

Political Hesychasm

Philotheos Kokkinos and His Successors

Philotheos Kokkinos (c. 1300-78) was a patriarch comparable in influence to Athanasios I and perhaps in the long term even more important.¹ Born in Thessalonike and baptised Phokas (Philotheos, *Encomium of St Phokas* 2.16-18; Katsanes and Tsames 1982: 425), he remained to the end of his life extremely proud of his native city.² The name Kokkinos ('Redhead') may be a sobriquet rather than a family name. He may have been of Jewish descent, as his enemies

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1. The fullest discussion of Philotheos' biographical details is now Mitrea 2018: 38-83. See also Rigo 2021: 57-58. For a complete list of Philotheos' writings, some still unpublished, see Laurent 1935: 1503-8; and for the dating of many of them, Mitrea 2018: 56-57, 63-79.
 2. Philotheos' hagiographical *œuvre*, besides the encomium on St Phokas of Sinope, after whom he was named, includes homilies on Thessalonike's patron saint, St Demetrios, an early Thessalonian martyr, St Anyisia, and the monk Nikodemos of Berrhoia, as well as the *Vitae* of Philotheos' Thessalonian contemporaries, the monks Germanos Maroules, Sabas the Younger and Isidore Boucheiras, together with a long encomium on Thessalonike's archbishop, Gregory Palamas.

claimed, for he never denied it.³ Of modest family circumstances, he supported his higher studies in Thessalonike with Thomas Magistros, one of the leading scholars of the age, by working in his kitchen. He entered the monastic life in his early twenties, apparently at the Chortaïtes monastery on the northern slopes of the mountain now known as Chortiatīs just outside Thessalonike, where he would have been tonsured under the name of Philotheos. A few years later, in 1328, he moved to Mount Athos, entering Vatopedi, as he says, at the same time as St Sabas the Younger, whose disciple he became and whose *Vita* he later composed.⁴

On Athos Philotheos rapidly became an important figure. In the early 1330s he moved to the Lavra, in order to sit at the feet of the great spiritual teacher, Germanos Maroules (died c. 1336), whose *Vita* he was also to write (Tsames 1985: 97-158). At the Lavra he became a close friend of Germanos' nephew and disciple, Jakobos Maroules (Rigo 2021: 57, citing the *Life of Germanos* 46; Tsames 1985: 157). 'If Kokkinos arrived at the Lavra by ca. 1333', Mitrea writes, 'it is likely that he was part of Palamas' monastic audience, or "holy *theatron*" as Palamas calls it' (Mitrea 2018: 52, citing Palamas, *Logos on Peter of Athos* 3.16-18). At all events, his signature on the Hagioretic *Tomos* of 1340, in the sixth place as 'the least hieromonk Philotheos', reveals not only that he was already an ordained priest and senior figure on the Holy Mountain but also that he was one of Palamas' leading supporters.⁵ In the spring of 1342 Philotheos was elected *hegoumenos* of the Lavra. Within two years, however, he was forced to resign for reasons that are not entirely clear. These may possibly be connected with the official inquiry that was conducted in 1344 into the presence of 'Messalianism' (the dualist heresy of the Bogomils) on the Holy Mountain, as a result of which a number of monks, including the leader, George of Larissa,

3. The claim is made explicitly by Demetrios Kydonēs in his *Apologia* for his brother Prochoros (Mercati 1931: 311.488-92). There was a large Jewish community in Thessalonike in the fourteenth century.

4. Philotheos, *Life of Sabas* 59.1-4. The text of the *Life of Sabas* is in Tsames 1985: 161-325. Mitrea suggests, very plausibly, that, before moving to Athos, Philotheos may have attended the hesychast circle in Thessalonike of Isidore Boucheiras (2018: 51).

5. Rigo 2021: 124.202-3. Rigo mentions that in his *Encomium Gregorii Palamae* Philotheos records his presence as a hieromonk at the Athonite assembly that accepted Gregory's teaching and his signing of the *Tomos* (2021: 57; the relevant text is translated in Russell 2020: 109).

and several others from hermitages connected with the Lavra, were condemned and expelled from Mount Athos.⁶ More important, however, were the repercussions provoked by the sending of letters to Constantinople from the Lavra in support of Palamas, after he had been excommunicated and arrested in November 1344. It was these letters, in Rigo's view, that were the immediate cause of the end of Philotheos' hegoumenate (Rigo 2015b: 283).

Philotheos, nevertheless, remained an influential and revered hesychast who led the defence of Palamas on Mount Athos throughout the time of Palamas' imprisonment in Constantinople during the last years of the Second Civil War. His reward came in 1347 with the end of the civil war and the change of ecclesiastical regime. In May of that year he was appointed metropolitan of Thracian Herakleia, a very senior position in view of Herakleia's former status as Byzantium's metropolitan see before Constantine made Byzantium his imperial capital. As metropolitan, he distinguished himself both as a theologian and a pastor. It was he who drew up the *Tomos* of 1351, which made Palamite Trinitarian theology the official teaching of the church. He was proud to stand alongside Palamas, he says, 'the expert technician and champion of the word', for 'they attacked us no less than him, fighting against us publicly and, as it were, honouring us by including us in their abuse' (Philotheos, *Encomium Gregorii Palamae* 91; Tsames 1985: 528, trans. Russell 2020: 149). As the most senior metropolitan, he was the first, after the emperor and the patriarch, to sign the *Tomos* in the Great Church of Hagia Sophia on 15 August, the Feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God.⁷ As a pastor, he distinguished himself when his metropolis was sacked by the Genoese in October of the same year.⁸ He made strenuous efforts to raise the large sums

6. Rigo 2015b: 275. On how the Bogomil question was dealt with on Mount Athos, see Rigo 1989 and 1996.

7. 'The emperor' was John VI Kantakouzenos. John V Palaiologos signed early the following year when he returned from Thessalonike, where he had been living since the collapse of the Zealot movement in the winter of 1350-51 (Nicol 1996: 109-11; Meyendorff 1959b: 149).

8. The slaughter, rape and enslavement suffered by the people of Herakleia are recounted in detail by Philotheos in his *De expugnatione Heracleae* (Pseftonkas 1981: 235-64). The Genoese were at war with Byzantium because Kantakouzenos had been forced into an alliance with Genoa's great rival, Venice. Philotheos was absent at the time in

needed for ransoming the prisoners, both men and women, and went to Galata, the Genoese settlement on the opposite side of the Golden Horn from Constantinople, to organise their release. John Kantakouzenos describes him a ‘a good shepherd who lays down his life for his flock in accordance with the gospel text, not once, or twice, or three times, but repeatedly’ (*Histories*, IV, 4, 29; Schopen 1823-32: III, 217.8-10). When Patriarch Kallistos I resigned in the spring of 1353 rather than crown Kantakouzenos’ son Matthew co-emperor, Philotheos was the obvious choice for his successor.

Philotheos did not last long as patriarch. When in 1354 John VI Kantakouzenos was forced to abdicate, Philotheos was deposed with him. The Palaiologan loyalist, Kallistos I, then returned to the patriarchate and Philotheos retired to a monastery, almost certainly the Akataleptos in Constantinople,⁹ to spend the next ten years quietly studying and writing. Then in August 1363 Kallistos I died and in October 1364 Philotheos was recalled to patriarchal office. The ten years that followed mark a high point in the consolidation of patriarchal authority in ecclesiological, jurisdictional, and spiritual terms. Let us examine each of these categories in turn.

Ecclesiology in the Mid-Fourteenth Century

Philotheos was a hesychast zealous for a church led by the Holy Spirit. In John VI Kantakouzenos he found an emperor who shared his vision. Emperors were not, as a rule, given to acknowledging past mistakes but, in a remarkable speech to the synod that was convened in 1353 to elect Kallistos I’s successor, Kantakouzenos told the assembled fathers that in earlier times the bishops had prayed fervently to the Holy Spirit that he would manifest to them whom they should choose to lead the church of the faithful, and on their indicating three candidates the emperor would choose one of them (*Histories*, IV, 4, 37; Schopen 1823-32: III, 272-75). Latterly, however, patriarchal elections had become a matter of politics

Constantinople. If he had been present, the city might not have been taken for, on the appearance of the Genoese, the military governor and the garrison cravenly fled – proving once again the superior quality of the ecclesiastical to the military leadership in this period.

9. See Mitrea 2018: 70, for a discussion of the evidence. On the Akataleptos monastery, see Janin 1969: 594.

and shifty manoeuvring under external pressure.¹⁰ Kantakouzenos acknowledged his own fault in the matter – ‘we sinned in ignorance, led by evil habits’ (*Histories*, IV, 4, 37; Schopen 1823-32: III, 273.13). ‘Now’, he declared, ‘we restore the ancient freedom, not to you but rather to God.’¹¹ The bishops, after prayer for the right candidates to be revealed to them, were to present three names, and the emperor, in accordance with custom, would choose one of them. The names presented were Philotheos (Kokkinos) of Herakleia, Makarios (Chrysokephalos) of Philadelphia, and Nicholas Kabasilas. All three were not only capable men, but also pro-hesychast, anti-unionist and Kantakouzenist. Nicholas Kabasilas was a scholarly layman well known for his hesychast spirituality and his strong social conscience. In 1347 he had written to the empress Anna urging her to relieve the suffering of those oppressed by the rich by abolishing the usurious interest on loans made to them and requiring only the return of the sums originally lent (*De usuria*; Guiland 1935: 274.22, 276.30). Makarios Chrysokephalos, although initially cautious with regard to Palamite theology – he signed the *Tomos* of 1341 that exonerated Palamas from Barlaam’s charges only in 1346 – was highly regarded as a preacher and hagiographer. Kabasilas, however, although a close friend of Kantakouzenos, lacked administrative experience. Makarios was too useful as the energetic defender of the Christian outpost of Philadelphia to be moved to Constantinople. The emperor’s choice fell on Philotheos, who had demonstrated his pastoral and administrative capacities with his work in October 1351 to relieve the distress of the population of Herakleia.

In writings composed both before and after his deposition in 1354 Philotheos gives a number of indications of his ecclesiological convictions. The church is the bride of Christ (*Vita Sabae*, §55.40),

10. Kantakouzenos here implicitly acknowledges the irregularity of the election of Isidore, of which the anti-Palamite *Tomos* of 1347 had complained. For the text of this *Tomos*, see Rigo 2020: 110.133-48 (trans. Russell 2020: 316). See also the discussion in Rigo 2020: 73-78.

11. John Kantakouzenos, *Histories* IV, 4, 37 (Schopen 1823-32: III, 274.10): τοιγαρὺν ὑμῖν ζητήσεως περὶ πατριάρχου προκειμένης νῦν, τὴν ἀρχαίαν ἐλευθερίαν ἀποδίδωμι, οὐχ ὑμῖν μᾶλλον, ἢ τῷ θεῷ. As Michael McCormick has pointed out, the Byzantine commitment to the ‘order’ (*taxis*) by which human society mirrors that of the cosmos required that ‘reform could be represented only as return to the original ancient *taxis*’ (McCormick 1991).

even if, on a different level, each bishop is the bridegroom of his local church (*Encomium Gregorii Palamae*, §125.18; trans. Russell 2020: 195). The universal (παγκόσμιος) church of Christ is not Rome alone, as the Latins claim (*Laudatio sancti Demetrii*, §13.30-31). It is all the churches in communion with each other.¹² Philotheos is historically correct in claiming that the ecclesiastical schism followed the imperial schism. He acknowledges that under the emperor Leo V the Armenian (813-20) the patriarchate of Constantinople erred in embracing the iconoclasm promoted by the emperor (*De expugnatione Heracleae*, lines 252-59). The Church of Old Rome was right to break off communion but it was wrong to ordain (χειροτονεῖν) a barbarian German king as its emperor.¹³ The schism between the two senior patriarchates of Rome and Constantinople dates from that independent act that split ‘the single Roman authority’ (ἡ μία τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἀρχή) into two (*De expugnatione Heracleae*, lines 262-63). A number of evils followed, the chief of them being the unauthorised addition to the Creed of the phrase ‘and from the Son’ (*Filioque*), which thus introduced an innovative (and therefore erroneous) Trinitarian theology. Church and empire are to work together: ‘the emperor, manifestly in conformity with divine precepts, is exhorted to set forth [the teachings of] the church of God’ (*Vita Sabae*, §75.34).

We do not seem to have in Philotheos’ early writings the hierocratic ideology that Angelov has shown to be so prominent during the second patriarchate of Athanasios I.¹⁴ Rather, what we find is a version of *symphōnia* in which the patriarch is the emperor’s counsellor and spiritual father. This theme is examined with insight by Mihail Mitrea in his discussion of the way in which Philotheos presents John Kantakouzenos’ efforts to persuade Sabas to accept patriarchal office in the *Life of Sabas*. The emperor and the reluctant candidate are shown to be holding hands, a deeply symbolic gesture (*Vita Sabae*, §74). ‘Thus

12. This is not disputed today, even by Rome.

13. On Christmas Day 800, in the basilica of St Peter, Pope Leo III had placed an imperial crown on the head of Charles, king of the Franks (Charlemagne). Leo, however, refused to add the *Filioque* to the Creed, a step that was only taken by Benedict VIII in 1014.

14. A hierocratic ideology, however, does become apparent in the official documents addressed to Russian rulers and hierarchs during his second patriarchate.

Sabas', says Mitrea, 'is presented as Kantakouzenos' trainer, who guides him through prayers and council' (2018: 327). The emperor is not the dominant partner – he has to accede to Sabas' wishes – but neither does the man whom the emperor wants to appoint as patriarch seek to impose himself.

According to the fourteenth-century book of court ceremonial known as Pseudo-Kodinos, new metropolitans were required after their ordination to perform *proskynēsis* (a deep bow, or more probably a full prostration) to the emperor and offer a prayer for him. The peroration of Philotheos' prayer, offered after his appointment to Herakleia, is worth quoting:

Grant, Master, to our faithful kings that with their gaze on your gentleness and patience and compassion towards the needy, as on an archetypal image, they may always grow in appropriate virtue, well disposed towards ascents in their heart, and that they may show themselves an image and archetype of good government to all under their rule, and be truly called kings and earthly gods by grace through the imitation to the best of their ability of you who are the only true God and king.¹⁵

Besides petitioning God conventionally at the beginning of the prayer to preserve his servants the emperors (John V Palaiologos and John VI Kantakouzenos) that they may rule in peace and harmony (Mitrea 2018: 409.14), the text also, in this peroration, serves as a condensed statement of imperial ideology and exhortation to good government. The task of the imperial order (*taxis*) is to reflect the divine order. Philotheos does not seek to subordinate the empire to the church or the church to the empire. He does not present the emperors either as subservient to the church or as divinely set over it by virtue of their office. He prays that as 'earthly gods by grace' they might fulfil the vocation open to every Christian, which is to attain deification – not only eschatologically but here and now¹⁶ – and thus not only as kings

15. The Greek text is given by Mitrea in his Appendix 4 (2018: 410.31-36). The translation is mine.

16. On the profoundly Christian teaching on deification in the Greek patristic tradition (the expression 'gods by grace' drawing on Psalm