

## ADOPTING A SAINT: ATHANASIUS OF LAVRA AND HIS HAGIOGRAPHER ATHANASIUS ‘OF PANAGIOS’

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It is not uncommon for Byzantine hagiographers to speak about themselves, especially when they had known the saints whose deeds they recorded. Yet such autobiographical passages tend to be of modest dimensions. In most texts we find only one episode, usually a miracle, in which the author appears either as recipient or as witness. Such an episode is also found in *Vita A* of Athanasius the Athonite. Yet there it is supplemented by a passage in which the hagiographer, Athanasius, explains why he wrote his text. This passage is not only exceptionally long but also unusually well crafted. The present article offers an in-depth analysis of the argument. It demonstrates that the author, a member of the Byzantine elite, was an egocentric who believed that he was the sole heir of the monastic tradition that had been created by the saint.



The life and deeds of Athanasius the Athonite, saintly founder of the Lavra monastery, are recorded in two hagiographical narratives, *Vita A*, which was composed in the first quarter of the eleventh century, and *Vita B*, which postdates the year 1028.<sup>1</sup> The texts contain the same episodes and at times even have the same wording, which leaves no doubt that they are closely related to one another.<sup>2</sup> Yet

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- 1 The two texts have been critically edited by J. NORET, *Vitae duae antiquae Sancti Athanasii Athonitae* (CCSG, 9). Turnhout – Leuven 1982. The dates can be established because in *Vita A* Basil II († 1025) and his brother Constantine VIII († 1028) are mentioned as the current emperors, whereas in *Vita B* the same emperors are referred to as being deceased, cf. P. LEMERLE, *La Vie ancienne de saint Athanase l’Athonite composée au début du XI<sup>e</sup> siècle par Athanase de Lavra*, in: *Le millénaire du Mont Athos, 963-1963. Études et Mélanges*, I. Chevetogne 1963, 59-100, esp. 89, n. 89.
  - 2 Three different explanations have been proposed. Lemerle and Noret have argued that *Vita B* was dependent on *Vita A*, Leroy has argued that *Vita A* was dependent on *Vita B*, and Kazhdan and Krausmüller have argued that the two extant texts go back to a lost common model, the *Vita prima*. See most recently D. KRAUSMÜLLER, *An ascetic founder: the lost first Life of Athanasius the Athonite*, in M. MULLETT (ed.), *Founders and refounders of Byzantine monasteries (Belfast Byzantine Texts and Translations, 6.3)*. Belfast 2007, 63-86, with a discussion of the different hypotheses.

they are written in very different styles. Whereas the Greek of *Vita B* is simple and easy to understand, *Vita A* displays the full panoply of rhetorical devices and can only be fully appreciated by an educated reader.<sup>3</sup> The author of *Vita B* has not much to say about himself. He merely informs us that he lived in or near the Lavra.<sup>4</sup> By contrast, the author of *Vita A* is very forthcoming with information about his own person. He not only lets us know that he had once received an excellent education and worked in the imperial bureaucracy but also tells us what induced him to become a monk.<sup>5</sup> This latter theme is developed in three different places: in a passage at the end of a series of miracles, which Athanasius performed during his life-time,<sup>6</sup> in the account of the last posthumous miracle of Athanasius,<sup>7</sup> and in the epilogue.<sup>8</sup>

The best starting-point for the analysis is the first of the passages that I have just mentioned. It begins with the following statement:

Καιρὸς δὲ ἤδη καὶ τὰ περὶ ἡμῶν, ὃ καὶ ἀρχομένῳ τοῦ λέγειν ὑπέσχηται μοι – οὐδὲ γὰρ ταῦτα παραλειπτέον – εἰς μέσον θεῖναι, ὅθεν τε καὶ ὅπως κὰκ ποίου τὸ πρῶτον ὠρμήθημεν λογισμοῦ, καὶ τί τὸ κινήσαν ἡμᾶς τὸν ἀγῶνα τοῦτον ἐνστήσασθαι, ἐπεὶ καὶ τοῦτο μέρος τῶν ἐκείνου θαυμάτων.<sup>9</sup>

Now it is time also to present what concerns me, which has been promised by me even when I started to speak, because this should not be left out either: from where and how and by what kind of thought we were first impelled and what it was that moved us to undertake this struggle because this, too, is one of the miracles of that one (sc. Athanasius).

With these words the author of *Vita A* refers back to a passage in the prologue in which he had announced that he would explain what made him write the text.<sup>10</sup> Having identified his motivation as a ‘miracle’ which Athanasius performed on him he then continues by specifying what this miracle consisted of:

Τί οὖν ἐστί; Μάλιστα μὲν ἢ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς ἀρετῆ, ἧς κατάκρας ἀλοῦς ἐγώ, ὃ ταῦτα γράφων καὶ λέγων, οἷα τῆς φήμης μεγάλα περὶ αὐτοῦ θρυλούσης ἀκούων, ἔτρεφον ἀεὶ τὸν πόθον, πόθεν οὐκ οἶδα, καὶ πάντας ἐνίκα πόθους

3 See NORET (cited n.1), introduction, cxxxv-cxlv, where one finds an excellent analysis of the author's style.

4 *Vita B* 79, 3; ed. NORET (cited n. 1), 213.

5 *Vita A* 2, 10-14; ed. NORET (cited n. 1), 4.

6 *Vita A* 213; ed. NORET (cited n. 1), 103-105.

7 *Vita A* 254, ed. NORET (cited n. 1), 122-123.

8 *Vita A* 255, ed. NORET (cited n. 1), 123-124.

9 *Vita A* 213, 1-6; ed. NORET (cited n. 1), 103.

10 *Vita A* 2, 1-3; ed. NORET (cited n. 1), 3.

ὁ πόθος οὗτος. Εἶτα καὶ λύπη τις ἐπὶ τούτῳ πάλιν ἐτέρωθεν ἀνεφύετο, καὶ συμφορὰν οὐ μικρὰν ἐποιούμην τὸ μὴ τῆς τούτου θέας καὶ τῶν χαρίτων ἐν μετοχῇ γενέσθαι· ἔπειτά μέ τις καὶ θεῖος ἔρωσ εἰσῆει νεύματι θείῳ καὶ πάντων ὑπεριδεῖν ὅσα τῆς κάτω περιφορᾶς ἐβιάζετο· ὡς δὲ καὶ τινα τὸν δυνάμενόν μοι συμβαλέσθαι πρὸς τὸ ποθοῦμενον ἐπεζήτουν, καὶ ὁ μετ' αὐτὸν καὶ παρ' αὐτοῦ μεμαρτυρημένος εἰς γνώσιν ἤλθέ μοι, καὶ ὡς ὁ θεῖος ἐκεῖνος ἀνὴρ πάντων αὐτὸν τῶν ὑπ' αὐτὸν προέκρινε, καὶ μόνον τῆς προστασίας τῶν τοσοῦτων ἄξιον ἔκρινεν. Ὡς οὖν εἰς γνώσιν μοι τοῦτο παρελαμβάνετο, καὶ τὰ τοῦ πόθου πέρας ἐλάμβανε.<sup>11</sup>

What now is it? Certainly the virtue of the man (sc. Athanasius)! Having been utterly smitten by it because I heard fame say great things about him I, the writer and speaker of this, was ever nurturing the desire, wherefrom I do not know, and this desire was vanquishing all desires. Then there was also growing up in its turn some sorrow about this from elsewhere and I was considering it to be not a small misfortune not to have arrived at a participation in his appearance and graces. Thereafter there was also entering me some divine love through a divine nod and was forcing me to overlook all that belongs to the circumvolution down below. But when I was also searching for someone who could help me concerning that which was desired, he (sc. Anthony) who came after him and was confirmed by him came to my knowledge, and that that divine man (sc. Athanasius) had preferred him to all those who were under him and judged him alone worthy of the leadership of such a great number. When this, then, had come to my knowledge, what was related to the desire was finding its end.

At this point there follows a lengthy passage in which the author of *Vita A* explains how he gathered information about Athanasius.<sup>12</sup> Only afterwards is the main theme taken up again:

Ἐγὼ δέ, πρῶτον μὲν τῷ πρώτῳ τῶν ἐμῶν καὶ πάντων καλῶν αἰτίῳ τὸ πᾶν ἐπιγράφων, ὃς τὸν πόθον μοι τοῦτον ἀρχήθην ἐνέσταξεν, ἔπειτα καὶ τῷ αὐτοῦ γνησίῳ θεράποντι, ὃς τοῦτόν μοι τὸν ἄνδρα, τὸν ἐμὸν λέγω διδάσκαλον, οὐκ ἐγνώρισε μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν τοσοῦτων ἀποκρίνας ὅλον μοι δίδωσι φέρων, παιδευτήν τε τῶν θείων καὶ πατέρα τὸ ὅλον, ἀντισπέρω τῆς τοσαύτης εὐεργεσίας καὶ τοῦ περὶ ἐμὲ θαύματος, ὥσπερ ἄλλο τι δῶρον αὐτῷ, τὸν λόγον.<sup>13</sup>

But I, ascribing everything first to the first cause of my and all good things

11 *Vita A* 213, 6-20; ed. NORET (cited n. 1), 103.

12 *Vita A* 213, 20-41; ed. NORET (cited n. 1), 103-104.

13 *Vita A* 213, 41-49; ed. NORET (cited n. 1), 104.

who instilled the desire into me from the beginning, then also to his genuine servant (sc. Athanasius) who not only made known to me this man (sc. Anthony), I mean my teacher, but also separated him from the great number and bringing (sc. him) gives him to me completely as an educator of divine things and father completely, bring in turn for this so great kindness and the miracle about me, as some other present to him, this speech.

After a second defence against an envisaged criticism of boastfulness the author of *Vita A* returns to the events for a third time:

Ἄλλως τε καὶ τί θαυμαστὸν εἰ ἡ πίστις ἡμῶν πλεονεκτοῦσα τὸ πᾶν ἤνυσεν; Εἰ γὰρ ὄρη, τὰ πεπηγότα καὶ ἀκίνητα, μετακινεῖν οἶδε καὶ μεθιστᾶν ἡ πίστις, πόσῳ γε μᾶλλον ἀφιστᾶν τὸν κινούμενον καὶ τοῖς ἀκλινῇ ταύτην ἐκείνῳ τετηρηκόσιν ὀλικῶς ἀποκαθιστᾶν; Δηλοῖ δὲ ὁ τε μέγας ἡμῶν ἄνωθεν πόθος, οὐκ ἄνευ πίστεως δηλαδὴ γεγενημένος, καὶ ἡ τῶν πραγμάτων ἔκβασις, σαφῆς οὕσα πίστεως ἔλεγχος, καὶ ἃ νῦν ἤδη τελοῦνται· καὶ τὸ τὸν παρ' αὐτοῦ μαρτυρημένον οὕτω γνησίως ἀσπάσασθαι, οὐ μαρτύριον ἀψευδὲς πίστεως;<sup>14</sup>

Besides what is so amazing if our faith, taking a larger share, achieved the whole? For if faith knows how to move mountains, the fixed and unmoveable, does it not even more (sc. know) how to separate the moveable and give him completely to those who kept this (sc. faith) unbent for that one (sc. Athanasius). This is shown by our great desire from the beginning which evidently did not happen without faith, and by the outcome of the matters which is a clear proof of faith, and by what is now still happening. And to have so genuinely welcomed him (sc. Anthony) who had been confirmed by him (sc. Athanasius), is this not an unerring testimony of faith?

These passages are typical for the obscure style of the author of *Vita A* who uses complex syntax and has a penchant for abstract expression which is especially obvious in the use of demonstrative pronouns instead of personal names. In order to facilitate the discussion I shall first give a summary of the content.

The author of *Vita A* presents his story in three different versions. In the first version he gives the most detailed account of the steps that led from the conception of the 'desire' to write a biography of Athanasius to the point when he was in a position to fulfil this desire. He tells his readers that he formed this plan as soon as he heard about Athanasius' reputation. Yet at the same time he was worried about the fact that he had no first-hand knowledge of the saint: he had never seen him or experienced him in interaction. Then he developed another

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14 *Vita A* 213, 61-70; ed. NORET (cited n. 1), 104-105.

desire: he wanted to leave the world and become monk. At this point he looked for someone who could help him to realise his goals. This was when he heard about Anthony who as the favourite disciple of the saint and his designated successor had the best credentials as a source for the life of the saint. In the second version the information which had been given before is presented in a much more condensed way. Of the different themes only two reappear: 'desire to write the life' and 'getting to know Anthony'. At the same time, however, additional information is given. The author tells us that Anthony had left a large community and become his spiritual father. This new aspect is also highlighted in the third version where special emphasis is put on the author's 'subjection' to Anthony.

The three passages have been analysed by Julien Leroy who identified the large community as the Lavra monastery on Mt Athos and concluded that Anthony had given up his position as abbot there and come to Constantinople in order to live with the author of *Vita A*.<sup>15</sup> This interpretation is not entirely correct. Patricia Karlin-Hayter has shown that Anthony never became abbot of the Lavra but was ousted by a group of influential monastic officers immediately after Athanasius' death.<sup>16</sup> This reassessment, however, is not the result of a more thorough analysis of the text. Karlin-Hayter could only come to her conclusion because she found evidence in legal sources that supplements the information furnished in *Vita A*. Indeed, for scholars who wish to establish what really happened the text of *Vita A* is deeply unsatisfactory. We neither learn where and how the author of *Vita A* came into contact with Anthony nor are we told in what setting the two men lived together. Yet this does not mean that the text is devoid of interest. A closer look reveals that the historical data supplied by the author of *Vita A* are integrated into a complex explanatory framework from which they cannot easily be separated. Study of this framework can give us an understanding of the self-image of the author of *Vita A*.

The summary has shown that the different versions do not describe successive stages of the author's life. Quite the contrary, they cover more or less the same ground. What is different is the way in which the events are presented. In the first version the steps leading to the fulfilment of the author's wishes appear as a simple list in apparently chronological order, whereas in the second version the author supplies the causes for everything that has befallen him. The two causes to which the events are traced back are God who instils into the author of *Vita A*

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15 J. LEROY, Les deux Vies de saint Athanase l'Athonite. *AnBoll* 82 (1964) 409-429, esp. 412-413.

16 P. KARLIN-HAYTER, Review of LEMERLE, Actes de Lavra, I. Paris 1970. *Byz* 43 (1972) 291-293.

the ‘desire’ to write a biography of Athanasius the Athonite, and the saint himself who lets the author of *Vita A* know about Anthony and ‘gives’ Anthony to him. In his third presentation of the events the author of *Vita A* shifts the focus back to himself but introduces his own ‘faith’ as a supernatural faculty within himself through which he can make things happen in a way that exceeds normal human actions. Thus two explanations appear side by side. Having first attributed ‘the whole’ to God, the author of *Vita A* later claims that his faith achieved ‘the whole.’

The author’s intention is evident: he wants to convince his audience that he has experienced a miracle, something which is not immediately obvious from the events themselves. The starting-point for his argument is the first version in which there are no references to supernatural causes. Therefore one could argue that this passage tells us ‘what really happened’. However, a closer look at the text shows that the description is anything but neutral. The account begins with a sentence which has a relatively complex structure. Afterwards, however, the syntax changes noticeably. The next sentences are main clauses, which are strung together in the simplest possible manner, first through εἶτα καί and then through ἔπειτα καί. The sequence of ‘and then also ... and then also’ is strikingly monotonous. No attempt is made to integrate the single statements into an overarching period or to introduce even the most basic accentuation. The same observation can be made when the sentences themselves are analysed. There are two finite verbs in each sentence which are simply coordinated through καί even where subordination, either temporal or causal, would have been possible. A look at the individual expressions shows that they are equally vague. The indefinite pronoun τις is used in the expressions λύπη τις, τις ... ἔρωσ and τινα τὸν δυνάμενον (instead of a simple τὸν δυνάμενον). Moreover, the author uses verbs in the imperfect – ἔτρεφον, ἐνίκα, ἀνεφύετο, ἐποιούμην, εἰσήει, ἐβιάζετο and ἐπεζήτουν – which gives the passage an air of hesitancy and groping about. This impression is further heightened through the statement πόθεν οὐκ οἶδα, which signals to the reader that the author does not know the cause of his ‘desire’, and the corresponding ἐτέρωθεν which leaves the origin of his ‘sorrow’ equally undetermined.

When we now turn to the second version the contrast could not be more radical. All that has befallen the author is now summed up in τὸ πᾶν, and instead of a string of independent sentences, we find one complex syntactical structure in which the single elements find their place. Moreover, the author of *Vita A* shows himself to be fully in charge. Whereas before he had several times referred to himself either in the accusative or in the dative, he now begins the sentence with the emphatic ἐγὼ δέ. The participle ἐπιγράφων indicates that he has identified the causes behind the events and the finite verb ἀντεισφέρω informs us how he has reacted to this knowledge.

The author of *Vita A* is obviously a great stylist in whose hands language becomes a supple instrument that mirrors exactly the content that it expresses. In the first version he simply registers a succession of emotions and actions that 'happen' within him or to him without being able to identify their causes. The readers are mystified and will look for an explanation that can account for the persistence and intensity of the desire. Thus they are ready to accept the next step in the argument, which supplies the missing causes.

This mode of presentation has obvious consequences for the use of the autobiographical section in *Vita A* by modern scholars. It is necessary for the author of *Vita A* to present his contact with Anthony in such a way that it cannot be ascribed to his own efforts. Like the emotions mentioned before the information about Anthony 'comes' to him as if on its own regard. The two phrases εἰς γνώσιν ἦλθέ μοι and εἰς γνώσιν μοι ... παρελαμβάνετο are chosen to present the author of *Vita A* as the passive recipient of information. This creates a void into which Athanasius can then be inserted who in the second version appears as the one who 'makes known' Anthony. Therefore Leroy's conclusion that the author of *Vita A* has met Anthony 'presque par hasard' must be qualified.<sup>17</sup> This is the impression the author of *Vita A* wants to give of how the contact had been established but not necessarily what really happened. Indeed, it may well be the case that he had already contacted Anthony when he was still at the Lavra. We can conclude that in the case of a sophisticated text like *Vita A* any attempt at extricating 'data' without considering the author's intentions will result in misleading conclusions.



So far we have focused on Athanasius the Athonite as the executor of a divine plan and on the author of *Vita A* who makes things happen through his faith. Now we need to consider the position of Anthony, the saint's favourite disciple. As we have seen Anthony appears in all three versions of the events but is given different roles. First we only hear that he came to the knowledge of the author of *Vita A*, then that he also became his spiritual father, and finally that he had him as a 'subject'. This information is part of the overall framework through which the author of *Vita A* explains the events leading to his monastic vocation and the composition of the text. Analysing this framework will allow us to determine what function the author of *Vita A* ascribed to Anthony.

We have seen that in the first presentation of the events the author of *Vita A* carefully avoids references to his own initiative so that Athanasius could then in a second step be identified as the actor. The same is evidently true for Anthony

<sup>17</sup> LEROY, *Deux Vies* (cited n. 15), 425.

who is not given an active role in the interaction but remains passive. This passivity is even more pronounced in the second version of the events where Athanasius is shown as engineering the contact between Anthony and the author of *Vita A*. With Anthony the saint gives the author of *Vita A* a person who can help him accomplish his aim of writing the *Life*. The vocabulary used is telling: the author of *Vita A* states that Athanasius gave Anthony as a ‘gift’ to him and that he gives the speech as a ‘return-gift’ to Athanasius. Both actors use intermediaries through which they communicate and Anthony is treated like an inanimate object, at the same level as the speech. This is especially evident in the use of the participle ‘bringing’ by which the author of *Vita A* describes how Athanasius made Anthony known to him, and the corresponding ‘I bring in return’, which refers to the author of *Vita A* and his speech.

The same constellation is found in the prayer at the end of the text where the author of *Vita A* addresses Athanasius:

τὰ δὲ παρ’ ἡμῶν, ὅποια, οἷάπερ ὁ παρὰ σοῦ δεδομένος ἡμῖν διδάσκαλος ὑφηγήσατο, τῆς μὲν ἀξίας οὐδ’ ὅσον εἰπεῖν ἀπολειπόμενα, τῆς δὲ προθυμίας οὐδὲν ἐλαττούμενα· ὃν νῦν αὐτῷ σοὶ τῷ δεδωκότι τὸ μεγαλοπρεπὲς τοῦτο δῶρον ὁμοῦ καὶ τὸν λόγον ἀντι παντὸς προσάγομεν, τὸν μὲν εἰς πρέσβιν, τὸν δὲ εἰς ἀντίδωρον.<sup>18</sup>

But what is from us, which and of whatever kind the teacher (sc. Anthony) who is given us has related, (sc. is) lacking in worth beyond words but in no respect wanting in eagerness. Him (sc. Anthony) we now bring to you yourself (sc. Athanasius) who has given this grand present (sc. Anthony) and at the same time also the speech instead of all else, the one as intercessor and the other as return-present.

This prayer again describes an interaction between the hagiographer and the saint. Anthony is a ‘gift’ which ‘is given’ by Athanasius who appears as the ‘giver’, and the speech is the ‘return-gift’. Even when Anthony is called upon as ‘intercessor’ this does little to diffuse the impression that he is an object. Indeed, unlike Athanasius, Anthony is never addressed although he is referred to as ‘*this man*’ and ‘*this splendid gift*’ as if he were present.<sup>19</sup>

We can sum up that already in the first version the events are narrated entirely from the perspective of the author of *Vita A*. And this is even more so in the second and the third versions where Athanasius and the author himself appear as actors. The stress either on the ‘push’ of providence or on the supernatural ‘pull’

18 *Vita A* 255, 9-15; ed. NORET (cited n. 1), 123-124.

19 For the former see *Vita A* 213, 44; ed. NORET (cited n. 1), 104.



exerted on Anthony by the faith of the author of *Vita A* makes it very difficult to come to any conclusion as to how the contact was established. Anthony is never shown as acting in his own right: he is like a pawn that is used by the author and the saint for their own purposes.



So far we have analysed how the author of *Vita A* constructed a personal relation with Athanasius via the saint's favourite disciple Anthony. By doing so he claimed to be the heir of the Athanasian tradition. This claim, however, brought him into conflict with the members of Athanasius' community at the Lavra who could with equal justification regard themselves as the saint's followers.

This meant that he had to cover up the failure of Anthony to become Athanasius' successor in his own monastery. He did so in his usual way: by claiming that the fulfilment of his wishes is the final purpose of all that has happened. As we have already seen he asserts that it was Athanasius himself who posthumously separated Anthony from the many monks of the Lavra. Thus the author of *Vita A* presents his own need and not the revolt at the Lavra as the 'real' reason for Anthony's leaving Mt Athos. Yet he is not content with making this point. Other features of his account show that he believed in the existence of a providential plan that was set in motion long before Athanasius' death and the quarrel about his succession. In the first version of the events the author of *Vita A* explains how he learnt about Anthony in two consecutive statements: Athanasius 'preferred him to all those who were under him', and he 'judged him alone worthy of the leadership of such a great number'. These statements must be considered together with information found in the second version where we read that Athanasius gave Anthony to him 'having separated him from such a great number'. What is implied here is certainly more than just a temporal sequence. The author of *Vita A* has obviously taken great pains to create a resemblance between the three phrases, especially through the repetition of the object τῶν τοσούτων and the series προέκρινε, ἄξιον ἔκρινε, ἀποκρίνας. Thus, he can give the impression that there is a predestined and therefore inevitable sequence discernable in Athanasius' actions. It seems as if Athanasius already knew that Anthony would end up as the spiritual father of the author of *Vita A* when he chose him as his successor.

As has already been pointed out by Leroy, the author of *Vita A* polemicizes against people whose criticism he anticipates.<sup>20</sup> This polemic is already evident in the defence of Anthony as source, which the author adds after the first presenta-

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20 LEROY, *Deux Vies* (cited n. 15), 425-426.

tion of the events.<sup>21</sup> In the second half of the autobiographical section, however, it becomes the predominant theme. It is developed in two passages which are separated from one another by the section in which the author of *Vita A* introduces his faith as agent and which I have already discussed before. The first passage reads as follows:

καὶ μή μοι τις ἐνταῦθα τῶν πάντα ῥαδίων ἐπιφυσέσθω, ὡς ἀλαζονικώτερον κεχηρμένῳ τῷ λόγῳ καὶ τῶν πολλῶν ἐκείνων, ὡς ἂν εἴποι, καὶ σπουδαίων ἑμαυτὸν ἔμπροσθεν ἄγοντι, κακῶς φρονῶν καὶ λίαν ἐπισφαλῶς, καὶ τῆς θείας ὑπάρχων γνώσεως ἄπειρος· μάρτυς γὰρ ἐμοὶ τούτων ὁ ἐμὸς Χριστὸς ἀπαράγραπτος, ὃς τὰ πολλὰ τῷ ἀριθμῷ τέως ἀφείς ἐπὶ τὸ πλανώμενον ἦλθε, καὶ εὐρῶν ἐπὶ τῶν ὤμων ἀνέλαβε, τῇ τούτου μᾶλλον εὐρέσει χαίρων, ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλός, ἢ πᾶσιν ὁμοῦ τοῖς ἄλλοις· ὃν δὴ κὰν τούτῳ ὁ μιμητὴς αὐτοῦ μιμούμενος, τὸ πεπλανημένον τῶν ἀπλανῶν προετίμησε, καὶ τὸν κακῶς πάσχοντα τῶν ἰατρείας μὴ δεομένων, ὡς οὐκ ἐνὸν ἄλλως ἢ δι' αὐτοῦ ἢ τοῦ παρ' αὐτοῦ μεμαρτυρημένου τυχεῖν τῆς ἰάσεως.<sup>22</sup>

And none of those who are reckless in all respects shall rise up against me here as if I used the speech in a too conceited way and thought myself better than those many - as one might say - and eager ones, thinking badly and being exceedingly mistaken and being unexperienced in divine knowledge; for witness without fail of this is for me my Christ who for a while left the many in number and came to the one that was astray and having found it took it up on his shoulders, the good shepherd, rejoicing in the finding of it more than in all the others together. Imitating him in this, too, his imitator preferred that which had gone astray to those who did not stray and the one that suffered to those that do not need a cure, as it was not possible to achieve the cure in any other way but through him or through the one that had been confirmed by him.

In this passage the author of *Vita A* reminds his critics that Christ as the good shepherd also left the ninety-nine sheep in order to look for the one that had gone astray. Thus it should not surprise them that an imitator of Christ would act in similar fashion, preferring him who is a sinner to the holy monks of the Lavra. Here we get the impression that the author of *Vita A* sought to diffuse criticism through a show of humility. However, this is not the whole story. The author of *Vita A* does not say explicitly who the imitator of Christ is. Since he implies that this person left the Lavra to look after him one might first think that he speaks of Anthony. However, the last sentence with its juxtaposition of 'through him' and

21 *Vita A* 213, 20-41; ed. NORET (cited n. 1), 103-104.

22 *Vita A* 213, 49-61; ed. NORET (cited n. 1), 104.

'through the one who had been confirmed by him' shows beyond doubt that the subject is Athanasius and not Anthony who thus is again nothing more than an instrument that allows Athanasius to act posthumously. This means that while the author of *Vita A* appears to placate those who criticise his boastfulness by presenting himself as a needy sinner he in fact steps up his claim. Whereas before he had only mentioned that Athanasius separated Anthony from the Lavra, he now insinuates that Athanasius himself has left the Lavra in search of the lost sheep. The significance of this claim reveals itself when we consider the Byzantine belief that even dead saints could travel from one sanctuary to another and that they did so when they were unhappy with the behaviour of their devotees.<sup>23</sup>

The parable of the good shepherd had allowed the author of *Vita A* to make a self-deprecating statement and thus take the sting out of his claim to be the primary object of Athanasius' care. In the concluding part of the autobiographical section he drops this pretence and makes an explicit claim to superiority over the monks of the Lavra. This passage follows the third version of the events which I have already discussed:

καὶ τὸ τὸν παρ' αὐτοῦ μεμαρτυρημένον οὕτω γνησίως ἀσπάσασθαι, οὐ μαρτύριον ἀψευδὲς πίστεως, ἢ με κάκεινῳ διὰ τῆς πρὸς τοῦτον ὑποταγῆς ὑπέκλινε; Καὶ οὐδεὶς ὁ κωλύσων ἡμᾶς υἱοὺς αὐτοῦ καὶ κληρονόμους καὶ εἶναι καὶ ὀνομάζεσθαι γνησίους. Ἐπεὶ οὖν τοιούτους ἡμᾶς ὁ λόγος ἀπέδειξεν, ἀγέσθω καὶ τὰ τῆς τελευταίας εἰς μέσον βουλήσεως, καὶ ἦν τοῖς τέκνοις ὁ φιλότεκνος ἐν τάξει κλήρου δέδωκεν ἐντολήν, εἰς ἐπήκοον ὑπαναγινωσκέσθω· ἔχει δὲ οὕτως· «Ἐπισκίπτω πᾶσι τοῖς πατράσι καὶ ἀδελφοῖς καὶ πνευματικοῖς μου τέκνοις καὶ παρακαλῶ πάντας διὰ τὴν ἐν Χριστῷ ἀγάπην καὶ ὄρκους καθυποβάλλω ἀπὸ Θεοῦ καὶ τῆς Θεοτόκου, ὑπέικειν καὶ ὑποτάσσεσθαι τῷ ἐμῷ διαδόχῳ καὶ καθηγουμένῳ καθὰ τῆ ἐμῆ ταπεινώσει.» Ταύτην ἡμεῖς αὐτοῦ τὴν τελευταίαν ἐντολήν ὡς υἱοὶ τηρήσαντες γνήσιοι, καὶ τῆς εὐλογίας καὶ τῆς εὐχῆς κληρονόμοι κατέστημεν, καὶ τοῦ μακαρισμοῦ τῶν μὴ τεθεαμένων καὶ πιστευσάντων ἠξιώθημεν· διό, μὴ ὑψούσθωσαν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς οἱ παραπικραίνοντες· οὐ γὰρ μικρὸν τοῦτο θαύματος μέρος παρὰ δικασταῖς ἀδεκάστοις· ἢ γὰρ οὐ θαῦμα, ἡμᾶς μὲν οὕτω σφοδρούς ἀοράτως ἐραστὰς ἑαυτοῦ καταστήσαι, ἑαυτὸν δὲ θερμότατον ἡμῖν καὶ προστάτην καὶ κηδεμόνα παραστήσαι, καὶ ὅπερ οὐκ εὐδόκησε περιῶν, τοῦτο μετὰ τὸ ἀπελθεῖν εὐδοκῆσαι, ὥσπερ ἐν Παύλῳ Χριστὸς ἐποίησεν;<sup>24</sup>

23 Many stories of this kind can be found in John Rufus' *Plerophoriae*, ed. F. NAU, Jean Rufus, évêque de Maïouma, Plérôphories. Témoignages et révélations contre le Concile de Chalcedoine (*Patrologia Orientalis*, 8.1). Paris 1912.

24 *Vita A* 213,69–215,19; ed. NORET (cited n. 1), 105.

And to have thus genuinely welcomed him (sc. Anthony) who had been confirmed by him (sc. Athanasius), is this not an unerring testimony of faith which bent me under (sc. the yoke of) that one (sc. Athanasius), too, through the subjection to this one (sc. Anthony)? And (sc. there is) nobody who will prevent us from both being and being called his (sc. Athanasius') genuine sons and heirs. Since the speech has proved us (sc. to be) such ones, the text of his last will shall be brought forward and the commandment that the child-loving one (sc. Athanasius) gave to his children by way of a legacy shall be read! It reads as follows: 'I enjoin all my fathers and brothers and spiritual sons and entreat all for the love in Christ and subject them to oaths from God and the Mother-of-God, to yield and to subject themselves to my successor and abbot just as to my humility'. Having kept this last commandment of his as genuine sons we have become heirs both of the blessing and of the prayer and have been honoured with the beatitude of those who have not seen and yet believed. Therefore, the embittered ones shall not be puffed up in themselves for this is not a small part of the miracle in the eyes of honest judges. For is it not a miracle that he (sc. Athanasius) made us such ardent lovers of himself in an invisible manner and that he presented himself to us as a most fervent patron and carer and that he granted after his departure what he had not granted while he was alive, as Christ did with Paul?

The centre-piece of this passage is the so-called 'commandment' from the *Diatyposis* of Athanasius which is quoted *in extenso*.<sup>25</sup> In this text the saint had demanded that the monks show the same obedience to his chosen successor as they had shown to himself. The author of *Vita A* sets up the obedience to this commandment as the criterion for whether one can call oneself 'genuine son and heir' of the saint. For the author of *Vita A*, this successor is, of course, Anthony. Thus he insinuates that by not having accepted Anthony as their abbot the monks of the Lavra had broken this commandment and that consequently they could no longer consider themselves the 'genuine sons' of the saint.

Such a title is claimed by the author of *Vita A* for himself. The argument begins in the passage in which he traces back the events to his own faith as agent: there he defines himself as the one 'who has kept the faith to Athanasius unbent'. This theme is then taken up again when the author states in typically paradoxical fashion that his faith 'bent' him under Athanasius' yoke. However, by adding 'through ... subjection' to Anthony, this statement is also linked to the following commandment 'to yield and to subject oneself' to Athanasius' successor. In

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25 Athanasius, *Diatyposis*, ed. PH. MEYER, Die Haupturkunden für die Geschichte der Athosklöster. Leipzig 1894, 123-140, esp. 124, 10-15.

keeping with his intention to construct a direct link with the saint the author of *Vita A* concludes that by being subjected to his successor he is also subjected to Athanasius himself. Here we can again see how the 'subjection' to Anthony is only mentioned by the author of *Vita A* because otherwise he could not apply the commandment to himself.



The discussion so far has shown that the author of *Vita A* regarded the monks of the Lavra as his rivals. In his interpretation of the autobiographical section Leroy has argued that the author of *Vita A* acted as spokesman for the new community of Panagios which had gathered around Anthony in the capital.<sup>26</sup> This view was accepted by Noret who claimed that the author of *Vita A* speaks 'en moine pour des moines'.<sup>27</sup> If this hypothesis were correct, we would need to conclude that the author had abandoned the personal perspective that is visible in all other parts of his text. However, a careful reading of the autobiographical section shows that Leroy's interpretation is incorrect and that it is the author of *Vita A* alone who pits himself against the community of the Lavra.

I will start the analysis with the passage where the author of *Vita A* evokes the parable of the good shepherd in order to defend himself against the criticism of boastfulness. In his paraphrase of the parable he states that Christ leaves the 'many in number' in order to find 'that which has gone astray'. Leroy took this to refer to the 'petit groupe' of the monks of Panagios.<sup>28</sup> However, this is not borne out by the Biblical story where only one sheep is mentioned.<sup>29</sup> This suggests that the author of *Vita A* only speaks of one person, and that is himself. This interpretation is confirmed through the prayer at the end of the text. When the hagiographer begs saint Athanasius 'for the salvation of the soul through him (sc. Anthony) through whom you have decided that it should be shepherded' Anthony again appears as the shepherd of a flock of one, and no reference is made to other monks under his authority.

The same objection must be made against Leroy's interpretation of the use of Athanasius' commandment in *Vita A*. Leroy duly stressed the role of the quotation from the *Diatyposis* as the centre piece of the argument and was the first to recognise the author's stance against the monks of the Lavra.<sup>30</sup> However, again he

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26 LEROY, *Deux Vies* (cited n. 15), 426.

27 Cf. NORET (cited n. 1), introduction, cxxx.

28 LEROY, *Deux Vies* (cited n. 15), 426.

29 *Matthew* 18, 12-13. Cf. *Luke* 15, 5-7.

30 LEROY, *Deux Vies* (cited n. 15), 427.

assumed an opposition between the large group at the Lavra and the ‘petit groupe’ or ‘petit monastère’ in Constantinople.<sup>31</sup> Leroy based his conclusion on the use of the plural in the two sentences that ensconce the quotation of the commandment: ‘there is nobody who will prevent *us* from being and being called his (sc. Athanasius’) sons and heirs’ and ‘having kept this his last commandment as genuine sons *we* have become the heirs of both the blessing and the prayer’. However, the use of the plural in itself is no conclusive proof. In the immediately preceding sentences the new topic is developed out of the preceding theme of the ‘faith’ of the author of *Vita A*. Here the author switches from the plural in the phrase τοῖς ἀκλινῇ ταύτην (sc. τὴν πίστιν) ἐκείνῳ τετηρηκόσιν to the singular in the statement ἡ πίστις με κάκεινῳ ... ὑπέκλινε and then back again to the plural in the sentence immediately before the quotation.<sup>32</sup> The same conclusion can be drawn from the passage following the commandment. After having claimed to be the true ‘sons and heirs’ of Athanasius the author then continues with the sentence ‘and *we* were deigned worthy of the blessing of those who have not seen and yet believed’. This refers back to the beginning of the autobiographical section where the author complains that he had never seen the saint. This first statement, however, is phrased in the first person singular.<sup>33</sup> We must conclude that despite the alternation between ‘I’ and ‘we’ there can be no doubt that not only the singular but also the plural refers to the author of *Vita A* alone. Nowhere can it be shown that the author of *Vita A* acts as a spokesman of a group.

Indeed, the function of the autobiographical section can only be understood when one accepts that the hagiographer juxtaposes the ‘many’ monks of the Lavra with himself as Anthony’s ‘one’ new follower without ever alluding to a community. Small wonder therefore that the author of *Vita A* expected to cause offence and that he felt the need to defend himself against the criticism of ‘being too boastful in his speech.’<sup>34</sup>

This interpretation can be substantiated through analysis of the last posthumous miracle.<sup>35</sup> The content of the episode can be summarized as follows: Cos-

31 LEROY, *Deux Vies* (cited n. 15), 426. Noret follows Leroy when he refers to the quotation from the *Diatyposis* and concludes ‘il prétend être fils et héritier d’Athanasie, avec Antoine, et apparemment, tout son monastère’, cf. NORET (cited n. 1), introduction, cxxx.

32 The subject ἡ πίστις ἡμῶν is taken up again in ὁ τε μέγας ἡμῶν ἄνωθεν πόθος which clearly refers to the author alone.

33 *Vita A* 213, 11-12; ed. NORET (cited n. 1), 103: συμφορὰν οὐ μικρὰν ἐποιοῦμην τὸ μὴ τῆς τούτου θεάς ... ἐν μετοχῇ γενέσθαι.

34 *Vita A* 213, 50-51; ed. NORET (cited n. 1), 104: ἀλαζονικώτερον κεχρημένῳ τῷ λόγῳ. Cf. also *Vita A* 214, 12-13; ed. NORET (cited n. 1), 105, with a quotation of *Psalm* 65, 7.

35 *Vita A* 254; ed. NORET (cited n. 1), 122-123. This passage has been translated by I. ŠEVČENKO, On Pantoleon the Painter. *JÖB* 21 (1972) 241-249, esp. 247.

mas, the ecclesiarch of Lavra, who is staying with Anthony asks to be given as a present an icon of the saint. At Matins of the next day Anthony therefore goes to an icon painter to have a copy made for himself. When he speaks with the icon painter he is told by him that somebody else had already come and asked him to perform this task. As this cannot be accounted for otherwise it is then attributed to a miraculous intervention of the saint.

This episode is also found in *Vita B*.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, both versions are virtually identical.<sup>37</sup> However, in one point they diverge. Whereas in *Vita B* we are told that Cosmas visited abbot Anthony in the monastery of Panagios, the corresponding passage in *Vita A* has the vague τῷ ἡμετέρῳ πατρί and παρ' ἡμῖν instead.<sup>38</sup> This vagueness gave rise to a debate between Lemerle and Leroy. Lemerle argued that the miracle took place in the house of the father of the author of *Vita A* while he was still a layman. There is no need to go into a detailed discussion of Lemerle's argument which was based on the assumption that the author of *Vita A* was a monk of the Lavra.<sup>39</sup> This assumption was convincingly disproved by Leroy.<sup>40</sup> Leroy showed that in *Vita A*, too, the setting of the last posthumous miracle is monastic, pointing in particular to the term κέλλα which clearly refers to a monastic cell and to the reference to Matins.<sup>41</sup> In the introduction to the first volume of *Actes de Lavra* Lemerle repeated his view that the setting was secular and not monastic.<sup>42</sup> However, he did not produce new evidence to substantiate his claim.<sup>43</sup> As a consequence, Leroy's interpretation was accepted by Mossay and Ševčenko.<sup>44</sup>

Leroy, however, went a questionable step further. Taking the testimony of *Vita B* as starting-point he tried to read the existence of a fully developed monastery into the text of the last posthumous miracle in *Vita A*, too. He explained the omission in *Vita A* of an explicit reference to the monastery of Panagios and

36 *Vita B* 78; ed. NORET (cited n. 1), 211-212.

37 Cf. esp. the identical passages in *Vita A* 254, 20-24, ed. NORET (cited n. 1), 123, and *Vita B* 78, 21-22, ed. NORET (cited n. 1), 212.

38 *Vita B* 78, 7-8, ed. NORET (cited n. 1), 211; *Vita A* 254, 4-7, ed. NORET (cited n. 1), 122.

39 LEMERLE, *La Vie ancienne* (cited n. 1), 59.

40 LEROY, *Deux Vies* (cited n. 15), 411, cf. also J. MOSSAY, À propos des «Actes de Lavra». Notes sur les deux *Vies* de saint Athanase l'Athonite. *AnBoll* 91 (1973) 121-132, esp. 131.

41 Cf. LEROY, *Deux Vies* (cited n. 15), 416-418, with a detailed refutation of Lemerle's arguments.

42 P. LEMERLE et al., *Actes de Lavra, I: Des origins à 1204 (Archives de l'Athos, 5)*. Paris 1970, 27, n. 66.

43 In fact, Lemerle's argument reveals an insufficient knowledge of the text. See MOSSAY, À propos (cited n. 40), 131.

44 Cf. MOSSAY, À propos (cited n. 40), 130-131, and ŠEVČENKO, *On Pantoleon* (cited n. 35), 247, n. 20.

to Anthony as abbot by the fact that the locality was known to the audience and therefore an identification was not required.<sup>45</sup> Yet the way in which the author of *Vita A* speaks of Anthony militates against such an interpretation. References to Anthony constitute the main difference between the two versions of the *Life*. In *Vita B* he is referred to as ὁ μοναχὸς Ἀντώνιος, whereas in *Vita A* we find ὁ ἡμέτερος πατήρ instead.<sup>46</sup> From these phrases Lemerle concluded that the author only speaks about a personal relationship between the ‘father’ and the author of *Vita A*, then in a second step identifying this father with the progenitor of the hagiographer. Leroy rejected this view by pointing to the use of ‘father’ in a monastic context. Leroy interpreted ὁ ἡμέτερος πατήρ as the standard title of an abbot and as proof that the author of *Vita A* here speaks for the community he is part of.<sup>47</sup> However, this interpretation creates difficulties: in the same passage the author of *Vita A* also uses – interchangeably – the singular ὁ ἐμὸς πατήρ.<sup>48</sup> Leroy explains this shift with the special relationship between the author of *Vita A* and Anthony.<sup>49</sup> It is, however, not possible to defend such a sharp distinction because the context is in both cases the same.<sup>50</sup> As a consequence, this argument was rejected by Lemerle and treated with caution even by Mossay in his defence of Leroy’s interpretation.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, we must conclude that in the version of *Vita A* there is no sign of the existence of a monastery. The setting for the episode remains vague. All we hear about is a single cell where Anthony himself lived together with a servant.<sup>52</sup>

Thus, one cannot exclude that Lemerle was right in stating that the author of *Vita B* committed an anachronism when he presented Panagios as already existing at the time of the icon miracle.<sup>53</sup> However, this is only one possible explanation.

45 LEROY, *Deux Vies* (cited n. 15), 416.

46 *Vita B* 78, 22-23; ed. NORET (cited n. 1), 212.

47 *Vita A* 254, 7-8. 21; ed. NORET (cited n. 1), 122.

48 *Vita A* 254, 7-8; ed. NORET (cited n. 1), 122.

49 LEROY, *Deux Vies* (cited n. 15), 418: ‘L’emploi unique de ‘mon père’ ne fait pas de difficulté dans ce context.’

50 Indeed, throughout the text the author of *Vita A* uses both the first person singular and the first person plural when he speaks about himself. Cf. e. g. *Vita A* 213, 71-72; ed. NORET (cited n. 1), 105.

51 LEMERLE, *Actes de Lavra* (cited n. 42), 27, n. 65. Even MOSSAY, *À propos* (cited n. 40), 131, is more cautious than Leroy and does not distinguish between ‘my’ and ‘our’ although he still speaks about a monastery. Noret declares that the use of the phrase ὁ ἡμέτερος πατήρ is a ‘fait significatif’ but does not explain why this is so. See NORET (cited n. 1), introduction, cxx.

52 *Vita A* 254, 41-42; ed. NORET (cited n. 1), 123.

53 This would not be the only anachronism found in *Vita B*. Another example is the men-



One can also argue that the monastery already existed but that the author of *Vita A* simply chose not to refer to it.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, it is difficult to picture the assertive author of *Vita A* as a simple coenobitic monk.<sup>55</sup> If he was responsible for bringing Anthony to Constantinople, as he claims in his text, he may have had a special position which placed him outside the community in the strict sense. Due to the lack of evidence, however, this, too, must remain guesswork.

From his autobiographical remarks it appears that the author of *Vita A* was an extreme egocentric who saw himself as the sole object of a vast providential plan. As he was only interested in Athanasius as his 'adopted' saint it follows logically that only the Lavra as Athanasius' monastery is of interest to him and not any other community that Anthony might have founded.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, he clearly considered Anthony as his trove and showed strong signs of possessiveness when he stressed the exclusiveness of his relationship with Anthony through the repeated use of ὅλος, τὸ ὅλον, and ὀλικῶς.<sup>57</sup> While this first and foremost means that the monks of the Lavra did not keep a share of him it also implies that the author of *Vita A* was loath to share Anthony with anybody at all. Thus, it is hardly surprising that the community of Panagios is never addressed by the author of *Vita A*. We can conclude that even if the author of *Vita A* was nominally a member of the community of Panagios this status was of no significance to him.



In sum, the author of *Vita A* not only presents the events leading up to the composition of his text in an extremely selective way but also distorts the information he gives in order to make it fit into an overarching explanatory framework. Within this framework only two actors appear, the author of *Vita A* himself and Athanasius the Athonite. Anthony, on the other hand, is reduced to a mere link and is treated as if he were an inanimate object. Indeed, it seems that the author of *Vita A* would have gladly done without Anthony if Athanasius the Athonite had

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tion of a μονή τοῦ Ζυγοῦ which at the time of Athanasius did not yet exist, cf. LEMERLE, *Actes de Lavra* (cited n. 42), 68, n. 66.

54 He quotes from the *typikon* of the Panagios monastery. See D. KRAUSMÜLLER, *On Contents and Structure of the Panagios Typikon: A Contribution to the Early History of 'Extended' Monastic Rules*. *BZ* 106 (2013) 39-64.

55 The author's interest in coenobitic ideology is indisputable. Yet he seems to have been enamoured with the idea rather than with its reality.

56 This is undoubtedly the reason why Anthony is never identified as abbot. Noret's conclusion is obviously unfounded, cf. NORET (cited n. 1), introduction, cxxxii: 'notre auteur a pour διδάσκαλος et πατήρ – c'est-à-dire comme higoumène, apparemment – Antoine.'

57 See *Vita A* 213, 45. 47. 66; ed. NORET (cited n. 1), 104-105.

still been alive. Consequently, he was only interested in those aspects of Anthony's life which contributed to his plans and omitted everything else as irrelevant. For the same reason he never addressed or referred to the monastic community of Panagios which at that time must already have been in existence. It is difficult to imagine a more egocentric and self-absorbed stance. This shows clearly that the author of *Vita A* had not internalised the monastic value system but was still behaving like a member of the Byzantine elite where relentless self-promotion was the order of the day.

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#### ABSTRACT

Athanasius, the author of *Vita A* of Athanasius the Athonite, included into his text several passages in which he explains why he took up the pen. These passages are not only exceptionally long but also unusually well crafted. The present article offers an in-depth analysis of the argument. It demonstrates that Athanasius, a member of the Byzantine elite, was an egocentric who believed that he was the sole heir of the monastic tradition that had been created by the saint.