

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS ON THE ICONOCLAST ISSUE IN THE HESYCHAST CONTROVERSY

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ABSTRACT. Mid-fourteenth-century Byzantine sources bear witness to an increased interest in Iconoclasm among the theologians involved in the Hesychast Controversy. The writings of the defenders of icon veneration were mined for authoritative quotations and the history of Iconoclasm became a repository of historical role models. This article is comprised of two sections. The first part expands a catalogue of texts of the epoch which make explicit reference to precedents in the Iconoclast period. The second part assesses, first, the polemical advantages and disadvantages of the accusation of iconoclasm in mid-fourteenth-century Byzantium by revisiting the afterlife of this label after the Triumph of Orthodoxy. Secondly, it traces the dynamics of how Iconoclasm was remembered in the Hesychast debate, distinguishing between the mythologizing and the philological levels of remembrance. The conclusion draws a connection between Nikephoros Gregoras' approaches to theological polemics and to hagiography. The initial success and eventual fading-away of the iconoclastic motif in Hesychast polemics is explained by the uniqueness of Gregoras' literary method and his personal circumstances.

Keywords: Nikephoros Gregoras, John Kyparissiotes, Theodore Graptos, Byzantine literature, cultural memory, Palaeologan period, Iconoclasm, Hesychasm

The objective of the present article is twofold. The first part (which is technical in nature) constitutes an addendum to a 2013 publication: it provides a list of texts pertaining to the Hesychast Controversy that contain explicit mentions of Iconoclasm (or quotations from anti-iconoclast sources) but which,

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for a variety of reasons, previously escaped my notice. The second part, which is more speculative in nature, ponders the relative importance of theology, politics, and literary aesthetics as factors that propelled the Iconoclast issue to the top of the agenda during the Hesychast Controversy. I argue that, despite undeniable polemical advantages surrounding the accusation of Iconoclasm, explained by its usage during the Komnenian and early Palaeologan epochs, it is ultimately Nikephoros Gregoras' personal circumstances and literary principles that should be held responsible for the revitalization of the Iconoclast issue in mid-fourteenth-century Byzantium.

1.

The preliminary catalogue of fourteenth-century authors interested in Iconoclasm, which I published in 2013, included Joseph Kalothetes, Gregory Palamas, Philotheos Kokkinos, John VI Kantakouzenos, Nikephoros Gregoras, Isaac Argyros, Theodore Dexios, and Manuel Kalekas (John Kyparissiotis was barely mentioned).¹ These are, by any count, the most distinguished theologians of the epoch, but the list is far from being exhaustive. It should be expanded to include:

1. The compilers of the *Synodal Tomos* of 1351, Philotheos Kokkinos and Neilos Kabasilas, who mention Theodore Graptos by name, the confessor of second Iconoclasm.²

2. Kallistos I, Patriarch of Constantinople (1350–1353, 1355–1363/4). Of interest are the *Homily against the False Prophets and False Teachers* (1355–1357), in which the anti-Palamites are compared to the arch-iconoclast Eusebius of Caesarea,³ and the *Homilies against Nikephoros Gregoras* (1357–1359): *Homily 2* (which makes reference to Eusebius' *Letter to Constantia*), *Homily 7* (a refutation

¹ Lev Lukhovitskij, "Historical Memory of Byzantine Iconoclasm in the 14th Century: The Case of Nikephoros Gregoras and Philotheos Kokkinos," in *Aesthetics and Theurgy in Byzantium*, eds. Sergei Mariev and Wiebke-Marie Stock (Byzantinisches Archiv 25) (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013), 210–213, 231–233.

² *Concilium Constantinopolitanum 1351*, ed. Frederick Lauritzen, in *The Great Councils of the Orthodox Churches: From Constantinople 861 to Moscow 2000*, ed. Alberto Melloni (Corpus Christianorum Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Generaliumque Decreta 4.1) (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), 189.418–419. On Theodore Graptos, see *PmbZ* 7526.

³ Kallistos I, *Homilia adversus pseudoprophetas et pseudomagistros*, ed. Constantine Paidas, *Ψευδοπροφήτες, μάγοι και αίρετικοί στο Βυζάντιο κατά τον 14^ο αιώνα: Επτά ανέκδοτες όμιλίες του Πατριάρχου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως Καλλίστου Α΄* (Κείμενα Βυζαντινής Λογοτεχνίας 6) (Athens: Κανάκη, 2011), 70–126, here at 122: αὐτὸς ὁ τῶν εἰκονομάχων προστάτης Εὐσέβιος. On Kallistos I, see *PLP* 10478.

of Gregoras' reading of Eusebius), and *Homily 9*. The title of the *Homily 9* promises to prove that Gregoras "inflicts on the Church the disgrace of Iconoclasm."⁴

3. George of Pelagonia, in a short treatise *Against Palamas*, composed after Palamas' demise, presumably in 1360 (wherein the *Antirrhetici* of Nikephoros of Constantinople are quoted and attributed to Graptos).⁵

4. John Kyparissiotēs:

a. *Decades (Elementary Exposition of Theological Sayings)* (wherein multiple quotations from Nikephoros of Constantinople are attributed to Theodore Graptos).⁶

b. Polemical treatises. After the demise of his teacher Nikephoros Gregoras, Kyparissiotēs, as a new intellectual leader of the anti-Palamites, authored a series of polemical treatises known as the *Transgressions of the Palamites* or *Against the Heresy of Palamas*. Book 5, which is primarily directed against Neilos Kabasilas, was composed when Neilos was still alive (i.e., before 1363).⁷ Books 1–4 can be tentatively dated to the early 1360s (before the second election of Kokkinos as patriarch of Constantinople in October 1364). Books 1–4 were, in turn, refuted one by one by John VI Kantakouzenos in 1365–1367, but this voluminous treatise remains unedited (*Laur. Plut.* 8.8).⁸ Material for our analysis can be found in all parts of Kyparissiotēs' oeuvre. Book 1 opens with an excursus on the

⁴ Kallistos I, *Homiliae adversus Gregoram*, ed. Paidas, *Oi katà Γρηγορά Ὁμιλίαι τοῦ Πατριάρχου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως Καλλίστου Α΄* (Βυζαντινὴ Φιλοσοφία καὶ Θεολογία 1) (Athens: Γρηγόρη, 2013), 89–299, esp. *Hom.* 2, 17, *Hom.* 7, 3–4, and *Hom.* 9 (τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ προστρίβει τὸ τῆς εἰκονομαχίας αἴσχος). The dating of the *Homilies* depends on the date of the *Second Antirrhetics* by Gregoras (PLP 4443), which is uncertain; see Lukhovitskij, "Historical Memory," 212, n. 49. Assuredly, they were composed before Gregoras' death, which is usually placed in 1361; see Demetrios B. Gonis, *Τὸ συγγραφικὸν ἔργον τοῦ Οἰκουμενικοῦ Πατριάρχου Καλλίστου Α΄* (Athens: Ἀλτιντζῆ, 1980), 162–199.

⁵ George of Pelagonia, *Adversus Palamam*, ed. Ioannis D. Polemis, *Theologica varia inedita saeculi XIV* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 3–51, esp. 43 (chapter 32). The quotation comes from Nikephoros I, *Antirrhetici tres adversus Constantinum Copronymum*, PG 100, 304c-d (I 41). On George of Pelagonia, see PLP 4117.

⁶ John Kyparissiotēs, *Expositio materiaria*, ed. Basil L. Dentakis, *Ἰωάννου τοῦ Κυπαρισσιώτου Τῶν Θεολογικῶν Ῥήσεων Στοιχειώδης Ἐκθεσις: Editio princeps* (Athens, 1982), 279 (VI 4), 287–289 (VI 5), 601–605 (X 4). The fragments quoted and discussed go back to Nikephoros I, *Contra Eusebium*, ed. Jean-Baptiste-François Pitra, *Spicilegium solesmense complectens sanctorum patrum scriptorumque ecclesiasticorum anecdota hactenus opera*, vol. 1 (Paris: F. Didot, 1852), 408.1–27, 417.34–418.15, 420.10–28, and Nikephoros I, *Antirrhetici*, 325b (I 48), 304c-d (I 41), 325b (I 48). On John Kyparissiotēs, see PLP 13900.

⁷ On this book, see Anna Gioffreda, "Giovanni Ciparissiota e il 'Contra Nilum Cabasilam.' L'autore e il suo testo," *Medioevo greco* 17 (2017): 87–106.

⁸ Antonio Rigo, "Il Prooemium contra Barlaamum et Acindynum di Giovanni Cantacuzeno e le sue fonti," *REB* 74 (2016): 6–13, and Gregorios Mpagkabos, "Ἰωάννης ΣΤ' Καντακουζηνός. Το θεολογικὸ του ἔργο" (PhD diss., University of Thessaloniki, 2008), 58–62.

history of heresies, in which Iconoclasm occupies an important place.⁹ Books 2 and 5 contain quotations from Nikephoros, some of which are ascribed to Theodore Graptos¹⁰ and some of which are transmitted anonymously.¹¹ In Book 3, Kyparissiotēs presents his reader with a peculiar logical twist by claiming that the Iconoclasts and the Palamites are very much alike precisely because they say diametrically opposing things about Christ's Transfiguration (ἐκ διαμέτρου τὸ κακὸν καθέστηκεν).¹² Book 4 remains unedited.

5. Prochoros Kydonēs, who quotes Nikephoros of Constantinople as Theodore Graptos in a short treatise *On the Light of Tabor* (after 1365).¹³

6. Arsenios of Tyre, who quotes Nikephoros of Constantinople's (i.e., Theodore Graptos') famous defense of the simplicity of God, which was known to almost every participant of the controversy, in a *Tomos* against the decisions of the 1351 Council (1367, according to Ioannis Polemis).¹⁴

7. An anonymous author of a lengthy treatise against Kantakouzenos preserved in *Vaticanus gr.* 1096, ff. 65^r–148^r, who quotes many fragments from Nikephoros of Constantinople (Theodore Graptos), some of which remain unknown to his contemporaries.¹⁵ On internal grounds, the text can be dated to 1381–1383,

⁹ Kyparissiotēs, *Palamiticarum transgressionum liber primus*, PG 152, 663–738, esp. 672–673 (chapter 1.1). This edition, which reproduces an earlier one by François Combefis, includes only the first and the fourth chapters of Book 1. Chapters two and three are unedited.

¹⁰ Kyparissiotēs, *Contra tomum palamiticum*, ed. Constantine E. Liakouras, "Ἰωάννου τοῦ Κυπαρασιώτου κατὰ τῶν τοῦ Παλαμικοῦ Τόμου διακρίσεων καὶ ἐνώσεων ἐν τῷ Θεῷ: *Editio princeps*" (PhD diss., University of Athens, 1991), 216, 310, 461–464, 467; quotations go back to Nikephoros I, *Apologeticus Maior*, PG 100, 797a (chapter 77) and *Antirrhetici*, 304c-d (I 41), 325b (I 48).

¹¹ Kyparissiotēs, *Orationes antirrheticae quinque contra Nilum Cabasilam*, ed. Stavros Th. Marangoudakis, "Ἰωάννου τοῦ Κυπαρασιώτου κατὰ Νείλου Καβάσιλα λόγοι πέντε ἀντιρρητικοί: *Editio princeps*" (PhD diss., University of Athens, 1984), 168–169 (chapter IV.3). Once again, the quotation comes from Nikephoros I, *Antirrhetici*, 304c-d (I 41).

¹² Kyparissiotēs, *Contra Palamitas liber tritus*, ed. Soteroula N. Pyriou, "Ὁ λόγιος Ἰωάννης Κυπαρασιώτης καὶ τὸ Τρίτο Βιβλίον τῆς πραγματείας του Κατὰ τῆς τῶν Παλαμιτῶν Αἰρέσεως (Κριτικὴ ἔκδοσις — Μετάφρασις — Σχολιασμός)" (PhD diss., University of Athens, 2014), 262–263, 322–324, 333–335.

¹³ Prochoros Kydonēs, *De lumine Thaborico*, ed. Polemis, *Theologica varia inedita*, 327–359, here chapter 27 quotes Nikephoros I, *Antirrhetici*, 297 (I 29). On Prochoros Kydonēs, see *PLP* 13883.

¹⁴ Polemis, "Arsenius of Tyrus and His Tome against Palamites," *JÖB* 43 (1993): 268, 271; quotation from Nikephoros I, *Antirrhetici*, 304d (I 41). On Arsenios, see *PLP* 1407.

¹⁵ Anonymus, *Adversus Cantacuzenum*, ed. Polemis, in *Theologica varia inedita*, 55–323, esp. chapters 10–11, 24, 72, 86, 90–91, 118, 151, 194, 240, and 295. For instance, a fragment in chapter 11.3-8 (= Nikephoros I, *Contra Eusebium*, 407.1-8) (Τί δήποτε καὶ ἀόρατον ... μικρολογούμενος) cannot be found in any other fourteenth-century writer.

but its authorship is contested. According to Polemis, it was composed by Kyparissiotēs. The other possible author is Argyros.¹⁶

By the late 1350s, Theodore Graptos was so famous that his name would easily come up in theological discussions not directly related to the Hesychast Controversy. Neilos Kabasilas mentions and quotes Graptos in the *Orations on the Procession of the Holy Spirit*. The selection of fragments reflects Neilos' interests. He pays no attention to Graptos' (Nikephoros of Constantinople's) Christology, focusing instead on Trinitarian theology and extensively quoting the *Confession of Faith* preserved in Nikephoros of Constantinople's *Apologeticus Maior*.¹⁷

Even the list above is far from being exhaustive. For one, it does not include multiple *florilegia*, as, for instance, an anti-Palamite collection in *Vaticanus gr.* 604, ff. 17^r–38^v, which contains a series of quotations from Graptos (Nikephoros of Constantinople). The manuscript can be dated to 1368/9; some parts of it were copied by Prochoros Kydonēs and Manuel Kalekas.¹⁸ A complete critical edition of Kyparissiotēs' treatises and their refutations by Kantakouzenos will probably also yield new matches, but the general impression will not be much different. It was virtually impossible to spend a day in mid-fourteenth-century Constantinople without hearing the word "iconoclasm."

2.

Iconoclasm established itself as a universal point of reference: both the Palamites and their adversaries claimed to be the heirs of the defenders of icon veneration and castigated their opponents as "the new iconoclasts."¹⁹ This

¹⁶ Giovanni Mercati, *Notizie di Procoro e Demetrio Cidone, Manuele Caleca e Teodoro Meliteniota ed altri appunti per la storia della teologia e della letteratura bizantina del secolo XIV* (Studi e testi 56) (Vatican: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1931), 239–241; Gioffreda and Michele Trizio, "Nicholas of Methone, Procopius of Gaza and Proclus of Lycia," in *Reading Proclus and the Book of Causes*, vol. 2: *Translations and Acculturations*, ed. Dragoş Calma (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 124–128; Gioffreda, *Tra i libri di Isacco Argiro* (Transmissions 4) (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2020), 98–118, 126. Rigo, "De l'apologie à l'évocation de l'expérience mystique: Évagre le Pontique, Isaac le Syrien et Diadoque de Photice dans les œuvres de Grégoire Palamas (et dans le controverse palamite)," in *Knotenpunkt Byzanz. Wissenformen und kulturelle Wechselbeziehungen*, eds. Andreas Speer and Philipp Steinkrüger (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 98, also ascribes the text to Argyros but moves its date to the late 1360s/early 1370s.

¹⁷ Neilos Kabasilas, *Orationes de Spiritu Sancto*, ed. Théophile Kislas, *Nil Cabasilas. Sur le Saint-Esprit* (Paris: Cerf, 2001), 174–416, here *Or.* 2, 64 and *Or.* 5, 24–26 quotes Nikephoros I, *Apologeticus Maior*, 580c-1a (18). On Neilos, see *PLP* 10102.

¹⁸ Alexis Chrysostalis, *Recherches sur la tradition manuscrite du Contra Eusebium de Nicéphore de Constantinople* (Paris: CNRS, 2012), 74–75; Daniele Bianconi, "La controversia palamitica: Figure, libri, testi e mani," *Segno e testo* 6 (2008): 352–353; Gioffreda, "Giovanni Ciparissiota," 89, n. 10.

¹⁹ The best introduction to the issue is Jeffrey Featherstone, "An Iconoclastic Episode in the Hesychast Controversy," *JÖB* 33 (1983): 179–198.

theological ping-pong calls for an explanation. Why not choose any other “heresy,” for instance, Arianism or Nestorianism?

To understand the exceptional status of Iconoclasm among other heterodox teachings in Byzantine collective memory and polemical culture we must briefly revisit its history after 843. The struggle between the two orthodoxies, one of which is commonly known as “iconoclasm” and the other as “the party of the iconophiles or iconodules” (although, the latter terms were not in use in Byzantium),²⁰ ended with the so-called Triumph of Orthodoxy, which defined “orthodoxy” through icon veneration. But this was not the end of it, because the specific tool devised to promote and impose the equation between orthodoxy and the icons, the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*, had the potential of creating new iconoclasts. Each new set of anathemas appended to the *Synodikon* tacitly equated new heretics with the iconoclasts—the heretics par excellence. As an arch-heresy and a measure of all heresies, Iconoclasm did not have to evince a theological affinity with the teachings of, say, John Italos or Neilos of Calabria. Year after year, on every first Sunday of the Lent, they were remembered as new iconoclasts not because they were accused of questioning icon veneration, but by virtue of the mere arrangement of chapters in the *Synodikon*.²¹

The distance between actual icons and the charge of iconoclasm grew further during the early years of the reign of Alexios I Komnenos (1081–1118). As I argue elsewhere, the opponents of the emperor, disconcerted by the confiscation of church property carried out under the pretext of accumulating resources for military campaigns against the Normans and the Pechenegs, were reluctant to accuse Alexios of “iconoclasm,” although many icons could have been destroyed. Alexios, by contrast, did not have such scruples and threatened to direct the accusation of Iconoclasm against Leo of Chalcedon, the leader of the opposition. The specific term used to warn Leo against further escalation was *χριστιανοκατήγορος* (“the accuser of Christians”), a derogatory label invented by the iconophiles in 787 and since then regularly used as a circumlocution for the iconoclasts.²² In Alexios’ logic, Leo could be justly called “an accuser of Christians”

²⁰ Lukhovitskiy, “Speaking as an Iconoclast: Another’s Voice in 9th-century Hagiography,” *TM* 24.2 (2020): 359–362.

²¹ In fact, Italos’ devotion to icons was questioned during the trial; Jean Guillard, “Le procès officiel de Jean l’Italien: Les actes et leurs sous-entendus,” *TM* 9 (1985): 153.114–155.340, 157.385–390, 155.375–377. However, the relevant sections of the *Synodikon* are silent on this matter; see Guillard, “Le *Synodikon de l’Orthodoxie*: édition et commentaire,” *TM* 2 (1967): 57–61.

²² It is consistently used in this sense in the most important sections of the *Acts of the Seventh Ecumenical Council: Concilium universale Nicaenum Secundum: Concilii actiones VI—VII; Tarasii et synodi epistulae; Epiphaniï sermo laudatorius; canones; Tarasii epistulae post synodum scriptae; appendix graeca*, ed. Erich Lamberz (Berlin: de Gruyter 2016), 600.32, 602.9, 666.24,

(i.e., an iconoclast) precisely because he defended the icons and quoted Theodore the Stoudite and Nikephoros of Constantinople.²³

The early Palaeologan period witnessed the next stage in the separation between the icons and the accusation of iconoclasm. The opponents of the Union of Lyons (1274) Theodora Rhaoulaina, John Staurakios, and Manuel Holobolos turned to the iconoclastic controversy in search for convincing—and yet safe—historical parallels that would give them an opportunity to criticize Michael VIII Palaeologos. By means of the Aesopian language of hagiography, they wrote a history of Iconoclasm that can be read as a statement on the burning issues of late thirteenth-century politics.²⁴ Thus, whereas the Komnenian period created the triumphalist imperial version of anti-iconoclastic rhetoric, the controversies of the early Palaeologan epoch brought to life its underground oppositionist twin. By the fourteenth century, the history of Iconoclasm could be mined for suitable precedents by both the ecclesiastical establishment and the opposition.

All of the above explains the polemical convenience of the “iconoclast” label. Put simplistically, they were the universally-accepted bad guys, and no one really cared what gave them this name in the first place. But I believe there is more to it than that. If we trace the dynamics of the recollection of Iconoclasm during the Hesychast Controversy, we will see that at least two stages are discernible. During the first phase (*ca.* 1347–1360), the accusation of Iconoclasm and the anti-iconoclastic precedent were wholly the domain of the anti-Palamites, whereas their opponents did not take the trouble to read and interpret the sources of the iconoclastic epoch themselves. Only during the second phase (after *ca.* 1360) did the Palamites lay claim to the legacy of the defenders of icon veneration.

The theologian who retrieved Iconoclasm from oblivion was Nikephoros Gregoras. Fascinated by parallels between his epoch and the iconoclastic period,

854.23. *TLG* lists 37 occurrences of the stem *χριστιανοκατηγορ-* in the synodal proceedings. Notably, when Patriarch Nikephoros I continued (in 815–820) the heresiological catalogue of John of Damascus with the 102nd heresy of Iconoclasm, he chose this term to denote the iconoclasts; see Nikephoros I, *Antirrhethici*, 538c–33a (III 84). No later than in the early tenth century an abridged version of this chapter was appended in the manuscript tradition to the original text of John of Damascus; see Bonifatius Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, vol. 4: *Liber de haeresibus. Opera polemica* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1981), 4–5.

²³ Lukhovitskiy, “Споры о святых иконах при Алексее I Комнине: Полемические стратегии и выбор источников,” *VV* 73 [98] (2014): 88–107; idem, *Слова и образы: Иконоборчество глазами византийцев VIII–XV вв.* (St. Petersburg: Dmitriy Bulanin, 2023), 117–131.

²⁴ For a recent discussion, see Eleonora Kountoura Galaki, “Rewriting on Martyrs of Iconoclasm during the Palaiologan Period,” in *Les Nouveaux Martyrs à Byzance*, vol. 1: *Vie et Passion de Bacchos le Jeune par Étienne le Diacre*; vol. 2: *Études sur les nouveaux martyrs*, eds. André Binggeli, Stephanos Efthymiadis, and Sophie Métivier (Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2021), vol. 2, 285–304; Lukhovitskiy, *Слова и образы*, 139–179.

he rewrote its history, making its central episode an anachronistic confrontation between Eusebius of Caesarea, Emperor Theophilus (r. 829–842), and Theodore Graptos, who were treated as historical reflections of Palamas, Kantakouzenos, and Gregoras himself. The degree of self-identification with the figures of the past was high: intending to present himself as a defender of Theodore Graptos' posthumous memory, and as his rightful heir, Gregoras took the liberty of creating pastiches of fragments that did not initially belong together in Nikephoros of Constantinople and violated historical accuracy by treating Eusebius and Graptos as contemporaries.²⁵

Mythologizing memory was possible only if Gregoras' opponents did not have the means to reverse the accusation. The discovery of Nikephoros of Constantinople's legacy by Philotheos Kokkinos initiated a transition to the next—philological—phase of remembering the Iconoclast controversy. Kokkinos accused Gregoras of tampering with textual evidence and distorting the thought of Graptos (Nikephoros of Constantinople) in order to suit his agenda.²⁶ Once again, the roles were reversed: now, the initiative was on the side of the Hesychasts, and the anti-Palamites had to react. Their only retreat was philology. After 1360, it became standard practice to provide an *incipit* for the treatises of Graptos (Nikephoros of Constantinople), so that the reader would have no doubt as to whether the polemicist took a quotation from an anthology or read the relevant text in full. This is true for Kyparissiotēs and the Vatican Anonymous, who both use the expression οὗ ἡ ἀρχή (“which begins as follows”).²⁷ The latter stressed that he carried out a special study to make sure that his adversaries' claims did not find support in the genuine writings of Graptos (Nikephoros of Constantinople):

Ἀλλὰ καὶ ἔτι τοῦτο οὐκ ὀκνήσω μετ' ἀληθείας εἰπεῖν, ὅτι τὰς ἱερὰς τῶν ἁγίων μετερχόμενος βίβλους τοῦ εἰρημένου ζητήματος ἔνεκεν, ὥσπερ ἔφην, καὶ μηδεμιᾶ ἐντυχῶν ἁγίου ῥήσει τὴν τοιαύτην αὐτῶν συνιστώσῃ κακοδοξίαν, συμφερομένους μᾶλλον εὖρον αὐτοῦς τοῖς εἰκονομάχοις.²⁸

But I will not shy away from saying with all confidence that perusing the books of the saints regarding this problem, as I have already said, I did not encounter any statement by this saint that would give support to their [i.e., the Palamites'] wicked teaching; quite the contrary, I discovered that they [i.e., the Palamites] were in agreement with the iconoclasts.

²⁵ Lukhovitskij, “Historical Memory,” 220–225.

²⁶ Lukhovitskij, “Historical Memory,” 215–216.

²⁷ Kyparissiotēs, *Contra Palamitas liber tritus*, 322; Anonymus, *Adversus Cantacuzenum*, 24.2–4.

²⁸ Anonymus, *Adversus Cantacuzenum*, 10.18–23.

However, the pursuit of philological precision did not guarantee accuracy in historical matters. Kabasilas took care to provide the incipit of Graptos' (Nikephoros of Constantinople's) treatise before quoting it,²⁹ but was sure that Graptos (born in 775) defended icons at the Seventh Ecumenical Council in 787: "He fought for piety at this Council, too, and was adorned with the marks of martyrdom."³⁰ To complicate the matter even further, Kabasilas did have some evidence for the "great" Nikephoros too.³¹ He regarded him as a Graptos' contemporary (έν τοῖς χρόνοις ἐκείνοις) (whatever this might stand for) who died in exile for the cause of icon veneration (φεύγων τὴν ἑαυτοῦ, ἐπανῆκεν ἡμῖν νεκρὸς ἀριστεύς, μαρτυρίου στέφανον περιφέρων). A brief text on the Holy Trinity that he allegedly "sent to his followers from exile" (τοῖς οἰκείοις διαπέμπων ἐκ τῆς ὑπερορίας) (commencing with Πίστιν τοίνυν τὴν καθ' ἡμᾶς ἀσπαζόμενοι) does not match anything in Nikephoros' extant writings but rather coincides verbatim with a lemma from the *Suda* (Π 1650).³²

The three and a half decades that separate the *First Antirrhetics* of Gregoras and the Vatican Anonymous turned the memory of Theodore Graptos from a rare piece of knowledge and the exclusive property of the Chora monastery into a commonplace. Before the mid-fourteenth century, Theophanes Graptos, a metropolitan bishop of Nicaea (843–845) and a prolific hymnographer, was much better known than his brother.³³ As late as 1356, Gregoras had to introduce Theodore Graptos both to his opponents and to his followers.³⁴ Conversely, for Kyparissiotēs and the Vatican Anonymous, he is a familiar friend: they know how to play with his sobriquet (he is "beyond any description" – ἀπαράγραπτος³⁵) and never forget to clarify which of the two Graptoi, Theodore or Theophanes, they have in mind. For Gregoras, a simple designation Γραπτός was sufficient. His disciple Kyparissiotēs prefers ὁ τῶν Γραπτῶν Θεόδωρος.³⁶

²⁹ Neilos Kabasilas, *Orationes de Spiritu Sancto* 5, 25.3-4 = Nikephoros I, *Apologeticus Maior*, 533b (1): ἡ δὲ τοῦ λόγου ἀρχὴ "Καιρὸν εἶναι τῷ παντὶ πράγματι, τὸ σολομώντειον ἡμᾶς ἐκείνο καὶ σοφὸν ἐμπεδοῖ λόγιον."

³⁰ Neilos Kabasilas, *Orationes de Spiritu Sancto* 5, 24.2-3: προστάτης δὲ καὶ οὗτος τῆς εὐσεβείας ἐπὶ τῆς ἀγίας ταύτης συνόδου καὶ μαρτυρικοῖς φιλοτιμούμενος στίγμασι.

³¹ Neilos Kabasilas, *Orationes de Spiritu Sancto* 5, 28.1-8: [...] μέγαν οἱ κατὰ Χριστὸν ἀγῶνες ἐκάλου.

³² *Suidae lexicon*, vol. 4: Π-Ψ, ed. Ada Adler (Munich; Leipzig: K. G. Saur, 1935), 135–136. This text, entitled *On Faith* (*Περὶ πίστεως*), is transmitted uniquely in manuscript A (*Parisinus gr.* 2526, 12th c.).

³³ On Theophanes Graptos, see *PmbZ* 8093.

³⁴ Nikephoros Gregoras, *Byzantina historia*, vol. 3, ed. Immanuel Bekker (Bonn: Weber, 1855), 381.19–382.4.

³⁵ Anonymus, *Adversus Cantacuzenum*, 194.2 and 240.1.

³⁶ Kyparissiotēs, *Expositio materiaria*, 135 (III 7), 279 (VI 4), 287 (VI 6), 601 (X 4).

However, philological and historical accuracy does not amount to personal affection for the subject matter. Kyparissiotēs does not inherit Gregoras' defiant disregard for the actual history of Iconoclasm and obsession with historical parallels. For him the iconoclastic precedent is no more important than an Arian or a Monothelite precedent. It is no longer the mother of all heresies, but yet another misfortune that afflicted the Orthodox Church in the past and was eventually overcome. He suggests that the anti-Palamites put up with the fact that they have lost the first battle. They must lay low and bide their time because, as history teaches us, occasionally Divine Providence lets "the wolves enter the stables for some time and tear up the livestock" (πρὸς καιρὸν ἐπιχωριάσαι τῇ μάνδρᾳ τοὺς λύκους καὶ τὸ ποίμνιον διασπάσαι), but later on they inevitably "get caught in their own nets" (τοῖς οἰκείοις συμποδισθέντες ἄμμασι):

Καὶ χρόνον μὲν συχνὸν πολλάκις ἐπεντροφῆσαι ταῖς ἑαυτῶν ἀσεβείαις εἰάθησαν. Τοιοῦτον γὰρ εἰδωλολατρεία, ἐπὶ τριακοσίους καὶ πρὸς μετὰ τὸ κήρυγμα παρρησιασαμένη τοὺς χρόνους· τοιοῦτον Ἄρειος φλυαρία, καὶ ἡ τῶν Μονοθελητῶν ἀδολεσχία, καὶ ὁ τῶν Εἰκονομάχων ὄμιλος. Ὑπὲρ γὰρ πενήκοντα καὶ ἑβδομήκοντα τούτων ἕκαστον ἐπολίτευσεν ἔτη καὶ κετέδραμε τὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ Ἐκκλησίαν· αἰφνίδιον δ' ὅμως ἦκεν ἐπ' αὐτοὺς ἡ δίκη, καὶ νῦν οὐδ' εἰσὶν ὅπου γνωρίζονται.³⁷

Often, were they allowed to revel in their impiety for a long time. This is true for idolatry, which did not fear anything for more than three hundred years after the preaching [of the Gospel]; for the Arian foolery; the Monothelite idle talk; and the crowd of Iconoclasts. Each of these [heresies] prevailed and devastated the Church of Christ for more than fifty or seventy years. But suddenly a punishment came upon them, so that now there is not even a trace of them.

For Gregoras, Iconoclasm constitutes an essential part of present-day actuality; in Kyparissiotēs, it loses its exceptional status and becomes no more than a random example from the past. Iconoclasm is relocated from the present to the past, and the emotional component necessary for self-identification is suppressed.

Yet if something feels off about the iconoclastic episode of the Hesychast Controversy, it was not the decision of several mid-fourteenth-century theologians to use the iconoclastic precedent to argue for their cause, but the complete silence on this issue on the part of the next generation of polemicists. In 1368, Prochoros Kydonēs was condemned. Kyparissiotēs was forced to leave Constantinople for Cyprus and subsequently for Rome. The ecclesiastical and political situation (at

³⁷ Kyparissiotēs, *Palamiticarum transgressionum liber primus*, 672–673. The reading ἄμμασι (instead of ἄρμασιν in the edition) is restored from the *Laur. Plut.* 8.8, f. 13r.

least in the eyes of the anti-Palamite party) had to feel somewhat like the situation of roughly a hundred years before, when the anti-Unionists used the iconoclastic controversy as a foil for the conflict of their own epoch. Common logic dictates that the anti-Palamite opposition would turn to the iconoclastic precedent and draw parallels between the Councils of 1351 and 1368 and the Church councils convened by the iconoclasts. This polemical trope must have been even more attractive because, as we have seen, the texts composed during the iconoclastic crisis were right before their eyes. But this was not the case. The person of Graptos (Nikephoros of Constantinople) lost its appeal as an archetype and his writings were treated as a mere repository of lifeless χρήσεις.

The dynamics outlined above (from mythologizing remembrance to philological accuracy and from emotional self-identification to distancing neutrality) can be explained only if we go back to Gregoras. All evidence suggests that his case is unique—it was he who introduced Graptos and created an internally consistent and psychologically convincing system of parallels between the epochs, while all other theologians merely followed in his steps. Gregoras radically changed the intellectual atmosphere of the epoch, whereas the writings of his contemporaries witness to the subsiding waves of the after-shock.

Gregoras' success in refashioning Hesychasm as a new Iconoclasm rests on two factors: mere chance and literary aesthetics. We should bear in mind that Gregoras' emotional connection with the champions of icon veneration is much older than the Hesychast debate. His first creative engagement with the epoch is dated to the mid-1320s, when he was assigned by the brethren of the Chora monastery to compose a *Life* of its glorious ninth-century abbot, Michael the Synkellos, who was also a close associate of the brothers Graptoi (*BHG* 1297).³⁸ In fact, Gregoras' main source, an anonymous late ninth-century *Life* of Michael (*BHG* 1296), was more a joint *Life* of Michael, Theodore, and Theophanes than the conventional *Βίος και πολιτεία* of a single saint. The writer had to carefully disentangle the plotlines of the protagonists so that the monastery could finally possess a proper *Life* of Michael and Michael alone. Importantly, Gregoras' methods of rewriting included deep psychological introspection that allowed for self-identification between the reader and the heroes of the distant past.³⁹ Thus, in a way, whereas in composing the *Life of Michael* Gregoras was

³⁸ For this date, see Lukhovitskiy, "Nikephoros Gregoras' *Vita* of St. Michael the Synkellos: Rewriting Techniques and Reconstruction of the Iconoclast Past in a 14th Cent. Hagiographical *Metaphrasis*," *JÖB* 64 (2014): 194–195.

³⁹ This is also true for other hagiographical writings of Gregoras; see Lukhovitskiy, "Emotions, Miracles, and the Mechanics of Psychology in Nikephoros Gregoras' *Lives* of Empress Theophano and Patriarch Anthony II Kauleas," in *Metaphrasis in Byzantine Literature*, eds. Anne P. Alwis, Martin Hinterberger, and Elisabeth Schiffer (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), 155–174.

reincarnated in Michael; in a dispute with the Palamites he could not but be reincarnated in Theodore Graptos, whose personality inspired him back in the 1320s, but whose exploits could not have been fully praised in the *Life of Michael*.

Let us perform a thought experiment. What would have happened to the Hesychast polemic had Gregoras failed to accomplish his task (e.g., if he had not found an appropriate source-text for a new *Life of Michael*)? Would we still have the same number of quotations from iconophile theologians in the mid-fourteenth-century debates had the brethren of Chora commissioned Gregoras with the task of praising another saint whose memory was important to the monastery but whose deeds had nothing to do with the Iconoclastic controversy? In my view, the answer must be in the negative. I would go as far as to argue that had Gregoras made up his mind to compose an encomium for, say, the martyr Babylas of Nicomedia, whose relics were preserved in the Chora monastery, twenty years later the supporters of Palamas would have become not “new iconoclasts,” but “new pagans” and heirs of Maximian, the persecutor of Babylas.

Much ink has been spilled to investigate hagiography as a vehicle for theological polemics. I am convinced that in the case discussed above we observe movement in the opposite direction, where an important chapter in the history of ecclesiastical polemics is a mere derivative of the psychologizing method in hagiography.

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