

STUDIA PATRISTICA

VOL. CXXIV

Papers presented at the Eighteenth International Conference
on Patristic Studies held
in Oxford 2019

Edited by
MARKUS VINZENT

Volume 21:
Hagiographica
Ascetica
Martyria



PEETERS

LEUVEN – PARIS – BRISTOL, CT

2021

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Consultationes Zacchei christiani et Apollonii philosophi: A Literary Dialogue Arguing for Monasticism

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ABSTRACT

Written as a dialogue between a Christian and a philosopher discussing the content and legitimacy of proper Christian doctrine, the *Consultationes Zacchei christiani et Apollonii philosophi* has often been considered an apologetic work against Judaism, paganism, and heretical beliefs. However, in the third book, in which the dialogue partners discuss different Christian lifestyles, the anonymous author not only argues for Christianity in comparison to other faiths but also for certain monastic ways of living in comparison to other Christian lifestyles. The present article clarifies how the author promotes these lifestyles and it analyses the lifestyles the dialogue approves. This perspective on the *Consultationes* generates new insights about their author and audience as well as about their place of composition.

1. Introduction

‘Please reveal, advisor, the form of life which is most accurate for us to begin with’.¹ This plea of Apollonius to his teacher Zacchaeus stands at the beginning of the third book of the *Consultationes Zacchei christiani et Apollonii philosophi*, an anonymous work which was written between the end of the fourth and the end of the fifth century.² After the first and the second book, in

¹ CZA III, chap. 1.4, ll. 30-1: *quam nos potissimum uiuendi formam inire conueniat, consultus exprome*. The *Consultationes Zacchei christiani et Apollonii philosophi* are cited according to the edition of Jean Louis Feiertag, SC 401-402 (Paris, 1994) as following: CZA and book number, chapter and subchapter, line (e.g. CZA I, chap. 2.2, l. 5). The use of the letters ‘u’ and ‘v’ corresponds with this edition.

² The *Consultationes*’ date of composition is usually set between the end of the 4th and the end of the 5th century. See e.g. Eduard Bratke, ‘Epilegomena zur Wiener Ausgabe der Altercatio legis inter Simonem Judaeum et Theophilum Christianum: Die gallischen Consultationes Zacchei Christiani et Apollonii philosophi. Vorgelegt in der Sitzung am 14. Oktober 1903’, *Sitzungsberichte der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse* 148 (1904), 149-53, 149; Ferdinand Cavallera, ‘Un exposé sur la vie spirituelle et monastique au IV^e siècle’, *Revue d’ascétique et de mystique* 16 (1935), 132-46, 132; *id.*, ‘Consultationes Zacchei et Apollonii’, in Marcel Viller et al. (eds), *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique*, vol. 2.2 (Paris, 1953), 1641-3, 1641; Pierre Courcelle, ‘Date, source et genèse des “Consultationes Zacchei et Apollonii”’, *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 146 (1954), 174-93; Germanus Morin, ‘Die

which Zacchaeus instructed Apollonius in the main issues of the proper Christian doctrine, Apollonius is eager to learn more about how to live an accurate Christian lifestyle. Zacchaeus' subsequent development of adequate forms of Christian living as well as his teaching about higher lifestyles reveals one central aim of the *Consultationes*.

This brings me to my article's main thesis: I am arguing that the anonymous author of the *Consultationes* not only intends firstly to teach people in the proper Christian doctrine, and secondly to convert them. Both of these intentions are declared by him right at the beginning of his work.³ He also has a third intention which he does not mention explicitly, but which is very important for understanding the inner logic of the writing as a whole. This intention is: to promote specific monastic ways of living.

Previous research has mostly focused on identifying the author⁴ of the *Consultationes* as well as on analysing their theological content.⁵ However, all

„Consultationes Zacchei et Apollonii“: ein zweites christliches Werk des Firmicus Maternus', *Historisches Jahrbuch* 37 (1916), 229-66, 231; Jean Louis Feiertag, *Les Consultationes Zacchei et Apollonii: Étude d'histoire et de sotériologie* (Fribourg, 1990), 38-64; *id.* (ed.), *Consultationes*, vol. 1 (1994), 16-22. Feiertag assumes as terminus post quem the years 375-380 and bases his assumption on the fact that in CZA II, chap. 14 in his refutation of the Sabellians' assumption that the Holy Spirit is not God, Zacchaeus applies a way of reasoning similar to the one used in the pneumatological dispute at the end of the 4th century. See J.L. Feiertag, *Étude* (1990), 38-52. According to Pierre Courcelle and Jean Louis Feiertag, the terminus ante quem is the year 484, because in this year the Catholic bishops of Carthage, in their creed which they presented to the Arian Vandals, included sections from CZA II, chap. 2, 3 and 5. See P. Courcelle, 'Date, source et genèse' (1954), 174; J.L. Feiertag, *Étude* (1990), 57-64; *id.* (ed.), *Consultationes*, vol. 1 (1994), 16. However, Courcelle and Feiertag do not consider the possibility that the author of the *Consultationes*, vice-versa, could also have known and used the creed of the bishops of Carthage.

³ See CZA I, Praef.1, ll. 7-10: *in informatione autem duplex bonum sit: quod et religio nostra, sicut est, sancta et simplex, omnibus intimatur, et solent edocti credere quod spreuerint nescientes.*

⁴ Between the 18th and early 20th century scholars such as Edmond Martène and Ursin Durand, Remy Ceillier, Eduard Bratke, Germanus Morin, August Reatz, Pierre Batiffol, and Pierre Courcelle tried to identify the author of the *Consultationes* and to disprove such attempts of others. See Edmond Martène and Ursin Durand, 'Altercatio inter Theophilum christianum et Simonem judaeum. Auctore Evagrio qui initio Saeculi V. floruit', in *iiid.* (eds), *Thesaurus novum anecdotorum*, vol. 5 (Paris, 1717), 1-18; Remy Ceillier, *Histoire générale des auteurs sacrés et ecclésiastiques*, vol. 8 (Paris, 1861), 424-32; E. Bratke, 'Epilegomena' (1904); G. Morin, 'Die „Consultationes Zacchei et Apollonii“' (1916); August Reatz, *Das theologische System der Consultationes Zacchei et Apollonii: Mit Berücksichtigung ihrer angeblichen Beziehung zu J. Firmicus Maternus* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1920), 16-22; Pierre Batiffol, 'Le canon de la messe romaine a-t-il Firmicus Maternus comme auteur?', *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 2 (1922), 113-26; Germanus Morin (ed.), *I. Firmici Materni consultationes Zacchei et Apollonii, ad norman codicum recognitas adiectis adnotationibus criticis et indicibus*, Florilegium Patristicum 39 (Bonn, 1935); P. Courcelle, 'Date, source et genèse' (1954).

⁵ In the 1920s, August Reatz was the first to examine the writing regarding various points of its theology. Towards the end of the last century Jean Louis Feiertag wrote a dissertation on the history of research and the sotériology of the *Consultationes*. See A. Reatz, *Das theologische System* (1920); J.L. Feiertag, *Étude* (1990).

attempts to identify both the author and the place of composition have been refuted. In the 1990s, Jean Luis Feiertag published a critical edition of the *Consultationes* where he suggested to locate them in a monastic *milieu*. This article agrees with Feiertag and goes further: It shows that the *Consultationes* were not only composed in a monastic context but were also written to promote specific monastic lifestyles. This new perspective leads to new conclusions about who the author was, who the audience was, as well as the place where the *Consultationes* may have been composed.

In this article, I am first going to point out the argumentative strategies the author uses to promote monasticism, before I explain the specific monastic lifestyles he approves of. In a third step, I am going to present some implications of focussing on the *Consultationes*' argumentation for monastic lifestyles: I will present new insights about locating their author and audience as well as their place of composition.

2. Strategies of Promoting Certain Monastic Lifestyles

One strategy the author uses in his argumentation concerns the composition of the work. In the first and second books, he establishes a basic knowledge about Christianity which is important for being able to understand his instructions about Christian lifestyles. Also, in the course of the three books, there is a shift from an apologetical to an instructive conversation. Zacchaeus defends his position less and less, and at the same time, Apollonius becomes more and more interested in learning about Christian doctrine as well as about Christian lifestyles.

A second strategy involves the literary conception of the *Consultationes*. Their formation as a literary dialogue enables confrontations with different positions. These confrontations foster processes of developing an opinion about which basic components an ideal Christian belief and lifestyle contain. They foster such processes not only on the side of the protagonists, but also on the side of the author and the audience.

Thirdly, the *Consultationes* pursue an argumentation strategy, which in particular has an opinion-building and opinion-founding function.⁶ In the first two books, an ideal Christian doctrine is developed that contrasts with paganism, Judaism, and heretical movements. At the end of the second book, the author expresses this doctrine in a creed. The third book builds on this ideal Christian doctrine and uses the same method of argumentation: in contrast to deviant, supposedly monastic practices, three actually monastic ways of life are described. The work is thus characterised by a two- or threefold process of developing

⁶ In the process of writing the *Consultationes*, the author not only developed his own opinion, but he also aimed to have an influence on his audience and to found an opinion which others can identify with.

Christian ideals; with each book, the ‘true’ Christian or monastic ideal is more narrowly defined.

A fourth strategy concerns the conditions of being able to understand the Christian doctrine, and thus the conditions for converting to Christianity and for practicing an accurate or higher Christian lifestyle. The author of the *Consultationes* advocates that one cannot only conceive the content of the Christian doctrine rationally but must also believe it. This is because Christian truths of faith can only be understood through a subordination of reason (*ratio*) to faith (*fides*).⁷ At the end of the first book, Apollonius meets this requirement and converts. After this point, *ratio* is not completely switched off, but comes into close contact with scriptural argumentation and is almost replaced by it.

Reasoning with Scripture is another strategy the author uses. Apollonius attaches great importance to scriptural authorities in general, and after his conversion, to the authority of the Bible in particular. In the course of the three books, references to pagan authorities like Plato and the Sibylline Oracles⁸ get replaced by biblical references.⁹ The author of the *Consultationes* thus conveys the attitude that a doctrine that is not based on any scripture – and especially not on the Bible – is less valid. However, scriptural evidence from the Bible is indisputable.

3. Promoted Christian Lifestyles

At the beginning of the third book, Apollonius asks his teacher to tell him more about which lifestyle is most accurate. Zacchaeus lists three aspects that constitute such a way of life: One should believe firmly in God, and if God is truly believed, one should fear him even more. Also, the one who is feared should be loved with all heart.¹⁰ The good which follows is the purity of a simple life as well as a desire to love one’s neighbour.¹¹ Zacchaeus teaches Apollonius that marital life does not displease God,¹² however, practicing celibacy is more honourable.¹³ This is because an elevated Christian lifestyle consists in forgetting and rejecting earthly things, and in desiring heavenly ones.¹⁴

⁷ In the words of the anonymous author, reason is spiritually committed to faith. CZA I, Praef.5, ll. 26-8: *rationem [...] fidei spiritualiter commissam*.

⁸ See CZA I, chap. 4.4-6.

⁹ Biblical references are mostly made to the *Psalms* or the *Book of Isaiah* as well as to the *Gospels*.

¹⁰ See CZA III, chap. 1.7, ll. 53-5: *Itaque prima ac sine discrimine uia est deum firmiter credere, et, cum bene credideris, plus timere; toto insuper, ut saepe iam diximus, formidatum corde diligere*.

¹¹ CZA III, chap. 1.7, ll. 58-60: *Consequens bonum est uitae simplicis puritas, et [...] in proximos studium caritatis*.

¹² See CZA III, chap. 1.13, ll. 99-100: *Coniugia autem honesta deo non displicent, et in procreationibus liberorum sollemnis tori modesta dilectio*.

¹³ This opinion corresponds with Paul’s one about marriage and celibate life (see 1Cor. 7:1-8).

¹⁴ See CZA III, chap. 2.3, ll. 31-2: *oblitus respuensque terrena, caelestia concupisce*.

Asceticism is thus the foundation of every virtuous practice of Christian faith. The higher the degree of observance, the more praiseworthy and salutary the lifestyle.

However, in chapter three, it becomes clear that the author of the *Consultationes* does not promote monasticism in general but focusses on specific monastic ways of life. Zacchaeus differentiates between several types of monks who have different purposes.¹⁵ Some actually only pretend to be monks, but do not deserve to be called monks. One group of these deviants consists of monks who are obsessed by avarice, who desire gifts from weak women and dissuade them from their devotional chastity.¹⁶ The second group of *deuiantes* consists of monks who begin earnestly and make efforts by burning for the purpose of serving justice.¹⁷ However, very soon they give up on their project and move away from their strict custom. They stop practising this lifestyle because they have been softened by those who envy them or who refuse to live this way.¹⁸ Zacchaeus criticises these monks for falling back and giving in to all the temptations of the body, for invalidating their first fidelity as well as for approving the communal life and accusing the proposition of tougher action.¹⁹

The lowest category of true monks, however, includes all who live celibately, who participate in normal life and do not demand seclusion. Their clothing is neither neglected nor humble, and their food and drink is either what they all share, or rarely reduced and cut down on few things. They do not burn with vigour for psalmodies, and they do not interrupt their rest by any night vigils.²⁰

¹⁵ See CZA III, chap. 3.4, ll. 23-6: *diuersa genera monachorum [...] sit etiam diuersitas uoluntatum*.

¹⁶ See CZA III, chap. 3.6, ll. 32-6: *captasque mulierculas uanis opinionibus illudentes, in usum miserae cupiditatis illicitum, dum aut muneribus inhiant, et foeda auaritiae lucra conquirunt, aut dolo subditas uincunt, et a proposito deuotae castitatis abducunt*. J.L. Feiertag (ed.), *Consultationes*, vol. 2 (1994), 180 notes that *Codex Theodosianus* XVI, 2, 20 responds precisely to such a situation. This law, addressed to Pope Damasus by Valentinian, Valens and Gratian, accuses clerics and monks of receiving the heritage of widows and young women and forbids them to do so. Hieronymus' *Epistula* 52.6 to Nepotian reflects the same situation.

¹⁷ See CZA III, chap. 3.7, ll. 36-8: *Alii autem fideliter inchoant, ardentique proposito iustitiae seruire contendunt*. The motive of putting one's life in the service of justice is biblical (see *Rom.* 6:19).

¹⁸ See CZA III, chap. 3.7, ll. 39-41: *Deinde inconsideratius arrepta non perferunt atque a coeptis desistunt, uel certe inuidentium aut adgredi detrectantium persuasionibus molliuntur, atque ab instituti rigore discedunt*.

¹⁹ See CZA III, chap. 3.7, ll. 41-4: *Tum remissioribus adsuefacti in omnem illecebram corporis redeunt, ac primam fidem irritam facientes, communis uitae ordinem laudant ut actum propositi durioris accusent*.

²⁰ CZA III, chap. 3.10, l. 58-chap. 3.12, l. 74: *gradu parua obseruatione contenti tantum caelibes uiuunt [...] communis conuersationis intersunt, et secreta non expetunt [...]. Habitus his nec inhonorabilis, nec abiectus est, et aut idem qui omnibus cibus potusque communis, aut raro abstinent et in paucis recisus. Psallendi perinde uigore non feruent, nullisque uigiliis nocturnam rumpunt quietem*. Garcia M. Colombas wrongly identified this lowest category of true monks with the *remnuoth* mentioned by Hieronymus in his *Epistula* 22 to *Eustochium*. See Garcia M. Colombas, 'Sobre el autor de las Consultationes Zacchei et Apollonii', *Studia Monastica* 14 (1972),

The second group consists of those monks who have a better habit. They live at more remote places, and they all gather at one place, but live separately. Their clothing is humble, and their food is not pleasant. Their devotion to the praise of God is divided into fixed turns of hours. They are persistent with fasting until the evening, and if they have not worked through the day, they feel that food is undeserved.²¹

However, the highest level of observance is practiced by those monks who live alone in the wilderness as well as at rough places of the desert. They only eat old bread without adding any other food. They take a pure beverage from springs. They wear clothes which are either made of fur or goat hair, and their entire life consists of a competition between mind and body. Furthermore, they really constantly give prayers to God. There is a diverse crowd of demons in them and their victorious persistence fights often against the fraud of impure spirits. Their continuance of fasting is persistent, and their nights are passed in vigils.²²

Overall, the celibate way of life is placed at the centre of asceticism. Its strict observance is the criterion for distinguishing true from hypocritical monks.²³ Also, according to Zacchaeus, all truly monastic lifestyles are characterized by a desire to die for the name of God as well as by a longing for the glory of a holy death.²⁴ The *Consultationes* repeatedly mention this ideal of devoting

7-15, 14. However, the *caelibes* in the *Consultationes* and Hieronymus' *remnuoth* have little in common. While the author of the *Consultationes* does not mention that the *caelibes* live in communities, Hieronymus specifies that the *remnuoth* are organized in smaller groups. And while the *remnuoth* do not seem to care much about celibacy, from time to time they fast strictly. The *caelibes*, however, shine only with their celibate way of life – and not with fasting. The only thing the *Consultationes' caelibes* and Hieronymus' *remnuoth* have in common is that they follow almost no strict rules – with the exception of the *caelibes'* celibate lifestyle.

²¹ Literally: 'and nourishment which does not come from work seems not accurate'. See CZA III, chap. 3.13, l. 78-chap. 3.15, l. 92: *Huiusmodi autem consuetudo potiorum est. Locis primum remotioribus habitant [...]. His conueniendi unus omnibus locus est, sed dispar manendi. Vestitus humilis, cibusque non blandus [...], certisque horarum uicibus laudandi deum deuotio distributa. Iugis ieiunii usque ad uesperum [...], et uictus nisi ex labore non congruens.*

²² CZA III, chap. 3.17, l. 99-chap. 3.19, l. 113: *Hi autem, quibus primus obseruantiae gradus est, soli heremum ac squalentia deserti loca habitant [...], pane uetere et sine ciborum adiectione uescuntur, sumentes purum e fontibus potum. Vestitus talibus aut pellicius aut cilicinus est, et totius uitae usus in agone mentis et corporis. Iam uero ad deum incessabiles preces [...]. Inest praeterea multifaria daemonum turba, et dolis immundorum spirituum uictrix constantia saepe congregitur. Continuatio adsidua ieiunandi, noctesque peruigiles.*

²³ Even if it is not mentioned that the two superior monastic lifestyles require a decision for celibacy, one can assume that this is the case. Because in the logic of Zacchaeus, a higher way of life cannot include fewer ascetic virtues than a lower one.

²⁴ See CZA III, chap. 3.20, ll. 117-9: *Pro dei nomine uotiuu mors omnibus, atque optabilis sancti exitus pompa.* Zacchaeus does not express his opinion on the question of whether the desire to become a martyr is what makes a person a monk, or whether this intention rather emerges from the practice of a truly monastic lifestyle. He only notes that the ability for martyrdom is kindly bestowed by God (CZA III, chap. 9.16, l. 113: *Opemque martyrii benignus imper-tiet*). It also remains uncertain whether the practice of an ascetic way of life is only achieved

blood²⁵ and dying for the name of God.²⁶ Because they were written at a time when martyrdom in the sense of sacrificial death was not common any more,²⁷ it can be assumed that they allude to daily martyrdom in faith.²⁸

4. Author, Audience and Place of Composition

As already mentioned, many attempts have been made to identify the author of the *Consultationes*, but all suggestions have been refuted.²⁹ However, even if the author cannot be identified precisely, it is still possible to describe the *milieu* he comes from. His linguistic and rhetorical skills, as well as his knowledge of Christian dogmatics, allow us to locate him in an educated Christian environment in the Latin West. Already Jean Luis Feiertag suggested to situate him in a monastic context. According to him, the defence of monastic lifestyles in chapter three of the third book can only be explained by assuming that the author himself lived monastically.³⁰ However, also the fact that with the *Consultationes* the author intends to promote certain monastic lifestyles speaks for his monastic background. Furthermore, at the beginning of Zacchaeus' doctrine about the highest Christian way of life, he indicates that he teaches what he himself has not rejected.³¹ If at this point the author is talking about himself through Zacchaeus, one can assume that the author may come from a monastic *milieu*, and may even practice the ideal monastic lifestyle. However, because the whole dialogue – and not only Zacchaeus' statements – functions as a mouthpiece of the author, it is not clear which statements and thoughts can be attributed to the author and with which he only dares to engage. It can only be assumed that the teachings and ideals, which both protagonists finally accept, correspond to those of the author. In most cases, they correspond with the

through people's own efforts, or whether a gracious God supports believers in their efforts. In this regard, a certain ambivalence – or rather: a cognitive flexibility – can be noticed. While in one passage God is described as an uninvolved, watching judge of merits (CZA I, chap. 33.8, l. 30: *meritorum arbiter*), in another one he is mentioned as being gentle and protecting and directing his servant (CZA II, chap. 20.3, l. 23: *famulum placidus tueatur et dirigat*). And even if it is emphasized that believers should follow the example of Christ (CZA III, chap. 2.3, ll. 26-7: *exemplum [...] sequamini*), they still need to be protected against all ambushes of an infesting enemy through participation in the spiritual sacrifice (see CZA II, chap. 7.13, ll. 80-1: *contra omnes insidias infestantis inimici spiritalis sacrificii admixtione munimur*).

²⁵ See e.g. CZA III, chap. 10.5, l. 37: *deuotio sanguinis*.

²⁶ See e.g. CZA III, Praef.5, ll. 27-8: *mori quoque pro eius nomine*.

²⁷ Since Galerius' edict of tolerance 311 blood martyrdom barely occurred anymore, and with Constantine it definitely found to an end.

²⁸ Since Athanasius' *Vita Antonii* this idea has been quite popular in monastic circles. Athanasius, *Vita Antonii* 47 calls it μαρτυρῶν τῆ συνειδήσει, martyrdom of consciousness.

²⁹ See page 182, note 4.

³⁰ See J.L. Feiertag (ed.), *Consultationes*, vol. 1 (1994), 23.

³¹ CZA III, chap. 2.3, l. 28: *doceo, quae ipse non renui*.

views of Zacchaeus. That is why it seems reasonable to assume his statements as the main source of the author's teaching.³²

In some aspects, the author of the *Consultationes* differs from the official doctrine of the councils. This becomes particularly obvious in the creed which Zacchaeus formulates and teaches towards the end of the second book.³³ Its division into three parts reminds of established ecumenical creeds, such as the Nicene Creed and the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. In comparison with these two creeds, the *Consultationes* do not attribute omnipotence to God the Father, and do not call Jesus Christ by his name; they only speak of the 'Son' (*filius*).³⁴ Also, great importance is given to the Holy Spirit; his functions are described far more extensively than in the two established creeds. Finally, one statement stands out: *natus ex uirgine non credatur*.³⁵ The *Consultationes* explicitly deny the virgin birth and thus clearly disagree with the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.

The *Consultationes'* intended audience is probably part of a higher social class. The high Latin in which the *Consultationes* were written may have appealed especially to aristocrats. Also, it is very likely that the *Consultationes* address people who are already familiar with Christianity and monasticism. A basic knowledge of the Christian doctrine as well as a certain familiarity with monastic ideas is essential for being able to follow the argumentation of the *Consultationes*. For example, Zacchaeus and Apollonius do not begin with the principles of the Christian doctrine, and first of all talk about the fact that Jesus Christ was God and man, and that the Christian God is triune. Rather, they already debate to what extent the humanity and divinity of Christ is possible, and how the Holy Trinity functions. Furthermore, the motive of martyrdom which is introduced in the last chapter of the *Consultationes* can only be understood by readers who are familiar with the idea of the monastic way of living as a daily martyrdom in faith. This assessment corresponds with Maijastina Kahlos' and Richard Lim's observations on late antique dialogues in general. While Lim states that 'early Christian texts were principally addressed to an internal Christian audience',³⁶ Kahlos focusses in particular on apologetic and polemical writings which 'should be seen as maintaining discipline and reinforcing group identity among Christians themselves, insiders, rather than as

³² However, this interpretation opposes August Reatz, who supposes that the anonymous author only expresses himself through Zacchaeus. See A. Reatz, *Das theologische System* (1920), 7.

³³ See CZA II, chap. 19.4-7.

³⁴ Throughout the work Jesus Christ is never called with his name; he is always referred to as 'Son' (*filius*) or 'Lord' (*dominus*).

³⁵ CZA II, chap. 19.5, l. 30.

³⁶ Richard Lim, 'Christians, dialogues and patterns of sociability in late antiquity', in Simon Goldhill (ed.), *The End of Dialogue in Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2008), 151-72, 157.

communication with pagans, outsiders'.³⁷ Also, the composition of the dialogue sections as teacher-student conversations, as well as the declared intention of the *Consultationes* to instruct, indicate that they were probably written in an educational context. It is reasonable to assume that the *Consultationes* address people who are interested in getting instructed and who will possibly spread what they have learned to others.

Even if it is unclear whether the people who are mentioned to be present³⁸ can be identified with the audience, this cannot be completely excluded. Both groups are in the role of observers who witness the dialogue from an external perspective. However, one particular aspect distinguishes the two groups: The readers of the *Consultationes* have a certain additional knowledge – mediated in the frame sections – which is not accessible for the fictitious audience.

In previous research, Italy, Gaul and North Africa have been considered possible places of composition.³⁹ Arguments have mostly focused on linguistic characteristics and parallels to works of other authors, while up to now the context of the *Consultationes* has not often been considered.⁴⁰ However, the above-mentioned reflection on the author and the audience indicates that it is very likely that the *Consultationes* were written in a well-educated Christian monastic context.

There are good reasons for locating them in Late Antique Gaul. In the course of a mass conversion of the aristocracy to Christianity,⁴¹ an educated Christian upper class emerged. These aristocrats were interested in learning more about the proper Christian doctrine as well as about accurate and elevated Christian lifestyles. The ascetic ideal promoted in the *Consultationes* is compatible with the ideal of the contemporary Gallic monks, and also of the Gallic upper class. Martin Krön mentions three further characteristics which are typical for Late

³⁷ Maijastina Kahlos, *Debate and Dialogue: Christian and Pagan Cultures c.360-430* (Aldershot, 2007), 56. However, it cannot be excluded that the *Consultationes* also address people who were not familiar with the motive of daily martyrdom in faith. Through reading the *Consultationes*, they may have become curious and eager to learn more about it.

³⁸ CZA I, chap. 1.1, l. 3: *His qui adsunt*.

³⁹ While Jean Paul Migne and Pierre Courcelle locate the *Consultationes* in North Africa, Germanus Morin and Garcia M. Colombas assume Italy as their place of composition. Eduard Bratke locates them in Gaul. See P. Courcelle, 'Date, source et genèse' (1954); Jean Paul Migne (ed.), *Consultationum Zacchaei Christiani et Apollonii Philosophi: Libri Tres*, PL 20 (Paris, 1845), 1067B; G. Morin, 'Die „Consultationes Zacchei et Apollonii“' (1916); G.M. Colombas, 'Sobre el autor' (1972); E. Bratke, 'Epilegomena' (1904).

⁴⁰ Only Jean Louis Feiertag mentions some considerations concerning the context of the *Consultationes*. See J.L. Feiertag (ed.), *Consultationes*, vol. 1 (1994), 22-31.

⁴¹ Richard Bartlett points out that in fifth-century Gaul, there was a shift of the aristocracy towards the church. Many aristocrats committed themselves to the monastic way of life and more than a few, usually in a second step, took on a spiritual office. See Richard Bartlett, 'Aristocracy and Asceticism. The letters of Ennodius and the Gallic and Italian Churches', in Ralph W. Mathisen and Danuta Shanzer (eds), *Society and Culture in Late Antique Gaul. Revisiting the Sources* (Aldershot, Burlington, Singapore, Sydney, 2001), 201-16.

Antique Gaul. First, there is the conviction that one can achieve a much greater perfection by living as a monk than as a lay person. Second, this perfection is reflected in a better understanding of the Scripture.⁴² Third, it is characteristic that people who practise a lower way of life were warmly invited to strive towards a higher one.⁴³ All three of these aspects are found in the *Consultationes*.

As Steffen Diefenbach points out, in fifth-century Gaul, there was a conflict between different views on the connection between asceticism and power. On the one hand, there were ascetic aristocrats living without a close connection to an ecclesiastical office, and on the other hand, there were Senate aristocrats for whom an ascetic life was connected to an integration into the clergy and culminated in becoming a bishop.⁴⁴ Because the *Consultationes* advocate for an ascetic way of life as preparation for life after death, and because they do not consider an ascetic lifestyle as a means to obtain a bishop's office, and thus power, they are clearly to be located in the circle of the first group of ascetics.⁴⁵

Also, there is evidence that all of the conveyed manuscripts originate from Gaul. Because they were written between the 10th and the 12th century, they at least indicate that the *Consultationes* were especially widespread in Gaul at that time.

However, it is difficult to determine the exact place of composition, especially because many of the developments mentioned are typical for Gaul but may have taken place in a similar way in either Italy or North Africa. Also, through people like Jerome and Paulinus of Nola it is known that ecclesiastics from Gaul, Italy and North Africa were in frequent exchange with each other. This interchange of information certainly enabled them to develop a similar language as well as similar – or also contrary – opinions, e.g. on the ideal Christian lifestyle.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, my analysis suggests that we can locate the *Consultationes* in an intellectual, educational and monastic context – maybe in fifth-century Gaul. While the author probably lived a monastic lifestyle himself, the intended audience is most likely already familiar with monasticism.

⁴² This aspect is illustrated by Zacchaeus' scriptural fluency.

⁴³ See Martin Krön, *Das Mönchtum und die kulturelle Tradition des lateinischen Westens: Formen der Askese, Autorität und Organisation im frühen westlichen Zölibitium* (München, 1997), 100, 105. While the second aspect runs through the whole work, the first and third one are especially expressed in the third book.

⁴⁴ See Steffen Diefenbach, '„Bischofsherrschaft". Zur Transformation der politischen Kultur im spätantiken und frühmittelalterlichen Gallien', in *id.* and Gernot Michael Müller (eds), *Gallien in Spätantike und Frühmittelalter. Kulturgeschichte einer Region* (Berlin, Boston, 2013), 91-149, 120.

⁴⁵ The *Consultationes* show a certain closeness to John Cassian who also sees asceticism as a means to obtain greater perfection and appreciates a communal lifestyle as a pre-stage to the fully ascetic, hermitic one.