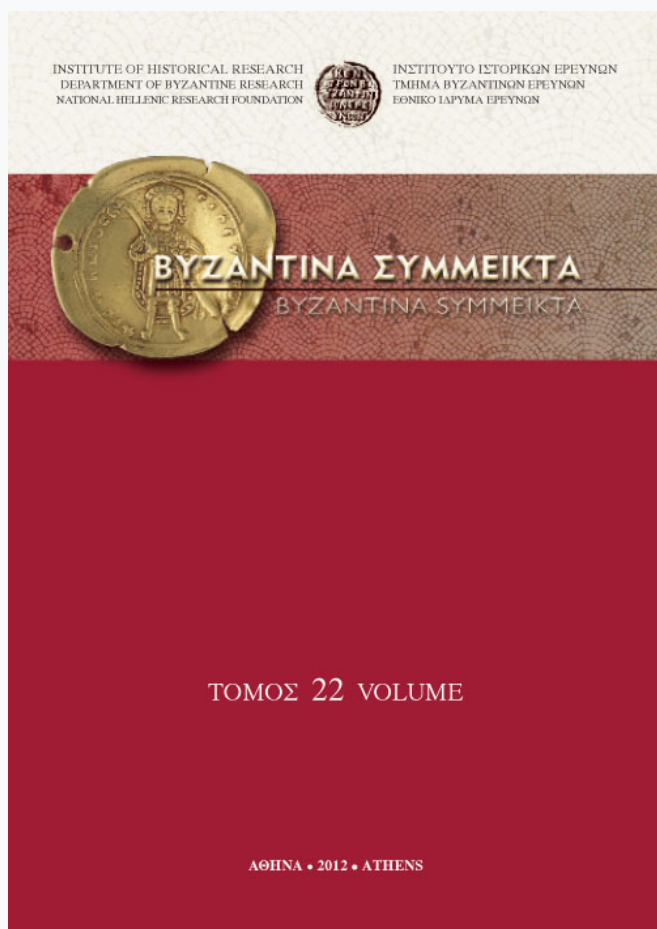


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Book review: Greg, PETERS, Peter of Damascus. Byzantine Monk and Spiritual Theologian (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Studies and Texts 175, 2011)

Daniel SAHAS

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G. PETERS, *Peter of Damascus. Byzantine Monk and Spiritual Theologian* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Studies and Texts 175, 2011), 182 p. + Appendices and Bibliography. ISBN 978-0-88844-175-1

This is a reworked doctoral dissertation on “an ignored author from the Byzantine Empire awaiting scholarly attention” and “an important contributor to the larger field of Byzantine monasticism and spirituality”, by an Anglican priest and Associate Professor of Medieval and Spiritual Theology in the Torrey Honors Institute at Biola University in La Mirada, California. The subject of the book, straightforward in appearance, is particularly complex; a complexity escaping even the author himself and this reviewer. The Introduction (*Recovering a Lost Spiritual Theologian*, pp. 1-12) gives a hint of the complexity without getting adequately into the nuances, and the significance, of the riddle. In spite of his effort, the author leaves the fundamental question as to who is really “Peter of Damascus” essentially unanswered. The arguments offered do not place the figure, firmly and meaningfully, in the exact historical context and in the context of the *Philokalia* corpus. Here is briefly the outline and the conclusions of the book as stated by the author (pp. 5-8):

“Chapter 1 will locate Peter geographically” - implying that “Damascus” as well as the place “where he spent his life as a monk has hitherto been uncertain”, or under questioning. The author’s assumption is that Peter was a monk and biological brother of Leo, a twelfth-century bishop of Nauplia (Nauplion), an assertion which to him determines “both, location and firmer dates of Peter’s life”. “Chapter 2 will take up the question of Peter’s name” - implying an ambiguity as to a single “Peter” in the midst of various figures under this name. “Chapters 3 and 4 will explicate the spiritual theology of Peter of Damascus as found in his two philokalic texts:

the *Admonition to His Own Soul* (ὑπόμνησις [sic] πρὸς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ψυχὴν) and the *Spiritual Alphabet* (Λόγοι κατ' ἀλφαβῆτον [sic]), implying that such an explanation is based on a Peter, whose identity, geography and dates are settled! “Chapter 5 will examine how Peter understood that his spiritual “program” is open to both monks and laity”. “Chapter 6 will offer the following conclusions: 1) Peter’s spiritual theology is original and it does not strictly follow the so-called Evagrian/Maximian paradigm; and 2) Peter employs the literary technique of intertextuality [?], accounting for how he uses past authors innovatively and originally”. Finally, “Three Appendices [pp. 183-193] provide a comparison of the contents of the *Admonition* and the *Spiritual Alphabet*, and a textual emendation and translation found in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ancien gr. 1135”. A Bibliography [pp. 195-209] and an Index [pp. 210-4] complete the book. In our view the substantive matter is found, and remains, in the first two chapters of the book upon which all other considerations about Peter of Damascus are connected organically.

The *Philokalia* assumes a Peter earlier and different than the one of this book. Three at least early figures under the name “Peter” (“... of Damascus”, or not) appear in the sources: a Peter, metropolitan of Damascus during the first-part of the eighth century, a said recipient of “Λίβελλος περὶ ὀρθοῦ φρονήματος” (*Libellus de recta sententia*)¹ and of “*In tractatum Contra Jacobitas, Admonitio*”², which the well known John of Damascus is presumed to have written “ἐκ προσώπου [on behalf of] Πέτρου τοῦ ἀγιωτάτου Ἐπισκόπου Δαμασκού πρὸς τὸν ἐπίσκοπον δῆθεν τοῦ Δαραίας τὸν Ἰακωβίτην”. According to Theophanes, this Peter became a confessor of faith when the Umayyad caliph al-Walīd II (r. 743-44) “ordered that the most holy metropolitan of Damascus [Peter], have his tongue cut off for reproving publicly the impiety of the Arabs and the Manichaeans, and exiled him to *Arabia Felix* [Yemen] where he died as a martyr on behalf of Christ after reciting the divine liturgy. Those who have told the story affirm to have heard it with their own ears”³. The information comes from a Syriac source⁴ repeated subsequently by

1. PG 94: 1421-1432.

2. PG 94: 1436-1501.

3. *Chronographia*, ed. C. DE BOOR (Leipzig, 1883-85), 416.

4. *Chronicon Syriacum* 1234 = J.B. CHABOT, ed. *Chronicon ad annum Christi 1234 pertinens*, 2 vols (Paris, 1937, Louvain, 1974).

Michael the Syrian⁵. P. Peeter has suggested that this Peter of Damascus has been confused with a certain Peter of Capitolias [Bayt Ras] who had died as a martyr on an earlier date, January 13, 715 during the reign of caliph al-Walid I (705-15)⁶. An *Oration* on this “pious neo-martyr Peter, who was put to death in the city of Capitolias”, has been attributed to John of Damascus and survived via Arabic only in a Georgian version, possibly from a Greek original. These two figures are distinct from each other, according to R.G. Hoyland; the first was a metropolitan and the second a government employee, a *χαρτουλάριος* of public taxes⁷. To confuse matters even further, Theophanes makes mention of two martyrs, a Peter metropolitan of Damascus (in 742/3, during the reign of al-Walid II) and Peter of Maiuma (most likely Peter of Capitolias), connecting the name Qaiuma (Peter’s Syrian servant) to Maiuma (as in Syriac Q and M are very similar)⁸! Hoyland, then, is right when wondering whether, as far as the name is concerned, Theophanes’ account has become confused with the fifth-century martyr Peter, bishop of Maiuma⁹. The fact also that both figures under the name “Peter” were punished under a caliph by the name al-Walid, explains Theophanes’ date of martyrdom in the same year.

A. Th. Khoury¹⁰ has attributed an Arabic treatise against Islam, now lost, to Peter of Damascus whom he identifies with Peter of Capitolias, thus agreeing with P. Peeters! This treatise may be the work to which J. Nasrallah refers to as a work in Greek against the Manicheans and Islam found in the Sinaitic manuscript Gr. 443 (erroneously referred to as Gr. 343), misreading Theophanes’s *Chronographia*¹¹! However, this particular manuscript contains a writing of *ascetic* nature under the title *Ἀνάμνησις*

5. *Chronique de Michel le syrien, patriarche jacobite d'Antioche (1166-1199)*, ed. tr. J.-B. CHABOT, 4 vols, (Paris, 1899-1910).

6. P. PEETER, La Passion de S. Pierre de Capitolias (+ 13 janvier 715), *AnBoll* 57 (1939), 299-333.

7. R. G. HOYLAND, *Seeing Islam as Others saw it. A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton 1997), 359.

8. *Chronographia*, 417-8.

9. Cf. D. M. LANG, *Lives and Legends of the Georgian Saints* (London 1956) 57-80; HOYLAND, *Seeing Islam*, 355, n. 69.

10. A. TH KHOURY, *Les théologiens byzantins et l' Islam*, (Leuven/Paris 1969), 40.

11. J. NASRALLAH, Dialogue islamo-chrétien à propos de publications récentes, *Revue des Études islamiques* 46 (1978), 126.

τῆς ἰδίας ψυχῆς, or better known as Ὑπόμνησις τῆς ἰδίας ψυχῆς, a treatise which H.-G. Beck has attributed to a much later “Peter of Damascus” dated either in late eleventh (1096-97) or middle twelfth (1156-57) century¹².

Much earlier than this confusing scholarly debate, Nicodemos the Hagiorite (1749-1809), who with Makarios Notaras (1731-1805) bishop of Corinth collected and edited the *Philokalia* texts¹³, author also of the unsigned *Introduction* to each figure, presented Peter as “bishop of Damascus during the reign of Constantine the Copronym in the year seven hundred and seventy five” [Constantine V (741-775)] who died as a martyr in *Arabia Felix*. The inference here is that Peter served as bishop only for a short while during the year 775 when Constantine was still an emperor. Peter, continues Nicodemos, was sent to exile “by Walid, the son of the ruler of the Arabs Isem” as he was a sharp critic “of the ill-intended heresy of the Arabs and the Manicheans”¹⁴. On the basis of two unspecified but dated manuscripts this view seems to be questioned by the commentator of a New Edition of the *Philokalia*, the Athonite monk Theokletos Dionysiates, who reluctantly places Peter and his works in the beginning of the 12th century; aiming at supporting especially hesychasts, but generally monks and ascetics of all forms of monastic life¹⁵. These two manuscripts may be the 13th century one of Peter’s works and another one of the 14th century, which have prompted some to date Peter in the years 1096-97 and 1156-57 respectively. It is the dates of these manuscripts which, according to the translators of the *Philokalia* in English, have led Gouillard to place Peter in the twelfth century¹⁶.

12. H. G. BECK, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich* (Munich, 1959), 644.

13. Φιλοκαλία τῶν ἱερῶν Νηπτικῶν. Συνερανισθεῖσα παρὰ τῶν ἁγίων καὶ θεοφόρων Πατέρων ἐν ᾗ διὰ τῆς κατὰ τὴν προᾶξιν καὶ θεωρίαν ἡθικῆς φιλοσοφίας ὁ νοῦς καθαίρεται, φωτίζεται καὶ τελειοῦται (Venice, 1782) 5 volumes (reprint: Ἀθήναι, 1957-1963)].

14. Φιλοκαλία τῶν ἱερῶν Νηπτικῶν, volume III, (1960), 3.

15. Φιλοκαλία τῶν ἱερῶν Νηπτικῶν. Μετάφραση ΑΝΤΩΝΙΟΣ Γ. ΓΑΛΙΤΗΣ, Third vol. (Θεσσαλονίκη: Τό Περιβόλι τῆς Παναγίας, 1997³), 66.

16. *The Philokalia. The Complete text compiled by St Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St Makarios of Corinth*. Translated from the Greek and edited by G.E.H. PALMER – PHILIP SHERRARD – KALLISTOS WARE, Volume III, (London, 1984), 70.

Greg Peters in a rather complicated discussion (Chapter One) attempts to establish the year 1050 as the *terminus post quem* and 1275 as the *terminus ante quem* of Peter of Damascus's life. The details of the argument, not particularly convincing, may be evaluated closely by a more competent person than this reviewer. The same can be said about the methodology and the validity of arguments used for explaining Peter's identity as "Damascene" (Chapter Two). One is left wondering, for example, in what way does the lengthy discussion about Mediaeval controversies on the azymes and the *filioque* (pp. 40-43) lead or contribute, in a convincing way, to the identity of Peter of Damascus! Also the argument that the twelfth-century debate about the nature of the Eucharist leads unequivocally to the person of Peter of Damascus as monk at the monastery of Areia and biological brother of Leo, bishop of Argos in the same century (pp. 46-48) seems, to this reviewer, as highly hypothetical! Suggesting also that the interchangeable use of the Arabic name Mansur (of Damascene origin) with the epithet "Damascene" or "of Damascus" (something questionable!) may have resulted in Peter's surname "of Damascus", sounds as a huge leap of imagination. The first two chapters of the book have pressed the key points of fact, date and geography, far too much; thus raising more questions than clarifications beyond doubt.

With these confusing and at times contradictory data in mind, we turn now to the "Peter of Damascus, the holy martyr" («τοῦ ἱερομάρτυρος») of the *Philokalia* itself, as these two are according to Nicodemus the Hagiorite coherent and congenial entities to each other¹⁷. In dealing mostly with Byzantine spirituality and its scholarly renaissance and less with the historical and contextual Peter, Greg Peters in an earlier section of the book (pp. 9-12) was eager to discuss the question of How does one read Byzantine spiritual texts; a question, which we must say, is of modern Western concern but of no significance to the collectors or the masters of the spiritual texts contained in the *Philokalia*. Nikodemus the Hagiorite in his unsigned *Introduction* calls the *Philokalia* "the means to deification" ("τὸ τῆς θεώσεως Μέσον") and in another place "the instrument of deification" ("τὸ τῆς θεώσεως ὄργανον")¹⁸, while he characterizes Peter's own place in it as "a *Philokalia* within the major *Philokalia*, the comprehensive one within the extended one" ("φιλοκαλίαν φιλοκαλία μείζονι μέγαν καὶ

17. Cf. *Φιλοκαλία τῶν ἱερῶν Νηπτικῶν*, Volume III, 4.

18. *Φιλοκαλία τῶν ἱερῶν Νηπτικῶν*, Volume I, κβ' and κγ'.

τῇ συνεπτυγμένῃ τὴν πλατυτέραν”)¹⁹. Indeed, Peter’s texts make up the second largest section of the whole *Philokalia* after Maximos the Confessor, and cover all subjects of the ascetic and nyptic writings. The latter is also attested to by the plethora of sources which Peter has used. It is on both these counts that the above mentioned Theokletos Dionysiates in the New Edition sets the priorities of study differently, by remarking that although “one may harbor some doubts as to the identity of the author of these texts and the century in which he lived” he, nevertheless, belongs to the *Philokalia* because “he exercised himself as an ascetic, became a saint and fell asleep in the Lord without committing a sin or going against the truth of the Church”²⁰. It is this “Peter of Damascus” who remains elusive and has received scant attention by the scholarly community - except for a study by Jean Gouillard²¹, and two articles published in 1995 by Greg Peters²², the author of the present book. The puzzle of this Peter takes other forms, too. For example, the first translation of the *Philokalia* in Slavonic by the Russian *starets* Paisy Velichofsky (1722-1794), published in St Petersburg one year before Paisy’s death in 1793, has remained faithful to its Greek original, while a later translation in Russian by Theophanes of Tabov and Vladimir in 1877, is marked by a number of additions and omissions of texts, most notable being the deletion of the whole section of “Peter of Damaskos”, with no explanation!

Peter of Damascus’s insistence that spirituality is equally applicable to monks and lay people makes him a precursor of the intellectual layman and admirer of hesychasm, Nicholas Kavalas (1322-*ca.*1391) - by two centuries, if we accept Greg Peters’s thesis that Peter of Damascus is a twelfth-century figure, or by five centuries, if we place him much earlier, in the late eighth century as is my opinion. Peter is writing for those who are seeking practical advice on spiritual matters, and in a manner neither systematic with an

19. Φιλοκαλία τῶν ἱερῶν Νηπτικῶν, Volume III, 4.

20. Φιλοκαλία τῶν ἱερῶν Νηπτικῶν, Third Volume (as in n. 15 above), 62-3.

21. J. GOUILLARD, Un auteur spirituel byzantine du XII^e siècle, Pierre Damascène, *Échos d’Orient* 38 (1939), 257-78, reprinted in his *La vie religieuse à Byzance* (London:Variorum, 1981).

22. G. PETERS, Peter of Damascus and Early Christian Spiritual Theology, *Patristica et Medievalia* 26 (2005), 89-109; and Recovering a Lost Spiritual Theologian: Peter of Damascus and the Philokalia, *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 49 (2005), 437-459.

intention of proving, nor grandiose with a posture of lecturing, insisting that spiritual knowledge and salvation are within the reach of everyone. Divine aid and grace, prayer, meditation, hope and proper exercise of freedom of human will are fundamental presuppositions and means to salvation –principles and teachings characterizing *the early spiritual fathers*. Thus, there are internal, congenial and contextual indications of Peter's early origin derived from within the *Philokalia* corpus, which seem to challenge the theses of the book. I will offer specifically three of them:

First, it is essential to pay attention to the list of books which Peter used; books which he had borrowed from and returned to his spiritual brothers as he owed no book of his own. The list is found in the Preface of the *Treasury of Divine Knowledge*. In manner and order this list goes as follows: The Old and the New Testament; specifically the Psalms, the four books of Kings, the six books of Wisdom (Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Wisdom of Solomon, Sophia Sirah), the books of Prophets, the books of Chronicles, the Acts of the Apostles, the holy Gospels and the Commentaries to all of them. After these Peter is citing writings of specific authors and fathers which he had read and quoted. This part is in itself a document. I have added for consideration the dates of these sources: [Pseudo]-Dionysius [the Areopagite, fl. ca. 500], Athanasios [295-373], Basil [ca. 330-379], Gregory the Theologian [329/330-ca.390], [John] Chrysostom [b.340-350-d.407], Gregory [of Nyssa (b.335-40-d. after 394)], Anthony [of Egypt, (ca. 251-356)], Arsenios [354-449], Makarios [of Egypt (ca.300-ca.390)], Neilos [d. ca. 430], Ephraim [the Syrian (ca. 306-373)], Isaak [fl. ca.680], Mark [the Ascetic (early 5th c.)], [John] Damascene [ca. 675-749], John of Klimakos [before 579-ca. 650], Dorotheos [of Gaza (ca. 500-560-80)], [Abba] Philemon [?6th-7th]; “as well as the lives and sayings of all the saints”, that is *Hagiologies*. The dates and kind of such sources should not be passed unnoticed as they provide a glimpse of Peter's own life time and thought. The translators of the *Philokalia* in English have made a revealing calculation, albeit not exhaustive, as to the frequency of use of these sources in Peter's works: Basil and Chrysostom each is mentioned 47 times. Next come John Klimakos (38 times), Isaac the Syrian (34 times), the *Gerontikon* or *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* (about 30 times), John of Damascus (28 times), Gregory of Nazianzos (23 times), Maximos the Confessor (19 times), Neilos (15 times), Dionysios (9 times), Dorotheos of Gaza (9 times), Mark the Ascetic and John

Cassian (2 times each)²³. These same translators have also noted that Peter makes mention of the tenth-century Logothete St. Symeon Metaphrastes (d. ca. 1000); something which certainly may point to an author who died much later than the eighth century and of al-Walīd II's era²⁴. Even with this note in mind, no one can miss the point that Peter's sources derive from a definite block of figures dating from the late third to the middle eighth century, from St. Anthony to John of Damascus, and that after this block a huge gap of about two and a half centuries follows until one reaches the single name of Symeon Metaphrastes! Symeon does not appear in the list of sources but only once, in a paragraph of Peter's *Treasury of Divine Knowledge* under the title "Active Spiritual Knowledge", and in passim. The context may be important in evaluating this reference:

"I have given the names of books and saints at the beginning, so as not to overburden my work by specifying to whom each saying belongs. Indeed, the holy fathers often copied out the words of the divine Scriptures just as they are, as St Gregory the Theologian did with those of Solomon; and Symeon Metaphrastis the Logothete said with reference to St John Chrysostom that it would be wrong not to use that saint's words and to substitute his own ..."²⁵.

There is no substantive use of any Symeon's *teaching* in this remark! Is it, then, unreasonable to suggest that the appearance of his name is, perhaps, the result of some kind of later editing and interpolation? One may also wonder why Peter (if he were, indeed, not just an eleventh but a twelfth-century ascetic) does not make mention of such major spiritual writers, closer to him in age and thought, as Symeon the New Theologian (949?-1022) or Nicetas Stethatos (1005?-ca. 1090)? Greg Peters has not raised such questions, even as working hypotheses.

Second, working on Gouillard's premise, Greg Peters seems to have been convinced that Peter was a monk of the late eleventh century (p. 13), although in a subsequent place (p. 21) has preferred later, middle twelfth century (1156-57) dates for his monastic life - both assumptions remaining unproven. His lengthy discussion on monasticism in the early twelfth century Byzantium and beyond (pp. 15-21), although informative,

23. *The Philokalia*, Volume III, 70.

24. *The Philokalia*, Volume III, 70.

25. *The Philokalia*, Volume III, 103.

does not necessarily lead to or strengthen this supposition. Descriptions and expressions of forms of monasticism do not yield facts but only speculation about the exact “Peter” and the kind of a monk he was, given the large number of 108 figures under the name “Peter” in the Byzantine Prosopography, of which seventeen from the twelfth century, counting the easily dismissible ones. Greg Peters has identified his Peter by a questionable process of elimination. After leaving aside seventeen 12th century “Peters” found in the *Prosopography of the Byzantine World*, he deals with the seven remaining ones discarding some of them because the, otherwise scant, sources do not refer to them as “monk”! What comes, however, from a close examination of Peter’s own writings is that he was living neither as a hermit nor as a member of an organized *κοινόβιον*. He was rather a part of a semi-eremitic *κελλίον* – a third form of life of two or three monks pursuing a life of silence which his own favourite author, John of Klimakos (before 579-ca.650), calls “the royal way”²⁶.

Third, Greg Peter in Chapter Three makes an exposition and evaluation of the so-called “spiritual theology” of Peter’s works *Ἑπόμνησις εἰς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ψυχὴν*, known also as *The Admonition*, and *“Λόγοι κατ’ ἀλφάβητον”*, or *The Spiritual Alphabet*. In this chapter the author endeavors to a) elucidate the spiritual theology of Peter of Damascus, and b) evaluate and correct, when necessary, previously negative assessments of Peter’s corpus (p. 54). This discussion is a scholastic-apologetic exercise and analysis of Peter’s thought which, in the words of the author, is to the common judgment, “unorganized, random, or even unoriginal” – a criticism which “is ubiquitous in the sparse secondary literature” (p. 51). Such an approach evades the unrehearsed character of Peter’s (not “theology” but) spiritual admonitions! Arguing about specific points of interpretation would require another thesis, which a younger and more able person should, certainly, undertake. The following two examples may offer a hint as to the kind of challenge. The essential meaning of the word *ἀπώλεια* in Patristic and especially the spiritual literature is «perdition» rather than “destruction” (pp. 62, 86f.) – an essential distinction between Eastern and Western theological frame of mind and praxis, with fundamental repercussions and views on humanity, evil, sin, freedom, grace, salvation and million of other experiences and principles. Secondly, postulations such as the following three: a) “a strong

26. *The Philokalia*, Volume III, 70.

emphasis on grace is unusual in Byzantine writers of the period c. 850-1204” (!) while it is of a heightened interest among Western theologians, and thus it “arises the question naturally whether or not Peter had some exposure to those currents of thought” (p.64); b) that although it is insisted that Peter is a twelfth-century author at the same time it is maintained that “It is likely that he learned his theology of grace from the writings of Mark the Monk/ Hermit (early 5th century!), whom he references as one of his sources” (p. 66); and c) that “It would appear that Peter’s theology of sin and grace, *though sharing many similarities with western theologians, was acquired through his reading of Eastern Christian texts*” (p. 67) [the emphasis is ours] - make little sense, and show a peripheral understanding and a speculative analysis of Peter’s theological and spiritual presuppositions, particularly because the one who is called to support Peter’s theology on sin and grace is the ... early *fifth-century* Mark the Hermit!!

On a very different front, the book does not make for an easy reading. All references seem to have come from the English translation of the *Philokalia*, while those from the Greek original are plagued with grammatical and spelling mistakes; for example: «Λόγοι κατ’ ἀλφαβῆτον», «... ἰνδικτιῶνος πεμπτῆς ἔτους...», «καὶ ταῦτα ἐν πάσῃ», «Πέτρῳ πρωτοσπαθαριῳ», «ληστῶν», «Ναυπλίου καὶ Ἀργους», «Ἐκδοσις», «ἀγία μονή», «καθ’ αἷμα», «ἐπίκρισις», «ἐπιτήρησις», «ὥσπερ τᾶλλα», «τοῦ πνεύματος [for πνεύματος]», «ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ βιβλίῳ», «οὕτω καταξιούμεθα», «οὐδ’ ὅλως βιβλίων ἰδίαν κέκτημαι, ἢ [instead of, ἢ] ἐκτησάμην ποτέ...», «ἀβροδιατίτης» (for ἀβροδιατός?), «Διάταξις», «ὅσον τὸ ἐπ’ αὐτόν», «Ἱεροσολυμιτικὴ Βιβλιοθηκῇ, Τομος Πρῶτος (En Petroupodei)», «ἐπισκόπου Πέτρῳ μητροπολίτῃ Δαμασκοῦ», «Επιστολῇ...», «κεφάλιον περὶ τοῦ ἀχράντου σώματος οὐ [instead of, οὐ] μεταλαμβάνομεν», «ἄζυμος», «...πατριάρχου Ἱεροσολύμων», «Επιστημονικὴ Επετηρὶς τῆς Θεολογικῆς Σχολῆς τοῦ Πανεπιστημίου Θεσσαλονίκης», «... ὅς [for ὡς] προπάτορα μὲν ... ἐν ἄναξι περιώνυμον», «ὅθεν καὶ διατόρω στόματι ἀνακηρύττο τε ... καὶ τῇ παναγίᾳ Τριάδι, τὸ ζωοποιὸν αἷμα...», «ἵνα εἴτε ἐλθὼν καὶ ἰδὼν ὑμᾶς ... ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι ... ἥτις ἐστὶν αὐτοῖς ἔνδεξις [instead of, ἔνδειξις]», «ἡσυχία», «ἐγένετο σύζυγος...», «εὐρων ὁ δρᾶκων ... ἀλλ’ αὐτός καταλιπὼν τὸν χιτῶνα... αὐτοῦ ταῖς ἰκεσίαις...», «ἐν Ἑλλάδι» - an environment which makes the reading of the book cumbersome, and its scholarship suspect. The flagrant use of Greek quotations and words (even when these are not definitive or necessary) is adding to the problem.

In spite of these comments, one has to say that this is a contribution to an important and essential subject of Byzantine monasticism and spirituality, as well as to a significant (albeit obscure) personality. The author of the book and his mentors are to be commended for undertaking a topic which is neither easy to decipher, nor fanciful to the academia of our times to tackle. The challenge for a fresh, thorough, most serious reconsideration and meticulous treatment of the specific figure with its interwoven issues has now been posted; and for such a challenging task the book is a welcome beginning.

DANIEL J. SAHAS
Professor Emeritus
University of Waterloo (Canada)

