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What does it mean to call the monasteries of Gaza a ‘school’? A reassessment of Dorotheus’ intellectual identity¹

Abstract

This paper investigates the pedagogic theory and practice reflected in the *Instructions* of Dorotheus of Gaza. Recent scholarship has emphasised the school-like character of Palestinian monasticism in the sixth century, but failed to define in what respects the monks’ activity in the coenobia near Gaza resembled teaching in the ancient schools. Taking the education system of the Neoplatonic schools as a starting point, this article systematically analyses Dorotheus’ conceptualisation of his community, his methods in the formation of the brothers and the role of intellectual activities in the daily life of the monks. It is demonstrated that Dorotheus implemented a curriculum of medico-philosophical therapy that followed the pedagogic pattern in philosophical schools and circles. However, what distinguishes his pedagogy from that of ancient philosophers is the strong emphasis on communal psychagogy and the role of practice in the progress to virtue.

Key words

Dorotheus of Gaza; monasticism; education; philosophy; school; Palestine

Introduction

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Only rarely can we catch a glimpse of how ancient writers were judged by their immediate followers. In the case of Dorotheus of Gaza, who founded and led a coenobium in sixth-century Palestine, we are in the lucky position that his body of writings is prefaced by a letter addressed to a monk who had asked for the collection of Dorotheus' works.² Written probably by a Palestinian monk fairly soon after Dorotheus' death, the letter not only gives an idealised image of the abbot, but also tries to characterise the ethos of his writings.³ To pre-empt potential reservation on the reader's part, the letter makes the caveat that Dorotheus had no qualms about drawing on pagan philosophy when he taught his disciples. From a sentence whose convoluted style betrays the writer's circumspection we learn that the holy man did not refrain from employing maxims such as 'know thyself' and 'nothing in excess', but, like a selective honeybee, only made use of pagan philosophical thinking according to the principle of usefulness.⁴ Appropriately enough, the accompanying letter by drawing on the standard vocabulary of schooling suggests that Dorotheus' main activity resembled the job of a teacher addressing his students.⁵ And yet, as if to balance this image, the letter hastens to add that the divine man's style is far from being ornate and elevated. Quite the reverse, Dorotheus, following Paul's precept, addressed also humble, ordinary people in 'pedestrian' style.⁶ Apparently, it was

² Edited in Lucien Regnault and Jacques de Préville (eds.), *Dorothee de Gaza: Oeuvres spirituelles* (SC 92), second ed. (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2001). The Greek text with a German translation, introduction and notes can also be found in Judith Pauli (ed.), *Dorotheus von Gaza: Doctrinae diversae, die geistliche Lehre* (Fontes Christiani 37), 2 vols. (Freiburg im Brsg.: Herder, 2000).

³ For the possible origin and date of the anonymous prefacing letter see Regnault and de Préville, *Dorothee*, 33–35 and Pauli, *Dorotheus*, 26–31, who argues for a later date.

⁴ *Ep. ad frat.* 4: καὶ ταῦτα δὴ τὰ τῶν ἔξωθεν λεγομένων φιλοσόφων, ἅπερ κατὰ τὴν σοφὴν ὄντως μέλισσαν ἀνθολογῶν φέροντά τι χρήσιμον εὑρισκεν, ἀόκνως αὐτὸν εἰς διδασκαλίαν ἐν καιρῷ προβαλλόμενον. The image of the bee is in this context traditional. Most famous is the passage in Basil, *Address to the Young* (*leg. lib. gent.* 4). On the principle of *chresis* in the ancient Church Fathers see Christian Gnllka, *Chresis: Die Methode der Kirchenväter im Umgang mit der antiken Kultur* (Basel: Schwabe, 1984).

⁵ See e.g. the remarks on teaching in *ep. ad frat.* 4 and 6.

⁶ *Ep. ad frat.* 7, with reference to Rom 12:16.

still the norm in a monastic context to insist on the enormous gap that lay between uneducated ascetics like St Antony and the pagan intellectuals.

The anonymous compiler of Dorotheus' extant works would be glad to find modern scholars agree with his verdict. Not only have many in the footsteps of Henri-Irénée Marrou cemented the picture of ancient monasticism as far removed from intellectual ambitions and any concern for formal education,⁷ but, as regards Gazan monasticism and Dorotheus in particular, theologians emphasise, and appreciate, the spirituality and unpretentious lack of refinement that seems to spring from the letters of Barsanuphius and John, and the instructions of their disciple Dorotheus.⁸ The reason why scholars usually concur in this view is that the letter writer's opinion seems to be warranted by Dorotheus' own works, for they appear as largely void of sophisticated rhetoric, even employ words borrowed from Latin and, by their vividness, allow us a fascinating glimpse into Dorotheus' personality. Notwithstanding, recent theological scholarship has firmly established the notion that the coenobia in the vicinity of Gaza were a 'monastic school', a label that implies at least some degree of intellectualism and formal teaching.⁹ The use of the term 'school', however, is seldom discussed and those who employ it nowhere bother to define what they mean by it.¹⁰ It is not hard to see the reason for this absence

⁷ Henri-Irénée Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, transl. by George Lamb (London: Sheed and Ward, 1956) 330, 333.

⁸ See the idealistic portrait in Regnault and de Préville, *Dorothee*, 35–36. Lucien Regnault, "Moines et laïcs dans la région de Gaza au VI^e siècle," in *Christian Gaza in Late Antiquity*, ed. by Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony and Aryeh Kofsky (Leiden: Brill, 2004) 165–172, especially 168 and 170. Pauli, *Dorotheus*, 42–43 also stresses Dorotheus' passing on of practical first-hand experience.

⁹ Lorenzo Perrone, "The necessity of advice: spiritual direction as a school of Christianity in the correspondence of Barsanuphius and John of Gaza," in *Christian Gaza in Late Antiquity*, ed. by Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony and Aryeh Kofsky (Leiden: Brill, 2004) 131–149 ('the idea of "being for the other" may conveniently sum up both the essential dynamics of the human religious experience of this monasticism and its lasting significance as a "school of Christianity"', 148); Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony and Aryeh Kofsky, *The Monastic School of Gaza* (Leiden: Brill, 2006) passim; Rosa Maria Parrinello, "La scuola monastica di Gaza," *Rivista di storia del cristianesimo* 5 (2008) 545–565. See also François Neyt, "A Form of Charismatic Authority," *Eastern Churches Review* 6 (1974) 52–65, here 57.

¹⁰ Alexis Torrance, *Repentance in Late Antiquity: Eastern Asceticism and the Framing of the Christian Life, c. 400–650 CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 125–127, though noticing its vagueness, adopts the term 'school'.

of theoretical reflection, as Barsanuphius' and John's correspondence makes no secret of its didactic purposes, neither in terminology nor in tone.

The discrepancy between the image of the 'simple' Dorotheus and the use of the school label is the more striking as already in 1981 Pierre Hadot in his magisterial book on *Philosophy as a Way of Life* pointed out that Christian asceticism in late antiquity was anything but untouched by the Stoic and Epicurean idea of spiritual exercises.¹¹ One of Hadot's chief witnesses for the common ground of the pagan philosophical mainstream and Christian Fathers was precisely Dorotheus of Gaza.¹² However, although scholars have acknowledged similarities between Dorotheus' ethics and the philosophical tradition, mainly Aristotle and Epictetus, they still tend to downplay the influence of Greek philosophy on the *Instructions*.¹³ If they address theoretical aspects in his works at all, they are almost exclusively interested in reflections of doctrinal debates that can be found in Dorotheus' oeuvre.¹⁴ What the study of his treatises and letters is suffering from is that it is largely uninformed by recent research into the intimate relationship between ancient monasticism and the intellectual tradition. A number of books and articles have

Considering the importance of humility in the correspondence of Barsanuphius and John, he argues that the practice in the monastery at Tawatha constituted a 'school of repentance'. Michael W. Champion, *Explaining the Cosmos: Creation and Cultural Interaction in Late-Antique Gaza* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) 39–41 qualifies the label 'monastic school' somewhat, but points to similarities between secular schools and the Gazan monasteries.

¹¹ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. by Arnold I. Davidson (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1995) 126–144.

¹² See Hadot's comparison between Dorotheus' conception of self-mastery and Epictetus' (*Philosophy*, 135–136).

¹³ Regnault and de Préville, *Dorothee*, 43–44 acknowledge traces of pagan philosophy in Dorotheus' *Instructions*, but lend greater weight to his practical experience. Jean-M. Szymusiak and Julien Leroy, "Dorothee (saint)," in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, vol. 3 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1957) 1651–1664, here 1658. Pauli, *Dorotheus*, 40–41. Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky, *Monastic School*, 158–160 use Hadot's illuminating book only superficially.

¹⁴ Alois Grillmeier et al., *Christ in Christian Tradition, vol. 2.3: The Churches of Jerusalem and Antioch from 451 to 600* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 109–112. Further, Rosa Maria Parrinello, *Comunità monastiche a Gaza: Da Isaia a Doroteo (secoli IV–VI)* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2010) 215–230 studies social mechanisms in Dorotheus' community.

shed light on the indebtedness of the ascetics to Greek learning and shown that monastic writing and practice were in fact cognisant of traditional philosophy and rhetoric.¹⁵

In the light of this revised image of monasticism it is now time to reassess the intellectual profile of Dorotheus and his approach to running a coenobium. If we want to understand accurately the nature of his community we need to examine systematically to what extent Dorotheus' activity was school-like, if it was, and influenced by traditional learning. Since we can no longer put aside what Hadot stated so convincingly about Dorotheus' way of philosophy, it is advisable to address this topic by starting from the concept of the philosophical school in late antiquity, which is mainly represented by the Neoplatonic centres in Athens and Alexandria. We should, however, also take into consideration the teaching of rhetoric ubiquitous in that period, which was not completely separated from the philosophical discipline.¹⁶ The aim of this study is to understand Dorotheus' position in monastic *paideia* and the nature of his spiritual pedagogy. For an accurate image of monastic education in late antiquity we cannot rely exclusively on narrative depictions, such as saints' Lives, but also need to study texts and genres that were applied to instruction in the communities.

Philosophical schools in late antiquity

¹⁵ Lillian I. Larsen, "On learning a new alphabet: The sayings of the Desert Fathers and the Monostichs of Menander," *Studia Patristica* 55 (2013) 59–77. Samuel Rubenson, "Monasticism and the Philosophical Heritage," in *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, ed. by Scott F. Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) 487–512. Philip Rousseau, "Ascetics as mediators and as teachers," in *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages: Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown*, ed. by James Howard-Johnston and Paul Antony Hayward (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 45–59, here 55: 'I believe it was the *schola*, the world of the *paidagogos* ... Here was the *milieu* that the Christian ascetic wished to capture, to colonize, to redefine.'

¹⁶ Robert Browning, "Education in the Roman Empire," in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 14: *Late Antiquity, Empires and Successors AD 425–600*, ed. by Averil Cameron, Bryan Ward-Perkins and Michael Whitby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 855–883 gives a useful overview of teaching in the period under discussion. On rhetorical teaching see Robert Kaster, *Guardians of Language: The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) and Raffaella Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

Daily life and practice in the Neoplatonic schools from Plotinus to the sixth century is amply documented both by literary texts and material evidence. Apart from numerous theoretical texts, mainly commentaries, originating from teaching in the schools, we possess a number of idealised portraits of Neoplatonic philosophers that provide invaluable information about pedagogic practice in both Athens and Alexandria.¹⁷ In addition, recent excavations in Kom el-Dikka have unearthed a complex of classrooms from the late fifth and early sixth century, which has greatly advanced our knowledge of the practicality of schooling contemporary to the Gazan monasteries.¹⁸ From these sources it becomes evident that, although the Greeks did not have a proper term for ‘school’, philosophical teaching, as well as rhetorical instruction, took place in an institutionalised setting and an organised form. Without denying diversity in teaching and differences between larger and smaller schools, we can identify some core characteristics of formal instruction. In the famous schools teachers and students regularly met for lectures and discussions in purpose-built facilities like the excavated auditoria of Kom el-Dikka in the heart of Alexandria. But often classes could also take place in public buildings such as temples or out in the open.¹⁹ Despite the lack of an expression for the school itself, the education sector had a developed terminology that differentiated types of teachers and their profession.²⁰ However, as important as the organisational framework was the close personal relationship between teachers

¹⁷ Richard Lamberton, “The schools of Platonic philosophy of the Roman Empire: The evidence of the biographies,” in *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity*, ed. by Y. L. Too (Leiden: Brill, 2001) 433–458 gives an instructive overview based on the Lives. See also Edward J. Watts, *City and School in Late Antique Athens and Alexandria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006) on the schools’ place in the intellectual milieu of Athens and Alexandria.

¹⁸ Tomasz Derda, Tomasz Markiewicz, and Ewa Wipszycka (eds.), *Alexandria: Auditoria of Kom el-Dikka and Late Antique Education* (Warsaw: Warsaw University, 2007). Richard Sorabji, “The Alexandrian classrooms excavated and sixth-century philosophy teaching,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Neoplatonism*, ed. by Pauliina Remes and Svetla Slaveva-Griffin (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014) 30–39.

¹⁹ See Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind*, 21–34, with regard to rhetorical teaching.

²⁰ Szabat, Elżbieta, “Teachers in the Eastern Roman Empire (Fifth–Seventh Centuries),” in *Alexandria: Auditoria of Kom el-Dikka and Late Antique Education*, ed. by Tomasz Derda, Tomasz Markiewicz, and Ewa Wipszycka (Warsaw: Warsaw University, 2007) 177–345, here 181–208 analyses the categories of teachers in late antiquity, but also points out their fuzziness.

and their students, which was reflected in the widespread use of the metaphor of father-son relationships.²¹

The feature that stands out most clearly from the Neoplatonic schools is their pedagogic method. Teaching practice centred on a set of canonical texts, comprised of Plato's dialogues and, as propaedeutic, the works of Aristotle, in particular the *Organon*.²² Hierarchically arranged according to subject matter, the twelve Platonic dialogues formed a relatively fixed curriculum and prescribed the sequence in which a student became familiar with the different branches of philosophy. These authoritative texts were supplemented by introductory handbooks, prolegomena, which prepared the students for reading by giving a concise overview of Platonic philosophy.²³ Usually the learning experience consisted in listening to the philosopher's lectures and, in all likelihood, participation in discussions accompanying the lectures.²⁴ What characterises the classes most is that the teacher's job largely was to read Plato's dialogues and provide a line-by-line commentary on them. So over the course of their studies, the students read Plato's works in a fixed sequence and learned how earlier commentators had explained them. This teaching practice is documented by the large amount of commentaries surviving from late antiquity on Plato's dialogues and Aristotle's treatises, which, as is generally held, go back to the lectures in the schools.²⁵ They were partly addressed to beginners and partly to more advanced students. It is reasonable to assume that the lectures were also interrupted or followed by questions from the students and discussions about the topics that they had just learned. And we

²¹ See e.g. *Lib. Or.* 3.21, 62.62, ep. 89, 239, 287, 634, 960, 1051, further *Marin. Procl.* 12.

²² See Harold Tarrant, "Platonist curricula and their influence," in *The Routledge Handbook of Neoplatonism*, ed. by Pauliina Remes and Svetla Slaveva-Griffin (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014) 15–29 on the Iamblichian curriculum that dominated Neoplatonic schooling.

²³ E.g. the anonymous *Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy*, usually attributed to Olympiodorus, and the commentaries on Porphyry's *Isagoge*. See Szabat, "Teachers," 196.

²⁴ Szabat, "Teachers," 195.

²⁵ Tarrant, "Platonist curricula"; Champion, *Explaining*, 34–35.

should also note that, despite the philosophical orientation of the exegesis, literary and rhetorical matters played a role as well in the commentary activity.²⁶ Before entering the philosophical schools, the students had of course completed their studies with the rhetorical teacher, and in refutation exercises in the philosophical classes they were supposed to make use of the skills acquired there.²⁷

Given all these parameters, it is fair to say that teaching in the Neoplatonic schools was largely text-oriented, focusing on the exegesis of classical works. From the peculiar nature of philosophical teachings we can glean the principal purpose of the education process: what the lectures with their exegetical focus aimed to facilitate was a proper understanding of philosophical doctrine as enshrined in written texts. The teacher's task was to impart theoretical knowledge about physics, mathematics, theology, ethics and political philosophy to the students so that they gained a thorough and comprehensive understanding of the Platonic system. We will not completely be mistaken to notice certain 'scholastic' tendencies in this orientation of Neoplatonic schooling. That formal, theoretical knowledge was at the forefront of teaching is also suggested by the range of areas that were discussed alongside Platonic philosophy proper: music, astronomy, mathematics and medicine complemented the study of Plato's dialogues.²⁸ However, the picture of philosophical schools in late antiquity would be incomplete without considering the element of social formation. The Lives of Proclus and other philosophers show very clearly that schooling was to a large extent a social experience for both masters and disciples. Eunapius in the fourth century gives us a series of vivid cameos of Neoplatonic student

²⁶ See Lambertson, "Schools," 449 on Proclus' lectures on Homer's epics.

²⁷ Lambertson, "Schools," 446–447. See also Champion, *Explaining*, 36–37 on the overlap between philosophical and rhetorical teaching. With regard to the local background of Dorotheus' monastery, we may add that Aeneas and Procopius of Gaza both combined rhetorical education with philosophical interests.

²⁸ Szabat, "Teachers," 197–198.

life and captures the atmosphere that characterised the community of teacher and students.²⁹ Already the Epicureans had laid great emphasis on philosophical friendship and the same held true for the philosophical circles in late antiquity. Although the classes did not meet throughout the year and the school does not seem to have been the students' place of residence, the community formed a social group of great cohesion. The bonds among its members were strengthened not least by shared religious practices and rituals, as far as the pagan Neoplatonists are concerned.³⁰ Theurgic rites not only facilitated direct contact with the deity, but also formed the school as a religious group. The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus in some aspects even came close to the monastic life as it favoured, in the footsteps of Pythagorean communities, an ascetic life governed by the spirit, the liberation from the passions, contemplation and mystic ecstasy.³¹ It is further important to note that at least the inner circle of the disciples in the schools, in contrast to the number of mere auditors, aspired to translate their theoretical knowledge into practice and devote themselves to the philosophical life.³² Therefore, teaching also comprised moral instruction, guidance on the ideal conduct, as we can see for instance in Hierocles' definition of philosophy in his commentary on the Pythagorean *Golden Verses*.³³ This aim was shared, we should add, by the rhetorical schools. Sophists like Libanius and Aeneas of Gaza

²⁹ See especially Eun. *VS* 478–485 (on Prohaeresius), further Marin. *Procl.* 11–13 for a later account.

³⁰ See e.g. Marin. *Procl.* 28–33, 36.

³¹ Porph. *Abst.* 1.29–36.

³² Lambertson, "Schools," 440.

³³ See Hierocl. *in CA* proem 1: 'Philosophy is a purification and perfection of human life: a purification from our irrational, material nature and the mortal form of the body, a perfection by the recovery of our proper happiness, leading to divine likeness.' Hermann S. Schibli, *Hierocles of Alexandria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 170. The Neoplatonic interest in teaching ethics is also documented by Simplicius' commentary on Epictetus' *Encheiridion*, which was addressed to beginners and taught them the first steps towards the eradication of passions.

equally had the pedagogic ambition to form virtuous and responsible characters who were well-prepared for an active life.³⁴

Dorotheus' pedagogy

This necessarily brief overview of life in the Neoplatonic schools gives us the criteria against which we can assess to what extent Dorotheus' activity in his coenobium near Gaza resembled the philosopher's profession. In a first step, we will analyse whether the abbot himself conceptualised his spiritual care for his brothers as pedagogy. We had already occasion to mention that the introductory letter to the *Instructions* speaks of 'teaching' and 'students' when characterising the life in Dorotheus' monastery.³⁵ When we look at Dorotheus' own writings we notice that this characterisation precisely catches the abbot's self-image. Expressions and phrases such as διδάσκω, μανθάνω and μαθητής pervade the *Instructions* and letters so that the encounter between Dorotheus and his brothers is linguistically marked as a pedagogic relationship.³⁶

Already the first *Instruction*, which with its discussion of renunciation lays the foundation for his monastic ethics, makes ample use of the vocabulary of schooling and, by reference to Scripture, indicates that the author sees himself in the tradition of Christ as a teacher.³⁷ A passage from the fourth *Instruction*, which deals with the fear of God, nicely encapsulates how Dorotheus establishes the relationship between teacher and students. Quoting from Psalm 33 the phrase 'Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord', he elaborates on the prophet's teaching, repeatedly resuming the expressions 'children' and 'teaching', until he has

³⁴ Aeneas presents himself as a teacher of morals in a number of letters to friends and former students (e.g. Aen. Gaz. Ep. 2, 5, 19). In this respect, Procopius of Gaza with his interest in ethics does not differ (see Procop. Gaz. Ep. 2, 104, 106, 139).

³⁵ Ep. ad frat. 4. Dorotheus' role as teacher is also depicted in the Life of Dositheus, his first disciple.

³⁶ E.g. Dor. doct. 1.3, 1.15, 2.35, 2.37, 4.52, 5.61, 12.126, 14.149. Terms related to παιδεύω are, however, infrequent (doct. 1.3, 10.105, 14.155).

³⁷ Doct. 1.3 (quoting Jer 2:30), 7 (reference to Christ as teacher) and 12 (addressing Christ as teacher).

virtually amalgamated his own personality as the monastic instructor with the prophet's educational authority.³⁸ Even more explicit is an episode in the tenth lecture, addressing the question of how one should follow the path of God. There, in characteristic manner, Dorotheus tells his brothers vividly of his own student experience:

When I was studying the pagan culture, from the outset I used to wear myself out and when I began to take the book I was like someone going to touch a wild animal. As I persevered in forcing myself to go on, however, God came to my assistance and I developed such a disposition in reading that I did not know what I was eating or drinking, or how I slept, because of the enthusiasm for my reading. ... So it was that I felt no pleasure in anything except my reading. When I then came to the monastery I used to say to myself, 'If in the case of pagan erudition so much desire and such a fervour arise from the occupation with reading and developing a disposition in it, how much more is this true in the case of virtue?' From this consideration I received much strength. Therefore, if anyone wants to acquire virtue he ought not to be indifferent or distracted by many things.³⁹

This passage is interesting for a number of reasons. First, it is clear evidence that Dorotheus when he had become a monk and leader of a coenobium did not totally sever the links to his

³⁸ *Doct.* 4.50 with Ps 33:12.

³⁹ *Doct.* 10.105: Ὅτε ἀνεγίνωσκον εἰς τὴν ἕξω παιδείαν, ἐκοπίων ἐξ ἀρχῆς πάνυ, καὶ ὅτε ἠρχόμην λαβεῖν τὸ βιβλίον, οὕτως ἤμην ὡς τί ποτε ὑπάγων ἄψασθαι θηρίου. Ὡς οὖν ἔμεινα βιαζόμενος ἑαυτόν, ἐβοήθησεν ὁ Θεός, καὶ οὕτως ἐγενόμην ἐν ἕξει τοῦ πράγματος, ὥστε μήτε εἰδέναι με τί ἔτρωγον ἢ τί ἔπινον ἢ πῶς ἐκοιμώμην ἐκ τῆς καύσεως τῶν ἀναγνωσμάτων. ... οὕτως ἤμην ὅτι οὐκ ἠσθανόμην οἴας δὴποτε ἠδύτης ἐκ τῶν ἀναγνωσμάτων. Ὅτε οὖν ἦλθον εἰς τὸ μοναστήριον, ἔλεγον ἑμαυτῶ· Εἰ ἐπὶ τοῦ ἕξω λόγου ἐγένετο τοιοῦτος πόθος καὶ τοιαύτη θέρμη ἐκ τοῦ σχολάσαι τινὰ τῇ ἀναγνώσει καὶ γενέσθαι ἐν ἕξει αὐτῆς, πόσῳ μᾶλλον ἐπὶ τῆς ἀρετῆς; καὶ ἐλάμβανον πολλὴν δύναμιν ἐκ τούτου τοῦ πράγματος. Οὕτως ἐὰν θέλῃ τις κτήσασθαι ἀρετὴν, οὐκ ὀφείλει ἀδιαφορεῖν οὐδὲ μετεωρίζεσθαι.

former, secular life and the traditional education he had received.⁴⁰ Second, this episode, whose presentation is itself evidently informed by literary skills acquired in the rhetorical school, implies that the monks in his coenobium were not completely averse to the cultural values and institutions cherished by the urban upper class.⁴¹ And third, it demonstrates that Dorotheus recognised striking parallels between studies in ‘external’ *paideia*, mainly rhetoric, and the formation process that the novices in the monastery had to undergo. Careful reading of literary texts under the supervision of the sophist, effort and devotion invested in studies and endurance in exercises throughout the day, the passage suggests, were not so far from what a brother was supposed to carry out in the ascetic community. Apparently, Dorotheus was not afraid to transfer the student experience from the secular schools to the brothers’ ascetic formation. That moral education in the monastery was just a stone’s throw from the practice in the school is further implied by a passage following soon after the quoted episode, where he differentiates the stages of progress in the acquisition of Christian virtue that the monks have achieved since they left the world for the coenobium.⁴² Taken together with the episode of Dorotheus’ total absorption in reading, this passage appears to maintain that, the conversion to a new way of life notwithstanding, the stepwise education process in the monastery is a straightforward continuation of school life. This view should not come as a surprise because nearly all of Dorotheus writings are in one way or another concerned with pedagogy. Usually, he not only discusses and explains his subject matter, first and foremost the ascetic virtues, but at the same time sets out his pedagogic vision, reflecting on the possibility and stages of progress, the

⁴⁰ His transition from life in the milieu of the urban elite to the ascetic life, as well as the tensions caused by it, is reflected in the letters which he received from Barsanuphius and John. See *resp.* 252–254. Hevelone-Harper, *Disciples*, 62–65.

⁴¹ Dorotheus’ vivid narrative episodes arguably owe much to the training in the rhetorical school, in particular to the *progymnasmata*, which included exercises in narrative and description.

⁴² *Doct.* 10.107, making explicit that the novices join the community in order to acquire the virtues.

appropriate learning methods, the role of the good teacher or guide, and the relationship of words and practice in moral instruction.⁴³ We will return to these points later. Here suffices it to say that throughout Dorotheus conceptualises his monastery as a teaching institution, a community of a master and his disciples, thus forming the brothers' mindset and habits.

To pass for a school an institution must have defined subjects and methods, as the Neoplatonic schools clearly had. Both also become apparent from Dorotheus' writings. His *Instructions*, entitled διδασκαλῖαι in the manuscripts, can easily be classified as lectures delivered on specific and manageable topics to an audience of people who are keen to learn. They cover the field of Christian, more precisely ascetic, ethics, ranging from renunciation to fear of God and humility. In the same way as pagan philosophers had done in their talks, Dorotheus addresses in every lecture one single and limited topic or question and deals with it in such a scope that his students gain a sufficient understanding of the virtue under discussion, its sub-categories and relationship to its opposite. One defining criterion of a school is certainly that classes take place regularly over a considerable period of time. This is what also emerges from Dorotheus' *Instructions*. In a passage from the eleventh lecture, *On cutting off affects quickly*, he says that they have already spent two or three hours discussing the topic up to this point.⁴⁴ Further comments make clear that he regularly meets the same audience to teach about virtues.⁴⁵ From these passages we can infer that the members of his coenobium gathered on a regular basis to listen to his talks and that the transmitted *Instructions* are merely short summaries or extracts of these extended lectures. The way Dorotheus addresses his disciples suggests in addition that, similar to the public displays of

⁴³ The most striking example is Dorotheus' *Letter 2*, which is addressed to the head of a monastery and his 'disciples' and sets out guidelines for a proper master-student relationship.

⁴⁴ *Doct.* 11.114.

⁴⁵ *Doct.* 4.50, 7.69, further 1.21 (reference to a previous discussion about Dositheus' life).

sophists, he did not always give carefully planned lectures on chosen topics, but let his students decide about which virtue they wanted to discuss.⁴⁶

When we turn to the level of the individual talk, it is easy to identify the forebears of Dorotheus' *Instructions*. Characterised by recurring rhetorical devices, they display a consistent teaching pattern. Not unlike Socratic dialogues or Aristotle's ethical treatises, Dorotheus' discourses are concerned with the definition of virtues and their counterparts. Often he addresses questions like 'what is the good itself?' and then proceeds to define virtues such as humility and fear of God, adding explanations on their sub-types and giving examples of virtuous behaviour. As we learn from the letters of the Two Old Men, the interest in the precise definition of virtues was something that Dorotheus displayed already as a young novice in the monastery of Seridus at Tawatha.⁴⁷ In keeping with this systematic approach, his lectures are generally structured very efficiently and make frequent use of divisions, for instance when he distinguishes the three dispositions of man towards the affects, which then organises the following reflection.⁴⁸ To ease the brothers' understanding, Dorotheus often sums up the findings of one section of his lecture before moving on to the next and repeats the basic tenets so that they take root in the audience's mind. His audience-oriented teaching style is further visible in innumerable questions with which his lectures are interspersed and frequent addresses to his disciples. One characteristic feature is that he gives the impression that he anticipates questions from them, so for example when he says, 'Should we treat the affect which you said you want to discuss? Do you want us to talk about arrogance? Do you want us to talk about fornication? Or should we rather discuss

⁴⁶ See *doct.* 4.50, 10.108. In numerous passages, for instance in *doct.* 6.73–75, Dorotheus also simulates a class discussion.

⁴⁷ Bars. *resp.* 278, a question addressed to John about humility.

⁴⁸ *Doct.* 10.108; see further 4.48, 4.51, 14.157.

vainglory since we are very much subject to it?⁴⁹ In a further move to activate his audience Dorotheus throughout enlivens his teachings with vivid examples, often taken from daily life both in the monastery and secular society. We have already seen that *Instruction* 10 affords a glimpse into his own student life, and other lectures employ examples taken from gardening, hunting and warfare or make even reference to the hierarchy at the imperial court.⁵⁰ It is worth noting that the examples often relate to the everyday experiences in the coenobium so that the monks can easily connect with Dorotheus' teaching. All these features enable us to discern the pedagogic background to his discourses: the *Instructions* bear all the marks of the so-called diatribe, the preferred format for ethical instruction not only among pagan philosophers of the imperial period but also Christian preachers like John Chrysostom.⁵¹ The dialogic nature and conversational tone of the lectures, as in the quoted questions, instructive examples and brief narratives put Dorotheus' ethical talks on a par with the philosophical discourses of Dio Chrysostom, Maximus of Tyre or Epictetus, with which they also share a considerable portion of their contents.

The *Instructions* are reminiscent of philosophical lectures also in another respect. Philosophical teaching in late antiquity, in contrast to the ethical *dialexeis* and *diatribai* of Stoics and Cynics, was mainly devoted to the exegesis of canonical texts. Dorotheus' talks, although standing in the tradition of moral instruction and exhortation, are not completely lacking in textual exegesis. Several times they start by presenting a passage from Scripture or a saying of the Desert Fathers,

⁴⁹ *Doct.* 10.108: ὁ εἶπατε οἷον θέλετε πάθος καὶ γυμνάσωμεν αὐτό; θέλετε εἶπωμεν περὶ ὑπερηφανίας; θέλετε περὶ πορνείας; ἢ θέλετε μᾶλλον λέγωμεν περὶ κενοδοξίας, ἐπειδὴ πάνυ ἠττώμεθα εἰς αὐτήν;

⁵⁰ E.g. *doct.* 2.33, 13.140, 14.151, 17.179.

⁵¹ On the ill-defined genre of the philosophical diatribe and its Christian reception see Karl-Heinz Uthemann, *Christus, Kosmos, Diatribe: Themen der frühen Kirche als Beiträge zu einer historischen Theologie* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005) 382–394.

which then provides the springboard for a discussion of a virtue. A fine example is the opening passage of *Instruction 4, On the fear of God*:

St John in one of the Catholic Epistles says, ‘Perfect love drives out fear.’ What does the holy man want to indicate to us by this? What sort of love and what sort of fear is he talking about? The prophet in the psalm says, ‘Fear the Lord all you his saints’, and we find countless similar sayings in Holy Scripture. If, therefore, the saints who so loved him feared him, how can he say ‘Love drives out fear’?⁵²

Here, Dorotheus presents a claim made in one of the Catholic letters of John and contrasts it with a quotation from Psalm 33 which seems to contradict it. This exegetical problem then gives Dorotheus the opportunity to explain in more detail the nature of the fear of God and its division into isagogic and complete fear, before elaborating on vigilance, humility and the preservation of one’s original disposition.

The lessons of Dorotheus’ talks are, however, not exclusively derived from Scripture, Christian theology and the Desert Fathers, even though they do not cite any other authors. Despite their overtly Christian orientation, they cannot completely conceal that Dorotheus had read in the field of ‘external *paideia*’ and absorbed the pagan philosophical mainstream. One striking case occurs in *Instruction 10*, which explains the right way of travelling the road of God. After having stated that it is the ultimate goal to make progress in the acquisition of virtue and having introduced the analogy of the sophist’s school, Dorotheus gives a specimen of his secular education, saying,

⁵² *Doct. 4.47*: Λέγει ἐν ταῖς Καθολικαῖς ὁ ἅγιος Ἰωάννης· Ἡ τελεία ἀγάπη ἔξω βάλλει τὸν φόβον. (1 Jn 4:18) Ἐὰρ τί θέλει διὰ τούτου σημαίνει ἡμῖν ὁ ἅγιος; ποῖαν ἄρα λέγει ἀγάπην καὶ ποῖον φόβον; Ὁ μὲν Προφήτης ἐν τῷ ψαλμῷ λέγει· Φοβήθητε τὸν Κύριον, πάντες οἱ ἅγιοι αὐτοῦ· (Ps 33:10) καὶ ἄλλα δὲ μυρία τοιαῦτα εὐρίσκομεν ἐν ταῖς ἀγίαις Γραφαῖς. Εἰ οὖν καὶ οἱ ἅγιοι οὕτως ἀγαπῶντες τὸν Κύριον φοβοῦνται αὐτόν, πῶς λέγει· Ἡ ἀγάπη ἔξω βάλλει τὸν φόβον;

The virtues stand in the middle. This is the royal road of which that saintly elder said, ‘Travel the royal road and count up the miles.’ The virtues are, as I said, middles between excess and defect. ... Therefore, we said that the virtues are middles. Courage, for instance, is the middle between cowardice and foolhardiness; humility is the middle between arrogance and obsequiousness; and likewise, vigilance is the middle between shame and shamelessness.⁵³

We can hardly fail to notice here the traces of Aristotle’s definition of virtue in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, be it that Dorotheus had read Aristotle directly or come across his influential definition elsewhere in pagan or Christian literature.⁵⁴ That his lecture on the progress towards virtue draws its inspiration from secular ethics is further suggested by the first example that he gives for virtue as a middle between excess and defect. Courage, ἀνδρεία, is not a particularly religious or even ascetic virtue, and among Dorotheus’ works there is only one further reference to it.⁵⁵

Apparently, he has taken it from the philosophical tradition, as he has his terminology.⁵⁶ In the passage which I have omitted from the quotation Dorotheus adds some comments on the opposite of virtue, evil. There he insists that evil itself is nothing, for it has neither existence (οὐσία) nor substance (ὕπόστασις). Rather, the human soul when declining from virtue is under the influence of affect and thereby generates evil. The use of the terms ‘existence’ and ‘substance’, otherwise almost absent from his works,⁵⁷ here recalls the intense debate among

⁵³ *Doct.* 10.106: Αἱ γὰρ ἀρεταὶ μέσαι εἰσὶν, ἡ βασιλικὴ ὁδὸς ἐστὶ, περὶ ἧς εἶπεν ὁ ἅγιος γέρων ἐκεῖνος· Ὁδῶ βασιλικῇ πορεύεσθε καὶ τὰ μίλια μετρεῖτε. (Aporhthegmata Patrum Benjamin 5) Μέσαι οὖν εἰσιν, ὡς εἶπον, αἱ ἀρεταὶ ὑπερβολῶν καὶ ἐλλείψεων. ... Διὰ τοῦτο εἶπομεν ὅτι μέσαι εἰσὶν αἱ ἀρεταί· οἷον ἡ ἀνδρεία μέση ἐστὶ τῆς δειλίας καὶ τῆς θρασύτητος· ἡ ταπεινοφροσύνη μέση ἐστὶ τῆς ὑπερηφανίας καὶ τῆς ἀνθρωπαρεσκίας· ὁμοίως ἡ εὐλάβεια μέση ἐστὶ τῆς αἰσχύνης καὶ τῆς ἀναιδείας.

⁵⁴ See Arist. *EN* 2.2, 1104a; 2.6–7, 1107a–b.

⁵⁵ *Doct.* 14.151. Yet courage can become relevant when discussing the monk’s efforts against temptations in terms of the athletic contest. See Bars. *resp.* 258.

⁵⁶ For the discussion of courage see Arist. *EN* 2.2, 1104a; 2.6–7, 1107a–b; 3.6, 1115a.

⁵⁷ There is only one almost identical formulation about the nature of passions in *doct.* 12.134.

Neoplatonic philosophers about the nature of evil. Plotinus had dealt with this problem in respect to the quality of matter, and also Proclus, not long before Dorotheus, had dedicated a whole treatise to the question of whether evil exists and has substance.⁵⁸ This philosophical question, though, had a far more long-standing tradition. Dorotheus' view that evil does not exist and is instead generated by the human soul if it is misguided by passions is reminiscent in particular of Stoic doctrine. According to Epictetus and others, moral evil is a matter of false representation and human misjudgement, while there is no nature of evil in the world.⁵⁹ This is not to say that Dorotheus borrowed his theory directly from Stoic or Neoplatonic philosophers. After all, the problem of evil was, of course, a vexed question in Christian theology, and thinkers such as Gregory of Nyssa and Evagrius Ponticus, themselves knowledgeable about the philosophical tradition, had addressed it.⁶⁰ However, the passage is evidence that ethical teaching in Dorotheus' coenobium displayed overlap with what students in the schools of Athens, Alexandria and elsewhere used to learn. Having said that, it is important to note that Dorotheus' tries to obfuscate his indebtedness to pagan *paideia*. Not only that he never mentions Aristotle or Epictetus by name (not even when he quotes the latter⁶¹), instead he identifies the concept of virtue as middle with the royal road recommended by Scripture and the Fathers⁶² and through quotations from Basil and Gregory Nazianzen gives the impression that his discussion of virtue

⁵⁸ Plot. *Enn.* 3.2.7. Procl. *De malorum subsistentia*. See in particular the formulation of the central question in *De mal. subs.* 11.1. See John Phillips, *Order from Disorder: Proclus' Doctrine of Evil and Its Roots in Ancient Platonism* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Jean-Marc Narbonne, "Matter and evil in the Neoplatonic tradition," in *The Routledge Handbook of Neoplatonism*, ed. by Pauliina Remes and Svetla Slaveva-Griffin (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014) 231–244.

⁵⁹ Epict. *Ench.* 27; M. Ant. 4.39.

⁶⁰ Gr. Nyss. *hom. 7 in Eccl.* (GNO 5.406–407), *In illud: Tunc et ipse filius* (GNO 3.2, 13): 'The nature of evil will tend to non-existence.' See also his *virg.* 12 (GNO 8.1), where Gregory insists that there is no such thing in the world as evil irrespective of a will and discoverable in a substance apart from that. Gregory follows the Platonist tradition of defining evil as an absence of the good and, thus, an absence of being. Evagr. Pont. *vit. cog.* (PG 40.1276); id., *Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.51, 3.59. See Alden A. Mosshammer, "Nonbeing and evil in Gregory of Nyssa," *Vigiliae Christianae* 44 (1990) 136–167.

⁶¹ *Ep.* 2.187 with Epict. *Ench.* 8. The saying can already be found in Bas. *ep.* 151.

⁶² Num 20:17. The letters of Barsanuphius and John also make reference to this concept (*resp.* 58, 226).

and evil is entirely based on Christian theology.⁶³ It seems that he considered it inopportune to infuse pagan theoretical discourse into his monastic ethics.

The influence of the philosophical heritage might even go deeper than the level of individual thoughts. Recently, Henrik Rydell Johnsén has convincingly argued that the fundamental pedagogic pattern that structures Dorotheus' lectures is closely related to the Greco-Roman tradition.⁶⁴ The *Instructions*, as they are arranged in the manuscript tradition, follow a pattern that leads from renunciation to reorientation through the implementation of virtues and exercises, to guidance and the purification of vices, until it culminates in the higher virtues. This pattern can also be found in Plutarch's treatise *On the progress in virtues*, though Plutarch does of course not see the conversion process in terms of a complete withdrawal from the world. The comparison between Dorotheus and Plutarch seems to indicate that monasticism and philosophy display similar pedagogies with regard to moral progress, and that perhaps the monastic pattern originates from the philosophical tradition to which Plutarch belonged. When we take into account that the likely social background of many monks in the Palestinian monasteries was similar to Dorotheus' own, that is, the Greek middle and upper class,⁶⁵ we will not take the case too far if we state that the pedagogic formats applied in the *Instructions* were tailored for students who had been brought up in the classical tradition and perhaps already received some formal schooling.

The close contact between Dorotheus' monastic education and the classical heritage seems to contradict what he himself maintains about the appropriate stance of the ascetics towards the

⁶³ Dorotheus quotes Bas. *hom. in Ps. 7:7*, PG 29.244 and Gr. *Naz. or. 23.1*, PG 35.1152.

⁶⁴ Rydell Johnsén, "Renunciation, Reorientation and Guidance: Patterns in Early Monasticism and Ancient Philosophy," *Studia Patristica* 55 (2013) 79–94.

⁶⁵ Leah Di Segni, "Monk and society: The case of Palestine," in *The Sabaite Heritage in the Orthodox Church from the Fifth Century to the Present*, ed. by Joseph Patrich (Leuven: Peeters, 2001) 31–36. See also Rubenson, "Monasticism," 489–491.

values of the world. His seemingly total rejection of the urban elite's value system is thrown into high relief in *Instruction 2*, which promotes humility as the master virtue of the ascetic life. After relating his conversation with a noble citizen of Gaza whose pride in social status is exposed as unfounded vainglory, Dorotheus proceeds to argue that, in the light of Christian humility, a re-evaluation or rather replacement of the aspirations of the urban elite is necessary. To justify his demand he refers to Moses, who did not evince confidence in his eloquence, as the sophists do, but considered himself unworthy, saying, 'I am slow of speech and of tongue'.⁶⁶ Interestingly, Dorotheus, when quoting Exodus to make his point, suppresses God's reply to Moses, which insists that the human capacity of speech is also a divine gift.⁶⁷ This anti-intellectual, anti-rhetorical bias is in keeping with the following episode, an encounter between Abba Zosimas and a sophist. Any attempt to explain virtues through theoretical discourse, this passage illustrates, is totally misguided, as the desire for exact knowledge is.⁶⁸ No wonder then that Dorotheus carefully avoids using the term 'philosophy', and 'wisdom' for that matter, to describe his ideal of the ascetic conduct.⁶⁹ Evidently, the label of Greek intellectualism per se, although claimed by Chrysostom and others for Christian asceticism, seemed to him unsuitable for defining the road of God.⁷⁰

However, that is not the whole story. Unlike what Dorotheus openly professes, his instruction in the coenobium did have room for intellectual activities. Not only that immediately after revealing

⁶⁶ *Doct.* 2.35, quoting from Ex 4:10: ἐγὼ γὰρ εἰμι ἰσχνόφωνος καὶ βραδύγλωσσος.

⁶⁷ Ex 4:11: 'Then the Lord said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?'

⁶⁸ *Doct.* 2.36.

⁶⁹ There is only one instance of the verb φιλοσοφῶ in *doct.* 10.108, in relation to the second type of dealing with passions, denoting the person who checks the passions, but still has them within himself. The word σοφία occurs a handful of times, with some cases in biblical quotations.

⁷⁰ On Chrysostom's conception of Christian philosophy see now Jan R. Stenger, "Where to find Christian philosophy? Spatiality in John Chrysostom's counter to Greek *paideia*," *Journal for Early Christian Studies* 24.2 (2016) 173–198 (with further references).

the sophist's desire for theoretical explanation as misdirected, he nevertheless gives a satisfactory explanation of the nature of humility. Also testament to the possession and use of books in the monastery is Dorotheus' own life. When he as a young man of a well-to-do family joined Seridus' community he had to give up nearly all of his possessions, but was granted the permission to keep his library for use in the coenobium.⁷¹ Against the backdrop of Dorotheus' upbringing we can speculate that his shelves contained works of literature and philosophy. What we do know for sure is that he owned medical writings as well, which he was allowed to use in the monastery for the benefit of his brothers.⁷² They would be of particular help when he was assigned the task of setting up and overseeing an infirmary. Dorotheus' own works with their frequent medical imagery and his interest in physical health and dietetics still exhibit the fruits of his secular studies. In addition, other 'academic' disciplines such as geometry and professional expertise like architecture also make an appearance in his teachings.⁷³ In one instance, in the context of a discussion of the nature of gluttony and subtle terminological differentiation, Dorotheus frankly refers to the dietetic vocabulary used by 'external', that is, pagan, authors.⁷⁴ Christian ethical discourse, this reference indicates, did not need to shun what pagan thinkers had said on self-mastery and its lack, but quite the reverse could benefit from using their theories. Still more recognisable are the traces of theological reading. Throughout Dorotheus references and quotes the treatises and orations of Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus and Chrysostom.⁷⁵ This practice documents that as an abbot he studied their works intensely and makes it likely that he expected also his disciples to consult the Church Fathers in the monastery's library.

⁷¹ Bars. *resp.* 326. For similar questions about the use of books in the monastery see *resp.* 547, 600 and 606.

⁷² Bars. *resp.* 327. For Dorotheus' work in the infirmary see Hevelone-Harper, *Disciples*, 64–67.

⁷³ *Doct.* 6.78, 14.149–158.

⁷⁴ *Doct.* 15.161. For the terminological differentiation see already Clem. *paed.* 2.1.12.1.

⁷⁵ See Regnault and de Préville, *Dorothee*, 40–44 and Pauli, *Dorotheus*, 35–43 on his sources.

While we can only speculate on the concrete use of secular books in Dorotheus' coenobium, it is absolutely certain that the exegesis of Scripture and Christian writings played a central role in the monastic education. Passages as the opening from *Instruction 4*, quoted above, are evidence that the members of the community used to read and discuss the books of Scripture, and they expected guidance from their Abba on their meaning. Alongside Scripture, the sayings of the Desert Fathers were the core of the monastic curriculum.⁷⁶ They too, as countless quotations in the *Instructions* show, must have been constantly read and discussed in the gatherings so that we can regard them as the vade mecum of the community. *Instruction 5*, for instance, starts the class on not trusting one's own judgement with an exegesis of Proverbs 11:14 and then elaborates on this passage with a detailed discussion of Abba Poemen's views on human will and the pretension of justice.⁷⁷ Finally, Dorotheus' extant oeuvre contains two homilies that are completely devoted to exegesis. There he expounds to his brothers two chants on Easter and on the martyrs by Gregory of Nazianzus.⁷⁸ Considering all these cases of engagement with sacred texts, we can be fairly sure that intellectual activity similar to what was practised in rhetorical and philosophical schools was not alien to the members of Dorotheus' coenobium. Reading and discussing books must have been a regular feature of the ascetics' lives.

This claim is further supported by the role Dorotheus assigned to reading. It is a well-known fact that regular reading and memorising was a key technique in the ancient concept of spiritual exercises. Careful study of the core teachings on virtues and of authoritative maxims was an important step towards the cultivation of correct habits and the practice of virtue. Likewise, as Pierre Hadot has pointed out, writing was considered as meditation, both in pagan and Christian

⁷⁶ For Dorotheus' use of these sayings see Pauli, *Dorotheos*, 37–38.

⁷⁷ *Doct.* 5.61.

⁷⁸ *Doct.* 16 and 17 on Gr. Naz. or. 1 (*In sanctum pascha*) and 33 (*Contra Arianos et de seipso*) respectively.

spiritual exercises.⁷⁹ Dorotheus is no exception. Study of Scripture on one's own, to be sure, could pose risks because it entailed the possibility of misunderstanding and, thus, generating heretical opinions. This danger is present in a number of Barsanuphius' and John's letters and also in the Life of Dorotheus' disciple Dositheus.⁸⁰ However, it is clear that the brothers in the monasteries practised reading Scripture on a regular basis in order to learn about the Christian conduct. Moreover, the prominence of the sayings of the Desert Fathers, and of discussion of them, in Dorotheus' lectures suggests that a collection of these maxims and exemplary stories was available in the library of the coenobium, to be constantly consulted by the disciples as guidance for their behaviour and actions. We need not speculate on the concrete use of these sayings as Dorotheus himself repeatedly instructs his audience on how to study them. After quoting a maxim of one of the Elders he says,

Therefore, each one of you, my brothers, must meditate these words and exercise these sayings of the holy Elders, so that you may be zealous, with love and fear of God, to seek to benefit yourselves and each other. So you are in a position to profit from everything that happens and make progress through God's support.⁸¹

Dorotheus wants his brothers to take the maxims of the Fathers at heart, to memorise them so that they are able to put them into practice. This exhortation strongly recalls what Marcus Aurelius and others recommended on meditation, namely that through the internalisation of pithy rules one is able to deal with any situation at hand. Further, we need to bear in mind that memorising famous maxims such as the *Sentences of Menander* was an important ingredient in

⁷⁹ Hadot, *Philosophy*, 209–211. Michel Foucault has also drawn attention to the practice of 'writing the self', for instance in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981–82*, ed. by F. Gros (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) 358–362.

⁸⁰ E.g. Bars. *resp.* 547, 600–607, 697 and *Life of Dositheus* 12.

⁸¹ *Doct.* 4.60: "Ἴνα μελετᾶτε ταῦτα ἀεὶ καθ' ἑαυτοῦς, ἀδελφοί, ἵνα γυμνάζητε τοὺς λόγους τῶν ἁγίων γερόντων, ἵνα σπουδάζητε μετὰ ἀγάπης καὶ φόβου Θεοῦ ζητεῖν τὴν ὠφέλειαν ἑαυτῶν καὶ ἀλλήλων. Οὕτως δύνασθε ἐκ πάντων τῶν συμβαινόντων ὠφελεῖσθαι καὶ προκόπτειν διὰ τῆς βοήθειας τοῦ Θεοῦ.

classical education.⁸² We may also think of the Neoplatonist Hierocles of Alexandria and his interest in the Pythagorean *Golden Verses*. As his detailed commentary shows, Hierocles made these ethical maxims a part of moral instruction in his school.⁸³ From these parallels we can infer that Dorotheus' use of the Desert Fathers followed the same, long-standing pattern as pagan philosophical exercises.

In the same way as reading could function as spiritual exercise, writing was regarded as a useful tool in reflecting on one's own achievements and shortcomings. Here, it is above all Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*, daily notes (*hypomnemata*) for personal use, that spring to mind, but life in the coenobium also provided opportunities to examine one's conscience by writing about one's concerns.⁸⁴ When Dorotheus was still a member of Seridus' monastery he approached John with a question about the benefit of tribulations. Even before he received a reply from the Old Man, he tells us, he felt relief while writing down his question.⁸⁵ The act of writing about the own thoughts and past behaviour helped Dorotheus to scrutinise his soul and make progress. As with other episodes of self-revelation in the *Instructions*, this account of his experience was intended as a model for his disciples. We can also surmise that they could retrieve further examples of writing as an aid from the library. Jennifer Hevelone-Harper has argued that the collection of the Two Old Men's letters was compiled by no one else than Dorotheus, their preferred disciple.⁸⁶ If this assumption is correct, the library in Dorotheus' coenobium will have contained a manuscript of Barsanuphius' and John's correspondence that provided a plethora of

⁸² Lillian Larsen, "On learning a new alphabet," has drawn our attention to the close resemblance between memorisation of sayings in monastic communities and the use of maxims in classical education. Jerome, for instance, still read Publilius' maxims (he quotes a line in *ep.* 107.8 and 128.4). See Teresa Morgan, *Popular Morality in the Early Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 84–121 on the practice of reading moral maxims at school.

⁸³ Schibli, *Hierocles*.

⁸⁴ Hadot, *Philosophy*, 209–210.

⁸⁵ *Doct.* 1.25.

⁸⁶ Hevelone-Harper, *Disciples*, 76–77.

examples of writing as self-examination. For the letters of various petitioners imply that before seeking advice one must, while writing, reflect on the own thoughts, which is the first step on the ladder to self-improvement. Reviewing the evidence for the presence and use of written texts in the monastic community it is, thus, impossible to maintain the view that Dorotheus sought perfection in total simplicity and the complete withdrawal from intellectual pursuits. Although the study of texts and the acquisition of theoretical knowledge were not an end in itself, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that he considered techniques that were also part of classical pedagogy useful for engendering ascetic virtues and entering the path to Christian conduct. Private study of texts served as practical training, like in philosophical therapy, in order to eradicate vices and cultivate virtues.⁸⁷

So far we have analysed the close links and parallels that existed between traditional schooling and Dorotheus' teaching practice. There was, however, one dimension of monastic *paideia* that, though not absent from the philosophical schools, reflected to a greater degree the specific conditions of a Christian monastery. While pagan spiritual exercises focused on the self-mastery of the individual, communal living was vital to Dorotheus' pedagogic vision. Of course, neither the Stoics nor the Epicureans were blind to the philosopher's place in society and the importance of social relationships. The Epicureans in particular cultivated a distinctive form of philosophical friendship. Their idea of the community of teachers and students as a tightly-knit social network is reflected in Philodemus' *On Frank Criticism*. There we find a circle of friends frankly criticising each other in order to be 'saved by one another'. In this setting of communal psychagogy, self-disclosure was expected from the students, as well as the reporting of errors of

⁸⁷ See also Heinrich von Staden, "La lecture comme thérapie dans la médecine gréco-romaine," *Comptes-rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 146 (2002) 803–822 on the use of reading in ancient physical and mental therapy.

others, for the sake of mutual correction.⁸⁸ Thus, every member of the community depended on friends as advisors and correctors, and was supposed to participate in mutual correction.⁸⁹

However, the Epicureans' vantage point was primarily that of the individual human being establishing a specific relationship to the self, and the Neoplatonists, too, emphasised the solitude of the philosopher in his approach to God.⁹⁰

Christian asceticism in late antiquity is also often associated with the holy man's withdrawal from human company to the solitude of the desert. Yet this hermitic way of life was not to Dorotheus' taste as already the writer of the introductory letter highlighted.⁹¹ Instead of anchoritic renunciation Dorotheus because of his anthropology favoured a monastic community that was based rather on the *mental* withdrawal from the world. Since one of his tenets is that everyone is in need of advice to correct himself, moral progress can only take place in an environment conducive to dialogical learning.⁹² This preference for mutual support is clearly shown in *Instruction 4*, which pays much attention to the monk's relationships with his neighbours.⁹³ Everyone, Dorotheus says, when behaving inappropriately is in danger of doing harm not only to himself but also to others, above all by inducing affects in the brother's heart. Therefore, the elder aims to implement a strict regime of monastic 'surveillance', for the moral benefit of all. If a brother finds fault with one of his peers he should consult one who is able to

⁸⁸ Philodemus, *On Frank Criticism*, fr. 14, 39–42, 47–49, 53–55; the quoted phrase in fr. 36. See Philodemus, *On Frank Criticism*, ed. by David Konstan et al. (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1998) 15–16. Further, Foucault, *Hermeneutics*, 389–391.

⁸⁹ This element of Epicurean friendship possibly influenced also Christian thinkers such as Augustine. See Jennifer Ebbeler, *Disciplining Christians: Correction and Community in Augustine's Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) 45–48. See also Clarence E. Glad, *Paul and Philodemus: Adaptability in Epicurean and Early Christian Psychology* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), on the relationship between Pauline psychology and Epicurean friendship.

⁹⁰ Plot. *Enn.* 6.9.11. Porph. *Abst.* 2.49.1. Kevin Corrigan, "'Solitary' mysticism in Plotinus, Proclus, Gregory of Nyssa, and Pseudo-Dionysius," *The Journal of Religion* 76.1 (1996) 28–42.

⁹¹ *Ep. ad frat.* 1. See Regnault and de Préville, *Dorothee*, 78.

⁹² For the idea of the need for advice in Seridus' monastery see Perrone, "Necessity." Hadot, *Philosophy*, 91 also points out that every spiritual exercise is a dialogue, an exercise of authentic presence, to oneself and to the other.

⁹³ See also the quotation from *doctr.* 4.60 above.

correct the other's misbehaviour.⁹⁴ Dorotheus' detailed account of such a conversation underlines that the whole consideration of the case has to be carried out with fear of God and sympathy and be targeted at the benefit of the one who failed. Equally, though, the mediation process has a profound impact on the informer because he is prompted to reconsider his own role and motives in the affair and becomes aware of his own weaknesses and need for self-mastery. Confession of the own flaws, seeking advice from the more advanced and reflection on one's behaviour towards others are indispensable elements in Dorotheus' pedagogy. Without mutual sympathy, support and guidance no one is able to free himself from passions and return to his initial state of natural goodness. That is why *Instruction 6*, significantly dealing with the refusal to judge one's neighbour, dwells on the analogy of the human organism to illustrate the necessity of assisting each other for the sake of all.⁹⁵

In this regard, it is worth noting that Dorotheus' teaching method differs considerably from that of his two masters, Barsanuphius and John. While subscribing to the same ascetic ideals, the Two Old Men used to teach exclusively through written letters addressed to individuals.⁹⁶ Dorotheus' dialogical pedagogy, by contrast, required a mode that would facilitate joint learning. Therefore, he seems to have preferred the format of the *dialexis*, or lecture, which allowed of discussion and interaction. In the setting of the monastic community, the brothers collaborated in their effort to make progress towards virtue, constantly switching the roles of the advisor and the advisee.⁹⁷ Dorotheus' monastic vision thus bears witness to the tension inherent in monasticism between the formation of the individual in his relationship to God and being for the other,

⁹⁴ *Doct.* 4.53–55. Reporting the faults of brothers and mutual correction already occupied Dorotheus' mind when he lived in Seridus' monastery. See Bars. *resp.* 293–301.

⁹⁵ *Doct.* 6.77–78. For the body analogy see Basil, *reg. fus.* 7 and 24 (PG 31.928–929 and 981–984).

⁹⁶ Letters addressed to a group are a small minority, e.g. 390 and 551.

⁹⁷ The dialogical nature of his pedagogy and the reversal of perspectives is also illustrated by the programmatic *Letter 2*, which instructs both the president of a monastery and those who are under his supervision.

obedience and compassion towards the other.⁹⁸ The Abba himself, of course, stood at the helm, as the imagery of the steersman suggests, yet had completed the same learning process.⁹⁹ Not unlike Seneca in his letters to Lucilius, Dorotheus in his lectures often relates what happened to him and how he responded to situations, sometimes even foregrounding his own achievements. These episodes of self-revelation, though seemingly at odds with the principle of humility, serve an important didactic function as they illustrate the teacher's own progress. They show that Dorotheus may be more advanced than his disciples, but far from being perfect, thus providing to the brothers an excellent role model.¹⁰⁰

The ultimate goal of the collaborative education in the coenobium is the progress towards the reunion with God, which is identical with the return to man's original nature.¹⁰¹ Like the traditional philosophers who had couched the progress in virtue as philosophical therapy Dorotheus frequently employs medical imagery and metaphors.¹⁰² He understands his own pedagogic role as that of the good physician who knows the remedy for the passions and advises his patients on the successful therapy. Medicine, as *Letter 2* makes clear, is a model for the spiritual exercises which lead to self-improvement, with learning seen as the healing of the soul's disease.¹⁰³ Traditional as this conceptualisation seems, Dorotheus nonetheless puts a distinctive

⁹⁸ For the idea of individuality in ancient monasticism see Alexis Torrance, "Individuality and identity-formation in late antique monasticism," in *Individuality in Late Antiquity*, ed. by Johannes Zachhuber and Alexis Torrance (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014) 111–127.

⁹⁹ See *doct.* 5.61 and 64 (following Prov 11:14). Dorotheus also uses the metaphor of showing the way (ὁδηγεῖν), for instance in 4.50 and 5.61.

¹⁰⁰ See in particular *doct.* 5.66–68.

¹⁰¹ See Grillmeier et al., *Christ*, 109–112 and Pauli, *Dorotheus*, 51–53 on Dorotheus' anthropology. For a more developed version of this thought see Gr. Nyss. *virg.* 12. There, Gregory says that the return to the first man can be achieved by turning in oneself and self-examination, so that the beauty of the soul shines forth again.

¹⁰² For philosophy as medical therapy see Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994) 13–40, and Philip van der Eijk, *Medicine and Philosophy in Classical Antiquity: Doctors and Philosophers on Nature, Soul, Health and Disease* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 8–14. Luke Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 104–130 analyses the medical imagery in the Christian conception of spiritual healing.

¹⁰³ *Ep.* 2.182 and 187.

stamp on monastic formation. His discourses, discussions, reading and meditation certainly form part of this constant exercise and therapy. But he is completely clear that formal teaching and intellectual effort alone cannot guarantee the success of monastic education. The ticket to success is physical labour and practical experience.¹⁰⁴ Alongside the overt display of anti-intellectual tendencies, Dorotheus insists that virtue cannot be grasped by theoretical discourse, let alone attained by thinking, but must be sought through exercises by night and day. He not only paraphrases the acquisition of virtue with that of ‘spiritual practice’ (κτήσασθαι ἐργασίαν πνευματικήν), but also stresses the actual physical effort involved in spiritual process.¹⁰⁵ How the link between virtue and body is to be understood is discussed in *Instruction 2*.¹⁰⁶ According to Dorotheus, the master virtue of humility has to be achieved through bodily acts and physical labour. The basis for this view is that the soul is sympathetically affected by the body (συμπάσχει καὶ συνδιατίθεται ἢ ἀθλία ψυχῇ) so that labour and acts of submission can engender a disposition of humility. While Hellenistic philosophy, too, advocated the idea of philosophy as a way of life, with great emphasis on the role of practice and exercise, the weight that is put here on the role of the human body seems to be far greater.¹⁰⁷ And quite naturally so, as Dorotheus saw spiritual perfection above all in terms of medical therapy, as a healing process. The combination of teaching through words and practice, with preference for the latter, is nicely encapsulated in the opening of the pedagogic *Letter 2* where in the advice to the spiritual director, the concepts of mental and bodily formation are intriguingly intertwined.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ *Doct.* 2.35–36, 11.122, 12.129–130.

¹⁰⁵ *Doct.* 10.105. See also 2.33, 2.36.

¹⁰⁶ *Doct.* 2.39.

¹⁰⁷ For the importance of practice, in the sense of lived philosophy, in the Greco-Roman tradition see Hadot, *Philosophy*, passim; Foucault, *Hermeneutics*, 315–319 on the role of practical knowledge and exercises in the acquisition of virtue.

¹⁰⁸ *Ep.* 2.184: Ἐὰν εἴ ἀδελφῶν ἐπιστάτης, φρόντισον αὐτῶν ἐν στρυφνότητι καρδίας καὶ σπλάγχνοις οἰκτιρμῶν, παιδεύων αὐτοὺς ἔργῳ καὶ λόγῳ τὰ πρακτέα, τὰ πλείω δὲ τῷ ἔργῳ, ἐπειδὴ τὰ ὑποδείγματα μᾶλλον ἐνεργέστερά εἰσιν, εἰ μὲν δύνασαι καὶ ἐν τοῖς σωματικοῖς τυπῶν αὐτοῦς, εἰ δὲ ἀσθενὴς εἶ, τῇ τῆς ψυχῆς καλῇ καταστάσει (‘If you

Conclusion

The writings of Dorotheus of Gaza display a sustained and intense interest in pedagogy, mainly in the ethical formation of the members of his community. What he says on spiritual exercises, moral progress and didactic methods reflects a pedagogic practice and vision that bear close resemblance to training in the philosophical schools of Greco-Roman antiquity. Not only that we find in the vicinity of Gaza a community of a teacher and his disciples within an institutionalised setting. More than that, daily life in the coenobium was structured by regular oral instruction and individual study. Dorotheus, fashioning himself as a teacher, implemented a strategic curriculum in order to habituate his brothers to ascetic virtues and imparted formal knowledge as the theoretical foundation of the set of virtues that would lead to the reunion with God. This article has shown that the teaching in Dorotheus' monastery, both in content and methods, followed in the footsteps of classical philosophers, although it has to be said that the Abba could derive most of these elements from earlier Christian thinkers and did not have to directly access philosophical works. More basically, Dorotheus' entire concept of spiritual exercise with the aim of gaining a healthy soul owed much to the idea of medico-philosophical therapy, which had been proposed by Greek physicians and philosophers since long. Therefore, we need to acknowledge the great extent to which Dorotheus' pedagogy was informed by the classical heritage, lest we are deceived by the fallacy of the ideology of the illiterate ascetics.

Having become aware of the intellectual ambitions of Dorotheus' monastic education, we should, however, not underestimate a crucial difference between his coenobium and the

are put in charge of the brethren, in your care of them be strict in thought and merciful in action, teach them the way to live both by word and by deed, but especially by your deeds, because example is more stimulating than words. If you are strong in body, mould them by bodily works; if you are weak in body, by the fruits of the spirit...').

philosophical schools. While textual exegesis and reading had a place in his curriculum, these activities were, in contrast to the Neoplatonic schools, not the mainstay of Dorotheus' pedagogy. Instead, in agreement with the notion of medical therapy priority was given to practice and even physical labour. The study of Scripture and the sayings of the Fathers, accompanied by Dorotheus' classes, can only lay the theoretical foundations, which then must be translated into regular practice. Since Dorotheus puts the acquisition of a firm disposition centre stage, the element of habituation or constant self-improvement gains precedence. As we have seen, this principle is also the basis for the idea of a communal learning endeavour because progress on the road of God cannot be achieved by the individual alone, but only in the context of mutual sympathy, encouragement and correction.

In conclusion, the distinctive profile of Dorotheus' monastic 'school' consists in being an education institution that, as a serious rival to the philosophical schools, pursues constant introspection and practical therapy of the soul. This form of education, instead of being merely a transitional stage in life, can only be practised in a life-long community of teachers and students. Focused on humility and obedience, the formation in the monastery, despite its indebtedness to Greek philosophy, assumes an unmistakable Christian accent. Dorotheus emerges from his *Instructions* as a true philosopher in the classical sense, a therapeutic guide, though one who offers a psychagogy that unites mind and body.