379–382, around the time of the ecumenical Council of 381, in which he participated as a deacon. Now, Evagrius was ordained a deacon by Nazianzen himself according to Socrates (*HE* 4.23.34), but, as I shall point out, Socrates’ testimony is contradicted by Palladius.

Socrates’ affirmation is followed by virtually all scholars in Evagrian studies, for instance Manlio Simonetti⁷ and Robert Sinkewicz, who speaks of Gregory Nazianzen as the one who ordained Evagrius and never mentions Gregory Nyssen in his biography of Evagrius;⁸ the same is true of Giovanni Cataldo,⁹ David Brakke,¹⁰ and Kevin Corrigan.¹¹ Joel Kalvesmaki also speaks only of Gregory Nazianzen in connection with Evagrius’ formation, without mentioning Gregory Nyssen.¹² Julia Konstantinovskaya mentions Gregory of Nyssa only once in her account of the life of Evagrius, not as the one who ordained him or was his friend or accompanied him to Egypt (see below), but

the possibility is interesting and suggests a possible parallel with Leonidas, “Origen’s *so-called* father (ὁ λεγόμενος Ὀριγένειος πατήρ),” as Eusebius describes him (*HE* 6.1.1). Details and arguments in I. L. E. Ramelli, “Origen, Patristic Philosophy, and Christian Platonism: Re-Thinking the Christianisation of Hellenism,” *VChr* 63 (2009) 217–263, and “Origen the Christian Middle/Neoplatonist,” *Journal of Early Christian History* 1 (2011) 98–130.

⁷ M. Simonetti, *Letteratura cristiana antica greca e latina* (Milan 1988) 287.

⁸ R. E. Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus. The Greek Ascetic Corpus* (Oxford 2003) xvii–xix.

⁹ G. Cataldo, *Vita come tensione nell’antropologia di Evagrio Pontico* (Bari 2007) 22–23.

¹⁰ D. Brakke, *Evagrius of Pontus, Talking Back: A Monastic Handbook for Combating Demons* (Collegeville 2009) 2–3.

¹¹ Corrigan, *Evagrius* 2. See also G. Wassen, “A Life of Evagrius of Pontus,” http://home.versatel.nl/chotki/a_life_of_evagrius_of_pontus.htm.

¹² J. Kalvesmaki, “The *Epistula fidei* of Evagrius of Pontus: An Answer to Constantinople,” *J ECS* 20 (2012) 113–139, at 113–115.

simply in connection with the other Cappadocians: “Evagrius undoubtedly also encountered Gregory of Nyssa, both in Basil’s Cappadocian estate and in Constantinople, although no reliable record exists of their contacts.”¹³ This last point, in light of what I shall argue, may be questionable.

Palladius’ account is squarely different from Socrates’ with regard to who was Evagrius’ close friend and who ordained him a deacon. For, instead of indicating Gregory Nazianzen, Palladius indicates Gregory of Nyssa. I shall analyse Palladius’ testimony below. First, however, it is necessary to observe that Palladius of Helenopolis’ report is noteworthy, for he was a personal disciple of Evagrius, unlike Socrates. He wrote a biography of Evagrius, devoting a whole chapter of his *Historia Lausiaca* to him—as Eusebius had done with Origen, his hero, devoting almost a book to him in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Palladius was an Origenian monk, and was bishop of Helenopolis in Bithynia from 400 CE. He was a supporter of John Chrysostom (in honour and defence of whom he probably wrote the *Dialogue on the Life of John Chrysostom*),¹⁴ and an acquaintance of

¹³ Konstantinovsky, *Evagrius Ponticus* 11–26.

¹⁴ Many scholars support Palladius’ paternity of the *Dialogue*. See P. Devos, “Approches de Pallade à travers le *Dialogue sur Chrysostome* et l’*Histoire Lausiaque*,” *AnalBoll* 107 (1989) 243–266, who bases his argument on the similarity between this *Dialogue* and Palladius’ *Historia Lausiaca*; N. Zeegers-Vander Vorst, “A propos du *Dialogue de Pallade sur la vie de Jean Chrysostome*,” *RHE* 85 (1990) 30–41; L. Dattrino, *Palladio. Dialogo sulla vita di Giovanni Crisostomo* (Rome 1995); E. Cattaneo, “Le cause della decadenza del clero nel *Dialogo sulla vita di Crisostomo* di Palladio,” *Augustinianum* 37 (1997) 333–349; A. Miranda, “Autorità ecclesiastica e giurisdizione civile nel *Dialogo sulla vita di Crisostomo* di Palladio,” *Studia Patristica* 49 (2002) 405–423; G. D. Dunn, “The Date of Innocent I’s *Epistula* 12 and the Second Exile of John Chrysostom,” *GRBS* 45 (2005) 155–170; D. Katos, “Socratic Dialogue or Courtroom Debate? Judicial Rhetoric and Stasis Theory in the *Dialogue on the Life of St. John Chrysostom*,” *VChr* 61 (2007) 42–69, who grounds his demonstration on the presence in the *Dialogue* of principles of judicial rhetoric and late antique *stasis* theory, well known to Palladius, and argues that he wrote it, not as a biography, but as a case for the restoration of John

the Origenian monks dubbed ‘Tall Brothers’, as well as of Evagrius, Rufinus, and Melania the Elder, all convinced Origenians. Palladius actually speaks of Evagrius as his teacher (*H.Laus.* 23.1). When Chrysostom was exiled, Palladius went to Rome and tried hard to have him restored to his seat, but he himself was banned, to Syene of the Thebaid in Egypt.¹⁵ He even requested that Theophilus be put on trial as responsible for the exile of John.¹⁶ The *Dialogue*, which is probably by him, was modelled on Plato’s *Phaedo*, notably just as was Gregory Nyssen’s *De anima et resurrectione*.¹⁷ I think it very likely that Palladius had Gregory of Nyssa’s work in mind and was inspired by him.

In Egypt, before being elected bishop, Palladius had become acquainted with the Desert Fathers Macarius of Alexandria, and Evagrius. Remarkably, Palladius had known Evagrius personally, as he himself attests (*H.Laus.* 12, 23, 24, 35, 38, 47), and it is in Evagrius’ spirit that, after his return from his own exile, ca. 418–420, he wrote his *Historia Lausiaca*¹⁸ (in the same

to the diptychs as a bishop. See now D. Katos, *Palladius of Helenopolis, the Origenist Advocate* (Oxford 2011).

¹⁵ On those who supported John in and after his exile see M. Wallraff, “Tod im Exil. Reaktionen auf die Todesnachricht des Johannes Chrysostomos und Konstituierung einer ‘johannitischen’ Opposition,” in *Chrysostomosbilder in 1600 Jahren* (Berlin/New York 2008) 23–37.

¹⁶ John Chrysostom was accused, among other imputations, also of having invaded Theophilus’ jurisdiction when he received the Origenian monks, and of having been given money by Olympias, his rich deaconess. See J. Tloka, *Griechische Christen, christliche Griechen* (Tübingen 2005) 159–160; E. D. Hunt, “Palladius of Helenopolis: A Party and its Supporters in the Church of the Late Fourth Century,” *JThS* 24 (1973) 456–480.

¹⁷ A full study and commentary is provided by I. L. E. Ramelli, *Gregorio di Nissa sull’Anima e la Resurrezione* (Milan 2007); cf. the reviews of P. Tzamalikos, *VChr* 62 (2008) 515–523, M. J. Edwards, *JEH* 60 (2009) 764–765, M. Herrero de Háuregui, *Ilu* 13 (2008) 334–336.

¹⁸ R. Draguet, “L’*Histoire lausiaque*: Une oeuvre écrite dans l’esprit d’Evagre,” *RHE* 41 (1946) 321–364; 42 (1947) 5–49. See also N. Molinier, *Ascèse, contemplation et ministère d’après l’Histoire Lausiaque de Pallade d’Hélénopolis* (Bégrolles-en-Mauges 1995); and G. Frank, *The Memory of the Eyes: Pilgrims to*

spirit in which he very probably wrote the *Dialogue on the Life of John Chrysostom*.¹⁹ At *H.Laus.* 86 Palladius speaks of Evagrius in the most laudatory terms. Palladius much appreciated another faithful Origenian as well, and a friend of Evagrius: Rufinus, of whom he says that nobody was more learned or kind (98). From Palladius' work, including his account of John Chrysostom's character and trial,²⁰ his sympathy for the Origenian tradition is transparent. What is most relevant to the present investigation is Palladius' closeness to Evagrius himself, both from the biographical and from the ideological point of view.

This is why Palladius' account of Evagrius' closeness to Gregory of Nyssa is noteworthy. Now, Palladius in his *Historia Lausiaca* is clear that it was *not* Gregory of Nazianzus, but

Living Saints in Christian Late Antiquity (Berkeley 2000). According to Bunge, one of the main sources of the *Historia Lausiaca* was a book by Palladius himself on the sayings and deeds of the Desert Fathers: G. Bunge, "Palladiana I: Introduction aux fragments coptes de l'*Histoire lausiaque*," *StudMon* 32 (1990) 79–129. On the genesis of the *Historia Lausiaca* see K. Nickau, "Eine *Historia Lausiaca* ohne Lausus: Überlegungen zur Hypothese von René Draguet über den Ursprung der *Historia Lausiaca*," *ZAC* 5 (2001) 131–139. For a comparative approach between pagan and Christian hagiography see U. Criscuolo, "Biografia e agiografia fra pagani e cristiani fra il IV e il V secolo: le *Vitae* di Eunapio e la *Historia Lausiaca*," *Salesianum* 67 (2005) 771–798. Edition and German transl. D. Schütz, *Historia Lausiaca. Die frühen Heiligen in der Wüste* (Basel 1987); French transl. N. Molinier, *Pallade d'Hélénopolis, Histoire lausiaque* (Bégrolles-en-Mauges 1999).

¹⁹ This is highlighted by G. M. De Durand, "Evagre le Pontique et le Dialogue sur la vie de saint Jean Chrysostome," *BLE* 77 (1976) 191–206, at least in respect to Evagrius' psychology and ethics.

²⁰ F. van Ommeslaeghe, "Que vaut le témoignage de Pallade sur le procès de saint Jean Chrysostome?" *AnalBoll* 95 (1977) 389–414, who vindicates Palladius as a witness to the events anterior to John's trial, outside Constantinople. M. Wallraff, "Le conflit de Jean Chrysostome avec la cour chez les historiens ecclésiastiques grecs," in B. Pouderon and Y.-M. Duval (eds.), *L'historiographie de l'Eglise des premiers siècles* (Paris 2001) 361–370, observes that Palladius is even more favourable to John Chrysostom than Socrates is: while Socrates does not side with John in his conflict with the imperial court, Palladius does.

Gregory of Nyssa who ordained Evagrius and was a close friend of his (86: *PG* 34.1188C):²¹

μετὰ δὲ τὴν κοίμησιν τοῦ ἁγίου ἐπισκόπου Βασιλείου προσέχων αὐτοῦ τῇ ἐπιτηδειότητι ὁ σοφώτατος καὶ ἀπαθέστατος καὶ πάσῃ παιδείᾳ λάμπων ὁ ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Νυσσαεὺς ἐπίσκοπος ἀδελφὸς τοῦ ἐν τιμῇ τῶν ἀποστόλων Βασιλείου τοῦ ἐπισκόπου, προχειρίζεται τοῦτον διάκονον.

After the death of the bishop Saint Basil, Saint Gregory, the bishop of Nyssa, a brother of the bishop Basil who enjoys the honour of the apostles, Saint Gregory I say, most wise and free from passions to the utmost degree, and illustrious for his wide-ranging learning, became friends with Evagrius and appointed him as a deacon.

Thus Gregory of Nyssa, according to Palladius, treated Evagrius with kindness and friendship, and after the death of Basil ordained Evagrius deacon.²² Palladius does not even speak of Nazianzen here, but only of Basil first, and then of Nyssen. It is impossible that an error occurred in this text and that Palladius meant Nazianzen, since he expressly states that this Gregory was the brother of Basil and was bishop of Nyssa. Moreover, Palladius was a great admirer of Gregory Nyssen and knew him well, and so was in a position to distinguish him clearly from Nazianzen. Palladius describes Gregory Nyssen in

²¹ I follow here Migne's text, basically the edition of J. Cotelerius, *Monumenta ecclesiae graecae* III (Paris 1686), against recensio G (ed. Bartelink), because it transmits what I believe to be the original text, as the whole of my discussion in the present essay endeavors to demonstrate.

²² Anthony Maas, "Evagrius Ponticus," *The Catholic Encyclopedia* 5 (1909) 640, does not draw any conclusion, but says only that Evagrius was ordained by Nyssen: "Instructed by St. Gregory Nazianzen, he was ordained reader by St. Basil the Great and by St. Gregory of Nyssa (380), whom he accompanied to the Second Council of Constantinople (381). According to Palladius, who differs in his account from Socrates and Sozomen, Evagrius remained for a time as archdeacon in Constantinople, while Nectarius was patriarch (381–397)." Then Nyssen disappears from his account; moreover, he seems to make no distinction between Evagrius' ordination as a reader and as a deacon.

the most laudatory terms for his wisdom, his ascetic life, and his glory due to the richness of his learning.

The sentence that comes immediately next in the *Historia Lausiaca*, namely that “Gregory the bishop” left Evagrius in Constantinople during the council and entrusted him to bishop Nectarius, might refer to either Nyssen or Nazianzen. Usually it is thought that it was Nazianzen who recommended Evagrius to Nectarius when he withdrew from Constantinople. But in Palladius’ text the immediately preceding mention of Nyssen rather than Nazianzen would make the reference to Nyssen more natural:

ἐκεῖθεν ἐλθὼν ὁ ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ ἐπίσκοπος ἐν τῇ μεγάλῃ συνόδῳ τῇ κατὰ Κωνσταντινούπολιν καταλιμπάνει αὐτὸν [*sc.* Evagrius] Νεκταρίῳ τῷ μακαρίῳ ἐπισκόπῳ, διαλεκτικώτατον ὄντα κατὰ πασῶν τῶν αἱρέσεων.

When he left, Saint Gregory the bishop left Evagrius with the blessed bishop Nectarius at the great Council of Constantinople. For Evagrius was most skilled in dialectics against all heresies.

Socrates himself, when he states that Gregory went to Egypt with Evagrius (*HE* 4.23), an otherwise unattested piece of information to my knowledge, may betray a source that in fact referred to Nyssen. For while Gregory Nazianzen never went to Egypt or Jerusalem after the Council of Constantinople, and indeed seems to have never left Nazianzus and Arianzus after the council,²³ it is attested that after Constantinople, where he was in 381, Gregory of Nyssa in fact went to Jerusalem late in 381 and in 382 (see his *Ep.* 3). It is quite possible that he travelled further to Egypt with Evagrius, all the more so in that Nyssen also was in Arabia in exactly that period. This, moreover, or at least an acquaintance with Evagrius’ and Melania’s circle, would help to explain why Gregory’s *De anima et resur-*

²³ After renouncing the bishopric of Constantinople, Gregory returned to Nazianzus. There he administered the local church. He subsequently withdrew to his Arianzus property with the intention of devoting himself to literature, but he died there shortly after, in 390.

rectione was translated into Coptic in Egypt very soon, possibly already during Gregory's own lifetime.²⁴ This is even more probable in light of the consideration that Gregory's *De anima et resurrectione* is a strong endorsement of the Origenian doctrine of *apokatastasis* (the eventual universal restoration of all rational creatures to God), which Evagrius himself decidedly supported.²⁵

Indeed, it was the Council of Constantinople itself, in 381, that sent Gregory of Nyssa to Arabia, to a church of that province (possibly Bostra), which was close both to Palestine and to Egypt. The goal of this mission was διορθώσεως ἕνεκεν, "for the sake of correcting them" (*Letter* 2.12 [*GNO* VIII.2 17]) While he was there, Gregory also undertook a trip to Jerusalem, exactly when Evagrius too went there. Gregory was requested to do so by "those who oversee (προεστῶσι) the holy churches of Jerusalem." These were certainly close to Melania and Rufinus, whose double monastery was on the Mount of Olives. Gregory's mission was very difficult, and he even ended up being charged with heterodoxy, surely because of his Christology, which, notably, drew on Origen's conception that Christ the Logos assumed not only a human body but also a human soul. It is worth noting that this was also Evagrius' conception. When Gregory finally left Jerusalem, thus, he was sad (*Letter* 3.4).

It can therefore be hypothesised that it was Gregory of Nyssa who ordained Evagrius a deacon, and as his friend later was with him after he left Constantinople, in Palestine and perhaps in Egypt. At first, when Gregory left, he entrusted Evagrius to Nectarius, because the former could be of use in Constan-

²⁴ See Ramelli, *Gregorio di Nissa sull'Anima*, Appendix I; the very early Coptic translation was fruitful there in establishing the new edition of *De anima et resurrectione*.

²⁵ On Evagrius' doctrine of *apokatastasis*, its metaphysical reasons, and its Origenian roots, see I. L. E. Ramelli, *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis: A Critical Assessment from the New Testament to Eriugena* (Leiden 2013), the chapter on Evagrius.

tinople for his dialectical skills. But later Evagrius too left Constantinople and may have joined Gregory of Nyssa in Palestine and in Egypt. This hypothesis would also explain the reason for the apparently odd interruption of all relationships between Evagrius and Gregory Nazianzen after the Council of Constantinople. This interruption is rightly noticed as very strange by Julia Konstantinovskiy,²⁶ but she does not attempt to explain it. Indeed, after 381, no contact seems to have taken place between Evagrius and Gregory of Nazianzus. Only *Letter 46*, written shortly after Evagrius' arrival in Egypt, may have been addressed by him to Nazianzen, but this is uncertain, and, moreover, even if this was the case, in that letter Evagrius apologises precisely for having *failed* to be in contact for so long.²⁷ Evidence of further contact is lacking; Konstantinovskiy is right to deem it highly uncertain that Evagrius' *Letters 12 and 23* were addressed to Gregory Nazianzen.²⁸ Now, this odd and inexplicable situation would become less so if one admits that it was Gregory of Nyssa who travelled to Palestine, and possibly Egypt, with Evagrius, while Gregory Nazianzen remained far from Evagrius, both geographically and from the epistolary point of view.

At any rate, for a while Evagrius had been the assistant of Gregory Nazianzen in Constantinople,²⁹ received from him advanced education,³⁰ and supported him in his fight against Arians and Pneumatomachians—the same fight that Gregory of Nyssa also undertook. Evagrius' letter *On Faith*, which re-

²⁶ Konstantinovskiy, *Evagrius Ponticus*, 14.

²⁷ Konstantinovskiy, *Evagrius Ponticus* 14 n.24, even wonders whether this letter was in fact ever sent, given that it was found in the corpus of Evagrius' letters and not in that of Nazianzen's letters.

²⁸ Konstantinovskiy, *Evagrius Ponticus* 14 n.25.

²⁹ Gregory mentions Evagrius in his testament, written in 381, as "the deacon Evagrius, who has much labored and thought things out together with me," πολλά μοι συγκαμόντι καὶ συνεκφροντίσαντι (*PG* 37.393B)

³⁰ Sozomen (*HE* 6.30) attests that Evagrius "was educated in philosophy and Holy Scripture by Gregory Nazianzen."

flects the Trinitarian theology of all the Cappadocians to the point that it was handed down in Greek as Basil's *Letter* 8, probably stems from these years. Here Evagrius follows the Cappadocians' Trinitarian formula, μία οὐσία, τρεῖς ὑποστάσεις, "one common essence, three individual substances," which in turn is wholly grounded in Origen's Trinitarian theology and terminology.³¹

I think it very probable, however, that Evagrius met Gregory Nyssen as well, became a friend of his, possibly was ordained a deacon by him, and was with him in Palestine and Egypt, and surely was very well acquainted with his thought. There are close and significant convergences between Evagrius' and Nyssen's ideas;³² several, of course, can also be explained as common dependence on Origen. But a systematic assessment of the relationship between Evagrius' thought and Nyssen's, from protology to eschatology, from theology to anthropology, is still badly needed and will be, I expect, momentous and fruitful. Some help has been recently offered in an interesting study by Kevin Corrigan.³³ But much still awaits to be done. A closer personal relationship between Evagrius and Gregory of Nyssa would also better explain the impressive similarities that can be found in their thought.

³¹ For the roots of this formula in Origen see I. L. E. Ramelli, "Origen's Anti-Subordinationism and its Heritage in the Nicene and Cappadocian Line," *VChrist* 65 (2011) 21–49, and "Origen, Greek Philosophy, and the Birth of the Trinitarian Meaning of *Hypostasis*," *HThR* 105 (2012) 302–350. On the *Letter on Faith* see P. Bettiolo, *L'Epistola fidei di Evagrio Pontico: temi, contesti, sviluppi* (Rome 2000).

³² I point out some in *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis*. However, a systematic study is needed.

³³ Corrigan, *Evagrius*, might perhaps be seen more as a juxtaposition of these two Christian philosophers in respect to some anthropological, ascetic, and mystical themes, than as an examination of their interrelationship and of Gregory's influence on Evagrius (which means Origen's influence on Evagrius as well—and it must be determined which influence was direct and which was mediated by Gregory). This is not at all meant as a criticism, however. I have expressed my high appreciation of this book in n.1 above.

I agree with Konstantinovsky that Evagrius' mature thought is not so close to that of "the Cappadocians,"³⁴ but I would rather say that it is not so close to that of Basil and Gregory Nazianzen, while remarkably more affinities are to be found with Gregory of Nyssa, most apparently in the eschatological and the metaphysical domains. Evagrius' predilection for Gregory Nyssen over Basil is understandable, if one considers that Nyssen was one of the most faithful and perspicacious followers of *Origen* (Basil and Nazianzen were too in some respects, but Nyssen was far more). And Evagrius' allegiance to resolute and sometimes radical admirers of Origen such as the Tall Brothers, John of Jerusalem, Rufinus, Melania, and Palladius was strong. To Melania, Rufinus, and John, Evagrius also addressed many letters, including the fundamental *Letter to Melania*—sometimes also called *Great Letter*—which was very probably addressed either to Melania herself or to Rufinus.³⁵

³⁴ Konstantinovsky, *Evagrius Ponticus*, chs. 3–6.

³⁵ What is relevant to the present argument is that the addressee is an Origenian. In one of the two Syriac manuscripts in which it is preserved, as in other letters of Evagrius extant in Armenian, the addressee is Melania the Elder. Some scholars do not accept the identification of the addressee as Melania, especially because in the Syriac text Evagrius addresses her thrice calling her "my lord." Thus, some deem Rufinus a more probable addressee: G. Bunge, *Evagrius Pontikos, Briefe aus der Wüste* (Trier 1986) 194. G. Vitestam, *Seconde partie du traité qui passe sous le nom de La grande lettre d'Évagre le Pontique à Mélanie l'ancienne* (Lund 1964) 4–5, also thought that the addressee was originally a man. Casiday, *Evagrius* 64, agrees. On the other hand, Palladius repeatedly calls Melania *Μελάνιον*, in the neuter form, a diminutive: in Bartelink's edition, 5.2, 9.1 (n.b. ἡ ἄνθρωπος τοῦ θεοῦ Μελάνιον), 10.2, 18.28, 38.8, 38.9, 46 title, 46.1, 54 title, 54.1, 54.4, 54.7, 58.2, 61 title, 61.1. Syriac translators may have understood it as a masculine. Evagrius, like his disciple Palladius, may have used to call her *Μελάνιον*. Rufinus, like Melania and Evagrius, was a steadfast admirer of Origen; indeed this letter is intelligible only against the background of Origen's ideas. Some scholars consider the address in the masculine form for a woman to be understandable in a 'gnostic' context, as a kind of honorific address: M. Parmentier, "Evagrius of Pontus' Letter to Melania," *Bijdragen, tijdschrift voor filosofie en theologie* 46 (1985) 2–38, at 5–6.

It is likely that Evagrius considered, and called, Gregory of Nyssa his teacher. The reference to “Gregory the Just” in the epilogue of Evagrius’ *Praktikos* may refer to Gregory Nazianzen, but an alternative reference to Gregory Nyssen cannot be ruled out: “The high Sun of Justice shines upon us ... thanks to the prayers and intercession of Gregory the Just, who planted me (τοῦ δικαίου Γρηγορίου τοῦ φυτεύσαντός με), and of the holy fathers who now water me and by the power of Christ Jesus our Lord, who has granted me growth” (transl. Sinkewicz). The same “Gregory the Just” is mentioned by Evagrius at *Gnostikos* 44 on the four cardinal virtues, a topic that Gregory of Nyssa did develop.

Likewise in *Praktikos* 89, a relatively long chapter, Evagrius expounds the tripartition of the soul according to Plato, with the relevant virtues that are proper to each part of the soul, crowned by justice which is a virtue of the whole soul. Interestingly, however, he does not attribute this doctrine to Plato at all, but rather to “our wise teacher” (κατὰ τὸν σοφὸν ἡμῶν διδάσκαλον). It is usually assumed that this unnamed teacher is Gregory of Nazianzus, for instance by Antoine and Claire Guillaumont, followed by Columba Stewart—who however admits that it is unlikely that Gregory Nazianzen transmitted this doctrine to Evagrius, but does not propose alternative solutions.³⁶ In light of what I have argued, it is more probable that Evagrius meant Gregory of Nyssa, who used this doctrine extensively in his *De anima et resurrectione* and elsewhere. And I have suggested above that Gregory’s *De anima et resurrectione* was circulated in Egypt, and soon translated into Coptic, thanks precisely to the influence of Evagrius there. Evagrius’ sympathy for this dialogue was certainly much facilitated by its defence of the doctrine of *apokatastasis*, which Evagrius too upheld.

Evagrius arrived at the Egyptian desert via Palestine, where he belonged to the circle of Melania and Rufinus. A relation-

³⁶ Antoine and Claire Guillaumont, *Evagre le Pontique. Traité pratique ou Le moine* (Paris 1971) 680–689; Columba Stewart, “Monastic Attitudes toward Philosophy and Philosophers,” *Studia Patristica* 47 (2010) 21–327, at 324.

ship with the wife of a high functionary led him to depart from Constantinople, as is well known (a novelistic account is provided by Sozomen *HE* 6.30³⁷ and an even more detailed version is in Palladius *H.Laus.* 38.3–7); he arrived at Jerusalem (382 CE), where he frequented the Origenian, and pro-Nicene, Melania the Elder in her double monastery, where Rufinus also was. They had settled there in 380. Melania definitely confirmed Evagrius in monastic life—whether he had already been a monk earlier or not—and gave him the monastic clothing herself according to Palladius: *παρ’ αὐτῆς ἐκείνης μετημφιάσθη*, “he had his clothes changed [*sc.* to monastic attire] by Melania herself” (*H.Laus.* 38.9 = *PG* 34.1194A). This is plausible, given that Melania directed the double monastery. It is even more certain that she influenced Evagrius’ choice of the Egyptian desert as the place where he would spend the rest of his life, first Nitria, a cenobitic environment, and then Kellia, a hermitic place, where Evagrius practiced an extreme form of asceticism (383–399).

In Egypt Evagrius was a disciple of Macarius of Alexandria (†394) and especially of Macarius the Egyptian, called the Great, who was converted to asceticism by St. Anthony himself, founded Scetis, and was also a supporter of the Origenian

³⁷ In Constantinople, “an acquaintanceship he had formed with a certain lady excited the jealousy of her husband, who plotted his death. While the plot was about to be carried forward into deed, God sent him, while sleeping, a fearful and saving vision in a dream. It appeared to him that he had been arrested in the act of committing some crime, and that he was bound hand and foot in irons. As he was being led before the magistrates to receive the sentence of condemnation, a man who held in his hand the book of the Holy Gospels addressed him, and promised to deliver him from his bonds, and confirmed this with an oath, provided he would quit the city. Evagrius touched the book, and made oath that he would do so. Immediately his chains appeared to fall off, and he awoke. He was convinced by this divine dream, and fled the danger. He resolved to devote himself to a life of asceticism and proceeded from Constantinople to Jerusalem.”

doctrine of *apokatastasis*.³⁸ Near Alexandria Evagrius may also have visited Didymus the Blind, the faithful Origenian whom bishop Athanasius appointed head of the Alexandrian Didaskaleion. Evagrius had disciples himself, among whom were Palladius and Cassian,³⁹ and many pilgrim visitors. He refused the episcopate at Thmuis that Theophilus of Alexandria offered him.⁴⁰ In 399 he passed away just in time, shortly before Theophilus' Paschal letter against anthropomorphism: this arose from a revolt by the simpler, anti-Origenian and anthropomorphising monks which alarmed Theophilus and induced his U-turn against the Origenians. This rather opportunistic move led him to persecute Evagrius' fellow-monks in Nitria and Kellia, and in particular Evagrius' friends—the Origenian Tall Brothers, the monks Ammonius, Euthymius, Eusebius, and Dioscorus. Palladius mentions them together with Evagrius when he speaks of “those belonging to the circle of Saints Ammonius and Evagrius” (*H.Laus.* 24.2). He probably is referring to the same people when he mentions “Evagrius' community” (*H.Laus.* 33) and “the circle of St. Evagrius”

³⁸ The former seems to be mentioned by Evagrius in *Περὶ λογισμῶν* 33 and 37 and *Antirrheticus* 4.23, 4.58, 8.26. In *Pract.* 93–94, instead, the reference seems to be to the latter; Sinkewicz, however, refers *Pract.* 94 to Macarius of Alexandria as well: *Evagrius of Pontus* xix. As for St. Anthony and Macarius and their adhesion to the doctrine of *apokatastasis* see my *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis*, the chapter devoted to Anthony.

³⁹ For a reconsideration of the person and the works of Cassian, however, see now P. Tzamalikos, *The Real Cassian Revisited: Monastic Life, Greek Paideia, and Origenism in the Sixth Century* (Leiden 2012), and *A Newly Discovered Greek Father: Cassian the Sabaite eclipsed by John Cassian of Marseilles* (Leiden 2012).

⁴⁰ Evagrius, a monk, tended to privilege the spiritual authority deriving from inspiration, prayer, learning, teaching, and miracles, over and against that which comes from ecclesiastical hierarchy: see C. Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition* (Berkeley 2005) 56–99; for the derivation of these ideas from Origen see E. dal Covolo, “Sacerdozio dei fedeli, gerarchia della santità e gerarchia ministeriale in alcune omelie di Origene,” in *Origeniana VIII* (Leuven 2003) 605–612; I. Ramelli, “Theosebia: A Presbyter of the Catholic Church,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 26.2 (2010) 79–102.

(*H.Laus.* 35). Evagrius himself attests that he was with Ammonius when they visited John of Lycopolis in the Thebaid desert (*Antirr.* 6.16). Chased by Theophilus from Egypt, the Tall Brothers would be received by the aforementioned John Chrysostom. Much is known of their vicissitudes, once again thanks to Palladius (besides Socrates and Sozomen).

I judge that Palladius is a more reliable source than Socrates when it comes to the relationship between Evagrius and Gregory of Nyssa: not only because Palladius, unlike Socrates, was personally acquainted with Evagrius and is a first-hand source, not only because Socrates wrote his information on Evagrius and Gregory Nazianzen some forty years after Evagrius' death, but above all because Socrates seems to be much better informed on Gregory Nazianzen than on Gregory Nyssen. This is clear from *HE* 4.26. After devoting one whole chapter to Didymus the Blind (4.25), Origen's admirer and follower, and before devoting another whole chapter to Gregory Thaumaturgus (4.27), Origen's disciple and the author of a thanksgiving oration in honour of Origen himself, in *HE* 4.26 he focuses on the other great Origenian and anti-Arian authors of that time: the Cappadocians. But instead of speaking of the most Origenian of them, Gregory Nyssen, unquestionably the closest of all the Cappadocians to Origen's authentic ideas, Socrates spends almost the entire chapter on Basil and Gregory Nazianzen (4.26.1–26), as though he knew rather little of Gregory of Nyssa after all. Indeed, only in the very end of his treatment of Basil (4.26.26–27) does Socrates introduce two brothers of his: Peter, who is said to have embraced the monastic life, imitating Basil himself, and Gregory, who is said to have chosen to teach rhetoric (Γρηγόριος δὲ τὸν διδασκαλικὸν τοῦ λόγου [*sc.* βίον ἐζήλωσε], "Gregory in his zeal embraced the life of a teacher of rhetoric"). This is correct, but it refers to a rather short phase of Gregory's life, before his adhesion to the ascetic life and his episcopate. Socrates is uninterested in, or incapable of, offering more comprehensive details concerning Gregory's life and intellectual place. He adds only a very brief notice regarding Gregory's works, but

here he merely lists the *Apologia in Hexaëmeron* (clearly on account of its connection with Basil's own *Hexaëmeron*), his *Oratio funebris in Meletium episcopum*, and "other orations" or, more generally, "works," of different kinds (καὶ ἄλλοι λόγοι διάφοροι). From this report, Socrates would seem to know nothing of Gregory's own opting for the ascetic life, of his ecclesiastical career as a bishop, of his anti-Arianism, and his predilection for Origen, as well as all of his theological works. Only a funeral oration of his is mentioned, plus his continuation and defence of Basil's *In Hexaëmeron*.

What must be remarked in this connection is that Gregory Nyssen was even more Origenian than Nazianzen and Basil were, and that this would have been a very attractive aspect to highlight for the strongly philo-Origenian Socrates, all the more so in this sequence of chapters on the Origenians Didymus, Gregory Thaumaturgus, and the Cappadocians. But if Socrates does not even mention this, and if he barely says anything of Gregory of Nyssa, while allotting incomparably more room to Basil and Nazianzen, there must be a reason for this apparent oddity. Either he had almost no information available to him concerning Nyssen, or he was hostile to him for some reason that escapes us but has nothing to do with Origen. Socrates does not even say that Gregory was bishop of Nyssa; he never calls him "Nyssen," but only refers to him as "Gregory, the brother of Basil," both in the aforementioned passage and at the end of *HE* 4.26–27. In the latter passage Socrates is summarising the various Gregories related to Origen, in order to avoid confusion: thus, he mentions Gregory Thaumaturgus, the disciple of Origen, then Nazianzen, and finally ὁ ἀδελφὸς Βασιλείου (4.27.7)—nothing else about Nyssen, not even the name of his episcopal see.

However, Socrates did know, at least, that Gregory was the bishop of Nyssa. Indeed, he mentions him in two other passages, albeit again only incidentally. In one, *HE* 5.9, he speaks of the death of Meletius, bishop of Antioch, and repeats that "Gregory, the brother of Basil," delivered a funeral oration for him. Note that this is one of the only two works of Gregory Nyssen that Socrates names in *HE* 4.26–27. The other passage,

HE 5.8, is the only one in which Socrates refers to Gregory's bishopric. He is speaking of the Council of Constantinople in 381, and observes that Gregory Nazianzen returned to Nazianzus after renouncing his see in Constantinople (5.8.11). Soon after, Socrates treats of the patriarchal territorial divisions established at that council: Nectarius, he records, was assigned Constantinople and Thrace; Helladius, the successor of Basil, received the Pontic diocese; and then the mention of Gregory: Γρηγόριος ὁ Νύσσης, ὁ Βασιλείου ἀδελφός, Καππαδοκίας δὴ καὶ ἦδε πόλις, "Gregory of Nyssa, Basil's brother, received this town in Cappadocia" (5.8.15). This is the only point in all of his work in which Socrates cites Nyssa as the bishopric of Gregory.

Different is Jerome's entry devoted to Gregory of Nyssa, written ca. 392 (the year of publication of his *De viris illustribus*). Although it is a very short entry, both Gregory's episcopate at Nyssa and one of his major doctrinal works, *Contra Eunomium*, are mentioned with prominence, in addition to the reference to "many other works" that Gregory had written and was still writing (he died shortly after the completion of *De viris illustribus*): *Gregorius, Nyssenus episcopus, frater Basilii Caesariensis, ante paucos annos mihi et Gregorio Nazianzeno Contra Eunomium legit libros, qui et multa alia scripsisse et scribere dicitur* (128). Jerome gives the impression of not having read the other numerous works by Gregory, but he surely was acquainted with his *Contra Eunomium*: some years before the completion of *De viris illustribus* Jerome, as he says here, directly met Gregory of Nyssa, who even read to him and to Gregory Nazianzen together his books *Contra Eunomium*. This must have happened in 381 in Constantinople, on the occasion of the council, when Evagrius also was there. Gregory indeed composed his books against Eunomius between 380 and 383.

The relationship between Gregory Nyssen and Evagrius may easily go back to Gregory's stay in Ibora, Evagrius' birthplace, in Hellenopontus, shortly before the Council of Constantinople, from late 379 into 380. After the death of their bishop Araxius, the inhabitants of Ibora asked Gregory to come and supervise the election of a new bishop. Gregory's intervention

was crucial, especially because of the controversy with the Arians. It was essential to have a pro-Nicene bishop, and Nyssen would have provided for this (see his *Letter* 19.12 [*GNO* VIII.2 66]). Moreover, Ibora was close to Annesi, the seat of Basil's and Macrina's monasteries. Gregory considered Ibora as belonging to his own jurisdiction as bishop of Nyssa (*In XL Mart.* II, *GNO* X.1 166). Nyssen went to Ibora, where Evagrius was the son of a member of the local clergy, stayed there, and provided for the election of bishop Pansophius, who, shortly afterwards, participated in the Constantinople council.

In this council, in which Evagrius participated as well in his capacity as deacon, and during which Nazianzen withdrew from the episcopate of Constantinople, Gregory of Nyssa surely played an important role, very probably even more important than that of Nazianzen himself, who encountered such harsh opposition as to be forced to resign. His theological weight was certainly remarkable, and even from an institutional point of view Nyssen was considered to be important. Indeed, in the list of bishops with whom one had to be in communion in order to be considered orthodox—a list indicated by the emperor Theodosius himself in the edict which imposed adherence to the Council for any Christian (*Cod.Theod.* 16.1.3)—Gregory of Nyssa was included for the diocese of Pontus, along with Helladius of Caesarea, the successor of Basil, and Otreius of Melitene. Nazianzen, instead, seems to have criticised Theodosius' edict.⁴¹ It is possible that Gregory Nyssen was present also at the Constantinople council in 382, though improbable given the aforementioned trips, and he certainly participated in the Constantinople council in 383, a “colloquium” under the patronage of Theodosius, where he delivered his oration *De*

⁴¹ F. Gautier, “A propos du témoignage de Grégoire de Nazianze sur le concile de Constantinople (mai-juillet 381) aux vers 1750–1755 du *De uita sua*,” *REAug* 51 (2005) 67–76, demonstrates that Gregory's criticism of the “teachings” (διδασκαλίας) of the council on the Spirit in fact refer to Theodosius' edict of 10 January 381 (*Cod.Theod.* 16.5.6).

deitate Filii et Spiritus Sancti and confronted Arians, Eunomians, and Macedonians.⁴²

The close relationship between Evagrius and Gregory of Nyssa which Palladius reports (their friendship and Evagrius' ordination as a deacon by Gregory Nyssen) and which the source of Socrates suggests (their possible going together to Egypt after Constantinople), along with the very probable connection between Evagrius and the remarkably early spread of Nyssen's Origenian work *De anima et resurrectione* in Egypt, bears on Evagrius' thought and his relationship with the thought of the Cappadocians and, as a consequence, of Origen himself—all the more so in that Gregory of Nyssa is the most insightful and faithful follower of Origen, the one who best grasped Origen's true thought. For reasons that will be expounded in a future study, I suspect that Gregory Nyssen in fact played a fundamental role in transmitting Origen's true ideas to Evagrius, i.e. not simply Origen's texts—which Evagrius read directly on his own—but especially an interpretation of Origen's thought that was the closest to Origen's authentic ideas. This issue is clearly crucial to an overall assessment of Evagrius' thought, in which it is pivotal to investigate the impact of Origen on Evagrius' system, as well as to examine the possible role of the Cappadocians in the transmission of Origen's true thought to Evagrius.

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Catholic University of Milan &
Durham Univeristy, UK
ilaria.ramelli@unicatt.it &
Ramelli@safe-mail.net

⁴² On this “colloquium” and its participants see A. M. Ritter, *Das Konzil von Konstantinopel und sein Symbol* (Göttingen 1965) 227.