THE ORIGIN OF THE SYRIAN ASCETICISM OR MONASTICISM

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Every student of Syrian Asceticism or Monasticism will soon become aware that we are dealing here with a totally different phenomenon than the Asceticism or Monasticism of the West as it is believed to have originated in Egypt.

This almost consensus of opinion of the Church historians that the Christian Monasticism and Asceticism originated in Egypt and was transplanted from there throughout the whole Christian world, cannot, therefore, be left unchallenged.

It is generally accepted that Antony (St. Anthony) (251—356) was the “pioneer” of this movement.1) “Monasticism first appears in history with St. Antony, the ‘father of monks’.”2) It is related how, at an early age, he retired to the Nitrian desert. Before long he had so many adherents or disciples that, according to Zernov,3) the towns and villages became depopulated and the desert was filled with ascetics.

The next stage in this development is said to have been precipitated by Pachomius (d. 348). He experienced the dangers of this seclusion and to avoid these dangers he organised a communal life for ascetics in monasteries.

From Egypt this movement is then supposed to have spread to all other Christian countries, including Syria.4)

It is of course true, as Van der Ploeg5) rightly points out, that we must to a certain degree distinguish between the terms “monnikewese” (monkdom) and “kloosterwese” (cloisterdom). The word “monk” is derived from the Greek word μοναχός (in Latin monachus) which means “to be alone, isolated”. Centuries earlier, and even before Christianity, there were such people who separated themselves from the community and lived in isolation for long periods or even for their whole lives. They are also called recluses, hermits, anchorites or ascetics. If we define asceticism as “... jede religiöse begründete Enthaltung oder Einschränkung von Speise und Trank, Wohnung und Schlaf, Kleidung und jeglichem Besitz, vornehmlich die Einhaltsamkeit im engern Sinn, den zeitweiligen oder völligen Verzicht auf den Geschlechtsverkehr”6) it is true that even in the earliest Christian communities7) such ascetical notions can be indicated as well as in certain instances in the Old Testament8) and even in non-Christian communities, as indicated above.

The word “cloister”, again, is derived from the Latin word claustrum, that is “a locked-in place, a wall or an enclosure” and refers to the enclosure within which the monks lived together singly
or in groups. Even this is no specific Christian phenomenon and has also existed in pre-Christian times. We need only remind you here of the Qumran community or sect.

Regarding the apparent individualism of asceticism we should, however, always bear in mind that it was (and still is) basically not an individualistic but "essentially a corporate movement".9) The monks and nuns did not merely discard their family-ties and responsibilities in and regarding the community. At the same time they forged new and even stronger bonds and ties and took upon themselves much larger responsibilities. They merely exchanged one form of loyalty for another which brought with it many more privations and heavier demands under very stringent living conditions; as well as complete subordination to the rules of this new way of life or to their superiors.

If we take a closer view of the Syrian Asceticism and Monasticism this thesis will be elucidated. The individual monk was dependent upon his fellow-monks. In fact, development very soon took place in just the opposite direction: he, who wanted to become an ascetic, was first admitted into the cloister and, only after a probationary period of a few (mostly about three) years, he was allowed to become an ascetic or anchorite who could live alone in a cell in the monastery or apart from all communal life. The two terms, therefore, belong inseparably together: we can distinguish between them but never separate the one from the other.

What we now wish to demonstrate is the fact, as we see it, that the Syrian Christendom10) evidently displayed such ascetical and encratite notions right from the beginning and deemed the normal community life as inferior to the dignity of the real Christian.

But whence did these ascetical traits originate in Syrian Christianity? Of the origin of Syrian Christianity not much is known. Actually, the only written document known today, which professes to deal with the origins of Christianity in Edessa is the so-called "Doctrine of Addai".11) Most scholars see in it a purely legendary work. It is, however, possible to detect at least a few facts amongst all the legendary data of the "Doctrine".

All the old Churches endeavoured to link the origin of their Church to some or other "apostolic authority". According to the most ancient oriental Christian literature the apostle Thomas is clearly to be designated as "the apostle of the Orient". It is said that he was the apostle who brought the evangel to India. Edessa was so sure that Thomas was responsible for the first preaching of the Gospel in their city that they are said to have reinterred his remains in Edessa during the early third century.12) Edessa is the city of the apostle Thomas.

This tradition is contained in the first part of the "Doctrine of Addai". After the Ascension of Christ Thomas is to have fulfilled
Christ's promise to Abgar Ukkama and sent Addai, one of the 70, to him to cure him of his disease and preach the Gospel in his city.

Later on in this document we meet with an anachronism when it is said that Palût, the successor of Aggai who succeeded Addai as bishop of Edessa, was not ordained by Aggai himself but by Serapion of Antioch, who in his turn was ordained by Zephyrinus of Rome. This happened, according to the "Doctrine", as a result of the sudden martyrdom of Aggai at the hands of one of Abgar's successors.

Serapion, however, was bishop of Antioch from 189 or 192 to 209; while Zephyrinus was bishop of Rome from 202 to 218, so that he could not possibly have ordained Serapion. Furthermore, according to this rendering: Addai and Aggai together must have filled the see of Edessa for approximately 170 years — which is also an impossibility.

The simple explanation, we believe, is that Edessa and its environs came under the sphere of the influence of the Roman empire at just about this time and the westernisation of the Church and that of the Christian life of Edessa commenced. Therefore the Church had to be linked to the West as well — and no better link could be found than the one with Rome, the seat of the apostle Peter.

So much for the "apostolic binding" of the Church according to Addai. I shall refrain from going into further details (and conjectures) here as to the origin of Christianity in Edessa.

We do, however, meet with the name of Addai in so many different, and independent, writings of the Syrian Church that it seems impossible just to ascribe him to legendary fiction. It is true that the periods of his so-called evangelical work differ largely; but his name figures so prominently that some historicity must be attached to his person.

Here we merely wish to refer to one more written and, to our mind, more reliable source where we meet with Addai again and which relates a few important facts concerning the origins of the Church in Adiabene, that is, Arbela and its surroundings.

To get the right perspective on this information we should bear in mind that Arbela is about three hundred miles east of Edessa on the highway from the West, through Edessa to the East, and within the confines of the Parthian empire.

We refer here to the Mšiha Zekha published by Mingana in 1907 with a French translation. According to this source a convert of Addai, called Pšidha, became the first bishop of "the country of Adiabene", at approximately the turn of the first century A.D. Furthermore it is stated that Addai himself was, prior to Pšidha's ordination, preaching the Gospel in "the villages of the mountains". A third relevant fact mentioned here is that after Pšidha's death, in approximately 120 A.D., Mezra, the bishop of Beth-Zabdai, visited...
the country of Adiabene in the company of a caravan of merchants. In Arbela he found that these Christians were without a “chef” for the past six years.\textsuperscript{18} This last statement, and especially the report that Mezra on their request consecrated the deacon Samson as bishop, gives the impression that the Church of Beth-Zabdat, or at least its episcopate, was firmly established by this time and recognised as such.

Especially noteworthy of the Church of Adiabene is also the fact that most of the first bishops of this see bear purely Old Testament or Jewish names such as Samson, Isaac, Abraham, Noah and Abel.\textsuperscript{19}

At this stage it is interesting to note the fact told us by Josephus in the twentieth book of Antiquities, namely that King Izates of Adiabene, as well as his mother Helena, publicly adopted the Jewish religion at approximately 40 A.D.\textsuperscript{20} For how long this dynasty remained Judaists cannot be determined with certainty, although it must have lasted some decades.

All these facts definitely point towards a Jewish-Christian origin for this congregation and shows us the important role played in these Churches by the travelling merchants and their co-travellers.

If Christianity had penetrated thus far to the East at the end of the first century and to such an extent, we deem it not inappropri-ate to infer from it the right to conclude that Christianity was by this time already firmly established in Edessa. And if Christianity here, as in Arbela, was of Jewish-Christian origin, then it’s ascetic, encratitic character also becomes obvious.

We must then try to find traces of it in the Jewish-Christian mode or life and in the early documents originating from that source. We have already referred to the Ebionites and Elkesaites. According to Scripture and contemporary sources there were, even during the life-time of the apostles — actually right from the beginning — influential Judaising currents in the early Christian Church.\textsuperscript{21} This is only natural because most of the first Christians came from the ranks of the Jewish nation and it is impossible to expect of them to discard every vestige of their earlier way of life.

In the West the apostle Paul, especially, contended with these forces and combated them successfully. Amongst the Syriac-speaking Churches these ideas seem to have had free access and some of them developed and were embedded with them to such an extent that even the later westernising process could not eliminate them completely. In the following discussion we shall limit ourselves to only a few documents out of the vast literature displaying these tendencies; and then specifically documents of Syriac and/or Oriental origin.

The first document to be discussed here is “The odes of Solomon”. The writer and specific place of origin of this document is unknown. Harris and Mingana\textsuperscript{22} dates it before the end of the
first century with a possible Antiochean origin. De Zwaan has quite convincing arguments for the Edessene origin of these Odes. Klijn, to mention only a third authority, also gives preference to Antioch as the place of origin of these Odes, but immediately adds: "...in ieder geval blijkt dat deze Oden al zeer vlug in Edessa zijn bekend geworden. Ze zijn daar van harte geaccepteerd en in het Syrisch vertaald. Ze vertegenwoordigen dan ook zeker een Christendom, zoals dat in Edessa werd beleden." We seem to be on safe ground if we assume that these Odes were known in Edessa at approximately 125 A.D. if they did not actually originate there at a still earlier time.

In these "Odes of Solomon" there are many statements that can be traced to Jewish traditions. We pass over these, however, and merely quote a few instances where the nature of this world (or life) is described, the "salvation" expected from Christ is elucidated and where virginity is mentioned — all aspects bearing on our theme.

Although much attention is given to the work of Christ one gets the feeling that the "salvation" that is expected of Him is limited to a matter of "aid" or "assistance" or, literally, the "opening of the door to salvation". His advent (first coming) is seen as a descent to hell and the earth regarded as part of the realm of the dead, because it (the earth) is the place of transitoriness. These ideas are lucidly expressed in Ode XLII: 10—20, which reads:

"10. I was not rejected, though I was reckoned to be so; And I did not perish though they thought it of me.

11. Sheol saw me and was in distress; 
Death cast me up and many along with me:

12. I have been gall and bitterness to it, 
And I went down with it to the extreme of its depth.

13. And the feet and the head let it go, 
For it was not able to endure my face;

14. And I made a congregation of living men amongst his dead men; 
And I spoke with them by living lips: 
In order that my word may not be void.

15. And those who had died ran towards me; 
And they cried and said, Son of God, have pity on us;

16. And do with us according to thy kindness; 
And bring us out from the bonds of darkness:

17. And open to us the door 
By which we shall come out to thee; 
For we perceive that our death does not touch thee."
18. Let us also be saved with thee;  
    For thou art our Saviour.

19. And I heard their voice,  
    And I laid up their faith in my heart;  

20. And I set my name upon their heads:  
    For they are free men and they are mine.  
      Hallelujah." 28)  

In Ode XIX: 9 and 10 the singer undoubtedly sings of the  
virginal birth of Christ. Regarding a midwife however, he says:  

"9. And she had not required a midwife,  
    For He delivered her.  

10. And she brought forth, as a man, of her own 29) will". 30)  

This idea very definitely brings us to the realm of the Judaeo-Christian world where the so-called Protevangelium of James 31) originated. This document actually deals with the virginal birth of Mary but also propounds the preservation of her virginity with the birth of Jesus. In fact, the midwife and also Salome (according to this specific recension in Hennecke) must only become witnesses of the preservation of her virginity directly after the birth of Jesus (19: 2—20: 1). 32)  

What is of special importance in these Odes, in regard also to the date of its composition, is the fact that the creation of the earth is still regarded as an act of God, XVI: 12 and 18—19:  

"12. And He fixed the creation and set it up:  
    And He rested from his works.  

18. And there is nothing that is without the Lord;  
    For He was before anything came into being.  

19. And the Worlds were made by his Word,  
    And by the thought of His heart". 33)  

The gnostics and other sects of this era ascribe the creation of the world not to God but to the devil. In this way the ideal of being freed from this world could be better stressed — an ideal shared by these Christians with the sectarian. But as yet the composer(s) of the Odes did not yield to the temptation!  

Concerning the Odes of Solomon we must, in conclusion, point out that the redeemed bard sometimes equalises himself with the Saviour to such an extent that it even becomes impossible to distinguish who has the say, the Saviour or the saved; see Ode X, especially verse 4: "I was strengthened and made mighty and took the world captive". 34)  

The next and most important document for this part of our lecture is "The Gospel of (or, according to) Thomas". 35)
In the past the name of this document was known (because some of the Church fathers mentioned it); also very short quotations from it survived in patristic and other writings. Parts of it have been found earlier, but could not have been recognised as such until recently. The epoch-making discovery at Nag Hammádi in 1945 also brought to light a full text (in a Coptic version) of this "Gospel of Thomas" consisting of 114 Logia (Words or Sayings) of Jesus.

Some of these Sayings more or less (some even literally) correspond to Words of Jesus in the canonical (especially the sinoptic) Gospels. Others are altogether new — as far as they are supposed to be Words of Jesus.

Guillaumont, etc. dated this Coptic translation in the 4th—5th century A.D., with a Greek original (according to them), which must be dated at approximately 140 A.D., "and which was based on even more ancient sources". Unfortunately I have not yet had access to the more extensive and complete work of these scholars as envisaged in the introduction of the above-mentioned book. I have, however, been informed that this publication does draw attention to the many Semitisms in this Gospel, which points towards a Semitic, or more precisely, a Syriac original.

C. E. Puech, one of the collaborators in the above-mentioned publication, wrote the introduction to the Gospel of Thomas for the "New Testament Apocrypha" and, regarding the date of its origin, he says on p. 305: "At most one will be inclined to place the earliest redaction of our gospel about 140, ... This question is, however, secondary. More important than the dating of the collection itself is that of its constituent elements ..." On the dating of these "constituent parts" Puech did not venture to express him in this introduction.

Grant and Freedman (of whose publication I could as yet only acquire the Dutch translation) say: "in de tweede helft van de tweede eeuw had de christelijke Kerk zulke apokriefe evangeliën als dat van Thomas reeds in principe verworpen", which implies that the Gospel, in its original form, must have appeared some time previously. On page 15 they explicitly state: "Het Evangelie van Thomas ... stamt uit het milieu van het oudste Christendom".

Klijn is very outspoken about the Gospel originating in Syriac during the second century; also Baarda, who speaks of "... the Coptic Gospel of Thomas, of which the Syriac origin seems to me beyond doubt". There are mainly two arguments for this hypothesis. The first is the name of Thomas according to this document. It calls him: "Didymus Judas Thomas (Didymus is the Greek word for twin while Thauma means exactly the same in Aramaic/Syriac). Klijn's conclusion in this respect is: "... de naam Judas Thomas wijst onmiskensbaar naar Syrië als plaats van herkomst van het Evangelie van Thomas, omdat hier en ook alleen
hier Thomas als Judas Thomas bekend was". \( ^{42} \) (Compare also Puech, New Testament Apocrypha, p. 286).

The second argument is based on the marked resemblance between the Gospel of Thomas and the Diatessaron. Many of the divergencies of the Gospel of Thomas, from canonical Gospel-renderings, coincide exactly with the Diatessaron. \( ^{43} \) Schippers deemed this resemblance of such great importance that a whole chapter of his book is devoted to this theme. \( ^{44} \)

Klijn concludes his argumentation with: "om deze twee redenen zal het moeilijk zijn om te ontkennen dat dit werk uit Syrië stamt". \( ^{45} \)

We have treated the origin of this newly-found Gospel of Thomas in detail because it is of decisive importance to this lecture. If the Gospel cannot be traced to a Syrian/Syriac original of the early 2nd century A.D. it has no relevance for our purpose.

On the other hand, if it is of Judaeo-Christian origin and has found its scriptural fixation in Syria/Syriac in the second century, then it is of the utmost importance. Because in this Gospel of Thomas the a-sexual evasion of the world is given as explicitly as in all the other writings ascribed to or called by the name of Thomas \( ^{46} \) as well as the so-called Gospel of the Hebrews. The Judaeo-Christian origin of the last-named work is, as far as I could check, recognized by all.

Regarding the motives for an ascetic life, this Gospel of Thomas is very positive and clear in its teachings. We quote only a few examples.

He speaks of "single ones" (Afrikaans: eenlinge): \( ^{47} \)

23. Jesus said: I shall choose you, one out of a thousand, and two out of ten thousand, and they shall stand as a single one. \( ^{48} \)

49. Jesus said: Blessed are the solitary and elect, for you shall find the Kingdom; because you come from it (and) you shall go there again. \( ^{49} \)

75. Jesus said: Many are standing at the door, but the solitary are the ones who will enter the bridal chamber. \( ^{50} \)

What does this word "single one" or "solitary" mean? I do not think we can go as far as to understand it in the full sense of it's later technical meaning: \( \mu o v o \chi o s = \) monk, ascetic.

Although this is where it wants to lead us. "De eenling is de ongetrouwde en a-sexuele mens" says Klijn. \( ^{51} \) And not only Klijn, but the Gospel itself:

22. ...Jesus said to them: When you make the two one, ...and when you make the male and the female into a single one, so that the male not be male and the female (not) be female ... then shall you enter (the Kingdom). \( ^{52} \)
106. Jesus said: When you make the two one, you shall become sons of Man.51) 
And in the last Logion.

114. Simon Peter said to them: Let Mary go out from among us, because women are not worthy of the Life. Jesus said: See, I shall lead her, so that I will make her male, that she too may become a living spirit, resembling you males. For every woman who makes herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.44)

In a dexterous way the writer combines different texts to give it a new meaning. In Luke 11:27-28 we read: "And it came to pass, as he spoke these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed (is) the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked.

But he said, Yea rather, blessed (are) they that hear the word of God, and keep it".

In these words the mother of Jesus is blessed in a typical oriental way because of the conduct of her son. Jesus, however, points out to her that not the earthly blood-relationship but the relationship or attitude towards the word of God is of decisive importance.

In Luke 23:29 He says: "For, behold, the days are coming, in which they shall say, Blessed (are) the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck" — because without the consequent earthly relationships such women will find "the days to come" easier to endure than, for instance, a mother with a few small children.

These two texts are combined to:

79. A woman from the multitude said to Him: Blessed is the womb which bare Thee and the breasts which nourished Thee. He said to (her): Blessed are those who have heard the word of the Father (and) have kept it in truth. For there will be days when you will say: Blessed is the womb which has not conceived and the breasts which have not suckled.55) Instead of the blessing of the mother of Jesus by the woman, etc. Jesus is here made to declare a beatification over the women who have not conceived, in other words, those who have not had sexual intercourse!

The a-sexual person is also compared with a child:

37. His disciples said: When wilt Thou be revealed to us and when will we see Thee? Jesus said: When you take off your clothing without being ashamed, and take your clothes and put them under your feet as the little children and tread on them, then (shall you behold) the Son of the Living (One) and you shall not fear.56)

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Thus the responsibility of man to become a partaker of the salvation consists of a strenuous exertion of himself to live an a-sexual life as a "solitary" or "single one"; and Jesus Christ as Saviour is of minor importance. He is only a preacher who preaches to man how we must live to earn the Kingdom of God — and this way of life that He proclaims is a-sexuality!

The Diatessaron of Tatian, that we have already mentioned, is the next document to have had an immense influence on the Syriac speaking Christianity.57)

Tatian called himself an "Assyrian".58) He was converted to Christianity under the influence of Justin Martyr. Bishop Soter (± 166—175) excommunicated him as an heretic and he returned to Syria in 172 A.D. It is generally accepted that he wrote the Diatessaron while still a member of the Church in Rome. The age-old dispute as to what the original language of the Diatessaron was — whether Latin, Greek or Syriac59) — has, to my mind, been brought to a definite conclusion by Baumstark. Two fragments of the Greek version were found some years ago. This was immediately hailed as proof of the Greek origin of the Diatessaron. Baumstark's study of these fragments60) convinced him (and apparently everybody else) that the original Diatessaron must have been written in Syriac. Unfortunately there are no extant Syriac or Greek versions of this document. Why no Syriac versions survived will presently become evident. Translations have, however, survived in Armenian, Latin, Italian, German and Dutch.

The Diatessaron (in Syriac: Evangelion da-Mehalletē = the evangel of the mixed) is a skillful combination of the four canonical versions of the Gospel, with some deviations corresponding to the Gospel according to Thomas (as we have said earlier)61) and to some other apocryphal writings.

Because there is no uncertainty about the dating or the original language of the Diatessaron, Tatian's views in this document regarding marriage, sexuality, etc. are of especial importance for our purpose.

Irenaeus has already pointed out that Tatian regarded marriage as φθορα και παρνεμα.52) Just like the Gospel of Thomas, or in imitation of it (see note 61), Tatian introduced many encratitic ideas63) into his Gospel harmony. Of these divergencies Vööbus says i.a.: “It is interesting to notice that it did not demand very much from a capable man like Tatian to impart certain implications to his Gospel text. We are often surprised how very simple means were employed to the greatest effect: here a gloss, there a little change in word-order, sufficed to remind the reader that the carnal link between husband and wife is sin, merely a human invention, not intended by God, and to make it unmistakably plain that the prize of eternal life demands virginity”64)

We refrain from giving examples here because they are similar
to those of the Gospel of Thomas.

According to Quispel it is "wellicht onder zijn invloed" that the apocryphal acts of Thomas, John, Andrew, Peter and Paul taught "dat het Christendom de verbreking van de huwelijksband medebrengt". And then Quispel continues: "Dit loopt uit op het Manicheïsme, dat uit een enkratitische sekte is ontstaan en bijzonder tegen de geslachtelijke begeerlijkheid was".

Vööbus says: "... the introduction of this work constituted (I would like to change it to: perpetuated) a major event in the growth and development of Syrian Christianity'.

The main reason for this is surely the fact that Tatian's views, as given in the Diatessaron, coincided with the views that the Syrian Christians already had — at least a large portion of them. It spoke the language of their heart and was a reproduction of their interpretation of the Christian faith and way of life.

For this reason it was used by them for many generations. Ephraem Syrus, who wrote his works until the year 373 near Edessa, still wrote a commentary on the Diatessaron. A little later, however, the Diatessaron seems to have become discredited. The biographer of Rabbula, bishop of Edessa during the years 411—435 A.D., tells us that Rabbula commanded that the Diatessaron should be replaced by the Evangelion da-Mepharreshē (= the Gospel of the Separated or the four canonical Gospels). Theodoret, bishop of Cyrus (Cyrhus) from 423 to 457 A.D., confiscated more than 200 copies of the Diatessaron within his diocese "and introduced in their place the Gospels of the four Evangelists'.

It has already been mentioned in the quotation from Quispel that these ascetic, enkratite notions or way of life of the Syrians (as exhibited in the above-mentioned writings) led to Manicheism. There are, however, also other and earlier Christian and Gnostic sects which are of major importance for our lecture. In addition to Manicheism only two of men will be briefly mentioned here.

The first is the Montanism. Of this sect even Tertullian (150—222 A.D.) was a member for a number of years. This sect flourished by the middle of the second century A.D. and "imposed a rigorous asceticism upon its adherents''.

Also the Marcionites gained many adherents in Syria by the middle of the second century A.D. It is true that Marcion himself never went to Syria. However, the fact that the Chronicle of Edessa mentions that he left the Church in 137/8 while it does not mention anything about the early Christianity in Edessa shows us that Marcion's influence in Syria must have been very great.

We shall not go into the details of the doctrines of Marcion. We only wish to remind you that he drew a sharp distinction between the Old and the New Testaments and between (what he called) the Creator-God of the Old Testament and the loving-kindness of the "Foreign-God" of Jesus Christ. Of the mode of life that he preached,
the following is important for our purpose: "Deze levenswijze is streng ascetisch, omdat al het aardse, in het bijzonder het huwelijk, behoort tot het domein van de God van het Oude Testament".71)

Regarding Marcion's influence in Syria Vööbus says, inter alia: "It was just that area where Syrian Christianity had first begun to develop which very early became the field of operation for Marcionite Christianity... it found particularly fertile ground in the Syrian Orient where its seed grew up exuberantly and very soon it could reap a rich harvest".72)

Mani (216—277 A.D.) founded a new sincretistic religion comprising of elements of Christianity, of Buddhism and of Zoroastrianism by means of which he wished to replace all these religions and let it become the one and only universal religion.

Mani's father joined one of the encratite Christian sects and he, consequently, grew up in this kind of religious environment. In his own "church", which he formed later, these ideas still play a very important part. The following characterisation of Mani's Church and comparison of it with the Christian Churches of Syria, by Danielou and Marrou, is of the utmost importance for our whole theme; actually it is a summary of all that we have tried to elucidate from the writings of the Syriac-speaking Church. Therefore we cite them at length: "The Manichean Church was divided into those who are perfect, the ascetics, who alone make up the Church in the strict sense, and those who are imperfect, the listeners or catechumens".

"Manichaicism is in one sense foreign to Christianity and so is really a new religion... But at the same time this new religion can be considered a development of the original Syriac Christianity, whose tendencies it carries to their furthest extreme: a cosmological dualism, which results in a complete condemnation of the material world; and moral Encratism, which forbids marriage and the use of certain food. Manichaean monasticism developed in parallel with Christian monasticism".73)

We are now nearing the date of the origin of the Egyptian Asceticism and Monasticism. And we hope that, with what has been said so far, this one fact stands out clearly, namely that the Syrian Christianity of the previous century or two (actually right from the beginning) not only displays ascetical traits but is essentially of an ascetic and encratite character.

As a result of occidental influence after the end of the second century A.D. this characteristic of the oriental Christianity was moderated but never radically changed.

There are, unfortunately, insufficient reliable documents elucidating the factual position of the Asceticism or Monasticism of the Syrians of this early period above all uncertainty.

One document, the history of Mar Awgin,74) purports to give the origin of Syrian Monasticism and relates how Mar Awgin
"imported" it to Syria from Egypt. Labourt,\textsuperscript{73} however, has convincingly proved that this document is not older than the 11th century so that it cannot be accepted as authentic proof of the origin of Ascetism in Syria.

Sufficient evidence to show that Monasticism in Syria originated independently from the Egyptian model does, however, seem to be available if we piece it together.

In his \textit{Vita Hilarionis} Jerome states that when Hilarion came from Egypt to Majuma (in the vicinity of the biblical Gaza) in 306 A.D. to live an ascetic life there, he found no monasteries in Syria.\textsuperscript{76} From this we conclude: \textit{a}) that Egyptian Monasticism only reached the uttermost south-western part of Syria by this time (306 A.D.); and \textit{b}) that at this time the western part of greater Syria does not seem to have had any monasteries or ascetics of renown.

On the other hand we must draw the attention to Jacob of Nisibis. According to the M\textit{\c{s}iha Zekha Jacob lived during the episcopate of S\textit{\c{r}i}\textsuperscript{a} and it says that S\textit{\c{r}i}\textsuperscript{a} often visited Jacob, who was a famous monk in the vicinity of Nisibis, to receive his blessing.\textsuperscript{77}

According to this source S\textit{\c{r}i}\textsuperscript{a} was bishop of Adiabene from 291--317 (actually 316 A.D., because the date is given as 627 of the Greeks).\textsuperscript{78} Sachau dated S\textit{\c{r}i}\textsuperscript{a}'s episcopate from 304--316.\textsuperscript{79} According to Brooks\textsuperscript{80} Jacob became bishop of Nisibis in 308 A.D.\textsuperscript{81}

From this we may deduce that at approximately 300 A.D. — or even a number of years earlier — Jacob lived as an ascetic in the vicinity of Nisibis in the north-eastern part of Syria while the Egyptian monasticism only started penetrating into Palestine at approximately 306 A.D.

But from these sources, including Theodoret's description of the life of Jacob of Nisibis,\textsuperscript{82} even more can be deduced: they relate these facts (Theodoret even in great detail) without giving the impression that it is something new or extraordinary. On the contrary, it is related in such a matter of fact way that it is quite possible that there were many generations of ascetics such as these, before Jacob of Nisibis.

Supra we have mentioned Theodoret's detailed rendering of Jacob's way of life. Actually this is the characteristic trait of the Syrian Monasticism that, despite the influences of western Christianity, it retained such a totally different character from that of the West right through all the ages of its existence. We shall not elaborate on it here, but must at least mention the fact that quite a few of the Greek Churchfathers elaborate on this otherness ("andersheid") of the Syrian monks.

Ephraem of Edessa,\textsuperscript{83} a disciple of Jacob, also speaks of the "wild" way of life practised by his teacher and other (contemporary?) monks. From these sources the following picture of their way of life can be reconstructed:
They lived like and amongst the wild animals; naked, dirty, with long unkempt hair and nails. They ate only fruit and herbs. Their abode in summer was in the open, the heaven being their roof, while in winter they might sleep overnight in caves. They fasted for long periods on end and abstained from the use of clothing and fire, from doing manual labour, etc. while their main task was praying.

In all this we recognise no reproduction of the Egyptian Monasticism or even Anchoritism, but rather the influences of the abovementioned Old Testament examples and New Testament apocryphal writings that were widely read and adhered to in the Syriac-speaking Churches.

Even in later ages when we reach the fully historical or documented period, on which we have ample written sources that describe these phenomena, the Syrian Asceticism and Monasticism differ so entirely from that of Egypt and of the West that we cannot but come to the conclusion that we are dealing here with a movement that developed totally independently from the Egyptian model.

NOTES

4) Cf. Zernov: op. cit., p. 78 as well as the other books quoted above, especially Landwehr: op. cit., p. 140.
7) Cf. i.a. the Ebionites and the Elkesaites.
8) The Nazarenes (Numbers 6, etc.); also to a certain extent the Rechabites (Jer. 35, cf. 11 Kings 10 : 15 and 16).
9) Zernov: op. cit., p. 77.
10) In this lecture the term "Syrian Christendom/Christianity" is used to denote those Christians of northern and eastern Syria whose liturgical language was Syriac.
11) G. Philippus: The Doctrine of Addai, the Apostle, London, 1876, and other editions.
14) In my doctoral thesis "Rabbula, the Bishop of Edessa" this problem is dealt with exhaustively.
20) For more particulars see i.a. P. E. Kahle: op. cit., p. 270 et sqq.

23) Cf. op. cit., p. 67: “If the parallels which we brought forward are valid, then it is hardly possible to refer the Odes to any other time than the first century, or to any other district than Antioch”.


27) Citations from the Odes of Solomon are taken from Harris and Mingana, op. cit., vol. II.


29) Harris/Mingana actually translate this clause “by (God's) will”, while in a footnote they say: “Or, of her own will”. The original Syriac reads literally: “Like a man she brought forth (or, gave birth) with a will”. Klijn: op. cit., p. 61 translates: “Zij baarde als een man met een (vaste) wil”.


36) Papyri Oxyrhynchus, Nos. 1, 654 and 655.


43) Klijn: op. cit., p. 67.


46) The other works are well-known *Acts of Thomas; and The Book of Thomas the Athlete*. Of this book Puech (New Testament Apocrypha, vol. I, p. 308) says: “The style is rather Gnostic and the theme Encratite: condemnation of the flesh, of womanhood, of sexuality; promise of a future rest in the Kingdom of heaven, an αυτοκατανομή, which will be απάθεια, impossibility”.


58) Cf. Patrologia Graeca VI, col. 888 γεννηθεὶς μὲν ἐν τῇ τοιν Ασσυρῶν γῆ (Tatian’s, Oratio adversus Graecos).
61) Owing to the unprocurability of the material in South Africa it was impossible for the present writer (at this stage) to ascertain the exact relationship between the Gospel according to Thomas and the Diatessaron. There are, however, only two possibilities: the Gospel of Thomas is manifestly of an earlier date than the Diatessaron so that either the Diatessaron is dependant upon the Gospel of Thomas or both have a common older source from which they quote.
63) With the name Encratites especially those Christians of the second century are designated for whom it was a matter of principle to refrain from eating meat, drinking intoxicating drinks and having sexual intercourse.
64) Early Versions, p. 17; cf. also A. Vööbus: Celibacy, a Requirement for Admission to Baptism in the Early Syrian Church, Stockholm, 1951, p. 17 et sqq.
69) Zernov: op cit., p. 31.
71) Klijn, op. cit., p. 102.
72) Early Versions, p. 28.
76) Migne: Patrologia Latina, XXXIII, col. 34 et sqq.
81) See however Sources Syriques, note 2 on pp. 123 and 124.