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# *Ousia* in Christian Thought at the Turn of the Second and Third Centuries

István M. BUGÁR

To Metropolitan Kallistos Ware  
*αἰωνία ἡ μνήμη αὐτοῦ*

1. *Ousia* before III<sup>rd</sup> c. AD; 2. Pseudo-Origen, Hippolytus; 3. Christological usage; 4. Significance and influence of Hippolytus' and Pseudo-Origen's Trinitarian terminology

The Nicaean contribution to Trinitology has become synonymous with the term *homoousios*, which, however, is far from a self-evident development unless viewed retrospectively. Nevertheless, the word soon became a *shibboleth* for the orthodox confession and has later given rise also to sarcastic remarks, like in the best-known Hungarian drama, Imre Madách's *Tragedy of Man* (1861). The scene concerned is situated in Constantinople, where the main hero as a tired soldier returning from a fight for Christendom seeks refuge. Let me briefly quote:

FOURTH CITIZEN Do you believe  
In *Homoiousion* or *Homoousion*?  
ADAM I don't understand.  
LUCIFER Refuse to tell them which.  
It happens to be a burning issue here.

1 The situation appears to echo ultimately Gregory of Nyssa's *De deitate filii et spiritus sancti* PG 46,557: Πάντα γὰρ τὰ κατὰ τὴν πόλιν τῶν τοιούτων πεπλήρωται, οἱ στενωποὶ, αἱ ἀγοραὶ, αἱ πλατεῖαι, τὰ ἀμφοδῶ-οἱ τῶν ἱματίων κάπηλοι, οἱ ταῖς τραπέζαις ἐφειστηκότες, οἱ τὰ ἐδώδιμα ἡμῖν ἀπεμπολοῦντες. Ἐὰν περὶ τῶν ὀβολῶν ἐρωτήσῃς, ὁ δέ σοι περὶ γεννητοῦ καὶ ἀγεννήτου ἐφιλοσόφησε· καὶ περὶ τιμήματος ἄρτου πύθιοιο, Μείζων ὁ Πατήρ, ἀποκρίνεται, καὶ ὁ Υἱὸς ὑποχείριος. Εἰ δὲ, Τὸ λουτρὸν ἐπιτήθειόν ἐστιν, εἶποις, ὁ δὲ ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων τὸν Υἱὸν εἶναι διωρίσατο. Οὐκ οἶδα τί χρῆ τὸ κακὸν τοῦτο ὀνομάσαι, φρενίτιν μανίαν, ἢ τι τοιοῦτον κακὸν ἐπιδήμιον, ὃ τῶν λογισμῶν τὴν παραφορὰν ἐξεργάζεται.

which phrase becomes meaningful when Adam has to witness an *auto-da-fé* of a group of persons condemned to the stake for their *homoiousian* confession. His reaction is summarized in the play in the following way:

LUCIFER                      Why stand so silently? Why are you trembling?  
You think this is a tragedy. Regard it  
As comedy instead: it will amuse you.

ADAM                         O do not joke about it! That one can die  
So resolutely for the letter 'i'.  
What then can we call sublime or noble?<sup>2</sup>

Let me disregard the crude anachronism – whether intentional or not – that the scene is set to the time of the first Crusade, long after the Nicaean controversy and well before the time of the western inquisition pictured, and linger only on the claim that an ‘i’ makes no real difference. Well, who does not recognize that it is not quite the same to be thrown at by an ἰσβόλος (a venomous arrow) or an ὀβολός (a good hour’s wage). Neither encountering an image produces the same experience as meeting a mage, nor would I agree that quality and equality are interchangeable. Of course, this counter-remark may be as frivolous as the playwright’s original *bon mot*. Edward Gibbon expressed his position not unlike to that of Madách in a more learned and nuanced way:

The Greek word which was chosen to express this mysterious resemblance bears so close an affinity to the orthodox symbol, that the profane of every age have derided the furious contests which the difference of a single diphthong excited between the Homoousians and the Homoiousians. As it frequently happens that the sounds and characters which approach the nearest to each other

2 The work has several English versions (by Charles Percy Sanger, Joseph Horne, Iain Macleod, Ottó Tomschey, and George Szirtes) Both quotes are from the last mentioned translation available online: <http://mek.oszk.hu/00900/00918/html/madach7.htm>. The drama was actually used as a script for an opera by Clive Strutt, *The Tragedy of Man*, 1985. Madách’s great-grandson, the American actor and professor of literature has recast the play as a musical, replacing the original deist message with a Christian one: Michael Madách, *Manchild* cf. <https://litera.hu/irodalom/publicisztika/michael-madach-madach-imre-elfelejtett-dedunokaja-es-a-manchild.html>.

accidentally represent the most opposite ideas, the observation would be itself ridiculous, if it were possible to mark any real and sensible distinction between the doctrine of the Semi-Arians, as they were improperly styled, and that of the Catholics themselves.<sup>3</sup>

These considerations thus invite us to a deeper investigation into the puzzling term, as has been summarized in a brief judgement on a student's essay on the subject by the late K. T. Ware: "Hm, you should wrestle more with *homoousios*."<sup>4</sup>

### *I. Ousia before III<sup>rd</sup> c. AD*

In the following I aim to contribute to this wrestling by uncovering an episode in the history of the critical part of the term *homoousios*, i.e. the concept of *ousia*. I shall focus on authors writing in Greek at the end of the second and the first decades of the third century who are connected in various ways to the dialect and network of early Christian thought that has been termed Asian; first and foremost, Hippolytus and the Roman cleric whose writings were transmitted in the Ancient and Byzantine periods under the name of Origen or Josephus and were attributed in modern times by conjecture to Hippolytus. Both used the concept of *ousia* in an original albeit dissimilar way and have made a deep impact on later Trinitarian theology and Nicæan terminology in their own different ways. In order to assess their contribution, I shall overview both the prehistory of the term in Greek philosophy and the immediate developments of its Christian usage subsequent to their activity, namely in Tertullian and Origen. Tertullian will appear to exhibit a uniquely intimate relation to both authors in the focus of my inquiry, while Origen will offer a telling parallel and contrast. While

3 Edward Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, John Bagnell Bury (ed.), London 1901-3, II,354 (originally published in 1781).

4 The point of the anecdote, as has been reported to me, was that the sentence had been uttered to a Benedictine student wearing his habit just like the bishop and was preceded by a long silence, all which were unintentionally witnessed by a renovation worker at Pembroke College, Oxford.

he introduces the term *hypostasis* in the Trinitarian language and Plotinus will take a further step to the neo-Nicaean understanding of the terms, Hippolytus will be shown to have introduced the concept of *prosōpon* in its later meaning and anticipate some further devices in clarifying the key Trinitarian concepts. In this way the authors I discuss will appear closer to the Constantinopolitan (or Cappadocian) understanding of Nicaea rather than to the original Nicaean definition as we know it.

The most thorough and comprehensive analysis of the prehistory of the Nicaean term *homoousios* and its component *ousia* known to me is that of the late Chr. Stead in his book *Divine substance*.<sup>5</sup> The reason why in the following I shall also attempt at a brief survey of the history of the concept *ousia* is double. First, a scheme partially different from and a pattern simpler than that of Chr. Stead will help us to map the terminology of the early Christian authors more clearly. Second, while establishing this pattern I shall use partly different sources than he did in his groundbreaking monograph.

It was Plato in his middle period of literary activity who transformed the everyday noun *ousia* meaning ‘property’ into an abstract philosophical term meaning ‘reality’, the real, truthful and eternal aspect of the world as opposed to the sensual.<sup>6</sup> He meant that *real estate* is to be found elsewhere than in earthly possessions. The ground for this transformation was that – as we all know it – this noun

5 Christopher Stead, *Divine Substance*, Clarendon, Oxford 1977; cf. Id., “The Significance of the *Homoousios*”, in *Studia Patristica* 3 (1961), 397-412, and for a non-standard interpretation of the history of the phrase see Pier Franco Beatrice, “The Word ‘Homoousios’ from Hellenism to Christianity”, in *Church History* 71 (2002), 243-272.

6 Let me enumerate only some characteristic examples throughout Plato’s literary activity out of the 274 instances found in the *THESAURUS LINGUAE GRAECAE: A Digital Library of Greek Literature* <https://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu> database: (1) ‘possessions’, ‘property’: *Gorgias* 486c; *Crito* 53b; *Republic* 329e; 330bd; 361b; 416d; *Phaedrus* 232c; 240a. 241c; *Theaetetus* 144cd; (2) ‘essence’: *Euthyphro* 11a; *Meno* 72b; *Phaedo* 65d; 76d; 77a; 78d; 92d; 101c; *Republic* 359a; *Phaedrus* 245e; (3) ‘existence’, ‘the real existent’, ‘the intelligible world’, *Phaedrus* 247c; *Republic* 485b; cf. *Cratylus* 401c; *Theaetetus* 155e; *Philebus* 53c; 54a; (4) more vaguely, in a sense in between the previous two: ‘substance’: *Cratylus* 388c, 385e; 386a; *Philebus* 27b; cf. also Chr. Stead, *Divine Substance*, 25-54.

is formed out of the root of the verb meaning when used absolutely ‘to be’ or ‘to be true’.<sup>7</sup> A surprising parallel to this building can be found in the non-Indo-European Hungarian, where the word for possession (*vagyon*) is also formed from – in fact identical with an archaic form of – the verb ‘is’ (*van*).<sup>8</sup>

Aristotle elaborated on Plato’s innovation with a critical intent. His explanation of the term *ousia* in his *Categories* is all too well known.<sup>9</sup> However, besides other more complex analyses in the *Metaphysics*,<sup>10</sup> the most revelatory passage can be found in *De anima*, where – as he would put it – he draws from a higher science, i.e. first philosophy, a tenet to be used as a kind of axiom in psychology. Here he is not exercising an *epagōgē* (*inductio*) cutting through the difficulties (*aporiai*) surrounding the concept but takes over a pattern fully established – as he is convinced – by him earlier and, consequently, his views on the correct usage of *ousia* appear in a crystallized, or, with a different metaphor, in a distilled form. Thus, in his introduction – or, better said, *inductio* –, leading to the definition of soul he bases his claims as on a firm ground on his views on the structure of reality. ‘Real existent’ or ‘reality’ is primarily the sensible, tangible object, which can be analysed into ‘form’ or ‘species’ (*deuterē ousia*, ‘secondary reality’) and matter (‘third reality’). While his ‘secondary *ousia*’ is a

7 Charles Howard Kahn, “The Greek Verb ‘To Be’ and the Concept of Being”, in *Foundations of Language* 2 (1966), 245-265; cf. id., *The Verb ‘Be’ in Ancient Greek*, Reidel, Dordrecht, 1973, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Hackett, Indianapolis 2003.

8 An even earlier form of the same word for possession in Hungarian (‘vagy’) found in an early-fifteenth-century Bible translation is identical in form with the second person singular of the same verb and can also mean abilities, capacities (its usage is attested also in the beginning of the sixteenth c.). The form ‘vayyon’ as noun is attested possibly from the end of the sixteenth century the earliest and in early usage can also mean ‘matter’.

9 Chr. Stead, *Divine Substance*, 55-88 discusses *Categories* and *Metaphysics* Z.

10 Cf. also Aristotle, *Metaphysics* Δ 1017b10-26. The authorship of this treatise (i.e. *Metaphysics* Δ) in its present form is dubious, but the scope of the work (ποσαχώς λέγεται [in how many different senses a certain term is used] – a phrase echoed more than a dozen times in Aristotle) is thoroughly Aristotelian, even if the reference to such a work of his own in *Metaphysics* E 1028a5 were a later addition.

direct heir of Plato's 'real existent', i.e. the Forms meant individually or collectively, his ranking it as secondary has a critical overtone. While he gladly embraces the view suggested by Plato's middle dialogues on the epistemological priority of the Forms, he disagrees on their ontological status. The real and primordial existent is the concrete, individual, and, with a single exception, sensual one, while forms or species are dependent on it.

Aristotle's guide to the concept is a pattern on which all later usages can be quite well explained. Thus, the Stoics, who had made the most enduring impact on late antique conceptual development besides Plato and Aristotle, drew on Aristotle's ontology but reserved the usage of the term *ousia* to the third Aristotelian domain of meaning, i.e. substrate or matter. It is thus economic to classify later usages of the term according to Aristotle's threefold scheme, without forgetting though about Plato.<sup>11</sup> An interesting development is what we find in Philo of Alexandria and the roughly contemporary Pseudo-Aristotelian *De mundo*. Here the Stoic cosmological distinction between *ousia* and *dynamis* is elaborated and transformed, perhaps through the mediation of Posidonius,<sup>12</sup> into a theory that Divine Substance (*ousia* – taken perhaps in the first and the second Aristotelian sense) is unknowable, but divine effects (*dynamis*) are graspable for humans.

Following the pattern just established, one can say, for example that Tertullian's usage of *substantia*, which by his time had become, by accident (in the sense of *Umfall*) the Latin equivalent of the Greek *ousia* and is commonly characterized as Stoic,<sup>13</sup> takes the third meaning

11 On Middle Platonism see Chr. Stead, *Divine Substance*, 118-125. Philo in *De Opificio mundi* 1 echoes the Stoic concept.

12 A reconstruction of this development can be found (in Hungarian) in my "Úszia és dünamisz. Egy ontológiai és ismeretelméleti megkülönböztetés történetéhez", in *Passim* 5 (2003), 35-47; on the issue generally with a focus on the 4<sup>th</sup> century and precedents, see the volume Tomasz Stępień – Karolina Kochańczyk-Bonińska, *Unknown God, Known in His Activities: Incomprehensibility of God during the Trinitarian Controversy of the 4th Century*, Peter Lang, Berlin 2018.

13 See e.g. Eric Osborn, *Tertullian, First Theologian of the West*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001, 131; 135.

according to the Aristotelian classification. The case of the Valentinians is more delicate. They appear to be the first to use the term *homoousios* in Christian context and, for sure, are the first to be attested to use the term at all.<sup>14</sup> What they generally mean by it is that two entities belong to the same ontological sphere, i.e. that of the spirit, of the soul, or matter.<sup>15</sup>

This may echo a Stoic language as in Tertullian but can also be classified with Aristotle's second meaning in the broad sense as 'of the same kind' or, in a more Platonic sense, 'belonging to the same sphere of being'.<sup>16</sup> The same ambiguity applies to Irenaeus' use of the term.<sup>17</sup>

Looking from the other end of the story, the Trinitological controversies of the fourth century can be seen as turning on the different interpretations of the term *homousios* in the Nicæan creed, where it is left rather ambiguous, or even "triguous". My question in the following will then be, where Christian authors of the turn of the second and third centuries stand within this scheme.

14 Chr. Stead, *Divine Substance*, 190-209. The *Poemandres* is hardly an independent witness to the use of the term as belonging to the same context of ideas and terms with the Gnostic texts. The only possible candidate for an independent attestation of the term would be Aetius IV,7,1 DG 392,8. Here, however, the testimony used to reconstruct the doxographical work is Theodoret. Mansfeld, indeed, accepts Theodoret as the superior witness to this section of Aetius' work but rejects the term *homousion*, just like its explanatory *homogenes*, since neither appear in Pseudo-Plutarch, an earlier and non-Christian author reproducing Aetius' passage: Jaap Mansfeld – David Runia, *Aëtiana V: An Edition of the Reconstructed Text of the Placita with a Commentary and a Collection of Related Texts*, Philosophia Antiqua 153, Brill, Leiden 2020, I,1503.

15 At least Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* I,5,1 suggests that the term can be used also for the psychological sphere at least and not only to the spiritual. The passage is quoted also by Chr. Stead, *Divine Substance*, 192-193.

16 This is confirmed by the language used in Ptolemaeus' *Letter to Flora* 7,8 (SC 24bis), where the First Principle is said to "beget by nature entities similar to and *homoousia* with itself". The examples of begetting, however, implies in Aristotle both material and formal identity.

17 Cf. the examples in Chr. Stead, *Divine Substance*, 200; see also Jonatan Simons, "God and *eiusdem substantiae* in Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2.17-18", in *Studia Patristica* 109 (2021), 55-68 where it is argued that Irenaeus is the forerunner of the Nicæan (and neo-Nicæan) usage of the term. In this passage Irenaeus seems to use *ousia* in the third Aristotelian (or Stoic) sense, like in IV,9, where *ousia* is understood to function as material names.



## 2. Pseudo-Origen, Hippolytus

Let me first say a few words about the authors concerned. First, I take it more than well established by P. Nautin,<sup>18</sup> M. Simonetti,<sup>19</sup> A. Brent,<sup>20</sup> and already by R. A. Lipsius<sup>21</sup> that the attribution of the *Refutatio omnium haeresium* to Hippolytus is baseless and impossible. Since the work was ascribed to Origen in Late Antiquity<sup>22</sup> and preserved under his name in manuscripts and since the author obviously cannot be Origen of Alexandria, I shall call him pseudo-Origen. Secondly, I take it also established by M. Simonetti<sup>23</sup> and others that he is younger than the renowned pre-Nicaean author Hippolytus and is partially dependent on him. Thirdly, the identity of Pseudo-Origen with Pseudo-Josephus, the author of *On the Universe against Plato* is also firmly proven by

- 18 Pierre Nautin, *Hippolyte et Josippe*, Etudes et Textes pour l'Historie du Dogme de la Trinité, 1, Cerf, Paris 1947; Id., *Le dossier d'Hippolyte et de Méliton dans les florilèges dogmatiques et chez historiens modernes*, Patristica I, Cerf, Paris 1953; Id., „L'homélie d'Hippolyte sur le psautier et les œuvres de Josipe”, in *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 179 (1971), 137-179.
- 19 Manlio Simonetti, “A modo di conclusione: una ipotesi di lavoro”, in *Ricerche su Ippolito*, Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum 13, Institutum Patristicum «Augustinianum», Roma 1977, 151-156; Id., “Aggiornamento su Ippolito”, in *Nuove ricerche su Ippolito*, Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum 30, Institutum Patristicum «Augustinianum», Roma 1989, 75-130; Id., “Una nuova proposta su Ippolito”, in *Augustianum* 36 (1996), 13-46; Id., “Per un profilo dell'autore dell' Elenchos”, in Gabriella Aragione – Enrico Norelli (eds.), *Des évêques, des écoles et les hérétiques. Actes du colloque international sur la “Réfutation de toutes les hérésies”, Genève, 13-14 juin 2008*, Éditions du Zèbre, Lausanne 2011, 257-273. Cf. also John Andrew Cerrato, *Hippolytus Between East and West*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2001.
- 20 Allen Brent, *Hippolytus and the Roman Church in the Third Century: Communities in Tension Before the Emergence of a Monarch-bishop*, Vigiliae Christianae Supplements, Brill, Leiden 1995; Id., “The Elenchos and the identification of Christian communities in second – early third century Rome” in G. Aragione – E. Norelli (eds.), *Des évêques* (2011), 275-314.
- 21 Richard Adelbert Lipsius, *Die Quellen der ältesten Ketzergeschichte, neu untersucht*, J. A. Barth, Leipzig 1875.
- 22 See e.g. Theodoret, *Haereticarum fabularum compendium*, I, 19 (Theodoret, elsewhere, quotes several passages from Hippolytus, all of which he attributes to Hippolytus); Photius, *Bibliotheca* cod. 48 (Photius also quotes works by Hippolytus as by Hippolytus: see e.g. *Bibliotheca* cod. 121; 202)
- 23 Manlio Simonetti (ed., tr., intr., com.), *Ippolito, Contro Noeto*, Dehoniana, Bologna 2000, 60-68; 121-122.

P. Nautin and E. Castelli.<sup>24</sup> I have also advanced a plethora of arguments in support of these three claims in my monograph a few years ago.<sup>25</sup>

As for their usage of the term *ousia*, Pseudo-Origen and Hippolytus follow a totally different path in spite of their common criticism of the monarchian and psilathropist theology. The former uses the term *ousia* in his brief history of Greek philosophy<sup>26</sup> and summarizes Aristotle's analysis of the concept of *ousia* in the *Categories*,<sup>27</sup> obviously following his sources. *Homoousios* also occurs in his description of the teaching of various Gnostic sects, partially based on Irenaeus in this respect, too.<sup>28</sup> What interests me here is, however, the use of the concept in his own theological and philosophical exposition. This we find partly attached as a *demonstratio* to the end of the *Refutatio*, partly in his polemics against Kallistos (Callixtus) of Rome, and partly in the fragments of his *On the substance of the Universe*. In the case of the latter, already the title of the work contains the word *ousia*. While in the caption of later fragments and in Photius' description of the work there are variations on this title,<sup>29</sup> the author definitely refers to this treatise of his in the *Refutatio* with a phrase, which occurs several times elsewhere

24 Emanuele Castelli, "The Author of the *Refutatio omnium haeresium* and Flavius Iosephus", in *Vetera Christianorum* 46 (2009), 17-30. For the fragments of this work and a detailed analysis of the context see István M. Bugár, "Pseudo-Origen against Plato: a chapter in the history of interactions between Platonist and Christian thought before Origen and Plotinus", in Z. Pogossian – A. Kraft – L. Giginishvili (eds.), ΠΟΛΥΤΡΟΠΙΑ, Bibliothèque de Byzantion, Peeters, Leuven forthcoming.

25 István M. Bugár, *A teológia kezdetei – a jánosi tradícióban: A Melitón- és a Hippolütosz-dosszié* [The Formation of Christian Theology and the Asiatic Tradition: The Dossiers of Melito and Hippolytus], Caténa monográfiák 16, Kairosz, Budapest 2016, 151-403; for an English summary see *ibidem*, 432-436; for *De universo* see my "Pseudo-Origen Against Plato" (cited in the previous note).

26 Pseudo-Origen, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* (= *Ref.*) I = *Philosophumena* (7 examples); but the term appears quite often in the description of the teachings of several Christian sects in the later books.

27 A curious feature of this description is the threefold division of the meaning of *ousia* as *genus*, *species* and *individuum*.

28 See Chr. Stead, *Divine Substance*, 204-206.

29 See Bugár, "Pseudo-Origen Against Plato", n. 28.

in the same work<sup>30</sup> as Περὶ τῆς τοῦ παντὸς οὐσίας. Now what does *ousia* mean in this title? Both Photius' description of the work and the author's reference to its content make it clear that in the cosmological description therein *ousia* stands for the cosmic elements:

He first fashioned four different first principles for future beings, namely fire, spirit, water, and earth. From these four principles he made his diverse creation. Some things were made from one substance (οὐσία), others he bound together from two, others from three, and others from four. (Ref. X,32,2 tr. Litwa = *De universo* T1 Bugár<sup>31</sup>)

These he calls *prōtai ousiai*, in sharp contrast to Aristotle's classification.<sup>32</sup>

As we may gather from a direct quote of the work in Photius (F2 Bugár) and from the subtitle of the work (*Against Plato*),<sup>33</sup> this fact may be taken in itself as a direct corporealist polemic against Plato's ontology and cosmology. The real existent in the universe are the elements and not the immaterial and eternal archetypes of the world, which are called both collectively and distributively *ousia* in Plato's *Timaeus*.<sup>34</sup> A further point Pseudo-Origen makes is that the elements are created out of nothing, unlike in the *Timaeus*, but indestructible, like the soul-gods in the cosmology of Plato. While this second point is inconsistent with Stoic cosmology, the first – his insistence on the ontological priority of matter compared to universals – is largely dependent on Stoic ontology.<sup>35</sup> All the more so, since in Pseudo-Origen's doctrine of elements spirit (*pneuma*) takes the place of air and is the principle of life and cognition in humans (F2 ed. Bugár). This is

30 Ref. IV,51; VII,38.

31 Fragments of *De universo* (= *un.*) are cited according to the text in the appendix of István M. Bugár, *Pseudo-Origen Against Plato*. Translation is from the bilingual text of Matthew David Litwa (tr., intr. notes), *Refutation of All Heresies*, Writings for the Graeco-Roman World 40, SBL Press, Atlanta (GA) 2016.

32 Ref. X,33,4.

33 See the reference in n. 29.

34 Plato, *Timaeus* 29c, 35ab; 37ae.

35 This is reinforced by the phrase in Ref. IV,51: τὴν τοῦ παντὸς οὐσίαν καὶ δύναμιν.

congruent with the anthropology of Irenaeus and Tertullian, the first of which influenced, while the second was influenced by our author.<sup>36</sup> What we have said here stands also for Pseudo-Origen's use of *ousia* in Christology, to which I will return in the next section.

By analogy, however, he uses *ousia* also for the Divine Substance of the Son, which, by contrast, is not generated out of nothing: "His Word alone is out of Him and is thus god, too, since He is the substance (*ousia*) of God."<sup>37</sup>

Here, like in Tertullian, *ousia* is used in a way that a kind of divine matter is suggested as opposed to created elements. This usage is actually in line with the archaic language of the Nicæan definition ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ πατρὸς and the condemnation of ἐξ ἑτέρας ὑποστάσεως ἢ οὐσίας.<sup>38</sup>

There are two further occurrences of *ousia* in *De universo*. The first is a reference to the "numerous births (*genesin*) and innumerable substances (*ousian*) of gods"<sup>39</sup> in Hesiod and Homer, where the usage is close to the first Aristotelian domain of the noun, i.e. individual being but the parallelism of *genesis* and *ousia* might also recall a Platonic language. Since at least the critique of these literary authors for their claims that gods are born goes back to Xenophanes, the phrase quoted in the invective may actually have been borrowed and is thus of little telling for our author's terminology. It is in fact reinforced by the repetition of the same structure in his description of Paradise,

36 Charles Edward Hill, "Hades of Hippolytus or Tartarus of Tertullian? The Authorship of the Fragment *De Universo*", in *Vigiliae Christianae* 43 (1989), 105-126; István M. Bugár, "Pseudo-Origen Against Plato".

37 *Ref. X* 33,8 τοῦτου <δὲ> ὁ Λόγος μόνος ἐξ αὐτοῦ· διὸ καὶ θεός, οὐσία ὑπάρχων θεοῦ.

38 Eusebius, *Epistula ad Caesarienses* 8 = Athanasius, *De decretis Nicaenae Synodi* 33,8; 37,2 (cf. *ibid.* 33,13 and *Epistula ad Jovianum* PG 26, 817); Basil of Caesaria, *Epistulae* 125,2; 140,2; Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* (= HE) I,8; IV,12; Epiphanius, *Ancoratus* 118,13; 119,12; *Panarion* III,266; Theodoret, *HE* 215; Cyrillus of Alexandria, *De sancta trinitate dialogi i-vii*, Aubert (ed.), 390; Justinianus Imperator, *Contra monophysitas* 87,58skk). See also Athanasius, *De decretis* 27,1 (referring to the authority of Origen) and Socrates, *HE* III,7.

39 *un.* FI,1 ed. Bugár.

where “nor will there be generation (*genesis*) of wild beasts again, nor the bursting substance (*ousia*) of other creatures”.<sup>40</sup> This points to a poetic-rhetorical idiomatic phrase that is of little terminological or philosophical import.

Hippolytus, by contrast to Pseudo-Origen, uses *ousia* in his Trinitarian exposition at the end of his own heresiological work, the *Syntagma* in a completely different way:

If, again, he {Noetus} alleges His own word when He said, “I and the Father are one,” (Jn 10:30) let him attend to the fact, and understand that He did not say, “I and the Father am one, but are one.” For the word ‘are’ is not said of one person (*prosōpon*), but it refers to two persons, and one power (*dynamis*). [2] He has Himself made this clear, when He spake to His Father concerning the disciples, “The glory which Thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and Thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; that the world may know that Thou hast sent me.” (Jn 17:22-23) [3] What have the Noetians to say to these things? Are all one body in respect of substance [*ousia*], or is it that we become one in the power [*dynamis*], and disposition of unity of mind [*homonōia*]? In the same manner the Son, who was sent and was not known of those who are in the world, confessed that He was in the Father in power [*dynamis*] and disposition. For the Son is the one mind of the Father.<sup>41</sup>

Thus, in his Trinitology identity of *ousia* means numerical identity.<sup>42</sup> In other words, it represents what Aristotle called the first *ousia*. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are separate in *ousia* as are different human beings, but one in power and mind. As we learn later in his treatise, *ousia* is synonymous with person (*prosōpon*):

[2] If, then, the Word was with God, and was also God, what follows? Would one say that he speaks of two Gods? I shall not indeed speak of two Gods, but of

40 *un.* F5 ed. Bugár, translation by Stewart Dingwall Fordyce Salmond from *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5, *Hippolytus, Cyprian, Caius, Novatian, Appendix*. Alexander Roberts – James Donaldson (eds.), Arthur Cleveland Coxe, D.D. (rev.), T&T Clark, Edinburgh 1886 (= ANF 5), 221-223.

41 Hippolytus, *Contra Haeresin Noeti* 7,13, translation from ANF 5,226.

42 The question “Are all one *body* in respect of substance?” signifies possibly a material connotation of the use of *ousia*, but it still denotes an identity more radical than material identity, of which materiality is but an aspect. Nevertheless, since the expression ‘one body’ is a reference to the Pauline concept (Rom 12:5; 1Cor 10:17;12:13; Eph 4:4) conveying a similar message to Jn 17:21-4 quoted by Hippolytus, one should be cautious to read too much (even implicit) philosophical theory into this phrase.

one; of two persons however, and of a third economy (disposition), viz., the grace of the Holy Ghost. [3] For the Father indeed is One, but there are two persons, because there is also the Son; and then there is the third, the Holy Spirit.<sup>43</sup>

It is thus Hippolytus who introduces the term *person* into Trinitology<sup>44</sup> and by connecting it to *ousia* taken in the sense of *proté ousia*, which becomes *hypostasis* in the Cappadocian terminology, he detaches *prosōpon* from its original meaning as mask and role.<sup>45</sup> The *Contra haeresin Noeti* – the authenticity of which some debated on insufficient grounds<sup>46</sup> – is not the only text, where we find the new

43 Hippolytus, *Contra Haeresin Noeti* 14,2-3; translation from ANF 5,228.

44 See also Manlio Simonetti, “«Persona» nel dibattito cristologico dal III al IV secolo”, in *Studium* 91/4-5 (1995), 531. There are, however, earlier texts that prepared the way: Justin Martyr, *Apology I* 36,2; *Dialogus* 36,6; Theophilus, *Ad Autolyicum* II,22 (where it still rather means just ‘role’); Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* V,6: 34,1 (where it signifies ‘face’. i.e. the Son is the Father’s face; cf. *Excerpta ex Theodoto* 1,12,1; 1,23,5); Origen, *De engastrimytho* 4 (the Holy Spirit is termed a *prosōpon*, but in the sense of being one of the *dramatis personae* of the story besides other *human* characters. cf. also Mt 18:10 on seeing the Father’s *prosōpon*, i.e. ‘face’). It is remarkable, that the part of the *Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila* that is supposed to represent an earlier redaction dated to the (late) second or the third century describes the Father and the Son as two *πρόσωπα* (29,1, and in 25,1 with less likelihood original but especially reminiscent of Hippolytus, *Contra haeresin Noeti* 14,3 just quoted). On the problem of the dating of the dialogue and its incoherent Trinitarian language see Jacqueline Pastis, “Dating the Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila: Revisiting the Earlier Vorlage Hypothesis”, in *The Harvard Theological Review* 95 (2002), 169-195, esp. 173-174.

45 For the later development and a philosophical analysis of the concepts see e.g. John Zizioulas, *Personhood and Being*, in *Being as Communion*, Norman Russel (tr.), St Vladimir’s, New York 1985; (repr. 1993), 27-65.

46 Marcel Richard, s.v. ‘Hippolyte’, in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, VII, Beauchesne, Paris, 1969, coll. 531-571, 545-568; vö. Josef Frickel, *Das Dunkel um Hippolyt von Rom: Ein Lösungsversuch: die Schriften Elenchos und Contra Noëtum*, Grazer Theologische Studien 13, Eigenverlag des Instituts für ökumenische Theologie und Patrologie an der Universität Graz, Graz 1988. Their position directly followed from their attributing the *Ref* to Hippolytus, since the theology of the latter work is indeed different from that of the *Contra haeresin Noeti*. Butterworth in his edition shared their rejection of the attribution to Hippolytus: Hippolytus of Rome, *Contra Noetum*, Heythrop College (University of London), London 1977, 1-42. More recent authors, whom I follow, saw no point in denying the authenticity witnessed by Epiphanius of Salamis, who quotes the treatise (in fact the final chapter of Hippolytus’ heresiological work, the *Syntagma*): A. Brent, *Hippolytus*, 180-183; M. Simonetti, Ippolito, *Contro Noeto*, 62-68; similarly already P. Nautin, *Hippolyte contre les hérésies: Fragment*, Cerf, Paris 1949. I have argued for the authenticity on double grounds: the difference from the *Refutatio* (the recognition of which is shared by both parties) and the remarkable uniformity of terminology and thought in the remnants of the authentic *oeuvres* of Hippolytus: I. M. Bugár, *A teológia kezdetei*, 226-231; 239-263; 287-289. I have also supported with further arguments Simonetti’s claim (based on the relationship of *Contra haeresin Noeti* and

Trinitarian terminology in Hippolytus. It occurs also in his exegetical oeuvres, which fact shows its central place in his theology:

“Iuda, my son, you are a lion’s whelp from a blossom” – now when Jacob said “lion” and “lion’s whelp”, he showed obviously the two persons, that of the Father and the Son.<sup>47</sup>

Actually, traces of the Trinitological use of *prosōpon* coupled with *ousia* is attested in Pseudo-Origen’s polemic against Kallistos of Rome, where he describes his opponents’ view in the following way:

He is also called and addressed as Son in word but in reality (*ousiāi*) he is <one><sup>48</sup> with him. Since – he says – God is spirit (*pneuma*), God is not different from the Son, neither is the Son different from God. (4) Thus, it is one person (*prosōpon*) that can be divided on word (*onomati*) but not in reality (*ousiāi*).<sup>49</sup>

Here, if we are inclined to believe verbally to Pseudo-Origen, in Kallistos *ousia* represents *pneuma*, thus it is used in the third Aristotelian sense, just like in Pseudo-Origen’s own terminology and unlike in that of Hippolytus;<sup>50</sup> nonetheless it serves as a basis to

Tertullian’s *Adversus Praxean*) that Hippolytus is – in contrast with Brent’s dating – earlier than the *Refutatio ibid.* 232-238.

47 Hippolytus, *De Benedictionibus Isaac et Jacob*, Constantin Diobouniotis – Nicholas Weis (eds.), *Hippolyts Schrift über die Segnungen Jakobs*, Texte und Untersuchungen 38-39, 1914, 76,3-4: Σκύμνος λέοντος Ἰούδα ἐκ βλαστοῦ, υἱέ μου, ἀνέβη. λέοντα οὖν καὶ σκύμνον λέοντος εἰπὼν σαφῶς τὰ δύο πρόσωπα ἐπέδειξεν, τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ υἱοῦ.

48 The text appears to be truncated (although taken out of the context “is with [in] Him” makes perfect sense as in the passage quoted from Hippolytus’ *Contra haeresin Nocti* above [n. 41] but is inappropriate in a description of the theology of Kallistos), so Wendland and Marcovich in their editions rightly emend it based on the authority of *Ref* IX,12,16, but their addition “spirit” (based again on the same parallel passage in *Ref*) is not necessary and the omission could not be accounted for, unlike in the case of <ἐν> ὄντα with haplography (Marcovich, actually, rewrites the text with the insertion of other unnecessary phrases as he does throughout his otherwise exceptionally learned edition). M. D. Litwa, *Refutation of All Heresies*, 736 accepts only the insertion πνεῦμα and rejects ἐν.

49 *Ref.* X,27,3-4 (in the “summary”; cf. the detailed description in IX,12,18.

50 There is a fragment attributed to Hippolytus by Anastasius of Sinai (*Fragmentum de resurrectione et incorruptione* (ap. *Anastasio Sinaitam, Viae dux* CPG 1901) that uses *ousia* in a vague sense (beings, substances) that best fits the second Aristotelian meaning but can involve all three. As, however, it seems to suggest an incorporeal eschatological state that is contrary to Hippolytus’ strong emphasis on the presence of the body in the *eschaton*, it is highly suspicious (I. M. Bugár, *A teológia kezdetei*, 369; P. Nautin, *Le dossier d’Hippolyte et de Méliiton*, 84-85 comes to the same conclusion for different reasons).

personal identity, just not that of the three divine persons but of the sole and unitary God.

### 3. Christological usage

It is even more significant that we find the traces of the use of *ousia* in a Christological sense. It is especially Hippolytus who, following a long Asian theological tradition, emphasizes the paradox unity of divinity and humanity in Christ.<sup>51</sup> In an exegetical fragment, however, if we can trust the verbal fidelity of Leontius of Byzantium,<sup>52</sup> Hippolytus used the term *ousia* to express this conviction: “that he may be shown to have both the substance (*ousia*) of God and that of humans in himself”.<sup>53</sup> The passage then states that it is in this way that Christ mediates between two (legal) persons (*prosōpon*). Although one might suggest that the initial clause quoted summarizing the rest of the passage may have originally belonged with the lemma of the *testimonium*, or was a gloss at an earlier stage of the transmission of the quotation, that the terminology therein, however, is not anachronistic

51 Hippolytus’ “love for Christological antitheses” is highlighted already by Aloys Grillmeyer, *Christ in Christian Tradition I: From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon*, John Bowden (tr.), A. R. Mowbray & Co, London 1975 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), 113. More on the issue: István M. Bugár, “Can Theological Language be Logical? The Case of ‘Josipe and Melito’”, in *Studia Patristica* 54 (2012), 154-155; *A teológia kezdetei*, 68-71; 107-108; 325-333.

52 Hans Achelis (ed.), *Hippolyt’s kleinere exegetische und homiletische Schriften*, Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller 1.2., Hinrichs, Leipzig 1897, 82 from (1) Leontius <of Jerusalem>, *Contra monophysitas* (CPG 6917) PG 86,1836C (and Munich, BSB gr. 67, s. xvi) and (2) Leontius <of Byzantium>, *Contra Nestorianos et Eutybianos libri III* (CPG 6813) PG 86,1312A. I have collated Achelis’ text with one of the two earliest manuscripts (Vat. gr. 2195, 35) of the latter (in fact earliest of all codices containing either of the two works concerned) but found no textual variants. The previous testimony in the florilegium of Leontius of Byzantium is attributed to Irenaeus in the lemma (Irenaeus fr. 8., Harvey (ed.)) but is most probably rightly restored to Hippolytus by P. Nautin, *Le dossier d’Hippolyte et de Méliton*. Misattribution of Hippolytean texts to Irenaeus was actually common, like in the case of his *De benedictionibus Isaac et Jacob*. Leontius of Jerusalem cites only the first clause quoted above (as in Achelis, PG and the 16<sup>th</sup> century manuscripts the editors used; I had currently no possibility to check the two earlier codices).

53 *De benedictione Balaam* (fragmentum ex Leontio) H. Achelis (ed.) *Hippolyt’s kleinere Schriften*, 82, line 5: “Ἦνα δὲ δειχθῆναι τὸ συναμφοτέρον ἔχων ἐν ἑαυτῷ, τήν τε τοῦ θεοῦ οὐσίαν καὶ τὴν ἐξ ἀνθρώπων [...]



in itself for Hippolytus' time at least is shown by Pseudo-Origen's exposition of the true doctrine. He says:

If that man (i.e. Jesus Christ) had been actually of a different substance (*ousia*), how could he command to me, a weak man, to be and do things like him?<sup>54</sup>

Here, however, Pseudo-Origen again uses *ousia* in the sense peculiar to him, i.e. meaning substrate and matter, just as when he criticizes Apelles whom he alleges to have claimed that the body of Christ was of a different matter than ours.<sup>55</sup> He also suggests that Kallistos of Rome confessed a two-*prosōpon* Christology saying that "He (Kallistos) does not want that in Christ the Father (i.e. God) and the Son (i.e. the man) be the same person (*prosōpon*)."<sup>56</sup> We may gather from this that Pseudo-Origen favoured a two-substance and one-person Christology.

#### 4. Significance and influence of Hippolytus' and Pseudo-Origen's Trinitarian terminology

Thus, with Pseudo-Origen we come very close to Tertullian's Christological terminology: *duae substantiae in una persona*.<sup>57</sup> The first half of this definition, as we have seen, is possibly professed already by Hippolytus. In Tertullian's Trinitarian formula, conversely, the first half (*una substantia*) is attested by Pseudo-Origen<sup>58</sup> in sharp contrast to Hippolytus' language, while *tres personae*<sup>59</sup> comes quite obviously from Hippolytus.<sup>60</sup> The realization of the influence of these authors on Tertullian, which can be shown also in spheres other than Trinitology

54 Ref. X,33,16 εἰ γὰρ ἐκεῖνος ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἑτέρας ἐτύγγανεν οὐσίας, τί τὰ ὁμοία κελεύει ἐμοί, τῷ ἄσθ(ενεῖ) πεφυκότι, καὶ πῶς οὗτος ἀγαθὸς καὶ δίκαιος;

55 Ref. X,20 ἐς VII,38.

56 Ref. IX,12,19.

57 Tertullian, *Adversus Praxean* 27,11. On Tertullian see E. Osborn, *Tertullian*, 131-135 and Chr. Stead, *Divine Substance*, 202-204.

58 See above n. 37. This, in its turn, might be due to an influence from Irenaeus: see n. 17.

59 Tertullian, *Adversus Praxean*, 6,1; 7,9; 12,3.

60 See M. Simonetti, *Contro Noeto*, 60-68; 121-122 with further literature.

and Christology<sup>61</sup> – enables us to understand both Tertullian and generally the history of Christian doctrine better. Of course, we can detect the differences not only between Hippolytus and Pseudo-Origen, but also between Tertullian and the latter even where they agree on one *ousia-substantia*, since Pseudo-Origen, unlike Tertullian (and supposedly Kallistos of Rome) distinguished sharply between *pneuma* and divine substance. As for their common difference from Hippolytus' three-*ousiai* formula, it is explained by their different understanding of the term falling under different headings in the Aristotelian classification. Hippolytus' conceiving of it as individual being, while non-standard after Nicaea, is not surprising at this stage, since it is echoed also by Origen<sup>62</sup> and through him it influenced the neo-Nicaean efforts to clarify the meanings of the term when used for Trinitological discussion. Hippolytus' direct influence in these debates might be evidenced by Epiphanius' quotation of *Contra haeresin Noeti* in his *Panarion*.<sup>63</sup> Whatever the scale of this direct impact might have been, it appears established that Hippolytus and Pseudo-Origen played a decisive role in introducing the philosophical term *ousia* into Christian theological language. While at the latter of the two authors the inspiration through Irenaeus from the Gnostic (and Hermetic) concept *homoousios* played a major role beside Stoic ideas, Hippolytus

61 See literature above in n. 36.

62 On the synonymy of the two terms see esp. *Commentarii in Iohannem*. I,151 discussed with other passages of the same work in a wider investigation of the meaning of *hypostasis* in Origen in Vito Limone "Hypostasis in Origen: The Roots of the Fourth Century-Trinitarian Theology", in *Eastern Theological Journal* 7/2 (2021), 139-163, here 150-152. Already in *De principiis* Origen appears to have used *ousia* and the emerging term *hypostasis* interchangeably when corresponding to Aristotle's 'first substance', as we may gather from Rufinus' translation: *subsistentia*: I,1,3 (cf. V. Limone, 'Hypostasis', 161, n. 57); 3,1 (used for the Holy Spirit); I,2,2; 4,5; 2,6; 2,9 (for the Son); II 1,2 (for intelligent creatures); *substantia vel subsistentia* in I 2,8 probably translates the single Greek word *hypostasis* in a reference to Heb 1:3 (perhaps Rufinus had found *substantia* in the Latin translation he used); *substantia* I praef. 5 (soul); I,3,2 (Holy Spirit) I 1,6 (as a synonym for *natura*); 1,7 (sensual substance); I,2,2 (*substantialiter*) etc. On *homoousios* in Trinitological context in Origen see Chr. Stead, *Divine Substance*, 209-214 (on *ousia ibid.* 138-140).

63 Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion*, 57, Karl Holl (ed.), *Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller* 31, Hinrichs, Leipzig 1922, 343-349.

follows an independent path in identifying *ousia* with Aristotle's 'first substance'. While this differs from the consensus established in the fourth century, nevertheless through Origen – who according to the testimony of Jerome<sup>64</sup> at least knew and respected Hippolytus – it prepared the way for the formula accepted later universally. Further, as Hippolytus appears to be the first to introduce the term 'person' into the discussion, he, on the one hand, obviously influenced – through Tertullian and Novatian<sup>65</sup> – the preferred Trinitarian formula in Latin milieu. His way of expressing divine unity through common *dynamis* and *homonoiia*, on the other hand, comes very close to the neo-Nicaean position as formulated in St. Gregory of Nyssa's *Ad Ablabium*.

## Abstract

My paper aims at assessing the role of two authors in the prehistory of Nicaean theology. Hippolytus and Pseudo-Origen were both active at the beginning of the third century, probably both at Rome, and certainly both influenced by Irenaeus in their own different ways. Although they were speculatively and unsuccessfully identified by many scholars from the middle of the nineteenth to the middle of the twentieth century, their method, style, attitude, and theological horizon is radically different. This is obvious also from the present perspective, where I examine their usage of the term *ousia* in Trinitarian context. To distinguish between the different meanings of the philosophical term,

64 Jerome, *De uiris illustribus* 61, Ernest Cushing Richardson (ed.), *Texte und Untersuchungen* 14/1a, Hinrichs, Leipzig, 1896, 35-36).

65 Novatian seems to have been influenced both through Tertullian and directly by Hippolytus in the use of the term *personae* (*De Trinitate* 26,2; 27,3-4; 6-7; 9; 31,5). While he is closer to Tertullian's Trinitological and Christological formulas (*substantiae communio* – *De Trinitate* 31,20), Hippolytus' direct impact can be discovered in *De Trinitate* 17 (the exegesis of Jn 10:30), and in the description of the unity of *personae* as *concordia* in *De Trinitate* 27,3. On Novatian's *De Trinitate* in general see James Louis. Papandrea, *Novatian of Rome and the Culmination of Pre-Nicene Orthodoxy*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series 175, Wipf and Stock, Eugene (OR) 2008.

I use as a basis the simple but useful scheme described in Aristotle's terminological and metaphysical introduction to the definition of the soul in *De anima* II 1. This threefold division describes fairly well also the diverse understandings of the Nicaean definition in its fourth-century aftermath. It appears that the two authors scrutinised in this paper use the term consistently but differently from each-other. Nonetheless, they both contribute decisively to the later Trinitarian developments, especially by influencing Tertullian and through Hippolytus' possible impact on, or at least certain convergence with Origen.





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