

# ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ

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## TRACES OF BUDDHIST PRESENCE IN ALEXANDRIA: PHILO AND THE “THERAPEUTAE”

*Philo of Alexandria’s documentary on the ascetic community of the “Therapeutae” at Lake Mareotis as evidence of Buddhist presence in Egypt and its reception*

The religious identity of the spiritual community, which Philo of Alexandria (25 B.C. – 40 A.D.) describes as living near Alexandria, by Lake Mareotis, has for a long time been assumed to be of some kind of Reform Judaism, as of the “Essenes”. This ascription, which is still variously repeated,<sup>1</sup> is being revised, without clear identification attained so far. Its religious identity is important, since this community is by tradition considered to be the earliest model for Christian monasticism.<sup>2</sup> The issues of the identity of the spiritual community described by Philo and the reclamation of a lineage of tradition from it by early Christian authors, especially by Eusebius of Caesarea, has been a matter of extensive scholarship.<sup>3</sup> Sabrina Inowlocki describes the competing claims of the spiritual community of “Therapeutae” – which Philo never expressly designates as “Jewish” – for Judaism or for Christianity, as by Eusebius of Caesarea, and the “rhetoric of appropriation”<sup>4</sup> applied in their description. This device can already be identified in Philo’s description. It supports the view presented here that the “Therapeutae”, who were indeed an essential model for the development of Christian monasticism, were neither Jewish nor Christian.

The origins of Christian organized monasticism have been attributed to Buddhist models by noted scholars of Christian patristics, such as Fairy von Lilienfeld.<sup>5</sup> The thesis is supported by Antoine Guillaumont.<sup>6</sup> He believes however that different sources have contributed to the formation of Christian monasticism. The influence of Cynicism as a model and spiritual philosophy for an ascetic life on the life of Jesus and of his disciples as well as on St. Paul has been well established in New

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<sup>1</sup> *Coutsoumpos P.* Paul and the Lord’s Supper: A Socio-Historical Investigation. New York: Peter Lang, 2005. P. 31.

<sup>2</sup> *Taylor J. E.* Jewish Women Philosophers of First-Century Alexandria: Philo’s ‘Therapeutae’ Reconsidered. Oxford. Oxford Univ. Pr. 2003. P. 280.

<sup>3</sup> *Inowlocki S.* „Eusebius of Caesarea’s Interpretatio Christiana of Philo’s de Vita Contemplativa“. // Harvard Theological Review, vol. 97. No. 3 (2004), Pp. 305-328. URL: [https://www.academia.edu/38849012/Eusebius\\_of\\_Caesareas\\_Interpretatio\\_Christiana\\_of\\_Philos\\_De\\_vita\\_contemplativa](https://www.academia.edu/38849012/Eusebius_of_Caesareas_Interpretatio_Christiana_of_Philos_De_vita_contemplativa).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem.* P.3.

<sup>5</sup> *von Lilienfeld F.* „Mönchtum II“ // *Krause, G. and Müller, G.* Theologische Realenzyklopädie, vol. XIII. Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1994. Pp. 150–193, p. 159.

<sup>6</sup> *Guillaumont A.* Aux Origines du Monachisme Chrétien. Pour une phénoménologie du monachisme. Bégrolles-en-Mauges: Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1979.

Testament scholarship in the recent decades.<sup>1</sup> This explains their form of life as wandering ascetics, moving in small groups and teaching and counselling the people, as well as some features of their instructions about freedom from the orders of this world, as expressed by Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount. It does not explain the genesis of organized monastic communities and orders, with regular hours of daily worship, meditation and study. This model can be derived nowhere from Judaism or from the New Testament. Christian monasticism is however structurally in close agreement with Buddhist monasticism. This supports a thesis of Buddhism as model, which is plausible due to the well-documented presence of Indian ascetics in the Greco-Roman world. These were mostly Yogins. Their form of organization corresponds to that of Christian coenobitic communities and of hermits as found in the early Christian “Desert Fathers and Mothers.” This strand of tradition persists in Christianity, especially in Orthodox Christianity, in Hesychasm. For monasticism however, the Buddhist model is very likely the decisive source and origin. As to the reception of this model into Christianity, the loose form of wandering ascetics, as adopted from Cynicism, is most probably the basis for the adoption of the Buddhist model of monasticism as suitable. The presence of Buddhist monks as missionaries in the Eastern Mediterranean is firmly documented in the decrees of Emperor Ashoka (304 – 232 B.C.) on stone columns, where the Buddhist missions sent out by him to other lands such as China and South East Asia are described.<sup>2</sup> The Greek historian Strabo of Amasia (63 B.C. – 23 A.D.), a contemporary of Philo, gives a detailed description of India and of India’s relation with the Greek and Roman world in the 15th book of his Geography.<sup>3</sup> Strabo drew on the reports of Greek historians, some of whom, such as Onesicritus, had accompanied Alexander the Great to India, or who have lived in India for some times as diplomats. Strabo describes India’s religion and spirituality in some detail. He distinguishes clearly between the Yogins and Brahmans, whom he finds associated, in spite of their differences, thus predominantly taking note of the Hindu tradition. He also mentions the visits of several Yogins to the Roman Empire. Buddhism however was known to Hellenism through the Greco-Indian kingdoms in north-western India and Bactria, present Afghanistan, which were established there after the conquest of Alexander the Great and which flourished as Greco-Indian and Greco-Buddhist cultures between 180 B.C. to 10 A.D., as in Gandhara. Emperor Ashoka descended from intermarriage between Greek and Indian rulers there. Strabo describes the history of these kingdoms in detail. This means that knowledge about Buddhism existed in Hellenistic and Roman societies. It can also be taken for certain that organized Buddhist presence existed for some time in the eastern Mediterranean, as confirmed by Emperor Ashoka’s

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<sup>1</sup> *Downing F. G.* Cynics and Christian Origins. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992.

<sup>2</sup> *Olivelle P.* “Introduction to Renunciation in the Hindu Traditions” // *Flood, G.* (ed.). *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2003. Pp. 271–287. P. 272f.

<sup>3</sup> *The Geography of Strabo*. XV.1. Edition: *Hamilton, H.C.*, and *Falconer, W.* (transl., ed. and notes). *Strabo, Geography*. (Literally translated, with notes, in three volumes). London: George Bell & Sons. 1903. URL: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0239:book=15:chapter=1:section=1>.

edicts on the stone columns. In Ashoka's edict, no. 13 it is expressly stated that the Buddhist missions to four Hellenistic kingdoms in the eastern Mediterranean realm was successful and that the Buddhist doctrine, "Dhamma", had become established there.<sup>1</sup> The most likely region for this presence is Alexandria which was the hub of commerce with India, both on the sea route to southern India as well as on the land route to north-western India where Buddhism flourished.

In this realm and culture Philo of Alexandria lived and wrote. He came from a wealthy and noble Jewish family of Roman citizenship, socially well established in Alexandria. He was educated in Hellenistic philosophy, and shared Stoic and Platonist views. His method of exegesis, including allegorical interpretation as hermeneutical tool became influential for Christian scriptural exegesis. Philo assumed political responsibility as a spokesman for Alexandria's Jews in tensions with the Roman Empire regarding Jewish religious observance and rejection of the religious veneration of the Roman emperor and in ethnic conflicts with the city's Greek population. He strove for a mutual explication of Judaism and Greek philosophy, seeking consensus and mutual inspiration: "In the work of Philo himself there is an attempt to square Old Testament theology with the Greek philosophical tradition, leading Philo to posit Moses as the first sage and teacher of the venerable ancients of the Greek tradition."<sup>2</sup>

It is on this background that his depiction of spiritual community in the vicinity of Alexandria, the "Therapeutae", must be read. In his description Philo often represents this community in terms of Judaism without, however, explicitly claiming it to be Jewish. The religious difference is acknowledged, but a common "hermeneutical horizon" with Judaism is sought. This has lead tradition to believe Philo presented a special Jewish spiritual community, not otherwise known. Since Christian historiography believes this community to belong to the ancestry of Christian monasticism, the question of the religious identity of the "Therapeutae" is of special interest. Meanwhile research has recognized that this community was most probably not Jewish. However the religious affiliation of Philo's Therapeutae remains unidentified. In this paper I propose that it was essentially Buddhist. I do not aver that it preserved a pure form of Buddhism. Some syncretistic integration of beliefs and practices of the Hellenistic environment in the realm of Alexandria may have taken place. However the overall character of the "Therapeutae" and essential features are soundly Buddhist, as I may show.

Philo's description is deliberately vague. He uses ambiguous wordings which can be read in more than one sense, to introduce this community after having spoken about the Jewish Essenes, applying the generic term "Therapeutae" for both. He depicts the Egyptian community as part of a spiritual movement or religion which had established communities worldwide. The Egyptian community which he describes was situated at Lake Mareotis near Alexandria. The generic term "therapeutae" was

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<sup>1</sup> *Thapa R.* Ashoka and the Decline of the Mauryans. (rev. ed.), New Delhi: Oxford Univ. Pr., 1997. URL: [http://projects.mcah.columbia.edu/indianart/pdf/asoka\\_thapar.pdf](http://projects.mcah.columbia.edu/indianart/pdf/asoka_thapar.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> *Moore E.* "Middle Platonism" // Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. URL: <http://www.iep.utm.edu/midplato/>.

understood by a Pagan reader to describe a spiritual community in general. Philo states that this community is distinct from the Jewish Essenes.

His report is couched in Jewish or general philosophic terms, to convey the idea this might be some form of Reform Jewish community, deliberately obscuring its proper identity, and implicitly claiming it for Judaism. The rhetoric device has worked well and is still puzzling exegetes. This is expressed in the rising doubts, which G. Boccaccini has expressed about the Jewish “therapeutic” identity of this community. He refers to Philo’s introduction in his treatise *De Vita Contemplativa*:

“I have spoken of Essenes who followed with zeal and constant diligence the active life, and so excelled in all, or to put it moderately, in most particulars. And therefore, I will presently, following the due sequence of my treatise, say whatever is meant to be said about them who have embraced contemplation . . . They are called Therapeutae and Therapeutridae.”<sup>1</sup> Philo, however, makes it clear that the Egyptian Therapeutae had different customs from their Palestinian cousins. They lived isolated. . . . Any parallelism between the Palestinian Essenes and the Egyptian Therapeutae requires great caution;<sup>2</sup> if the Therapeutae were Essenes, they formed a completely autonomous group.”<sup>3</sup>

This amounts to saying that the spiritual community at Lake Mareotis had nothing in common with the Essenes. The doubts about any connections of affiliation or religious common adherence are expressed more markedly by David M. Hay, who envisages the idea, somewhat hesitatingly, that these “therapeutae” of Lake Mareotis might not be Jewish at all.<sup>4</sup>

Philo’s account contains significant features:

1. The motif that the community of devotees have come from all over the world but call this monastic community at Lake Mareotis their home reminds of the Buddhist idea of “homelessness” – an element adopted from Yoga when a “householder” passes on in life to leave his home and to live as a spiritual hermit or in a community of “forest dwellers” (“Shramanas”). The idea is in stark contrast to Judaism’s indelible attachment to Jerusalem and to the idea of the sacred “promised land” as given by God to Israel as everlasting homestead.

2. “The kind exists in many places in the inhabited world”: This may refer to Judaism – according to Philo’s deliberate ambiguous wordings – but the phrase “inhabited world” clearly envisages realms at the periphery of the known world, thus

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<sup>1</sup> *Philo of Alexandria*. *De Vita Contemplativa* I.1–2. Ed.: Kirby, P. *Early Jewish Writings*. 2012. URL: <http://www.earlyjewishwritings.com/text/philo/book34.html>.

<sup>2</sup> *Riaud J.* Les Therapeutes d’Alexandrie dans la tradition en dans la recherché critique jusqu’aux découvertes des Qumran // ANRW 2.20.2 (1987). Pp. 1189–1295.

<sup>3</sup> *Boccaccini G.* Beyond the Essene Hypothesis: The Parting of Ways Between Qumran and Enochic Judaism. Grand Rapids: William B. Erdmanns 1998. P. 27.

<sup>4</sup> *Hay D. M.* Foils for the Therapeutae: References to Other Texts and Persons in Philo’s *De Vita Contemplativa* // *P. J. Borgen, D. E. Aune, T. Seland and J. H. Ulrichsen.* *Neotestamentica et Philonica: Studies in Honour of Peder Borgen*. Leiden: Brill, 2002. (Supplements to *Novum Testamentum*, vol. 106). Pp. 330–348. P. 342.

especially India and its adjacent countries. This passage is formulated ambiguously. As we know that Egypt had a strong Jewish population, settled here since the time when Persia conquered Egypt and even before – of which the Old Testament has preserved memory – Philo’s wording is chosen to refer either to a group bearing traits of comparable to Jewish “therapeutae” such as the Essenes, whom he described before, or to Buddhist missionaries and religious groups of which we know that since emperor Ashoka’s decrees that they were present in all of these realms too.

3. The phrase “this kind” means an identifiable entity of group whose name is not disclosed for whichever reason.

4. “exists in many places in the inhabited world”: this suggests that the community spoken about is present at the periphery, e.g. in India as well as in many countries known, thus reasonably also in the Roman-Hellenistic realm.

5. The statement: “for perfect goodness must need be shared both by Greeks and the world outside Greece” contains a philosophical expression: “perfect goodness” which alludes to Platonism; the idea is that this group teaches and practises “perfect goodness”, thus a universal truth and ethics, which is necessarily common to all mankind. What Philo emphasises is that there appears to be a missionary initiative to it: “needs be shared”. While stating that this philosophical-spiritual doctrine and practise is shared by Greeks and non-Greeks, he does not state who its author is.

6. The information that “it abounds in Egypt in each of the nomes... and especially around Alexandria” indicates that Alexandria must be regarded as the centre from where the faith probably spread with communities established all over Egypt. This shows that it cannot be the established religion of ancient Egypt, whose centres were mostly further south and which was evenly spread in Egypt. The localisation of the highest frequency around Alexandria indicates that it was connected to the city as a hub of commerce with abroad, especially between India and the Mediterranean and connected to the cultural and religious exchange which happened here with the religious syncretism following from it. Again Philo formulates so deliberately vague that some –but significantly not all of it – could fit Judaism too, without committing the mistake to state that this was a form of Judaism. This would of course have been rejected by the knowledgeable reader of the time who certainly knew whom Philo was referring to in his vague terms, but who would not have forgiven him if he claimed that this was a form of Judaism, which it perceptibly was not.

Hay drew his conclusions as far as assuming Philo might have given a veiled description of a Pagan community: “Is he thinking of pagans who demonstrate a kind of contemplative piety analogous to that of the Jewish...?” The idea that this might be a Buddhist community evidently had not come to his mind, in spite of the evidence and various testimonies to Buddhist presence in the Eastern Mediterranean. This assumption however will be followed here. Philo was widely read in early

Christianity. Clement knew Philo's treatises and referred to them, working in the same city as the Hellenistic-Jewish philosopher-theologian.<sup>1</sup>

Research on the "Therapeutae" accepts them as model of Christian monasticism. Thus Otto Benz states in his article "Essener und Therapeuten" in the authoritative *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* that there can be no legitimate doubts about Philo as author of *De Vita Contemplativa* and that the "Therapeutae" may in no way be understood as a product of Philo's imagination nor as a projection of Christian monasticism into the past.<sup>2</sup>

Frank believes that Philo's description of the "Therapeutae" can be read as an anticipation of a Christian monastic community,<sup>3</sup> so that his depiction belongs to the pre-history of Christian monasticism.

*Awareness of Indian spirituality and Philo's description of the "Therapeutae" as model community of "philosophical" spiritual life and of spiritual healing*

Philo is aware of the Indian "gymnosophists", mostly called "shramanas", the Sanskrit term for Yogic ascetics, which was adopted in Hellenistic literature about India. They were well known in Greek and Roman culture. Philo's contemporary, Strabo, gave a detailed report about Indian religion, culture and society, and also about the Indo-Roman exchange.<sup>4</sup> However some awareness existed of the difference between Hindu Yogins, who were associated with the Brahmins, and Buddhism. Philo does not ascribe the monastic community of the "Therapeutae" to them. He remains vague about the religious adherence of the members of this community. However he identifies elements which are conform to Judaism. In some parts-though his descriptions do not fit in with Judaism. We therefore have all reasons to suspect that the "Therapeutae" were a syncretistic group. This is supported by the fact that no group with traits as the "Therapeutae" have been reported in Judaism neither before nor later or in any other contemporary documents.

Some passages from Philo's *De Vita Contemplativa* will convey an impression of the group, which he prefers to the Essenes: "I. (1) Having mentioned the Essenes, who in all respects selected for their admiration and for their especial adoption the practical course of life, and who excel in all, or what perhaps may be a less unpopular and invidious thing to say, in most of its parts, I will now proceed, in the regular order of my subject, to speak of those who have embraced the speculative life, and I will say what appears to me to be desirable to be said on the subject, not drawing

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<sup>1</sup> *Van Winden J. C. M.* Quotations from Philo in Clement of Alexandria's "Protrepticus" // *Vigiliae Christianae*. vol. 32, No. 3 (Sept. 1978). Pp. 208–213. P. 208.

<sup>2</sup> *Betz O.* Essener und Therapeuten // *Krause, G. and Müller, G.* (eds.). *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*. Vol. X, Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1982. Pp. 386–391. P. 390.

<sup>3</sup> *Frank S. K.* *Geschichte des Christlichen Mönchtums*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1993. P. 2.

<sup>4</sup> *The Geography of Strabo*. XV.1.4, (literally translated, with notes, in three volumes), London. George Bell & Sons. 1903. URL: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0239:book=15:chapter=1:section=4>.

any fictitious statements from my own head for the sake of improving the appearance ...”<sup>1</sup>

The “Therapeutae” are of interest to Philo as contemplatives with a wholesome spiritual practice: “(2) but the deliberate intention of the philosopher is at once displayed from the appellation given to them; for with strict regard to etymology, they are called Therapeutae and therapeutrides, ... either because they possess an art of medicine more excellent than that in general use in cities (for that only heals bodies, but the other heals souls which are under the mastery of terrible and almost incurable diseases, which pleasures and appetites, fears and griefs, and covetousness, and follies, and injustice, and all the rest of the innumerable multitude of other passions and vices, have inflicted upon them), or else because they have been instructed by nature and the sacred laws to serve the living God, who is superior to the good, and more simple than the one, and more ancient than the unit; (3) with whom, however, who is there of those who profess piety that we can possibly compare?...”<sup>2</sup>

Philo description fits the Buddhist understanding that the mildly ascetic lifestyle of renunciation cures the diseases of the soul. These come from desire in all its forms: for lust and property, and from uncontrolled passions. Philo also connects the name to the religious devotion practiced there. This fits the model of Buddhist monasticism too, with its regular hours of worship. Ascetic communities, such as of Cynics existed at Philo’s time in Egypt. However they did not engage in the regular religious devotion and festivals, or in the communal and solitary meditation which he describes of this community as well. Philo’s description echoes Gautama Buddha’s teaching of the “Four Noble Truths of suffering” according to which a person suffers because of desires, passion and greed, as expounded his first major sermon, delivered after his enlightenment in the Deer Park in Benares:

“What is this middle path, brethren? It is the Noble Eightfold Path, that is, right views, right aspiration, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right endeavour, right watchfulness, and right meditation. This, brethren, is the middle path, of which the Tathāgata has gained perfect knowledge, which produces insight and knowledge, and conduces to tranquillity, to supernatural faculty, to complete enlightenment, to Nirvana. [...] And this, brethren, is the noble truth of the cause of suffering: craving, which causes rebirth, accompanied by pleasure and lust, and rejoices at finding delight here and there, that is, craving for pleasure, craving for existence, and craving for prosperity. And this, brethren, is the noble truth of the destruction of suffering: which is the complete and trackless destruction of that thirst, its abandonment and relinquishment, liberation, and aversion. [...] And this, brethren, is the noble truth of the path that leads to the destruction of suffering, that is, right views, right aspiration, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right endeavour, right watchfulness, and right meditation.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Philo of Alexandria. De Vita Contemplativa, I.1.*

<sup>2</sup> *Philo of Alexandria. De Vita Contemplativa, I.2f.*

<sup>3</sup> *Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha). The Sermon at Benares. / Vin. Mahāv. I. 6, 10 ff. Ed.: Thomas, E. J. Buddhist Scriptures. 1913. URL: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/busc/busc09.htm>.*

Before dealing with the issue of suffering, which is at the basis of the metaphors of “sickness of the soul” and of cure, some of the virtues of the “Eightfold Path” should be noted, since they have bearings on the mode of life of this monastic community: “right livelihood, right endeavour, right watchfulness, and right meditation”. Together they describe essential elements of a monastic life with meditation, the practise of “watchfulness” – a keyword of Hesychasm – marked by ethically and ascetically “right endeavour”. In Buddha’s sermon they are bound to the diagnosis of the causes of suffering and to his theory of how they are to be overcome, which follow in the “Four Noble Truths” about suffering. Their combination with the “eight virtues” is the basis of the asceticism and monastic practise in all of its aspects which we also find in the community of the “Therapeutae”. It is this “in-depth”-motivation of Buddhist ascetic and monastic practise which leads to the assumption that it is also at the basis of the form of life, the values and the meditation of the “Therapeutae”, far more than the question of explicit references to “Buddhism”, since no other possible source exists elsewhere to account for the combination of these traits.

Philo picks up the motif of desire as source of “sickness” of the soul: “the other heals souls which are under the mastery of terrible and almost incurable diseases, which pleasures and appetites, fears and griefs, and covetousness, and follies, and injustice, and all the rest of the innumerable multitude of other passions and vices, have inflicted upon them”<sup>1</sup>

This includes the Stoic ideal of “apatheia” – the notion that any sort of passion, be it fear or desire might be cause of suffering and should therefore be avoided. The healing metaphor which Philo applies here, resonates with Buddha’s Sermon at Benares, which contains the healing metaphor implicitly, both in the third and fourth of the “four noble truths of suffering” – a central motif of Buddhism. The idea of “healing” goes beyond that of avoidance of displeasure according to the “apatheia”-ideal. In addition it comprises the idea of righteousness and the list of virtues of the “Eightfold Path”, which precedes the “Four Noble Truths”. These virtues are the basis of the life of asceticism and contemplation which Philo describes as the foundation of the spiritual and ascetic life of the “Therapeutae”.

Two considerations are essential here. The Stoic ideal does not require the life of a contemplative ascetic. Accordingly it does not serve as basis for spiritual communities in Antiquity. Secondly, the catalogue of sources of illness of the soul, which Philo enlists, does not correspond to the Old Testament. The ideal of righteousness and of virtue are essential to the Old Testament. However the idea of following the path of righteousness is central. Salvation is not primarily described in terms of “healing”, even though the notion of “health” also has spiritual connotations, being requirements for ritual purity.<sup>2</sup> The idea that a contemplative life is conducive to spiritual healing is not alien to the Old Testament,<sup>3</sup> but it is primarily related to the study of the Holy Scripture and to a life in pursuit of righteousness, the idea being

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<sup>1</sup> *Philo of Alexandria. De Vita Contemplativa*, I.2.

<sup>2</sup> Leviticus, 14:15. All Biblical quotes in the text are given in accordance with The King James Version.

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 1.



that of a married person with a profession. It is not the basis for ascetic contemplative communities – and has not been since, in spite of the rich life of mystical communities and brotherhoods which Judaism brought forth since early times, as in Hasidism. These however have not taken the form of monastic communities. In conclusion, in this initial passage about the “Therapeutae” we find values and figures of thought, a concept of salvation and a form of spiritual life which is soundly Buddhist.

Philo mentions a second motif: “or else because they have been instructed by nature and the sacred laws to serve the living God, who is superior to the good, and more simple than the one, and more ancient than the unit.”<sup>1</sup> Philo defines God in terms of Middle Platonic metaphysics here and suggests that the “Therapeutae” could have been “instructed by nature” or by supreme divine inspiration, and then declares that he finds them quite unique and not comparable to other groups of piety.

*On the meditation practice of the “Therapeutae” and on their “visio beatifica”*

After comparing their spiritual approach as far superior to the veneration of elements in Greek religion, which would not lead to purity, Philo continues with a phrase which alludes to meditative practise and to a training of the inner faculties of perception: “... I am speaking here not of the sight of the body, but of that of the soul, by which alone truth and falsehood are distinguished from one another. But the therapeutic sect of mankind, being continually taught to see without interruption, may well aim at obtaining a sight of the living God, and may pass by the sun, which is visible to the outward sense, and never leave this order which conducts to perfect happiness.”<sup>2</sup>

Here the phrase “the therapeutic sect of mankind, being continually taught to see without interruption” evidently refers to a practise of continuous focussed “looking” inwards, uninterruptedly as in sitting meditation with the gaze turned inwardly or focussed on an external point to attain a quieting of the senses and indifference to outward stimuli as well as those from within, in order to attain a clear “seeing of the soul” – a practise called “Dharana” and described by Patañjali in Yoga Sutra III,1<sup>3</sup> which is the goal of any Yogic meditation in “Samadhi”.<sup>4</sup> Philo clearly describes the rule of the practise as “being continually taught”. This may refer to a constant exhortation to regular practise. The rule “to see without interruption” during meditation, not disrupted by any distraction, may belong to it. The phrase: “the therapeutic sect of mankind” stresses the universality of the membership, possibly also of its distribution and rules out national limitations as specifically Jewish, Egyptian or Greek.

Philo interprets this practise in a theistic sense, but notably in the hypothetical mode: “But the therapeutic sect ... may well aim at obtaining a sight of the living

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<sup>1</sup> *Philo of Alexandria*. De Vita Contemplativa, I.2.

<sup>2</sup> *Philo of Alexandria*. De Vita Contemplativa, II.10f.

<sup>3</sup> *Eliade M.* Der Yoga des Patañjali – Der Ursprung östlicher Weisheitspraxis. (Introd. by *M. von Brück*), Freiburg i. B.: Herder Verlag, 1999. P. 80f.

<sup>4</sup> *Eliade M.* Der Yoga des Patañjali – Der Ursprung östlicher Weisheitspraxis. Pp. 93ff.

God.” This is entirely a conjecture and Philo phrases it so, of what those engaging in meditation and in the purification of their inner perception may see. This supposition is based on Philo’s own “Middle Platonism”.<sup>1</sup>

The object of the “beatific vision” is the supreme God, to be understood in terms of Philo’s “Middle Platonism”<sup>2</sup> as explicated in his definition of God above, by which God is defined as the One above “unit” or the “one”, whom Philo also identifies with the “living God”, as a referring to the Old Testament revelation of God in mutual interpretation with the Platonic doctrine. A reader accustomed to perceiving Buddhism as ultimately atheistic might be disturbed by Philo’s rendition of the mystical experience of the Therapeutae in theistic terms.

However we can find theistic references in Buddhist literature too, as by Emperor Ashoka. Then too we may not be too sure about the doctrinal purity of this community. Thirdly, Philo may have given the reports by the members of this community an interpretation in Platonic or Jewish terms. For the assessment of the Buddhist character of the “Therapeutae” this is not decisive, in view of the substantial agreements in ritual and meditative practice and in form of social organization, as well as in the prescriptions on asceticism and diet.

I assume that these “Therapeutae” have been founded by Buddhist ascetics who introduced their forms of worship and meditation practice, and gave them their rules on the organization of monastic communities, about daily meditation, the festivals and the structure of times.

The doctrinal purity of this form of Buddhism may have been limited, due to the issues of language and translation of canonical texts. The doctrine may likely have been taught orally to members from various backgrounds. The connections to the Indian motherland may have become thin after the demise of the Mauryan Empire of Ashoka and the resurgence of Persia and Zoroastrianism. Ritual practice however is long-lived and less subject to change than oral teachings and doctrine – except where institutions of learning and control exist which safeguard the precision of teachings learnt by heart, as the early stages of transmission processes of canonical texts of most major religions show.

A certain degree of syncretism may be assumed in this movement due to the distance from the core lands of Buddhism, as observable elsewhere in history of religions, with a lower degree of doctrinal control. The preserved Buddhist meditation practice and monastic structure of the movement practice possibly went along with a variety of Platonic, Jewish, Stoic and other convictions among the multi-ethnic adherents of these groups. Their socio-cultural make-up may not be very far off from that of eclectic spiritual practitioners of modern cosmopolitan areas, as the syncretistic documents preserved from this age suggest.

We also have to take Philo’s own interpretations into account that he gave to the practices he observed and to some self-explications he heard. From what we can

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<sup>1</sup> Moore E. “Middle Platonism” // Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. URL: <http://www.iep.utm.edu/midplato/>.

<sup>2</sup> see: Dillon J. M. *The Middle Platonists*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977.

gather he visited those groups and attended some rituals, and also questioned the members, but he gives no account of their scriptures. His ways of describing them are evasive and imprecise, so that no definite conclusions are possible. If he would have recognized their scriptures, he probably would have given a clearer indication of them.

Philo describes their spiritual practice as being motivated by a mystical experience: “But they who apply themselves to this kind of worship, not because they are influenced to do so by custom, nor by the advice or recommendation of any particular persons, but because they are carried away by a certain heavenly love, give way to enthusiasm behaving like so many revellers in bacchanalian or corybantian mysteries, until they see the object which they have been earnestly desiring ... ”<sup>1</sup>

Here Philo vague phrase of “this kind of worship” certainly does not refer to the synagogue liturgy with which he was familiar. His wording suggests a form of ritual which he perceives as novel. The members of the community follow it not by the authority of their inherited traditions – “not by custom ... nor by the advice or recommendation of any particular persons”. This means, as Philo states by negation, that the adherence to the “Therapeutae” came about by individual and spiritually motivated choice or conversion, not by established authority of tradition, family or ethnicity, “but because they are carried away by a certain heavenly love”.

The motif of “heavenly love” possibly alludes to the Platonic divine “eros”, which Plato also related to “philia”, as less subject to the influence of passions – a motif which echoes in Philo’s expression of “heavenly love”. Of this Plato says, that it raises a state of ecstasy (“mania”) which enables the soul to be released from mundane bondage and to be lead to the apperception of the divine beauty which it had before its incarnation.<sup>2</sup> Both “eros” and “philia” have an eminently spiritual function and meaning in Plato’s thought.<sup>3</sup>

In the Symposium Diotima ascribes to beauty the power to bring about a unified perception of the divine, relating its experience to the technical term of mystical perception: “myein”.<sup>4</sup> This concept is also applied to the experience of the Eleusinian mysteries.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Philo of Alexandria. De Vita Contemplativa*, II.12.

<sup>2</sup> *Plato. Phaedrus*, 244<sup>a</sup>. Ed. *Plato. Phaedrus*. Ed.: *Plato in Twelve Volumes*. Vol. 9 (translated by *H. N. Fowler*). Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1925. Pp. 227–279. URL: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0174%3Atext%3DPhaedrus%3Apage%3D244>. Cf. *Held, D. T.*, “Eros, Beauty, and the Divine in Plato” // *New England Classical Journal* 36.3 (2009). Pp. 155–167. P. 160.

<sup>3</sup> *Held D. T.* “Eros, Beauty, and the Divine in Plato” // *New England Classical Journal* 36.3 (2009), pp. 155–167, p. 160.

<sup>4</sup> *Plato. Symposium*, 210e. Loc. cit: *Held, D. T.* “Eros, Beauty, and the Divine in Plato” // *New England Classical Journal* 36.3 (2009), pp. 155–167. P. 162. URL: <http://caneweb.org/necj/pdf/ErosBeautyDivine.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> *Held D. T.* “Eros, Beauty, and the Divine in Plato” // *New England Classical Journal* 36.3 (2009), pp. 155–167. P. 161.

Philo describes the celebration of this mystical experience by the “Therapeutae” in terms which do not at all appear to fit with the silent meditation, which also formed part of the spiritual life of the community. Here however he describes communal ecstatic celebration and probably dance. The goal of this ceremony was spiritual perception, as in the Mysteries Cults. The alternation between a daily regimen of hours-long solitary meditation and study and joyous communal celebration, as described above is a feature of Buddhism.

*On forsaking wealth and possessions  
as requirement of admission to the “Therapeutae”*

Philo then goes on to discuss the doctrine of the “Therapeutae” that to relinquish all attachments to mortal existence is necessary for the attainment of salvation.

“Then, because of their anxious desire for an immortal and blessed existence, thinking that their mortal life has already come to an end, they leave their possessions to their sons or daughters, or perhaps to other relations, giving them up their inheritance with willing cheerfulness; and those who know no relations give their property to their companions or friends, for it followed of necessity that those who have acquired the wealth which sees, as if ready prepared for them, should be willing to surrender that wealth which is blind to those who themselves also are still blind in their minds....”<sup>1</sup>

This finds an explanation in the Buddhist concept of liberation by relinquishing all attachments and regarding oneself as not bound by desire to the world and thus to the cycle of rebirths. The common denominator for the relinquishing of material possessions and of human bonds of love, family, friendship and kinship, is indeed to be found in Buddha’s doctrine that any attachment to “life” will perpetuate bondage to the cycle of rebirths (“samsara”) and thus prevent the salvation of attaining liberation (“moksha”) from this cycle in the state of “Nirvana. In Gautama Buddha’s teachings this requirement of “detachment” corresponds to the second and third of the “four noble truths”. The third is: “And this, brethren, is the noble truth of the cause of suffering: craving, which causes rebirth, accompanied by pleasure (p. 44) and lust, and rejoices at finding delight here and there, that is, craving for pleasure, craving for existence, and craving for prosperity.”<sup>2</sup>

The condition for “liberation” accordingly is just as radical. The requirement to give up not only these bonds themselves but also the desire for them, since Buddha regards them as sources of suffering since they bind a person to the changing world of “conditioned factors” thereby preventing “liberation”: “And this, brethren, is the

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<sup>1</sup> *Philo of Alexandria*. De Vita Contemplativa II.13.

<sup>2</sup> *Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha)*. The Sermon at Benares. Ed.: *Thomas, E. J.* Buddhist Scriptures. 1913. URL: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/busc/busc09.htm>.

noble truth of the destruction of suffering: which is the complete and trackless destruction of that thirst, its abandonment and relinquishment, liberation, and aversion.”<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of renouncement is to attain a state of detachment. Thus Gautama Buddha addressed his followers: “In this community of monks there are monks who are Arahants, whose mental effluents are ended, who have reached fulfilment, done the task, laid down the burden, attained the true goal, totally destroyed the fetter of becoming, and who are released through right gnosis: such are the monks in this community of monks.”<sup>2</sup>

In view of Philo’s description, which mentions the aim of heaven, it is noteworthy that Gautama Buddha does not only speak about the final goal of Nirvana for the most perfect, but also about an intermediate state of perfection which would lead to a liberation from rebirth, but not to full dissolution but to a state of heavenly bliss: “In this community of monks there are monks who, with the total ending of the first set of five fetters, are due to be reborn [in the Pure Abodes], there to be totally unbound, never again to return from that world: such are the monks in this community of monks.”<sup>3</sup>

Tellingly Philo describes this state of detachment or of having relinquished all material and human bonds and claims as “blessed” and as fit for a person who has learnt to “see” in a spiritual sense whereas the material goods and the human bonds are for the “blind”. This double determination only makes sense on the basis of Buddhist metaphysics.

If the “Therapeutae” and their monastic life were based on Buddhist doctrine and long-established example, this model of renouncement of familial and other emotional as well as social bonds as condition of access to the community and to a life of meditative detachment, could still be adopted by the developing Christianity on the basis of Jesus’ re-evaluation of the hierarchy of “attachments” and of his commandment to put the obligations of the “Kingdom of God” first.

This could also be interpreted as basis for the call to a monastic life. Jesus instruction to the young man desirous of perfection is however even more relevant in this respect, since it also covers the also the aspect of material possessions which are seen as a hindrance to it: “If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.”<sup>4</sup> This is compatible with the practise of monastic communities of Buddhist inspiration. Therefore a “drift”, possibly through stages of syncretism or by conversions of monastic communities or of sufficient numbers of formerly “Buddhist” monks and nuns

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<sup>1</sup> *Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha)*. The Sermon at Benares. Ed.: *Thomas, E. J.* Buddhist Scriptures. 1913. URL: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/busc/busc09.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> *Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha)*. Anapanasati Sutta: On the Mindfulness of Breathing // *Majjhima Nikaya*. 118. (Transl. from the Pali by *Thanissaro Bhikkhu*). URL: [http://www.buddhistedu.org/en/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=50:mindfulness-of-breathing&catid=16:class-lessons&Itemid=41](http://www.buddhistedu.org/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=50:mindfulness-of-breathing&catid=16:class-lessons&Itemid=41).

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew, 19:21.

– the latter a novel feature compared to Judaism, but existent in Christian monasticism from its beginnings on –, appears as a likely basis for the transmission of this model of spiritual existence to Christianity.

Philo comments the renouncement of property in a way which shows, that he has not understood its fundamental reason, which nevertheless emerges out of its connection to this form of monastic life. Philo thinks in terms of justice, of a fair and equal distribution of means. As we can see, he offers a tentative explanation: “As if great anxiety concerning the means of subsistence and the acquisition of money engendered injustice by reason of the inequality which it produced, while the contrary disposition and pursuit produced justice by reason of its equality, according to which it is that the wealth of nature is defined, and is superior to that which exists only in vain opinion.”<sup>1</sup>

This is in line with his own Jewish ethics of justice, but it obviously fails the rationale of this practise, since nowhere do we find the “Therapeutae” engaged in the distribution of goods for welfare and as acts of justice. On the assumption of Buddhist motivation we may find acts of charity as expressive of compassion, but no steps towards distributive justice.

The urgency and importance accorded by the “Therapeutae” to the renouncement of material and emotional as well as familial attachments goes forth from his following account – which is not connected to issues of justice: “When, therefore, men abandon their property without being influenced by any predominant attraction, they flee without even turning their heads back again, deserting their brethren, their children, their wives, their parents, their numerous families, their affectionate bands of companions, their native lands in which they have been born and brought up, though long familiarity is a most attractive bond, and one very well able to allure any one.”<sup>2</sup>

Little could depict the drama and urgency of “renouncement” and thus the centrality which is accorded to severing the bonds of attachment to everything and to all who are dear to a person than this account. Philo must have learnt these heart-breaking stories from members of the community. This drama indicates how important it is for attainment of salvation. It is a step which can only be explained on the basis of Buddhism at that time, for neither did Judaism nor any of the Greek or Egyptian faiths demand any such renouncement of all legitimate bonds of attachment. The systematic importance of which is beyond doubt in view of this drama. It seems that Christianity has adopted this on its own premises in the course of its adaptation of this form of monasticism, but it has certainly not invented it.

The commandment for a Buddhist who wishes to live a monastic life, to leave his family was explained by Gautama Buddha with the following words: “The household life is crowded, a dusty road. Life gone forth is the open air. It isn’t easy, living in a home, to lead the holy life that is totally perfect, totally pure, a polished

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<sup>1</sup> *Philo of Alexandria*. De Vita Contemplativa, III.18.

<sup>2</sup> *Philo of Alexandria*. De Vita Contemplativa, III.18.

shell. What if I, having shaved off my hair & beard and putting on the ochre robe, were to go forth from the home life into homelessness?”<sup>1</sup>

These words are recited at the ordination of monks in Theravada Buddhism.<sup>2</sup> They state the necessity to sever the bonds of family and to leave behind the life in a family. They also mention the motifs of embarking on a life of “wandering”, of “homelessness”, and of putting on a monk’s robe and attire. Philo mentions them as features of the “Therapeutae” too.

*The spatial setting of the “Therapeutae” as “liminal” communities: “marginality”, “communitas”, “pilgrimage” and “beauty”*

Philo describes the “Therapeutae” as a community of like-minded persons. The setting itself is significant. The purpose is to find a place of quiet in which the mutual resonance of like-minded striving can take effect. In this passage he describes the layout of the monastery and its situation in a naturally pleasant place. The atmosphere of the place accords well with Buddha’s ideal of a “middle path” – not given to extremes of any kind.

He also mentions the motif of “pilgrimage” which is in some tension with the sedentary life of a monastery. It reflects two aspects of Buddhist monastic life: pilgrimage and the order of stationary monastic life. Here both elements are united. About “pilgrimage” it is interesting that Philo does not describe the pilgrimage of the “Therapeutae” as a journey to a specific place – such as a pilgrimage to Jerusalem – but rather as a spiritual wandering. He also states that only the best of them engage in such pilgrimage or wandering, which suggests that the community may have been structured in two tiers: as an “elite” of itinerant monks, wandering possibly for specific times, apart from their communal life, and a supporting wider community, which shares in the festivals. It is a structure which agrees with that of Theravada Buddhism and with Buddhism’s origins:

“III. (19) And they depart, not to another city... (20) but they take up their abode outside of walls, or gardens, or solitary lands, seeking for a desert place, not because of any ill-natured misanthropy to which they have learnt to devote themselves, but because of the associations with people of wholly dissimilar dispositions to which they would otherwise be compelled, and which they know to be unprofitable and mischievous. ... (22) and from all quarters those who are the best of these Therapeutae proceed on their pilgrimage to some most suitable place as if it were their country, which is beyond the Mareotic lake, lying in a somewhat level plain a

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<sup>1</sup> *Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha)*. Samaññaphala Sutta, DN2. Loc. cit: *Trafford, P. Avoiding pamāda: An analysis of the Fifth Precept as Social Protection in Contemporary Contexts with reference to the early Buddhist teachings* (Master’s dissertation on Buddhism, Oxford 2009). URL: [http://www.chezpaul.org.uk/buddhism/MSt\\_dissertation.htm](http://www.chezpaul.org.uk/buddhism/MSt_dissertation.htm).

<sup>2</sup> *Trafford P. Avoiding pamāda: An analysis of the Fifth Precept as Social Protection in Contemporary Contexts with reference to the early Buddhist teachings*. (Master’s dissertation on Buddhism, Oxford 2009). URL: [http://www.chezpaul.org.uk/buddhism/MSt\\_dissertation.htm](http://www.chezpaul.org.uk/buddhism/MSt_dissertation.htm).

little raised above the rest, being suitable for their purpose by reason of its safety and also of the fine temperature of the air.

(23) For the houses built in the fields and the villages which surround it on all sides give it safety; and the admirable temperature of the air proceeds from the continual breezes which come from the lake which falls into the sea, and also from the sea itself in the neighbourhood, the breezes from the sea being light, and those which proceed from the lake which falls into the sea being heavy, the mixture of which produces a most healthy atmosphere.”<sup>1</sup>

Philo’s description of the “Therapeutae’s” monastery by the Maraeotic lake is clearly moulded in the image of the “locus amoenus”-motif. This is a familiar motif of literature in Greco-Roman antiquity and denotes a place which is not subject to economic necessities and labour, but has connotations of freedom, also of “initiation”,<sup>2</sup> of return to the “golden age”, and of “paradise” in the Christian and Jewish adoption of the motif. In Roman society “loci amoeni” used to be created on the estates of wealthy landowners, to symbolise the return to an idyllic and divine state, free from the fetters of society. The motif has persisted into modernity and has given rise to the creation of parks and landscape gardens.

In antiquity these places had strong spiritual and also erotic connotations in Greco-Roman pagan imagination, which is echoed in a way by the asceticism of the community of the “Therapeutae”. Essential and significant is that these places were imagined as pleasant, as harmonious and of agreeable nature – a feature which Philo underlines by many details of his description. They are no places of harsh asceticism. The translation’s wording of a “desert place” refers to a place of solitude, not to a dry area, as the context shows. Whatever the intentions of the community’s founders were, they certainly chose a “locus amoenus” and Philo recognised it as such. He also emphasises, how healthy the site is. The description of the site as comprising houses scattered in the fields and surrounded by villages raises connotations of a rural idyll.

Considering that this idyllic place was a site of spiritual transformation, we may apply the concept of “liminality” here. Victor Turner<sup>3</sup> developed van Gennep’s theory of “liminal states” as elements of initiation ritual to a theory about the function of “liminal states” in spiritual settings, such as pilgrimages, or in spiritual communities, among them states of ecstatic experience of “community”, in relation to processes of dissolution within societies as elements of transition. This also applies well to the experience of the therapeutic community of Lake Mareotis. Turner’s description about the experience of “liminality” echoes well the image conveyed by Philo: “What is interesting about liminal phenomena for our present purposes is the bend

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<sup>1</sup> *Philo of Alexandria. De Vita Contemplativa* III, 19 – 23.

<sup>2</sup> *Kledt A.* [review of:] „*Hass, Petra. Der locus amoenus in der antiken Literatur: Zu Theorie und Geschichte eines literarischen Motivs.* Bamberg (Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Bamberg) 1998“ // *Göttinger Forum für Altertumswissenschaft* 3 (2000) 1001-1011. URL: <http://www.gfa.d-r.de/3-00/kledt.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> *Turner V. W.* *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure.* Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1967.



they offer of lowliness and sacredness, of homogeneity and comradeship. We are presented, in such rites, with a ‘moment in an out of time’, and in and out of secular social structure...’’<sup>1</sup>

This certainly set the pattern for Christian monasteries – and for the retreat centres of our days – where seclusion is chosen, balanced in varying degrees by accessibility, preferably in a beautiful site of nature, so as to set harmonious conditions for the spiritual and communal experience.

### *The motif of “harmony” in Philo’s description and its Jewish or Buddhist source*

Philo repeatedly mentions “harmony” as an important motif for the “Therapeutae” in various respects. The personal relations are among them. Thus Philo states that they seek an area which is sufficiently “lonely” to provide quiet and the possibility of forming a scattered community of like-minded people:

“... not because of any ill-natured misanthropy to which they have learnt to devote themselves, but because of the associations with people of wholly dissimilar dispositions to which they would otherwise be compelled, and which they know to be unprofitable and mischievous.”<sup>2</sup>

To seek harmony for the sake of the spiritual work to which they have dedicated themselves is clearly the core motif. To avoid the nuisance of dealing with mischievous people is secondary to the positive goal of harmony. The motif of the quest for harmony as beneficial for the spiritual work also extends to the natural environment sought for the establishment of the community. It influences the settlement pattern, the preferred climate, the relations with the surrounding population, safety and health concerns. A sense of moderation and balance also conveys itself from Philo’s description: “and from all quarters those who are the best of these Therapeutae proceed on their pilgrimage to some most suitable place... being suitable for their purpose by reason of its safety and also of the fine temperature of the air... the breezes from the sea being light, and those which proceed from the lake which falls into the sea being heavy, the mixture of which produces a most healthy atmosphere.”<sup>3</sup>

Repeatedly Philo points out that these harmonious conditions are not being sought for mere comfort of living, but for the sake of the spiritual endeavour to which they have committed themselves. The idea of harmony and balance even seems to govern the design spatial organisation of the monastic community. Here the concerns of pursuit of meditation, of simplicity and lack of possessions as well as of harmony are observed: “But the houses of these men thus congregated together are very plain, just giving shelter in respect of the two things most important to be provided against, the heat of the sun, and the cold from the open air; and they did not live near to one another as men do in cities, for immediate neighbourhood to others would be a troublesome and unpleasant thing to men who have conceived an admiration for, and

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<sup>1</sup> Turner V. W. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure*. P. 96.

<sup>2</sup> *Philo of Alexandria*. De Vita Contemplativa, III.21.

<sup>3</sup> *Philo of Alexandria*. De Vita Contemplativa, III.22–23.

have determined to devote themselves to, solitude; and, on the other hand, they did not live very far from one another on account of the fellowship which they desire to cultivate, and because of the desirableness of being able to assist one another if they should be attacked by robbers.”<sup>1</sup>

This description of the placement of the dwellings of the monks is quite similar to the structure of the coenobitic communities of the early desert fathers, who chose to live each in his own place for silent and solitary practise, but still at a calling distance to the next for mutual support. Rather, here the motif of solitude and silence is important and governs the structure. Mutual assistance against criminals is also taken into account. This form of living is quite different to the close-knit form of communal living of the Essenes. Likewise the ideas and values governing the manifest structure are evidently different too.

The ideal and value of “harmony” is decidedly Buddhist. In the New Testament the notion hardly occurs. Here the idea of love is central to the cohesion of the Christian community. St. Paul adds the ideas of mutually complimentary functional union, here again based on the principle of love.<sup>2</sup> The idea of social harmony in the Old Testament is based on the idea of a cosmic order in creation, as developed in the theology of the “Priestly Source”, in the creation story,<sup>3</sup> or in “Wisdom Literature”, where the order of creation as manifest in nature should correspond to good order in human life.<sup>4</sup> The other major source of social cohesion and good order is of course based on the divine commandments<sup>5</sup> as content and basis of God’s covenant, given as a blessing to Israel and also to be manifest to the world<sup>6</sup>. In Deuteronomy the experience of suffering and of humiliation in exile is important and forms the basis for compassion and responsibility for the weak.<sup>7</sup> This is foundation for social order and care for one another differs fundamentally from the idea of “harmony”.

The emphasis on “harmony” is a central value of Buddha’s instructions on monastic life. The very idea and origin of a Buddhist monastic community is based on Buddha’s “six precepts on harmony”.<sup>8</sup> This doctrine of the “six harmonies” is based on teachings of Buddha recorded in the Agama Sutra and applies specifically for Sangha members, but also to Buddhist society<sup>9</sup>

The “six harmonies” combine several elements, which also occur in Philo’s description of the community: (1.) common study of the holy scriptures and discussions of them to ensure common understanding, doctrinal unity and (2.) consensus

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<sup>1</sup> *Philo of Alexandria*. De Vita Contemplativa, III.24.

<sup>2</sup> 1. Corinthians, 13+14.

<sup>3</sup> Genesis, 1:1–2:4.

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 104 (103).

<sup>5</sup> Exodus, 19–24.; Deuteronomy, 5–7.

<sup>6</sup> Deuteronomy, 4:8.

<sup>7</sup> Deuteronomy, 5:13ff.

<sup>8</sup> *Yin-Shun (Daoshi)*. The Way to Buddhahood. (transl. by *Wing Yeung* from Chinese. Original title: Ch’eng fo chih tao) Somerville Mass: Wisdom Publications, 1998. P. 19f.

<sup>9</sup> *Tan B. T. and Wu Ling*. Introduction to Buddhism Series. lecture 7: Six Rules of Living in Harmony. (Amitabha Buddhist Library, Chicago). URL: <https://www.amitabhalibrary.org/Classes/Notes/Buddhism101/6harmonies.pdf>.

in the application of the teachings, and agreement on rules, (3.) the adherence to the common ideals of renouncement of possessions, except for a minimum, and sharing the material means at hand within the monastic community, (4.) living together peacefully and in mutual support, (5.) peaceful manners and (6.) tranquillity of mind as achieved by meditation and stillness.

*On pleasure, dietary and ascetic prescriptions among the “Therapeutae” and in Buddhism*

Importantly, Philo also mentions the element of “pleasure” – an element of joy that is also present in Philo’s description of the “Therapeutae”:

“(40) I wish also to speak of their common assemblies, and their very cheerful meetings at convivial parties, setting them in opposition and contrast to the banquets of others, for others, when they drink strong wine, as if they had been drinking not wine but some agitating and maddening kind of liquor, or even the most formidable thing which can be imagined for driving a man out of his natural reason ...”<sup>1</sup>

The detail that no wine is served at these festivals, is significant, since in Judaism, as in Christianity, wine is cherished as a blessing of God,<sup>2</sup> as a gift of God for the joy of man,<sup>3</sup> i.e. as a psychotropic substance. It is only forbidden to priests serving at the altar or the “tent of covenant” to drink wine, requiring them to be sober in their service.<sup>4</sup> The banning of wine by the “Therapeutae” is also confirmed when Philo describes their regular nourishment in a cultural context where wine was standard beverage, as among Greeks and Jews, or beer, as among the Egyptians:

“(37) and they eat nothing of a costly character, but plain bread and a seasoning of salt, which the more luxurious of them to further season with hyssop; and their drink is water from the spring...”<sup>5</sup>

Here the abstinence from alcohol is connected to the prescription, also to abstain from any luxuries of food altogether and to subsist on the most frugal fare possible – which, in Buddhism, is a token of renunciation of desires of the body as manifestation of the desire to be. The prohibition of alcohol and intoxicants is the fifth of the “five precepts” of Buddha: “I undertake the precept to abstain from liquor that cause intoxication and indolence.”<sup>6</sup>

These dietary restrictions exclude any interpretation of festivals of the Therapeutae as a form of Passover celebration, which has been proposed, since here both

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<sup>1</sup> *Philo of Alexandria. De Vita Contemplativa V, 40.*

<sup>2</sup> *Genesis, 27:28.*

<sup>3</sup> *Psalm 104(103):15.*

<sup>4</sup> *Leviticus, 10:8.*

<sup>5</sup> *Philo of Alexandria. De Vita Contemplativa, IV.37.*

<sup>6</sup> *Trafford, P. Avoiding pamāda: An analysis of the Fifth Precept as Social Protection in Contemporary Contexts with reference to the early Buddhist teachings. (Master’s dissertation on Buddhism, Oxford 2009). URL: [http://www.chezpaul.org.uk/buddhism/MSt\\_dissertation.htm](http://www.chezpaul.org.uk/buddhism/MSt_dissertation.htm).*

meat and wine are required.<sup>1</sup> About dietary prescriptions he writes: “Bread and drink none of them uses before sunset”, continuing with:

“...they judge that the work of philosophising is one which is worthy of the light, but that the care for the necessities of the body is suitable only to darkness, on which account they appropriate the day to the one occupation, and a brief portion of the night to the other; [...] and they eat nothing of a costly character, but plain bread and a seasoning of salt, which the more luxurious of them to further season with hyssop; and their drink is water from the spring; for they oppose those feelings which nature has made mistresses of the human race, namely, hunger and thirst, giving them nothing to flatter or humour them, but only such useful things as it is not possible to exist without. On this account they eat only so far as not to be hungry, and they drink just enough to escape from thirst, avoiding all satiety, as an enemy of and a plotter against both soul and body...”<sup>2</sup>

The Buddhist rules for fasting correspond to this report, as a Buddhist scholar explains: “Fasting in the monastic community is considered an ascetic practice a “dhutanga” practice. (Dhutanga means “to shake up” or “invigoration.”) Dhutangas are a specific list of thirteen practices, four of which pertain to food: eating once a day, eating at one sitting, reducing the amount you eat....”<sup>3</sup>

H. Sure gives an impression of the importance and the art of fasting, including the limits to which it is taken by some advanced practitioners. Philo’s report about the dietary rules of the “Therapeutae” community at Lake Mereotis reflects Buddhist prescriptions. The time for eating too corresponds roughly to the time given by Philo: “Fast can be broken at any time between midnight to noon next day.”<sup>4</sup>

*Sociological considerations on the “Therapeutae”  
as monastic communities and as spiritual centres for the adherents*

The “Therapeutae” were probably not accessible to outside visitors on a grand scale, as it would have disrupted their contemplative routine and discipline. From Philo’s report it appears that some contact existed with the villagers surrounding the community.<sup>5</sup> The forms of contact which exist between largely self-sufficient monasteries and the neighbouring communities today may be similar to those of the “Therapeutae”. The relations seem to have been harmonious, as common concern for safety shows, which Philo mentions and which also accords with the values of the community.

The location of the monastic community was not in a no-man’s land in the desert, but in a well-settled and desirable recreational area, from what emerges from

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<sup>1</sup> Leviticus, 23:13.

<sup>2</sup> *Philo of Alexandria*. De Vita Contemplativa IV.34–37.

<sup>3</sup> *Sure Heng*. On Fasting From a Buddhist's Perspective. UrbanDharma.org, 2015. URL: <https://www.urbandharma.org/udharma9/fasting.html>.

<sup>4</sup> *Sure Heng*. On Fasting From a Buddhist's Perspective.

<sup>5</sup> *Philo of Alexandria*. De Vita Contemplativa, III.26f.

Philo's report,<sup>1</sup> possibly on a piece of prime property. This suggests that the "Therapeutae" were well-connected, in spite of the renouncement of familial ties by their members. A degree of interaction probably existed between the spiritual community and a network of supporters, who may have shared in some of the group's activities, as Philo apparently did, whose access may have been within this frame of sharing with sympathisers.

His own visit to the Therapeutae and his participation in their festivals shows that visitors were admitted to some degree. A certain social network of the community has thus probably existed, extending into the nearby city of Alexandria. The community had elaborate buildings, with individual "monasteries" for solitary meditation and study, and with a common assembly hall for the apparently quite numerous community of male and female ascetics, whose

As to the social form of organisation Philo's statement that there were "therapeutic communities" of this order all over Egypt suggests a degree of coherence and possibly of central organisation, at least a common identity, as belonging to the same religious community and as abiding by the same rules and values, sharing the same beliefs. This uniformity was so strong that it was readily recognisable to outsiders too.

"Spiritual commerce" existed between the spiritual communities, such as at Lake Mareotis, with its monastic members who came here from distant lands – bringing along their doctrines, rituals, spiritual practises and liturgies. This perfectly fits the Buddhist pattern. Well educated monks wandered to establish Buddhist communities and monasteries in distant lands and foreign cultures. Such a model of mission emerges from Philo's words where he suggests that: "from all quarters those who are the best of these Therapeutae proceed on their pilgrimage to some most suitable place as if it were their country."<sup>2</sup> The expression "the best" certainly describes qualified monks, who have the knowledge and capabilities to become abbots and teachers of the religion in the countries where they established new monasteries as their new homes.

The widespread occurrence of early Christian monasticism in particular in the environment of Alexandria gives a strong indication that this model was established here before the advent of Christianity, which "picked it as a ripe fruit". It was a mature, complex form of organisation of monastic spiritual life, with an established social basis, which were taken over and continued in the Christian community. The memory that the "therapeutae" of Lake Mareotis have been a model and precursor of Christian monasticism has been preserved in Christian memory from early on. It may be a trace of this transition.

*The spatial organization: hermitages, "monastery" and the communal realm*

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<sup>1</sup> *Philo of Alexandria*. De Vita Contemplativa, III.22f.

<sup>2</sup> *Philo of Alexandria*. De Vita Contemplativa, II.21f.

The spatial structure of these communities reveals a pattern which provides both for the requirements of a communal ritual and social life and for periods of seclusion and solitary meditation, as for an association of hermits: “But the houses of these men thus congregated together are very plain, just giving shelter in respect of the two things most important to be provided against, the heat of the sun, and the cold from the open air; and they did not live near to one another as men do in cities, for immediate neighbourhood to others would be a troublesome and unpleasant thing to men who have conceived an admiration for, and have determined to devote themselves to, solitude; and, on the other hand, they did not live very far from one another on account of the fellowship which they desire to cultivate.”<sup>1</sup>

This reflects two elements of Christian monasticism, as in coenobitic communities: the solitary practise of meditation and the coming together for common worship as in the prayers of the “hours”, for lectures and vigils is suitably possible.

Philo also mentions: “writings of ancient men, who having been the founders of one sect or another ... whom they take as a kind of model, and imitate in the general fashion of their sect”.<sup>2</sup> This may well be an allusion to Gautama Buddha and his early followers as the founders of Buddhist monasticism.

The spiritual community of the “Therapeutae” has been regarded to be the forerunner of Christian monasticism early on in antiquity,<sup>3</sup> even claiming that they were early Christians. The possibility arises that the concept of a “monastic community” could have been formed and introduced by the “Therapeutae” themselves. The textual evidence allows some conclusions. In the first passage Philo uses the word in a general sense in a way which suggests not necessarily a specific spiritual or religious meaning of the word. It is applied to the buildings in which the members of this community perform their spiritual exercises:

“(25) And in every house there is a sacred shrine which is called the holy place, and the monastery in which they retire by themselves and perform all the mysteries of a holy life, bringing in nothing, neither food, nor drink, nor anything else which is indispensable towards supplying the necessities of the body, but studying in that place... by reason of which knowledge and piety are increased and brought to perfection. ...”<sup>4</sup>

Here “monasterion” means nothing more than a sheltered place of solitude, suited for spiritual practise. In the second passage Philo notes that this is what the members of the “Therapeutae” themselves call their places of retreat:

“(30) Therefore, during six days, each of these individuals, retiring into solitude by himself, philosophises by himself in one of the places called monasteries, never going outside the threshold of the outer court, and indeed never even looking out.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Philo of Alexandria*. De Vita Contemplativa, II.24.

<sup>2</sup> *Philo of Alexandria*. De Vita Contemplativa III.29.

<sup>3</sup> *Frank S. K.* Geschichte des Christlichen Mönchtums. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1993. P. 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Philo of Alexandria*. De Vita Contemplativa, III.25.

<sup>5</sup> *Philo of Alexandria*. De Vita Contemplativa, III.30.

Such individual shrines exist for individual homes too, which is customary in Buddhism. Every morning and evening devotions are held.<sup>1</sup> Possibly the “Therapeutae” gave the word “monasterion” the specific religious meaning in which it was later used by the Christian community.

There is also a communal hall for worship on religious feasts days as well as for lectures. The assemblies which Philo describes apparently had a liturgical character so that the hall was called a “*semneion*”. This term may have been applied by the “Therapeutae” themselves to their sacred space, since the name which Philo uses for a synagogue is “*proseukhe*”.<sup>2</sup>

*A festive vigil of the Therapeutae: chanting, dancing and ecstasy*

Towards the end of the part dedicated to the celebrations Philo describes a nocturnal festival held by both the men’s and women’s groups of the “Therapeutae”:

“XI. (83) And after the feast they celebrate the sacred festival during the whole night; and this nocturnal festival is celebrated in the following manner: they all stand up together, and in the middle of the entertainment two choruses are formed at first, the one of men and the other of women, and for each chorus there is a leader and chief selected, who is the most honourable and most excellent of the band. (84) Then they sing hymns which have been composed in honour of God in many metres and tunes, at one time all singing together, and at another moving their hands and dancing in corresponding harmony, and uttering in an inspired manner songs of thanksgiving, and at another time regular odes, and performing all necessary strophes and antistrophes. (85) Then, when each chorus of the men and each chorus of the women has feasted separately by itself, like persons in the bacchanalian revels, drinking the pure wine of the love of God, they join together, and the two become one chorus,... The ideas were beautiful, the expressions beautiful, and the chorus-singers were beautiful; and the end of ideas, and expressions, and chorussingers, was piety; therefore, being intoxicated all night till the morning with this beautiful intoxication, without feeling their heads heavy or closing their eyes for sleep, but being even more awake than when they came to the feast, as to their eyes and their whole bodies, and standing there till morning, when they saw the sun rising they raised their hands to heaven, imploring tranquillity and truth, and acuteness of understanding. And after their prayers they each retired to their own separate abodes, with the intention of again practising the usual philosophy to which they had been wont to devote themselves.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Yutang Lin*. A Brief Introduction to Setting up a Buddhist Altar (transl. by Chien-Yun Hsu). URL: <http://www.abuddhistlibrary.com/Buddhism/A - Tibetan Buddhism/Authors/Yutang Lin/Setting Up An Altar/A Brief Introduction to Setting up a Buddhist Altar.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> *Beckwith R. T.* “The Jewish Background to Christian Worship” // *Jones, C., Wainwright, G., Yarnold, E. (S.J.) and Bradshaw, P.* The Study of Liturgy. (rev. ed.) London: SPCK, 1992. Pp. 68–79. P. 70.

<sup>3</sup> *Philo of Alexandria*. De Vita Contemplativa XI.83–85

Here Philo describes an all-night ceremony. This type of “liturgy” exists in Buddhism since the beginnings, and is practised as a vigil in the form of a chanting ceremony which can last the whole night.<sup>1</sup> It is preserved in Christian Orthodoxy as “All-night Vigil”. The antiphonal structure has been adopted in Christianity as well.

While Gautama Buddha forbade his monks to dance, dancing has held a place in Buddhist rituals since the time of the formation of Buddhism, when it absorbed many forms of Hindu ritual and celebrations. Forms of dancing have remained preserved in Buddhist rituals and belong to the oldest elements of Buddhist ritualism.<sup>2</sup>

Chanting, either in unison or in antiphonal form, is the main form of Buddhist ritual music.<sup>3</sup> The texts are mainly recitals of Sutras for devotion and for memorising the doctrine. All of these features appear in Philo’s report.

The first is described by a Theravada Buddhist monk and teacher as follows: “There are some reasons sufficient to continue chanting practice. Regular chanting gives us confidence, joy and satisfaction, and increases devotion within us. This devotion is really a power. It is called the Power of Devotion (Saddhabala). It energises our life in general.”<sup>4</sup>

A part of the vigil consists of chanting sutras as a form of memorisation and of penetrating the meaning and structure of the sutras. This requires special practise and method, in order to be able to memorise the long texts.”<sup>5</sup> Philo notes that the hymns are uncommonly long and sung with considerable musical variation. He describes the chants as being metrical, organised in odes, sung antiphonally at times. All of this reminds of Buddhist evening chants, as they are still practised today. The way in which Philo describes the details of the chanting suggest that this was an unfamiliar experience to him, which he had not encountered in the synagogues. Philo’s description in many ways fits the instructions and texts of Buddhist chanting manuals of a variety of traditions.<sup>6</sup>

*On women as members of the “Therapeutae”, their role in Buddhist monasticism, and the legacy to Christian monasticism*

Philo also notes that men and women initially engage in separate chanting, before uniting their choirs later in the course of the night. About the participation of women in the general assembly he reports:

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<sup>1</sup> *Bhikkhu Dhammasami*. “The Practice of Chanting in Buddhism”. URL: <http://www.urbandharma.org/udharma2/chanting.html>.

<sup>2</sup> *Houseal J.* “A Day of Rare Buddhist Dances” // Core of Culture. Chicago, 2014. URL: <http://www.coreofculture.org/day-of-rare-buddhist-dances.html>.

<sup>3</sup> “Buddhist Chant” // *Swain, J. P.*, Historical Dictionary of Sacred Music. London: Rowland & Littlefield, 2016. P. 36

<sup>4</sup> *Bhikkhu Dhammasami*. “The Practice of Chanting in Buddhism”. URL: <http://www.urbandharma.org/udharma2/chanting.html>.

<sup>5</sup> *Bhikkhu Dhammasami*. “The Practice of Chanting in Buddhism”. URL: <http://www.urbandharma.org/udharma2/chanting.html>.

<sup>6</sup> *The Dhammayut Order in the United States of America* (eds.). A Chanting Guide. 2000. URL: <http://www.accesstoinight.org/lib/authors/dhammayut/chanting.html#ovada>.



“And this common holy place to which they all come together on the seventh day is a twofold circuit, being separated partly into the apartment of the men, and partly into a chamber for the women, for women also, in accordance with the usual fashion there, form a part of the audience, having the same feelings of admiration as the men, and having adopted the same sect with equal deliberation and decision;”<sup>1</sup>

The admission of women to spiritual orders and to the community of monks was a distinctive feature of Buddhism. Buddha himself had initially been reluctant about admitting women to the Sangha, but was eventually convinced by the example of a virtuous and zealous female follower. This distinctive trait is a mark of Buddhism. In case the admission of women to Christian monasticism goes back to the Buddhist example, this would account for the structural asymmetry in Christianity, that women were banned from the priestly orders – with few exceptions – whereas they were permitted to organise themselves in female monastic orders with the own abbesses.

Considering that women also had a minor role in Greek, Egyptian and Roman religion, the practise of the “Therapeutae” indeed sets them off from all of these and provides a strong indication, that the “Therapeutae” did indeed take their role model from Buddhist monasticism. The composition of this monastic community as housing both men and women coming together for worship but residing in separate quarters, has become a model for some forms of Christian monasticism. It is without precedence in Judaism.

*Philo’s account as literary appropriation of the Therapeutae  
as a model for Judaism*

Philo employed a literary technique of deliberate polyvalence in his description of the Therapeutae. E.g. the Buddhists’ presence in many lands of the Hellenistic realm and beyond is overlaid with the Jewish presence in these lands of the “diaspora” – even though the feature of an “ascetic community” given to meditation and characterized by renouncement of possessions did not fit the Jewish form of social and religious organization. This technique of deliberate “double-reading” makes sense if we consider Philo’s agenda to re-interpret Judaism along the models of Hellenistic philosophy and philosophically inspired spirituality – in order to integrate features of Platonism into Jewish theology, as has been shown. The same may be applied to the understanding of his intentions and his literary technique in this report.

My impression is that Philo intentionally tried to claim this group for the kind of Judaism of Middle Platonic interpretation which he wished to promulgate, by creating a literary fusion between them. Thus Philo named only those features which could be considered as common properties of Jewish and Buddhist groups, where it comes to names, places, and other external features. Any facts which could exclude identification with Judaism are avoided. Vague expressions are preferred. Characteristics of the movement are described in such a way that they could be interpreted

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<sup>1</sup> *Philo of Alexandria*, De Vita Contemplativa, III.25–32.

to include Judaism too. Where doctrinal inconsistencies between Jewish and Buddhist doctrine exists, Philo added a Jewish reinterpretation – a point which allows us to identify characteristic Buddhist elements in the doctrine and practice of this group. Philo seemed to intent on blurring the distinction.

He appeared to be aware that some readers might know about this group or have basic information about it, since this group lived on the outskirts of Alexandria and may have been known to the spiritually and philosophically interested in the city. Stating that “this class of persons may be met with in many places” and that “there is the greatest number of such men in Egypt, in every one of the districts, or nomi as they are called, and especially around Alexandria”<sup>1</sup> may indicate a certain public presence. However Philo avoided calling them Jews, as this may have not been credible to his readers.

Philo’s is thoroughly syncretistic<sup>2</sup> in approach, intent and procedure. Thereby he has probably prefigured a process of syncretistic inclusion of communities of the “Therapeutae” into nascent Christianity, in a time before doctrinal and structural boundaries became impermeable. If the communities of the “Therapeutae” became syncretistic in doctrine when ties with the lands of origin had weakened, a gradual inclusion of Jewish, Christian and Hellenistic philosophical doctrines would be conceivable, much the same as it also happened to Judaism in Egypt at the time. This would explain the drift of this form of monasticism into Christianity without much polemic surrounding the process. The actual process of such reception can be conceptualized in the framework of syncretism theory. It may have included stages of double religious adherence and practise in some cases, as is observable at present in processes of religious “drift”, as I have discussed elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> Such multiple religious – and philosophical, spiritual practise and belief was characteristic for the lifetime of Philo in the realm of Alexandria, as the early Christian author Clement of Alexandria discussed and justified theologically by assumed convergence in a universalist religious perspective for Christianity, two centuries later. A very similar position has been identified for Philo with regard to Middle Platonism. We can thus be quite sure, that he was aware of the Buddhist character of the “Therapeutae”, but that he deliberately chose to obliterate the doctrinal difference in order to assimilate this community which he perceptibly admired, for his vision of Judaism, as the analysis of Philo’s description of the “Therapeutae” as an intentional and deliberate syncretistic reception shows. Philo may thus have contributed to the reception of the manifold forms and motifs of Buddhist monasticism in the formation of Christian monasticism in the realm of Alexandria. The implications of this analysis, with the con-

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<sup>1</sup> *Philo of Alexandria*. De Vita Contemplativa, III.31.

<sup>2</sup> *Berner U.* Untersuchungen zur Verwendung des Synkretismus-Begriffes. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1982.

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

firmation of a Buddhist substratum in Christian monasticism through the interpretation of Philo's *De Vita Contemplativa* presented here, may be for further considerations.

For Christianity, especially for those Churches who have preserved monasticism and regard it as a core element of their spiritual life, this implies that its roots – and even origins – in Buddhism should be acknowledged. This includes that the inner logic of monasticism should be understood on this foundation. The legitimacy of the adoption of monasticism through the Christian Church is a matter of theological interpretation. The implications of these origins may be considered also with regard to a profound understanding of Christianity itself. For societies shaped by Christian monasticism this implies to realize that their cultures also have deep roots in India, which can be included in collective self-perception.

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*Notes on the systematics of Buddhist sacred scripture referred to*

On *Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha)*. Sermon at Benares. / Vin. Mahāv. I. 6, 10 ff. :  
The Theravada Buddhist Collection the Vinaya Piṭaka ("The Basket of Discipline") is the first part of the three collections of Buddhist Order rules, the Tripitaka (the "Three Baskets" in Pali language, the sole sacred scripture recognized by Theravāda Buddhism. Other versions exist based on Sanskrit sources in Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism.). It contains five books. Book 2: The Khandakas (the "Groups") contains the Mahāvagga (the "Great Group") consisting of 10 sections. It reports the illumination of Siddhartha Gautama Buddha and the first rules of his monastic order. The first Khandaka contains the Sermon at Benares in section 6, v. 10ff.

On: *Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha)*. Samaññaphala Sutta, DN2: The Majjhima Nikaya is the second of the five nikayas, or collections, in the Sutta Pitaka, the second "basket" of the Tripitaka. It contains discourses by Gautama Buddha and his disciples.