Constantine V Kopronymos or Michael VIII Plaeologos the New Constantine. The anonymous Encomium of saint Theodosia


doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.12681/byzsym.896

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Several years ago, when I was working on my dissertation, Professor Oikonomides advised me to undertake the philological edition of and the comment on a hagiographical text pertaining to the Iconoclasm. Thanks to Professor Oikonomides’ support and encouragement I started studying saint Theodosia’s hagiographical corpus and I singled out the anonymous Encomium written in her honour and proceeded with an initial approach to the subject, which was included in my thesis as an Appendix1. My interest in the «mysterious» Theodosia and the texts written about her dates from that time2. Here I present a further examination of the text as an expression of respect and commemoration to Professor Nikolas Oikonomides.

The texts about saint Theodosia, the saint that led the people against the destruction of Christ’s icon at the Chalke Gate of the Imperial Palace, provide scant and confusing information. The sources record the destruction as the first iconoclast act of Leo III3, and a hagiographical account that dates from the second half of the

2. Under the title «Αμφίδρομες σχέσεις μύθου και πραγματικότητας στην περίοδο των πρώιμων Παλαιολόγων ή το ανέκδοτο Εγκώμιον της οσίας Θεοδοσίας και ο ‘οικουμενικός διδάσκαλος’», I presented a paper at the International Conference: Αμφίδρομες σχέσεις λογοτεχνίας και τέχνης στο Βυζάντιο. Ιδεολογία, συμβάσεις και πραγματικότητα. ΙΒΕ/ΕΙΕ, Athens 1998; I discussed there the content and context of John Stavrakios’ Encomium of Theodosia. On this text see below, p. 184 with n. 10.
3. THEOPHANES, Chronographia, ed. C. De Boor, Leipzig 1883, 405, Life of Stephen the Younger, ed. Marie-France Auzépy, La vie d’Etienne le Jeune par Etienne le Diacon. Introduction, édition et
9th century presents a noble woman, named Maria, who acted as the leader of the opponents to the sacrilege and was put to death by Leo III. The earliest evidence relating Theodosia to the Chalke Gate event is to be found in the Grottaferrata manuscript, a copy of the so-called Menologium Basilii, which is dated around the year 1000. In the same context Theodosia is registered in the Synaxarium minus preserved in the ms. Parisinns gr. 1617, written in 1071, from which derives the ms. Parisinus gr. 1587, of the 12th century, as well as in the Sirmondianus gr. of the 12th century. With regard of the saint’s life and death these texts form two groups. The first, that consists of the Grottaferrata and the two Paris manuscripts, places Theodosia’s activity and martyrdom in the reign of Constantine V. The second group, represented by the 12th century Sirmondianum manuscript and its later tradition, places the saint in the years of Leo III. From the latter group derives the Slavic Life of the saint, as well as the two Encomia about her written in the second half of the 13th century and authored respectively by John Stavrakios and Constantine Akropolites.

traduction, Aldershot 1997, 100-101 and 193-194 (commentary). For a discussion of the sources see, EAD., La destruction de l’icone du Christ de la Chalcé par Léon III: propagande ou réalité?, Byzantion 60, 1990, 445-492, who argues that the event was fabricated by the iconophile milieu after 814; see the reservations on this interpretation by Constantina Mentzou Mermari, Ο αυτοκράτωρ Βασίλειος Α’ και η Νέα Εκκλησία(188,876),(289,982), Βυζαντινά 13, 1990, 68-71.


6. Synaxarium, 828.55-56. On the manuscript, see ibid, XXXVI.

7. Synaxarium, 828.40-52. See Luzzi, Studi sul Sinassario, 147.

8. Synaxarium, 828.11-829.10.

9. The Slavic translation of the saint’s Life and Martyrdom has been preserved in the so-called Uspenskii Sbornik, which is dated to the end 12th-early 13th centuries; see D. Afinogenof, A mysterious saint: St. Theodosia, the martyr of Constantinople, Khristianskij Vostok 2 (VIII), 2001, 2-13.

10. The Εξήγησιν του λαογραφίου καθοπλοαίος θεολογίας της Αθηνίων τοῦ Σιατράκου έν τίνι δύο συλλογήν και διαμισθήριαν θεολογίαν, which is preserved in 18 manuscripts, is mentioned neither in the list of Stavrakios works cited in PLP, 11, No. 26706, nor by C. N. Constantines, Higher education in Byzantium in the Thirteenth and early Fourteenth Centuries (1204-ca 1310), Nicola 1982, 127 note 80. The text is registered in H. G. Beck, Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich, Munich 1959, 689. An edition of the text is currently under preparation.

The anonymous *Encomium* of Theodosia, of which we presented a first approach in our dissertation, seems to rely on the 11th century tradition placing the saint’s martyrdom in the reign of Constantine V. However, the author presents an original composition. Among other important points that we will discuss later, the author claims that Constantine V (741-775) deposed Patriarch Germanos I (715-730), appointing Anastasios (730-754) in his place, and refers with virulence to the Council of Hierea summoned by Constantine V in 754, without mentioning however its supporting the emperor’s iconoclastic policy. Are these discrepancies due to erroneous information, ignorance, confusion, or to a deliberate falsification of events, according to a specific purpose? How can we explain the preference for Theodosia by the 13th century authors? Why does the anonymous author specifically choose this specific tradition, which he supplemented with further details?

The anonymous text is entitled ‘Εγκώμιον εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν καὶ ὡσιομάρτυρα καὶ θαυματουργόν Θεοδοσίαν τὴν παρθένον and it is conserved in two 15th century manuscripts: the Koutlumus 109, ff. 43-51, and the Chalcensis 139, ff 33-47. The *Encomium* must have been delivered on the saint’s nameday (29th May), as indicated by the following phrase: ἡ μνήμη πάντων ἐνθάδε συνάθροισε.

The work is structured as follows:

I (§1-4) The long introduction begins with the portrait of the «violent» and «ferocious» emperor (Kopronymos), who caused «many evils» and «innumerable hell temptations»; he persecuted not only men but also women, such as Theodosia. The author continues explaining that he was induced to write this work because he did not wish to suppress the truth, despite the obvious danger of rousing his enemies against him. He justifies why he should not keep silent and, then, specifies


15. According to the Synaxaria and the Menologium Basilii, the saint’s memory is venerated on 18th July; the sources of the Palaeologan period place her on 29th May.
which Theodosia he is going to speak of: the one whom the «arch-sacrilegious Kopronymos» put to death.

II (§5-6) Description of the saint’s virtuous character. She mortified the flesh and took care of the salvation of her soul.

III (§7) Envy was the root of the evil. Comparing the emperor to the Pharaoh, the author recounts the suffering and the ordeals to which the subjects of the «arch-cantankerous Kopronymos» were exposed because of the «evil», «betrayal» and the «novelties» he introduced, namely the banning of the worship of icons and also the introduction of the dogmatic deviation which refutes the «trinitarian nature of the consubstantial deity».

IV (§8) The imposition of the «impious» dogma resulted to the prevalence of «evil», the merciless persecution of «the pious», the «unjust» removal of the Patriarch Germanos and the elevation of the «extremely cunning» Anastasios. Evil deeds culminate in the removal of the icon of Christ from the Chalke Gate. All these were signs of the «vice» of the emperor and of his sacrilegious collaborators.

V (§9) Theodosia and other nuns prevent the emperor’s bodyguard from removing the icon of Christ and kill him. The emperor is informed of the deed and he orders that they be beheaded. The author reverts to the persecutions of the Christians, to connect them with the impending martyrdom of the saint, who was secluded in the monastery near the Skoteinon Phrear, praying and conducting great acts of charity.

VI (§10-11) Spies of the emperor denounce Theodosia to be the sole «iconophile» to resist the emperor’s official dogma and he immediately orders her arrest. She follows the emperor’s emissaries peacefully, even though she is aware that she is treading the path of martyrdom.

VII (§12-16) The saint is brought before the emperor who at first tries to win her over. The section, which is in dialogue form, presents the two main charges levelled against the saint: her deviation from the emperor’s «proper» dogma and her spurning of the Council’s decisions. The emperor considers the decisions of his Council to be divine and holy, while the saint terms them «impious» and remains faithful to the «traditional canons (rules) and the true faith».

VIII (§17) Dramatic execution of the saint by the emperor’s hand.

IX (§18) The saint’s burial and miraculous acts of the relic.

The narrative develops the incident of the destruction of the icon of Christ in the Palace’s Chalke Gate. In reading the text, one can easily discern that the author constructed a «peculiar» rhetorical piece, using the atticism adopted by orators in...
The Encomium is written with great animosity and contains elements of intense and violent invective on the one hand and of praise on the other. However, these elements are not distributed uniformly within the text: negative elements obviously predominate, since the anonymous author speaks more of the «tyrant» emperor and his immoral acts, which are directed against his subjects, and much less of the virtues of the saint. This disproportionate emphasis on evil, on the emperor’s condemnation, and of the negative aspects of the emperor leads us to the conclusion that our text is not a mere piece of laudatory hagiography, as suggested by its title (encomium), but rather a text with caustic political allusions, directed against an emperor. We could therefore argue that the anonymous author penned a text primarily intended to criticize the emperor and his deeds, specifically his attitude towards monks.

Already in the introduction, the anonymous author predisposes his audience of his purpose: he starts his text not with the praise of the saint, —the traditional introduction of an Encomium, used by both John Stavrakios and of Constantine Acropolites,18, but with insulting expressions directed against the emperor.19. This introduction, which, to my knowledge, is not frequently encountered in Byzantine laudatory hagiography, is worth examining more closely. The very first phrase of the text: Εἰ καί πολλών αφορμή προς κακίαν ἔδειχθη Κοπρώνυμος καί των ατελεύτητων κολάσεως πρόξενος, ὡσπερ καί τῆς ἑκείνου θηριστράτου καί βορβορώδους ψυχῆς ἀλλὰ καί τῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ βασιλείας, ης ἑκείνος, πολλῶ πλέον αἰτία γεγονεί (11. 3-720), states that the emperor, who will be dealt with, «induced...
many to evil deeds\textsuperscript{21}, «caused incessant sufferings», and he was the instigator of many more «evils». Moreover, he is considered to be «alien to the rule of Christ \textit{(καί τῆς τοῦ Χρίστου βασιλείας, ἦς ξένος ἐκείνος [L. 6])}, «ferocious» and his soul «plunged in mire». The text follows a similar narrative tenor: in order to demonstrate the extent of the emperor’s «evil» nature and to render his narrative more dramatic, the author continues by saying that it was not only men who opposed to his τύραννον ἐκείνου καί θεόμαχον κακίαν \textit{(1. 8)}, but women as well. Saint Theodosia was one of them. All these accusations are concentrated in 15 lines, which constitute only the preface to the saint’s impending dramatic end: her execution in an extremely hideous and violent way by the emperor’s hand. We may thus suggest that the anonymous author applies here the rhetorical rule of augmentation to compose his rhetorical invective\textsuperscript{22}. Therefore, the purpose of the text is to record and present the emperor’s shortcomings. In this context, the saint, who throughout the narrative constitutes the personification of goodness and piety, is juxtaposed to the negative image of the emperor, the personification of «evil». Instead of a laudatory piece, the \textit{Encomium} would constitute a castigation of the emperor. We may argue that we are dealing with a veiled imperial invective.

However, who is the emperor who is the object of such a virulent accusation? The anonymous author employs the surname Kopronymos to specify the emperor against whom the invective is directed, and, consequently, we can easily identify him with the iconoclast emperor Constantine V. Nevertheless, it is important to note the complete lack throughout the whole text of the emperor’s Christian name, Constantine. The anonymous author seems to consciously avoid any reference to the emperor’s Christian name, preferring instead the «impure name that befits his soul» \textit{(οὐδὲ γάρ ἐδόθη λέγειν τὸ τῆς ἐκείνου ψυχῆς δόξιον ὄνομα μυσαρόν, ὁ Κοπρώνυμος)}. The absence of the emperor’s Christian name reflects a deliberate technique of the author, intending to stress the emperor’s negative image. The invective in this text with the misleading title was drafted not only with the intention of praising Theodosia; it not only aimed at castigating the acts of the iconoclast emperor Constantine V; the Kopronymos of our \textit{Encomium} can only in name be indentified with Constantine V. In fact, the eighth century emperor constitutes a literary means by which the anonymous author refers to another emperor.

\textsuperscript{21} Evil, as noun and adjective, and the emperor’s malevolence recur in several instances of the narrative: lines 3, 7, 28, 128, 137, 164, 178, 185, 249, 370.

\textsuperscript{22} H. HUNGER, \textit{Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner I}, Munich 1978, 103.
Working on the texts written on Theodosia we were led to the conclusion that the saint was used by the various authors to express realities of their own time. When embarking on the research on saint Theodosia, we suspected that the anonymous Encomium would date several centuries after the events narrated. In fact, we were led to the hypothesis it was composed at the same time as the texts by John Stavrakios and Constantine Acropolites, each of them serving a different purpose. It is possible to argue that the text was written in the early Paleologan period, and more precisely during the reign of Michael VIII Palaiologos. Moreover, we would suggest that the emperor dubbed Kopronymos, against whom the anonymous invective is directed, could be identified with Michael VIII Paleologos (1258-1282).

To substantiate his accusations, our anonymous author uses, in a metaphorical sense, several factual elements. First, the allusion to the emperor’s Christian name, Constantine. It is known that following the recapture of Constantinople in 1261, Michael VIII aspired to be identified with the founder of Byzantium, Constantine the Great and that he adopted the surname of New Constantine. It is plausible that in using the nickname of Kopronymos, and by implicitly referring to an emperor named Constantine, the author wishes, by association, to bring to mind to his contemporary audience, the emperor Michael VIII. However, according to our author, neither Constantine V nor Michael VIII were worth, for different reasons, to bear the name of the founder of the Christian Empire.

To support his condemnation, the anonymous author stresses two further points. First, the allusion to the emperor’s usurpation of the throne, and second, the

23. See note 1.
25. For the familiarity of the late 13th century audience with the symbolic and prophetic discourse, see Angeliki E. LATOU-THOMADAKIS, Saints and Society in the Late Byzantine Empire, in Ead. (ed.), Charanis Studies. Essays in Honor of Peter Charanis, New Brunswick 1980, 84 ff. Symbols were widely used by the anti-Paleologan faction: see Ruth MACRIDES, Saints and Sainthood in the Early Palaiologan Period, in The Byzantine Saint (as above, n. 17), 68.
reversal of two fundamental elements of the imperial ideology: the ἐννομον ἐπιστάσιαν (ἀρχήν)\textsuperscript{26} and the ευσέβεια\textsuperscript{27}. The «arch-cantankerous» emperor referred to in the text is described as a tyrant\textsuperscript{28}, who had «unworthily and cunningly» assumed the crown and had not adhered to the traditional customs: δς, ἀνοξίως καί πονηρώς της τῶν χριστιανῶν βασιλείας ἐπιλαμβάνον, οὐκ ἔθελον εἶναι τῶν κανόνων μένειν καί παραβάσειςν καταγνών (ll. 131–133). Thus, the anonymous author contests the emperor’s legitimacy, a common feature used for emperors who reigned without maintaining the traditional customs\textsuperscript{29}. Therefore, although the author does not mention Artabasdos, we may suppose that he refers implicitly to the latter’s uprising\textsuperscript{30}, considering him to have been «worthy» of reigning, instead of his brother-in-law Constantine V. However, Constantine V, to whom our text alludes, would not be accused of usurping the throne, since he was the legitimate successor of his father, Leo III, and inherited the throne in 741, after having been crowned as co-emperor since 720\textsuperscript{31}. Iconophile tradition does not seem to contest Constantine’s V legitimacy, although he is described as a lawless tyrant, who τυραννικώς καί οὐκ ἐννόμως τῷ κράτει χρησάμενον, to implement his iconoclastic policy. The charges of «unworthy usurpation of the throne» (ἀνοξίως καί πονηρώς)...

\textsuperscript{26} H. HUNGER, Prooimion. Elemente der byzantinischen Kaiseridee in den Anregen der Urkunden, Vienna 1964, 120-121.

\textsuperscript{27} J. STRAUB, Vom Herrscherideal in der Spätantike, Stuttgart 1939, 128-129; G. RÖSCH, Ὀνομα βασιλείας, Vienna 1978, 41-43.


\textsuperscript{29} The antithetical pair ἐννομον βασιλεία vs τυραννίς was formulated by SYNESIOS OF CYRENE, Εἰς τὸν αὐτοκράτορα Πέτρο νύμφα, Opuscula, Rome 1944.

\textsuperscript{30} The uprising of Artabasdos in 741 against Constantine V, legitimate heir to the throne, is narrated by Theophanes, 416-418; cf. P. SPECK, Artabasdos, der rechtgläubige Vorkämpfer der göttlichen Lehren. Untersuchungen zur Revolte des Artabasdos und ihrer Darstellung in der byzantinischer Historiographie, Bonn 1981.

\textsuperscript{31} NICEPHOROS, Breviarium, ed. C. MANGO, Nikephoros Patriarch of Constantinople, Short History, Washington 1990, 58; THEOPHANES, 401.
correspond better with the case of Michael VIII. It is not necessary to recount here the details of Michael’s usurpation of the Lascarid heir to the throne, which begun with the «suppression» of the name of John IV Laskaris in Michael’s coronation ceremony, and was followed by the young emperor’s blinding and, finally, by his exile, to assume that the charges of usurpation of the crown are directed against Michael.

The challenge of the legitimacy of the emperor’s authority by calling him a «tyrant» is not only developed in the preface (καί τῆς τοῦ Χρίστου βασιλείας, ης ξένος ἐκείνος II. 5-6), but also in several passages of the narration (τὴν τύραννον ἐκείνον καὶ θεόμαχον κακίαν. II. 9-10; Φαραώ τὸν τύραννον I. 121; τὸ ἀδελφός ἀπερίσκουσε δόγμα παράνομον. II. 163-164; ή τὸν παράνομον παράνομος ἐργασία. II. 201-202; Φαραώ τὸν τύραννον I. 223). Such a repetition serves to create an intense climate against the emperor.

The emperor’s impiety is emphasised in the narrative in order to denigrate him. Piety and God-fearing are two fundamental features of the ideal sovereign’s portrait. In our narrative, the emperor is presented as «alien to the kingdom of Christ» and described as «impious», in accordance with the dogmatic deviations he tried to introduce.

The manifestation of the emperor’s impiety consists of the abolition of the worship of icons, commonly attributed to the iconoclast emperors. In fact, our text quotes the best-known excerpts regarding the worship of icons (II. 42-45). Among the charges against the «impious» emperor, the author introduces accusations that refer to the tentative of abolition of the trinitarian divinity, explaining how the «cursed one» δόγμα καθολικόν ἐδογμάτισεν ο κατάρατος (II. 153-154) by τὸ τρισυπόστατον ἀναφέρεται τῆς ἑρμοσειονθεότητος (II. 160-161). These charges, connected to the structure of the Holy Trinity, were among the burning issues in the aftermath of the Lyons Council of 1274 discussed between Unionists and anti-Unionists. Thus, it is obvious that the anonymous author alludes here in the theological controversy of the late 13th century, and that, moreover, he himself be-
longed to the anti-Unionist party.

The accusation against Kopronymos, the emperor of the narrative, namely the forced resignation of Germans I, constitutes a third element that may confirm the hypothesis that the text was in effect written against Michael VIII Paleologos. It is known that in January 730 Germans I (715-730) was forced to resign by the emperor Leo III\(^3\) and not by Constantine V, as inaccurately stated by the anonymous author:

\[ούτω δέ του δυσσεβούς βασιλέως εκείνου πονηρώς καί άθεος έκοντος πρός θεόν τὸν άγιωτάτον πατριάρχην, τὸν Γερμανόν, άθικος τῶν πατριαρχικῶν οἰκίων απήλλασεν, ἀν' αὐτοῦ δὲ τὸν πονηρότατον ἔχειται κρατησάν Ἀναστάσιον (II. 167-170).\]

The distortion of the chronology, the attribution to Kopronymos, that is Constantine V, of acts that cannot be connected with him, correspond to the author's contemporary reality. It seems that the anonymous seeks to stress similarities of names and of the fate of the two homonymous Patriarchs, Germans I and Germans III\(^4\). Furthermore, the author's statements would serve to remind the initiated audience of the deceitful attitude of Michael VIII on the issue of the resignation of Germans III (1265-1266)\(^4\) and the subsequent elevation of Joseph (1266-1275) to the patriarchal throne\(^5\). If we accept that the author refers to Germans III and not to the homonymous Patriarch of the eighth century, we would assume that our text was composed in or shortly after 1266, that is, after the sudden end of Germans' III patriarchate.

One more point confirms, in our view, the dating of the text in the second half of the 13th century, namely the passage in which the anonymous author provides some autobiographical elements\(^6\). Speaking of himself, he says initially that he is one of those who elected «the path of God»; consequently, we may suppose that he was a monk. He then expresses his fears about the double danger that his

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\(^3\) THEOPHANES, 409; cf. Eleonora KOUNTOURA-GALAKE, *Ο βυζαντινός κλήρος και η κοινωνία των «σκοτεινών αιώνων», Athens 1996, 144.

\(^4\) Since the former was transferred from the episcopate of Cyzicus and the latter from the episcopate of Adrianople to the Patriarchate of Constantinople. On the interdiction of transfer from one episcopate to another, see RHALLES-POTLES V, 391-394.


statements might cause him, both to his soul and body, and says that he will dare to utter the truth. He then repeats that the danger from his undertaking is evident. It is obvious that his words reflect the concern, the anxiety of a person who fears persecution. However, what sense would his fears have had, had he been writing of an emperor of the past and not for a contemporary one? It is known that, during the reign of Michael VIII, persecutions of those opposing the «royal laws» were particularly violent. The work exudes the fear of a person who dares to speak of issues engaging the attention of a contemporary audience in current problems; yet, through alteration and disguise he adjusts them to a corresponding but harmless past.

With carefully chosen stylistic devices the author expresses his views with reference to the Council of Lyons. It is only when he recounts Theodosia’s punishment, with her being brought before the emperor, that he has the opportunity to speak of the Council: διὰ πολλῶν δὲ τῶν ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ παράνομον ἔκθενον τὴν ἀγίαν τοῦ βασιλέως εἶχε συνέδριον (l. 290). Of course, the anonymous author could have been referring to the iconoclast Council of Hieria, which was convened by Constantine V, and yet he supplements his text with a plethora of quotations from iconoclastic writings, to render his narrative more convincing. However, he never mentions that the Church was involved into this imperial initiative. Instead, he speaks of a mere «convention» related to the emperor, who on this occasion went beyond his jurisdiction: περὶ τῆς κατ’ ἐκείνου ἁγίασμα συνόδου (ll. 307-308), περὶ δὲ τῆς συνόδου σου, ταύτης ην καὶ ἱεράν καὶ καθέν ἀοίδοις, περὶ δὲ τῆς συνόδου ἡν (ll. 363-364). Therefore, the iconoclastic stereotypes inserted in the narrative function as a rhetorical device. The real argument refers to the 1274 Council of Lyons, and since the author cannot express himself openly against the Council out of fear, the fictitious iconoclastic background is used to illustrate contemporary events. 1274 would thus be the terminus post for the redaction of the anonymous Encomium.

In conclusion, let us sum up the main points of the study of the anonymous Encomium. Although referring explicitly to Constantine V and to Theodosia as a
martyr of the first Iconoclasm, the text is in reality inspired by the situation of the late 13th century. The author made use of Theodosia’s legend, as it was developed in former hagiographical texts. He composed an original work, selecting from his sources the narrative elements he considered fitting better to his own aim. The «patchwork» method he used seems to have been a characteristic feature of the hagiography by the troubled late 13th century, when words had a double significance, both literal and symbolic. Rewriting hagiography was a literary tendency of the time, and as a method is explicitly cited by Constantine Akropolites, who remodeled the earlier Life of John the Merciful, in order to compose the portrait of the «merciful» emperor John III Vatatzes: καί γάρ ούκ οἱ οἵκως καὶ τῶν μοναστῶν οὐκ ἄλλοι συνήθες ἄνωθεν δεινες καὶ τῶν τοῦ ἱεροῦ καταλόγου συναλ ὀσίων τε καὶ μαρτύρων βίους ἄλλοι μετ’ ἄλλων ἀξιότητοι συγγράφεσθαι.¹⁸
