

MARTA PRZYSZYCHOWSKA
Biblioteka Narodowa w Warszawie

MACRINA THE YOUNGER – THE INVENTED SAINT

According to the recent studies on early monasticism and asceticism Macrina the Younger was one of the most important persons of 4th century Christianity in Pontus. Scholars treat *Vita Sanctae Macrinae* (hereinafter cited as *VSM*) written by her brother Gregory of Nyssa as a source of information about her character and achievements. A.M. Silvas begins a book about Macrina with the following statement: “The holy woman known in Christian tradition as Saint Macrina the Younger (327-379) was the descendant of resolutely Christian forbears, the first-born among some famous siblings, and the leader of a family outstanding for its contribution to Christian history, piety, and culture”¹. Further, “Macrina became a spiritual mother and teacher to her own mother, Emmelia, and to each of her four brothers”² (including Basil the Great). She is considered also “the guide and teacher of the virgins she directed in her monastery”³, “a pioneering monastic founder”⁴. S. Elm stressed in her study about feminine asceticism in Late Antiquity: “Because of her significantly earlier experience and her uninterrupted presence, Macrina may well have been the dominant figure at Annesi; her share in developing what is known as Basilian monasticism ought not to be underrated”⁵.

In my opinion, in order to establish who Macrina actually was, first of all we need to analyse the sources that speak about her, determine their literary genre and compare them with other sources.

¹ A.M. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger. Philosopher of God*, Brepols Publishers, Turnhout 2008, 1.

² A.M. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 2.

³ L.F. Mateo-Seco, *Vita Macrinae*, in *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, eds. L.F. Mateo-Seco – G. Maspero, Brill, Leuven 2010, 469.

⁴ J. McGuckin, *Macrina*, in *Encyclopedia of Monasticism*, ed. W.M. Johnston, Taylor & Francis, Chicago – London 2000, vol. 2, 801.

⁵ S. Elm, *Virgins of God: The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1994, 104.

I. WRITINGS ABOUT MACRINA THE YOUNGER

Macrina the Younger can be found in four Ancient writings: *Vita Sanctae Macrinae*, letter 19, dialogue *De anima et resurrectione* by Gregory of Nyssa and epitaph 120 by Gregory of Nazianzus. In order to assess the information they contain it is necessary, above all, to establish their literary genre, because depending on it we can treat the events they describe as historical facts or not.

1. *Vita Sanctae Macrinae* by Gregory of Nyssa

VSM is the most extensive Ancient writing about Macrina. It has been translated many times and widely studied; lately, it aroused special interest of researchers of early Christian spirituality and feminist theologians looking for meaningful feminine characters in Antiquity. I do claim that *VSM* is neither a philosophical biography⁶ as Maraval wanted⁷, nor a family chronicle, as Silvas called it⁸, but it is a hagiography. Although Barnes thinks that “hagiography was never a literary genre in the strict definition of that term”⁹, it has its characteristic features. What makes hagiography distinct from history is, according to H. Delehaye, the religious character of the writing and the purpose of edification¹⁰. At the beginning of *VSM*, Gregory declares that the benefit (κέρδος) brought by the history of good things (τὴν τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἱστορίαν) is that the life of the one who had raised herself to the highest summit of human virtue (πρὸς τὸν ἀκρότατον τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης ἀρετῆς ὄρον) would not pass unprofitable (ἀνωφελής)¹¹. The profit of the story of virtue is, of course, spiritual and it does not need real events or even real persons to be attained. We can see the same purpose also in the 2nd century influential *Martyrium Polycarpi*, belonging to the so-called Smyranean hagiography¹². The explicit aim

⁶ The scope of philosophical biography was to present the life and doctrine of a philosopher, see G.J.M. Bartelink, *Introduction*, in *Vie d'Antoine*, ed. G.J.M. Bartelink, Sch 400, Les éditions du Cerf, Paris 1994, 47-48.

⁷ P. Maraval, *Intoduction*, in *Vie de sainte Macrine*, ed. P. Maraval, Sch 178, Les éditions du Cerf, Paris 1971, 21-23 and 92.

⁸ A.M. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, op. cit., 103.

⁹ T.D. Barnes, *Early Christian Hagiography and Roman History*, Mohr Sieback, Tübingen 2010, 237.

¹⁰ H. Delehaye, *Les légendes hagiographiques*, Société des Bollandistes, Bruxelles 1906, 2: “Pour être strictement hagiographique, le document doit avoir un caractère religieux et se proposer un but d'édification. Il faudra donc réserver ce nom à tout monument écrit inspiré par le culte des saints, et destiné à le promouvoir. Ce qu'il importe d'accentuer dès le début, c'est la distinction entre l'hagiographie et l'histoire”.

¹¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *Vita Sanctae Macrinae*, ed. V. Woods Callahan, Brill, Leiden 1963, GNO 8/1, 371.16-23.

¹² For dating of the text and references to it in later Christian literature, see two articles by J.M. Kozłowski, *Pionius Polycarpi imitator: References to Martyrium Polycarpi in Martyrium*

of this writing is that “we may become Polycarp’s followers” (ἵνα μιμηταὶ καὶ ἡμεῖς αὐτοῦ γενώμεθα) and that its readers “glorify the Lord” (ἵνα καὶ ἐκείνοι δοξάζωσιν τὸν κύριον)¹³. That purpose is from the very beginning a characteristic feature of Christian hagiography.

VSM was not the first hagiography of an ascetic and non-martyr. The first was *Vita Antonii* by Athanasius of Alexandria (hereinafter cited as *VA*). *VSM* clearly follows the model of the saint established by *VA*¹⁴. Gregory’s Macrina in many details mimics the characteristics and behaviour of Athanasius’ Antony. Both Antony¹⁵ and Macrina¹⁶ were born to Christian families, were raised on the Bible, isolated from the influence of culture and Pagan habits. On the other hand, the letters by Antony and the dialogue *De anima and resurrectione* show our heroes from a completely different perspective. Scholars agree that his letters prove that Antony must have read with understanding the writings by Origen and Gnostics¹⁷, and Macrina in the dialogue not only mentions philosophers by name¹⁸, but engages in a discussion with Gregory on the highest scientific level (in the Ancient sense) using dialectic and rhetoric. So it seems that isolation from culture is nothing more than a literary topos.

Both saints lived very simple lives from very early childhood¹⁹. D. Brakke noticed the resemblance between the behaviour of young Antony (so Macrina as well) and the lifestyle of young Mary as Athanasius described it in his first Letter to Virgins²⁰. The characteristic feature of both is peace and total absence of corporal sensations²¹. It is an ideal that can be aspired to, but unattainable on earth.

Pionii, “Science et Esprit” 67 (2015), 417-434; and *Tanto perfusus est sanguine, ut... Dependence of Passio Perpetuae 21,1-3 upon Martyrium Polycarpi 14,2 and 16,1*, “Eirene. Studia Graeca et Latina” 52 (2016), 387-395.

H. Delehayé, *Les passions des martyrs et les genres littéraires*, “Subsidia Hagiographica” 13, Bruxelles 1966², 15-46.

¹³ *Ecclesiae Smyrnenensis de martyrio S. Polycarpi epistola circularis* I 2, PG 5, 1029B; XX 1; PG 5, 1044C.

¹⁴ Gregory of Nazianzus (*Oratio* 21, 5 (*In laudem Athanasii*); PG 35, 1088A) testifies that *VA* was known among Cappadocians.

¹⁵ *VA*, SCh 400, 130.

¹⁶ *VSM*, GNO 8/1, 373-374.

¹⁷ S. Rubenson, *Letters of St. Antony: Monasticism and the Making of A Saint*, Trinity Press Int’l, Minneapolis 1995, 59-88; D. Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1995, 256-258; E. Wipszycka, *Drugi dar Nilu. Czyl i o mnichach i klasztorach w późnoantycznym Egipcie*, Tyniec. Wydawnictwo Benedyktynów, Kraków 2014, 68-75 (the book by Prof. Wipszycka is being translated into English and is going to be published in 2018).

¹⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, *De anima et resurrectione*, ed. A. Spira, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2014, GNO 3/3, 8 and 33-34.

¹⁹ *VA*, SCh 400, 130; *VSM*, GNO 8/1, 374 and 376.

²⁰ D. Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, op. cit., 254.

²¹ *VA*, SCh 400, 172-174; *VSM*, GNO 8/1, 382.

Both authors of the *Lives* were aware of its unattainableness, so Athanasius calls the way of Antony's living a heavenly state (ἡ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς πολιτείαν) and Gregory compares the lifestyle of Macrina to angels (πρὸς μίμησιν τῆς τῶν ἀγγέλων διαγωγῆς). Bartelink analysed the biblical references in *VA* (more than 200) proving that the ideal personified by Antony (and Macrina as she follows Antony's model) had its deep biblical roots²².

The descriptions of the last days, death and funeral of Antony and Macrina are similar. In both cases they are long, detailed, and contain speeches of the heroes, kind of testaments for their companions, called farewell speeches²³. Festugière analysed the last prayer of Macrina from *VSM* and stated that it was a noble literary composition that had nothing to do with historical probability²⁴.

In order to achieve its intended purpose (which is edification of the readers) hagiography used fictional elements from the very beginning of the genre. In *VA* and *VSM*, even the emphasis present in both writings that the author was an eyewitness of the saint's life²⁵ is a literary topos and has little to do with reality. Brakke noticed "the paucity of evidence for actual contact between Athanasius and the historical Antony"²⁶, Wipszycka questions the probability that Athanasius knew Coptic and it was the only language he could use to talk with Antony or with the witnesses of his life²⁷. Regarding Gregory of Nyssa, he himself admitted in *VSM* that he did not see his sister for many years²⁸ and he knew her miracles only from the accounts of others²⁹.

Regarding Antony we can verify some events described in *VA* and some of them are obviously fictitious³⁰. Heussi thinks that the entire episode from *VA* 46, where Antony comes to Alexandria to support persecuted Christians, is fake³¹. Wipszycka believes that Antony could have been in Alexandria, but she considers the ban on letting ascetics into a court anachronistic as ascetics were not a separate, distinctive group at that time³². She also thinks it was impossible that Antony served

²² G.J.M. Bartelink, *Introduction*, SCh 400, 48-53.

²³ M. Alexandre, *À propos du récit de la mort d'Antoine. L'heure de la mort dans la littérature monastique*, in *Le temps chrétien de la fin de l'Antiquité au Moyen Age (IIIe-XIIIe siècles)*, ed. J.M. Leroux, CNRS Éditions, Paris 1984, 263-282.

²⁴ A.J. Festugière, *Vraisemblance psychologique et forme littéraire chez les anciens*, "Philologus" 102 (1958), 38.

²⁵ *VA*, SCh 400, 126-128; *VSM*, GNO 8/1, 371.9-16.

²⁶ D. Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, op. cit., 206.

²⁷ E. Wipszycka, *Drugi dar Nilu*, op. cit., 59.

²⁸ *VSM*, GNO 8/1, 387.6-9.

²⁹ *VSM*, GNO 8/1, 404.20-406.9; 410.7-413.16.

³⁰ T.D. Barnes (*Early Christian Hagiography and Roman History*, 160) calls *VA* a fictitious hagiography and an imaginative composition.

³¹ K. Heussi, *Der Ursprung des Mönchtums*, Scientia Verlag, Tübingen 1936, 94-96.

³² *Drugi dar Nilu*, op. cit., 90-91.

Christians who worked in mines/quarry (μέταλλα) as there were no such μέταλλα near Alexandria³³.

In *VA* 81, Antony receives a letter from Constantine and his sons, and replies with reluctance advising them how to hold power. We have the testimony of Sozomenus who presented a different version of the event. According to *Historia ecclesiastica* II 31, it was Antony who first wrote to the emperor in the defence of Athanasius. The letter of Constantius was only a reply; moreover, he declined to recall Athanasius from his exile. Historians have no doubt that the version of Sozomenus was a true one³⁴. So, Athanasius intentionally described the exchange of letters between Antony and Constantine at variance with the reality. And it is not a surprise, if we remember the purpose of hagiography: “the primary social function of the Athanasian Antony is to inspire imitation”³⁵, “Athanasius did not describe what happened, but what should have happened”³⁶, “hagiographical work may be historical, but it is not necessary. It can do all literary genres suitable for glorifying the saints from official relation modified for usage of the faithful to the exuberant poetical work, with no reference to the reality”³⁷.

All of the above quoted statements apply to *VSM* as well as to *VA*. Some scholars already noticed that what Gregory of Nyssa wrote about Macrina is typical of a literary construct. S. Elm pointed out that the description of Macrina’s earliest years is “stylized and subject to rhetorical conventions”³⁸. P. Maraval claimed that Gregory knew how to distort the reality in order to make his story more believable³⁹ and that the description of Macrina’s community in Annisa is very rhetorical⁴⁰. G. Luck suggested that he used the technique of a novelist to dramatize a very real event⁴¹. A. Cameron went even farther: “Though the temptation to read the Life of Macrina as a real portrait has been strong, especially among those interested in women in Late Antiquity, for Gregory, the figure of Macrina is a literary trope”⁴².

³³ Ibid., 89-90.

³⁴ K. Heussi, *Der Ursprung des Mönchtums*, op. cit., 91-93; T.D. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2001, 96-97.

³⁵ D. Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, op. cit., 258.

³⁶ E. Wipszycka, *Wstęp*, in Atanazy Aleksandryjski, *Żywot świętego Antoniego*, Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, Warszawa 1987, 39.

³⁷ H. Delehayé, *Les légendes hagiographiques*, op. cit., 2.

³⁸ S. Elm, *Virgins of God*, op. cit., 47.

³⁹ P. Maraval, *Encore les frères et soeurs de Grégoire de Nysse*, “Revue d’histoire et de philosophie religieuses” 60 (1980), 163.

⁴⁰ P. Maraval, *Introduction*, SCh 178, 54.

⁴¹ G. Luck, *Notes on the Vita Macrinae*, in *The Biographical Works of Gregory of Nyssa. Proceedings of the Fifth International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa, Mainz, 6-10 September 1982*, ed. A. Spira, The Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, Cambridge 1984, 26.

⁴² A. Cameron, *Dialoguing in Late Antiquity*, Washington DC 2014, <<http://chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/display/5495>> (24.2.2017).

2. Letter 19 by Gregory of Nyssa

Letter 19 by Gregory of Nyssa alludes to the circumstances of his election to the bishop of Sebastea⁴³, and according to its title should speak about the life of Macrina. Actually, we do not find there any information about her. The “description” of Macrina consists of quotations from the Bible, epithets that in the Bible refer to God. Using the verbs of Psalms, Gregory calls her a strong tower, a shield of favour, a fortified city and an utter assurance⁴⁴. Moreover, Macrina is described as devoid of any corporal sensation; she knew no distinction between night and day, she lived the life that we expect after resurrection (καθάπερ ἐπὶ τῆς ἀναστάσεως ὑποπτεύομεν). Gregory finished the portrayal with the meaningful rhetorical question: “How anyone could present to the eyes the reality that transcends any verbal description?”⁴⁵

The following description of Gregory’s arrival to his sister⁴⁶ is similarly rhetorical and could not be applied to a real person. Especially in the mouth of a Christian comparing somebody to a source of water (τινα κρήνην) and calling her “the entire good/every good” (πᾶν ἀγαθόν) must have sounded as a blasphemy if it concerned a real human being. So, the letter seems to be a rhetorical work, not a documentation as Silvas wanted⁴⁷.

Letter 19 has a strange title: “To a certain John on certain subjects, especially on the way of life and the character of such a sister of him Macrina (Πρὸς τινα Ἰωάννην περὶ τινῶν ὑποθέσεων καὶ περὶ τῆς διαγωγῆς καὶ καταστάσεως τῆς τοιαύτης ἀδελφῆς αὐτοῦ Μακρίνης)”⁴⁸. “The certain John” must have been a symbolic person and not a real one. Addressing the letter “to the certain John” proves in my opinion that the writing was not to be a personal letter, but was thought by Gregory as a circular⁴⁹.

Scholars have had trouble with the pronoun τοιοῦτος used in the title in relation to Macrina. It can mean “such wise”, but its first meaning is “such as this” and according to Liddell & Scott it can also refer to what goes before. G. Pasquali

⁴³ F. Diekamp (*Die Wahl Gregors von Nyssa zum Metropoliten von Sebaste im Jahre 380*, “Theologische Quartalschrift” 90 (1908), 384) states that the letter 19 is the only source that says anything about the election.

⁴⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *Epistula* 19, 6-8, ed. G. Pasquali, Brill, Leiden 1959, GNO 8/2, 64.14-65.2.

⁴⁵ *Epistula* 19, 9; GNO 8/2, 65.3-9.

⁴⁶ *Epistula* 19, 10; GNO 8/2, 65.10-23.

⁴⁷ A.M. Silvas, in Gregory of Nyssa, *The Letters. Introduction, Translation and Commentary*, Brill, Leiden – Boston 2007, 174.

⁴⁸ GNO 8/2, 62.2-4.

⁴⁹ A.M. Silvas (in Gregory of Nyssa, *The Letters*, 173) points out also the formal language of the letter: “He clearly intended this letter as a kind of bulletin of his affairs to someone well placed in church affairs, meant to correct any misinformation”.

commented it shortly: “non intellego”⁵⁰; R. Crisculo translated it into Italian with the word “tal”⁵¹; P. Maraval into French with “célèbre”⁵²; and A. Silvas just omitted it in her translation into English explaining: “the τριαύτης does not make much sense”⁵³. However, I can see a reason for its use.

We cannot date Gregory’s writings with absolute certainty as we have no external evidence to confirm the dating, but it is possible that all four writings about Macrina (including epitaph 120 by Gregory of Nazianzus) were written more or less at the same time. It is possible that *VSM* was the first writing about Macrina at all, and letter 19 was to be a kind of advertisement of *VSM*. It is important to realise that before *VSM* and letter 19 were written nobody had ever mentioned Macrina – neither Gregory of Nyssa himself, nor Basil, nor Gregory of Nazianzus. *VSM* is probably the first writing about Macrina, so the pronoun “such” in the advertising letter 19 specifies the person, referring to what goes before (*VSM*).

3. *De anima et resurrectione* by Gregory of Nyssa

Although a lot of prominent scholars claimed that *De anima et resurrectione* is a record of a real conversation between Gregory of Nyssa and Macrina⁵⁴, it is impossible for many reasons, for many other – improbable. First of all, the dialogue occupies 123 pages in GNO edition – it is physically impossible to read or deliver it in one afternoon as *VSM* suggests it was⁵⁵. Secondly, there are so many contradictions between *VSM* and *De anima et resurrectione* regarding the circumstances of the conversation (I will point them out below) that it is hardly believable it happened in reality.

On the other hand, a dialogue means not only conversation between two people but has been for ages an acknowledged literary genre⁵⁶. A special type of that genre is a philosophical dialogue⁵⁷, associated above all with Plato. It is difficult, if not impossible, to harmonise Plato’s Socrates with the one we know from other sources

⁵⁰ GNO 8/2, 62.

⁵¹ Gregorio di Nissa, *Epistole*, trad. R. Crisculo, Città Nuova, Napoli 1981, 123.

⁵² Grégoire de Nysse, *Lettres*, trad. P. Maraval, SC 363, Les éditions du Cerf, Paris 1990, 243.

⁵³ A.M. Silvas, *The Letters*, op. cit., 174, footnote 275.

⁵⁴ M. Hoffmann, *Der dialog bei den christlichen Schriftstellern der ersten vier Jahrhunderte*, Akademie-Verlag, Berlin 1966, 130 and 135; B.R. Voss, *Der dialog in der frühchristlichen Literatur*, Wilhelm Fink Verlag, München 1970, 175; J. Quasten, *Patrology*, Resources for Christian Living, Allen 1986, vol. 3, 261; J.M. Sauget, *Macrina la Giovane*, in *Bibliotheca Sanctorum*, vol. 8, Città Nuova, Roma 1996, 457; I. Ramelli, *Saggio introduttivo*, in Gregorio di Nissa, *Sull’anima et resurrezione*, RCS Libri, Milano 2007, 7; L.F. Mateo-Seco, *Macrina*, in *Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, op. cit., 473.

⁵⁵ GNO 8/1, 389-391.

⁵⁶ V. Höhle, *Der philosophische Dialog: Eine Poetik und Hermeneutik*, C.H. Beck, München 2006, 32.

⁵⁷ V. Höhle, *Der philosophische Dialog*, op. cit., 54.

(Xenophon, Aristophanes)⁵⁸, so it is generally assumed that Plato transmitted his own ideas through the personage of Socrates. And the same happened in the literary construction by Gregory of Nyssa, written in accordance with the canons of the genre – a philosophical dialogue. Therefore, I have no doubts that Macrina serves here as “a mouthpiece for Gregory’s theology”⁵⁹ and the dialogue is not a record of a real conversation. As Cameron stated: “Gregory’s use of the dialogue form in *On the Soul* is clearly a deliberate literary choice, carefully adopting a Platonic model”⁶⁰.

It is worth stressing that at the time when Gregory was writing, a dialogue as a literary genre already had a long and respectable tradition in Christian literature, starting with apologetic dialogues (Ariston of Pella, Justin and Minutius Felix) to the dialogues which Hoffman called dogmatic-polemic and philosophical⁶¹ (Origen, Gregory Thaumaturgos, and above all Methodius of Olympus). The purpose of those writings was apologetic and polemic; none of them was intended to record a real conversation but to convince a sophisticated, well-educated reader that Christianity is a true and best philosophy. I claim that *De anima et resurrectione* has the same polemical aim: to defend Gregory’s own concepts on the soul, resurrection and apokatastasis. We can, of course, ask why he chose his sister as a “mouthpiece”, but that is a subject for independent research and actually has been already widely discussed⁶².

4. The epitaph 120 by Gregory of Nazianzus

The fourth and last Ancient writing about Macrina is an epitaph by Gregory of Nazianzus. It suggests that Macrina had been hidden and unknown before *VSM* made her famous. The epitaph reads as follow:

“Me, the dust, I hold the radiant virgin, if you hear about certain
Macrina – the first-born of great Emmelia,

⁵⁸ C. Kahn, *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue: The Philosophical Use of a Literary Form*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1996, 1-35.

⁵⁹ E.A. Clark, *Holy Women, Holy Words: Early Christian Women, Social History and the “Linguistic Turn”*, “Journal of Early Christian Studies” 6 (1998), 427; B. Altaner, *Précis de patrologie*, Editions Salvator, Paris 1961, 438; P. Maraval, *Introduction*, SC 178, 36; A. Momigliano, *The Life of St. Macrina by Gregory of Nyssa*, in *On Pagans, Jews, and Christians*, Wesleyan, Middletown 1987, 208; D. Krueger, *Writing and the Liturgy of Memory in Gregory of Nyssa’s Life of Macrina*, “Journal of Early Christian Studies” 8 (2000), 488.

⁶⁰ A. Cameron, *Dialoguing in Late Antiquity*, op. cit.

⁶¹ M. Hoffmann, *Der dialog*, op. cit., 57-159.

⁶² E.A. Clark, *Holy Women, Holy Words*, op. cit., 413-430; D. Krueger, *Writing and the Liturgy of Memory*, op. cit., 483-510; W. E. Helleman, *Cappadocian Macrina as Lady Wisdom*, “Studia Patristica” 37 (2001), 86-102; S. Wessel, *Memory and Individuality in Gregory of Nyssa’s De anima et resurrectione*, “Journal of Early Christian Studies” 18 (2010), 369-392; L. Karfiková, *Gregory of Nyssa, Witness of Macrina’s Life and Death*, “Theologica Olomucensia” 14 (2013), 15-26; A. Cameron, *Dialoguing in Late Antiquity*, op. cit.

who hid herself from the eyes of men, yet now she is on every tongue and she has achieved better fame”⁶³.

The poetry as such could, of course, refer to real persons and historical events, but it is not necessary for its literary construction.

Summing up, all four writings about Macrina were written according to the rules of different literary genres: hagiography, rhetoric, dialogue, epitaph. Those genres have their specific purposes (edification, polemics, apology, honouring), but none of them is aimed at recounting real events and describing actual people. Of course, they can do that if it helps to achieve an aim intended by the author, but they can also distort reality and use fictitious elements in order to edify the reader (hagiography – *VSM*), present the point of view of the author (rhetoric – letter 19), fight doctrines of the opponents (philosophical dialogue – *De anima et resurrectione*), or honour somebody (epitaph 120). So, we cannot trust the information they contain, but we need to confront them with external sources.

II. CONTRADICTIONS IN THE WRITINGS ABOUT MACRINA AND OTHER SOURCES

Incoherencies and contradictions in the very writings about Macrina and between those writings and other sources are the most important evidence that none of the Macrina writings describes the real history; moreover, none of them pretended to do so. I will list here only some of the most important contradictions, but there are a lot more contradicting details.

1. Two Macrinas

The most conspicuous incoherence we face while thinking about Macrina is a huge difference between two Macrinas: one from *VSM* and the other from *De anima et resurrectione*. In *VSM* Macrina was educated by her Christian parents and from the very beginning she read only Bible; also when she grew up she and her companions cared only about divine things and unceasing prayer⁶⁴. Meanwhile, in *De anima et resurrectione* Macrina not only names Pagan philosophers⁶⁵, but she leads the discussion on the highest scientific level – scientific of course in the Ancient meaning; so, it is a philosophical discussion full of dialectic and rhetoric. If we treated both writings as describing historical person, we would have to admit that Macrina was schizophrenic or that there were two different Macrinas. And yet, Macrina was not schizophrenic nor Gregory was intellectually disabled, but

⁶³ *Epitaphium* 120, PG 38, 75-76 = epigram VIII 163, in *Anthologie palatine*, ed. P. Walz, Les Belles Lettres, Paris 1944.

⁶⁴ GNO 8/1, 382.15-18.

⁶⁵ GNO 3/3, 8 and 33-34.

Macrina constitutes in both writings a deliberate and elaborate literary construct. In *VSM* she is a model of a saint ascetic, simple and focused on virtuous life. In the dialogue she is a philosopher, teacher and authority on elevated philosophical and theological topics.

2. Circumstances of the last meeting

All three writings about Macrina by Gregory of Nyssa describe the last meeting of the siblings. In each of them the author himself gives a different reason why he decided to visit his sister. In *De anima et resurrectione* he comes to Macrina in order to share a mourning for Basil and he does it hurriedly (κατὰ σπουδῆν)⁶⁶; in *VSM* he just wanted to visit her and it was nine months after Basil's death⁶⁷. According to *VSM*, during the journey he had a vision which he interpreted as a harbinger of disaster and only after that he learned that Macrina was ill⁶⁸. By contrast, in letter 19 he said that while he was in Cappadocia he was alarmed by some rumours about her and that is why he decided to go to Pontus⁶⁹.

Those differences are understandable if we remember a different genre and different purpose of each of the writings. In *De anima et resurrectione* the death of Basil serves as a pretext for discussion about death, resurrection and soul's immortality. In the *VSM* Gregory "just felt like visiting Macrina," which was to stress his close relationship with his sister and make credible his story about her. In letter 19, Gregory justifies himself why he had left his own diocese endangered by many heresies (Cappadocia) and went on a journey to home (Pontus).

Farther, Gregory himself gives us different information on the time that passed from his previous meeting with Macrina. In *VSM* he counted the years and the result is not less than eight (τὸ διάστημα ὀκτὼ μικροῦ δεῖν παραμετρούμενον ἔτεσιν)⁷⁰; by contrast, in letter 19 he affirms that he saw his beloved sister for the first time in ten years (ἐνιαυτῷ δεκάτῳ)⁷¹. It seems that he did not pay attention to chronological details as none of the writings was intended to present historical events.

3. Number of siblings

In one and the same writing, namely *VSM*, Gregory seems to give two versions of the number of Emmelia's children. First, he says that the mother had four sons and five daughters (τεσσάρων γὰρ ἦν υἱῶν μήτηρ καὶ πέντε θυγατέρων)⁷², but

⁶⁶ GNO 3/3, 1.4-8.

⁶⁷ GNO 8/1, 385.22-387.3.

⁶⁸ GNO 8/1, 387.19-389.6.

⁶⁹ GNO 8/2, 65.10-14.

⁷⁰ GNO 8/1, 387.3-9.

⁷¹ GNO 8/2, 65.19-21.

⁷² GNO 8/1, 376.18-19.

when Emmelia is praying on the deathbed, she speaks about Macrina and Peter in such a way that a lot of scholars understand as if there were ten children: “To you, O Lord, I offer the first fruits and the tithe of my pangs (ἀπάρχομαι καὶ ἀποδεκατῶ τὸν καρπὸν τῶν ὠδίνων). For this my first-born is the first fruits (ἀπαρχή) and this, my last is the tithe (ἐπιδέκατος)”⁷³. But both expressions used here in relation to children (ἀπαρχή and ἐπιδέκατος) constitute in the Bible technical terms meaning the offering for God⁷⁴. Drawing the conclusion that Emmelia must have had ten children, but one of them died in infancy⁷⁵, seems absurd to me. However, I would stress that even the number of nine children is rather symbolic (nine fruits of the Holy Spirit from Ga 5, 22-23) as we have no external testimonies to confirm it. Gregory of Nazianzus said only that all of the children of Emmelia and Basil led virtuous life, though some of them were priests, some virgins and some were married⁷⁶.

4. Basil’s conversion

The biggest amount of incoherencies concerns the conversion of Basil, namely his decision to start leading ascetic life. It was a crucial moment of his career as the Ancients attached a lot of significance to the master-pupil relationship. According to *VSM*, when Basil returned to Annisa after his studies in Athens, he was proud and haughty because of his rhetorical skills. Then, Macrina “persuaded him to strive after philosophy” (κάκεινον πρὸς τὸν τῆς φιλοσοφίας σκοπὸν ἐπεσπάσατο)⁷⁷. Basil himself left us two different (not exclusive) stories about his own conversion. In letter 1 addressed to Eustathius the philosopher, identified by Garamond with Eustathius of Sebastea⁷⁸, Basil confessed that he had quitted his studies in Athens when he had heard about his philosophy (κατέλιπον τὰς Ἀθήνας κατὰ φήμην τῆς σῆς φιλοσοφίας)⁷⁹. Letter 1 was written most probably in 357. 18 years passed, Eustathius many times signed different heretic confessions of the faith, and it was difficult even for Basil himself to admit that he had been so fascinated by his

⁷³ GNO 8/1, 385.3-5.

⁷⁴ ἡ ἀπαρχή: Lev 2, 21; Deut 26, 2; τὸ ἐπιδέκατον: Num 18, 21. 26; Deut 12, 17; 14, 28; 26, 12.

⁷⁵ J.E. Pfister, *A biographical note: The Brothers and Sisters of St. Gregory of Nyssa*, “Vigiliae Christianae” 18 (1964), 113; P. Maraval, *Encore les frères et soeurs de Grégoire de Nyse*, op. cit., 162; A.M. Silvas, *The Asketikon of St Basil the Great*, Oxford University Press, Oxford – New York 2005, 65; A. Radde-Gallwitz, *Basil of Caesarea. A guide to his life and doctrine*, Eugene 2012, 22.

⁷⁶ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* 43, 9 (*In laudem Basilii Magni Caesareae in Cappadocia episcopi*), op. cit., PG 36, 505.

⁷⁷ GNO 8/1, 377.7-19.

⁷⁸ J. Gribomont, *Eustache le philosophe et les voyages du jeune Basile de Césarée*, “Revue d’histoire ecclésiastique” 54 (1959), 116-120.

⁷⁹ Basil the Great, *Epistulae* 1, ed. Y. Courtonne, Les Belles Lettres, Paris 1957, vol. 1, 3.

person⁸⁰. In letter 223 written in 375 and addressed to the very same Eustathius of Sebastea Basil passed over his role as an inspirer of his asceticism and wrote: "I woke up like from the deep sleep" (ὡσπερ ἐξ ὕπνου βαθέος διαναστάς)⁸¹.

These are not the only versions of Basil's conversion that we can find in Ancient literature. A matter of inspiration seems to be then the case of utmost importance. Not without reason Rufinus wrote that it was Gregory of Nazianzus who literally forced Basil to lead a monastic life (*ad monasterium manu injecta perduceret*)⁸². Rufinus apparently disliked Basil and wanted to discredit him with such inversion of roles⁸³. In reality, we know from letters by both Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus that it was Basil who was persuading his friend to lead an ascetic life (letters 2 and 14 by Basil). Gregory of Nazianzus promised to come to Basil, who was staying near the Iris river, but found various excuses in order not to (letter 1 by Gregory of Nazianzus).

III. WRITINGS THAT DO NOT MENTION MACRINA

If Macrina really was a pioneering monastic founder she should have appeared in the specific places in the specific writings, but she actually did not. I will point out at least the most obvious sources in which Macrina is absent, though she should have been present, if she had been the inspirer and the prominent representative of ascetic and monastic life in Pontus.

1. Basil the Great

Many scholars have been wondering why Basil never mentioned his sister Macrina not only in his ascetic writings, but also in any of his letters⁸⁴. Basil did not say a word about Macrina in his letter 1 describing his conversion, although according to *VSM* it was Macrina who inspired him to the ascetic lifestyle⁸⁵. He did not mention Macrina in his letter 207 describing the community in Annisa⁸⁶

⁸⁰ F. Fatti, *Monachesimo anatolico. Eustazio di Sebastia e Basilio di Cesarea*, in *Monachesimo orientale. Un'introduzione*, ed. G. Filoramo, Morcelliana, Brescia 2010, 71.

⁸¹ Basil the Great, *Epistulae* 223, 2, ed. Y. Courtonne, vol. 3, 10.

⁸² Rufinus of Aquileia, *Historia Ecclesiastica* II 9, PL 21, 518B.

⁸³ T.G. Kardong, *Who was Basil's mentor? Part 1*, "American Benedictine Revue" 60 (2009), 185.

⁸⁴ P. Maraval, *Intoduction*, SCh 178, 36-37 and 53; S. Elm, *Virgins of God*, op. cit., 82; J.R. Pouchet, *Basile le Grand et son univers d'amis d'après sa correspondance: une stratégie de communion*, Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, Roma 1992, 92, footnote 3; A.M. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, op. cit., 37; A. Radde-Gallwitz, *Basil of Caesarea*, op. cit., 28.

⁸⁵ *VSM*, GNO 8/1, 377.7-19.

⁸⁶ I agree with the analysis by Maraval (*Intoduction*, SCh 178, 38) that the name "Annisa" must have been neutrum in plural like today Chania or a lot of Greek towns.

in 375/376 where he was staying when he wrote the letter⁸⁷ and where according to *VSM* Macrina should have been the leader of a group of women for approximately 20 years. Basil passed Macrina over in his letter 223 to Eustathius of Sebastea alluding to many visits of Eustathius to the place near the river Iris (Annisa was located nearby), where Basil stayed with his brother Gregory. Finally, Basil did not address to Macrina even a single one of his more than 300 letters, 13 of which were addressed directly to women and some concerned women.

If anybody suspects that Basil was a misogynist and that was a reason he did not say anything about his sister, I reply in advance: it is not true. He was truly devoted to his mother and grandmother; in letters 205 and 223, he emphasised their role in his life by belittling achievements of his father and grandfather mentioned, on the other hand, by Gregory of Nazianzus⁸⁸.

2. Gregory of Nazianzus

In epitaph 54, in memory of Emmelia, Gregory of Nazianzus described her children as follows: sons and daughters, both married and unmarried, three famous priests and one wife of a priest (ἡ ἱερῆος σύζυγος)⁸⁹. It is obvious that the last one was Theosebia, honoured in epitaph 123 and called there the child of the famous Emmelia and the wife of the great Gregory (κλεινῆς τέκος Ἐμμελίου, Γρηγορίου μεγάλου σύζυγος)⁹⁰. Leaving aside the problem of Theosebia's identity⁹¹, I find it puzzling that in his epitaph 54 on Emmelia among the children of Emmelia Gregory of Nazianzus favoured the wife of a priest (Theosebia) over the leader of asceticism in Pontus (Macrina).

Further, Gregory of Nazianzus did write a consolation letter to Gregory of Nyssa after Theosebia (no matter, sister or wife) died⁹², but he did not write any in connection with Macrina's passing away. We do have another consolation letter of him addressed to Gregory of Nyssa on the occasion of Basil's death, in which he justifies himself that he had not come to Basil's funeral due to "the serious and

⁸⁷ A.M. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, op. cit., 45.

⁸⁸ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* 43, 5 and 12 (*In laudem Basilii Magni Caesareae in Cappadocia episcopi*), PG 36, 500 and 509.

⁸⁹ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Epitaphium* 54, PG 38, 37-38 = epigram VIII 161, in *Anthologie palatine*.

⁹⁰ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Epitaphium* 123, PG 38, 77 = epigram VIII 164, in *Anthologie palatine*.

⁹¹ J. Daniélou (*Le mariage de Grégoire de Nysse et la chronologie de sa vie*, "Revue des études augustiniennes" 2 (1956), 71-78) thought there were two Theosebias, both married to Gregories: one daughter of Emmelia, sister of Gregory of Nyssa and Basil, married to certain Gregory, and another one, wife of Gregory of Nyssa. S. Elm (*Virgins of God*, op. cit., 157, footnote 64) claims that there might have been only one Theosebia, sister of Gregory of Nyssa and Basil, and σύζυγος may mean here associate or collaborator; the same argument was repeated by Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, 7, footnote 25.

⁹² Gregory of Nazianzus, *Epistula* 197, 5-6; PG 37, 321-324.

dangerous illness⁹³. If soon after that Macrina, sister of Gregory of Nyssa and Basil, died (according to *VSM*⁹⁴), we could have expected similar letter. Unless Gregory of Nazianzus suddenly recovered and attended her funeral; but that would have been stressed in *VSM*, since Gregory named among the participants of the funeral an unknown bishop Araxios⁹⁵, he surely would have mentioned his famous friend, if he had been present.

3. Histories of the Church

Macrina does not appear in any Ancient sources describing the Church history of that period. Certainly, Ancient historians focused on relationships between the Church and the state, doctrinal disputes and bishops, but they also said something about the monastic life. And in none of that texts there is any mention of Macrina, alleged inspirer and leader of monastic life in Pontus according to *VSM*.

Macrina should have been evoked at least twice in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* by Sozomenus. When describing the beginnings of monasticism in Pontus and the vicinities he points to Eustathius of Sebastea as an initiator⁹⁶ and later on Basil the Great as his continuator⁹⁷. Socrates Scholasticus regarded Eustathius explicitly as a heretic⁹⁸ and yet he says nothing about Macrina; according to him the founder of monasticism in Pontus was Basil⁹⁹. He mentioned by name two brothers of Basil: Gregory of Nyssa and Peter, adding that only Peter followed Basil in monastic lifestyle¹⁰⁰ – again, no mention about Macrina. Similarly, Rufinus said that Basil was the founder of monasticism in Pontus¹⁰¹ and had two brothers: Gregory of Nyssa and Peter¹⁰², failing to mention their saint sister.

IV. MACRINA THE YOUNGER – A LITERARY CONSTRUCT

None of the writings about Macrina had as its aim to report historical events; they are full of literary *topoi*, rhetoric, quotations from the Bible. Even if they contain some information that seems historical, they are often incoherent and

⁹³ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Epistula* 76; PG 37, 140-141.

⁹⁴ GNO 8/1, 385.22-387.3.

⁹⁵ GNO 8/1, 407.14-15.

⁹⁶ Sozomenus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* III 14, PG 67, 1077-1081.

⁹⁷ Sozomenus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* IV 17, PG 67, 1336.

⁹⁸ Socrates Scholasticus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* II 39, PG 67, 333; II 43, PG 67, 352-353; IV 12, PG 67, 484.

⁹⁹ Socrates Scholasticus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* IV 26, PG 67, 532.

¹⁰⁰ Socrates Scholasticus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* IV 26, PG 67, 533-536.

¹⁰¹ Rufinus of Aquileia, *Historia Ecclesiastica* II 9, PL 21, 518C.

¹⁰² Rufinus of Aquileia, *Historia Ecclesiastica* II 9, PL 21, 520C.

contradictory. On the other hand, we have no external sources that confirm Macrina's achievements. Macrina described in *VSM* is obviously a literary construct.

1. Inventing a saint

Macrina became a part of a long tradition of fictitious women guiding men into mysteries of philosophy and true wisdom: Diotima from Plato's *Symposium*, Rhoda from *The Shepherd of Hermas*, 11 women from Methodius of Olympus' *Symposium*. She was also not the first fictional ascetic. In the middle 370s Jerome wrote *Vita beati Pauli monachi Thebani*, the life of the first eremite. Since 1877 many scholars have claimed that it is a life of a completely fictional character¹⁰³. The hagiography was written in Latin, but it was translated into Greek and spread widely in the East as well as in the West¹⁰⁴. Even if it had not been translated into Greek before *VSM*, Jerome could have told about it personally to both Gregories when he was in Constantinople in the years 380-381 as a student of Gregory of Nazianzus.

If Macrina as described in *VSM* was not a real person, it is obvious that she was invented by the author of *VSM* – Gregory of Nyssa. However, he had co-plotters. The first one, certainly, was Gregory of Nazianzus, who supported Gregory of Nyssa's invention by writing the epitaph on Macrina. Secondly, both could have been backed up by Jerome during his stay in Constantinople.

2. Macrina as a substitute for Eustathius of Sebastea

The complete absence of Macrina in the *Historiae Ecclesiasticae* written in the 5th century seems to confirm that she obviously was not the founder and leader of asceticism or monasticism in Pontus. The founder and inspirer of monasticism in Pontus was Eustathius of Sebastea. He became also an inspiration for Basil to start leading ascetic life. The analysis of Basil's correspondence proves that Basil and Eustathius had a close relationship for many years¹⁰⁵. Already Sozomenus (*Histo-*

¹⁰³ S. Rebenich, *Inventing an Ascetic Hero. Jerome's Life of Paul the First Hermit*, in *Jerome of Stridon. His Life, Writings and Legacy*, eds. A. Cain – J. Lössl, Routledge, New York 2009, 14-16; T.D. Barnes, *Early Christian Hagiography and Roman History*, op. cit., 172.

¹⁰⁴ J.N.D. Kelly, *Jerome, his Life, Writings and Controversies*, Hendrickson Pub, London 1975, 60; K. Jazdzewska, *Hagiographic Invention and Imitation: Niketas' Life of Theoktiste and Its Literary Models*, "Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies" 49 (2009), 269.

¹⁰⁵ D. Amand, *L'ascèse monastique de Saint Basile: Essai historique*, Maredsous 1949, 52-61; J. Gribomont, *Le monachisme au IV^e siècle en Asie Mineure: de Gangres au Messalianisme*, "Studia Patristica" 2 (1957), 400-415; J. Daniélou, *Grégoire de Nysse et le messalianisme*, "Recherches de Science Religieuse" 48 (1960), 119-134; Y. Courtonne, *Un témoin du IV^e siècle oriental: Saint Basile et son temps d'après sa correspondance*, Les Belles Lettres, Paris 1973, 179-222; C.A. Frazee, *Anatolian Asceticism in the Fourth Century: Eustathios of Sebastea and Basil of Caesarea*, "Catholic Historical Review" 66 (1980), 16-33; G. Dagron, *Les Moines et la ville: le monachisme à Constantinople jusqu'au concile de Chalcédoine (451)*, "Travaux et

ria ecclesiastica III 14) reported that some considered Eustathius to be the author of the ascetic book attributed to Basil and some analyses do indicate Eustathius' influence on Basil's ascetical writings¹⁰⁶.

In my opinion, Macrina was invented in order to substitute the heretic Eustathius in the life of Basil. Actually, it is not really my idea (apart from Macrina being invented). Already in 1959, J. Gribomont noticed the contradiction between descriptions of Basil's conversion and explained that *VSM* passes over Eustathius as since 375 he was openly a pneumatomachos¹⁰⁷. In reality, not the year 375 is crucial in that story, but 381. The First Council of Constantinople condemned all who had signed the pneumatomachian confession of 375 and had not withdrawn therefrom. Actually, Eustathius signed many heretic confessions of faith during his life and then he withdraw from all of them. This time it was impossible. Eustathius died before the Council.

So, the situation was as follows: Basil was dead (378 or 379¹⁰⁸) and the inspirer of his ascetic life was just condemned by the Council for the Trinitarian heresy (381). The matter of inspiration, of the master-pupil relationship, was something of crucial importance for the people of that time. If the inspirer of Basil's asceticism had been heretic, the entire work of Basil would have been questioned. It is worth stressing that it was not the first story of a substituted inspirer. First was Paul the Eremite (*Vita beati Pauli monachi Thebani*) who substituted Antony (*VA*) as a founder of monasticism¹⁰⁹; we do not know whether Jerome did it because of personal ambition, conflict with Athanasius or more sublime reason like presenting another model of monastic life¹¹⁰. Anyway, *Vita beati Pauli* by Jerome confirms the importance of the beginnings of asceticism and sets up the precedent of substitution of one leader and master for another.

Mémoires" 4 (1970), 248-252; P. Rousseau, *Basil of Caesarea*, University of California Press, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London 1998, especially 9-10, 73-76, 239-245; F. Fatti, *Monachesimo anatolico. Eustazio di Sebastia e Basilio di Cesarea*, op. cit., 53-91.

¹⁰⁶ F. Loofs, *Eustathius von Sebaste und die chronologie der Basilius-briefe. Eine patristische studie*, Max Niemeyer, Halle 1898, 97; W.K. Lowther Clarke, *St Basil the Great: A Study in Monasticism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1913, 160-162; S. Elm, *Virgins of God*, op. cit., 134-135 and 212.

¹⁰⁷ J. Gribomont, *Eustache le philosophe et les voyages du jeune Basile de Césarée*, 123. The idea is present also in P. Maraval, *Intoduction*, SCh 178, 52 and S. Elm, *Virgins of God*, op. cit., 135.

¹⁰⁸ Regarding the date of Basil's death for the very good summary of the discussion see A.M. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger*, op. cit., 50.

¹⁰⁹ Jerome attested that openly at the very beginning of his *Vita beati Pauli monachi Thebani* (SCh 508, 144-146; transl. NPNF II 6, 404): "It has been a subject of wide-spread and frequent discussion what monk was the first to give a signal example of the hermit life. [...] So then inasmuch as both Greek and Roman writers have handed down careful accounts of Antony, I have determined to write a short history of Paul's early and latter days".

¹¹⁰ S. Rebenich, *Inventing an Ascetic Hero*, op. cit., 20-23.

The absence of Macrina in *Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, incoherencies in the Macrina writings, and contradictions between the Macrina writings and other sources in addition to complete silence about Macrina in the letters of Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus make me advance a thesis that Macrina as described by Gregory of Nyssa is a literary construct aimed at substituting the condemned Eustathius by a saint ascetic sister in the life and work of recently deceased Basil. The fictional Macrina protected not only Basil, but also the entire monasticism in Pontus from the accusation to have been inspired at the very beginning by Eustathius of Sebastea, the heretic condemned posthumously for the Trinitarian dissent.

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Summary

Scholars usually treat writings about Macrina the Younger as sources of information about historical events and persons. In my opinion, all four sources about Macrina were written according to the rules of literary genres that do not have as their objective to report history but have other purposes such as edification, polemics or honouring somebody. In addition to that, Macrina did not appear in many other sources in which she should have been mentioned if she had been an inspirer and leader of monasticism in Pontus. I think that Macrina, as described by Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus, was invented by them in order to substitute the true inspirer and leader of asceticism in Pontus – Eustathius of Sebastea.

Keywords: *Gregory of Nyssa, Macrina the Younger, Eustathius of Sebastea, hagiography, monasticism*

Makryna Młodsza – wymyślona święta

Streszczenie

Dzieła dotyczące Makryny Młodszej badacze traktują zwykle jako skarbnicę informacji na temat historycznych wydarzeń i osób. Moim zdaniem jednak każde z tych czterech pism zostało napisane zgodnie z zasadami gatunków literackich, których celem nie było i nie miało być opisywanie historii, ale które miały zupełnie inne zadania, takie jak zachęta moralna, polemika czy uhonorowanie kogoś. Z drugiej strony Makryna Młodsza nie pojawia się w wielu innych źródłach, w których z pewnością została by wspomniana, gdyby rzeczywiście była inspiratorką i liderką monastycyzmu w Poncie. Sądzę, że Makryna opisana przez Grzegorza z Nyssy i Grzegorza z Nazjanzu została przez nich wymyślona po to, by zastąpić prawdziwego inspiratora i lidera ascetyzmu pontyjskiego – Eustacjusza z Sebasty.

Słowa kluczowe: *Grzegorz z Nyssy, Makryna Młodsza, Eustacjusz z Sebasty, hagiografia, monastycyzm*