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UNHISTORIC ACTS: THE THREE LIVES OF ROMANOS NIKIFOROU

Marc D. Lauxtermann

*“For the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts;
and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been,
is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life,
and rest in unvisited tombs.”*
(George Eliot, *Middlemarch*)

ABSTRACT: This paper sketches the biographies of three early seventeenth-century intellectuals by the name of Romanos Nikiforou: a uniate hieromonk from Thessaloniki who studied at the Collegio Greco in Rome and became a parish priest in Sicily; another hieromonk from Thessaloniki who lived in Paris, frequented the Capuchins and wrote a grammar of vernacular Greek; and an orthodox priest from Corinth who went to Rostock and sought the help of Gustavus Adolphus for the liberation of Greece. This paper aims to prove that these three intellectuals are in fact one and the same person, and to establish the connection between planning an armed revolt in the Peloponnese and composing a grammar.

I

This is either the story of a seventeenth-century intellectual with multiple religious identities, political allegiances and social roles, or that of three different people who happen to bear the same name: Romanos Nikiforou.¹ Whichever story appears to be the most credible, it should be noted that in two of these three intertwined lives our hero signs his letters and other writings as Ῥωμανὸς ὁ Νικηφόρου in Greek and Romanus Nicephori in Latin – it is only in the first life, that of a Greek in Rome and Palermo, that he is called Romano Niceforo in the few Italian sources that mention his existence. Nonetheless, the secondary literature rather perversely persists in calling him

¹ Z. N. Tsirpanlis, *Οι Μακεδόνες σπουδαστές του Ελληνικού Κολλεγίου Ρώμης και η δράση τους στην Ελλάδα και στην Ιταλία (16ος αι. - 1650)* [The Macedonian students of the Greek College of Rome and their activity in Greece and Italy (sixteenth century - 1650)], Thessaloniki 1971, p. 160, note 2: “Κάτι κοινό υποκρύπτεται ανάμεσα στα πρόσωπα αυτά, το οποίο μου διαφεύγει.” [These persons appear to have something in common, but what exactly eludes me.]

Ρωμανός Νικηφόρος or, even worse, Νικηφόρος Ρωμανός.² I see no reason to follow suit. “Romanos” is his first name and “Nikiforou” indicates that he is the son of one Nikiforos.

In the following I shall first present these three lives separately, as if they were unconnected strands of DNA, and then attempt to weave all the threads into a cohesive and organic whole. The first life leads us to Rome, where a certain “Romano, monaco, sacerdote” signed a petition of the pupils of the Collegio Greco (the Greek College of St Athanasius) in support of their Jesuit teachers in the year 1603.³ In a chronicle detailing the history of this famous college (written in 1638),⁴ one encounters a “Romano, monaco da Thesalonica”, who, having studied for four years in the Collegio Greco, requested permission to leave on health grounds and “who now lives in a most Catholic fashion, serving as the priest of the Greek church in Palermo”.⁵ In documents of the Greco-Albanian parish of San Nicolò in Palermo, dating between 17 June 1605 and 19 August 1607, the existence of a certain “Romano Niceforo” is indeed attested as a “beneficiale” (a clergyman holding

² For instance, *Μεγάλη ελληνική εγκυκλοπαίδεια* [Great Greek encyclopaedia], Athens n.d., *sub voce* Ρωμανός, Νικηφόρος; *Μεγάλη εγκυκλοπαίδεια νεοελληνικής λογοτεχνίας* [Great encyclopaedia of modern literature], Athens n.d., *sub voce* Ρωμανός, Νικηφόρος; I. Manolesou and D. Theophanopoulou-Kontou, “Γραμματικές της Νεότερης Ελληνικής. Από το Νικόλαο Σοφιανό (περ. 1550) έως το Δημήτριο Βενιέρη (1799)” [Modern Greek grammars: from Nikolaos Sophianos (c. 1550) to Dimitrios Venieris (1799)], in G. Babiniotis (ed.), *Το γλωσσικό ζήτημα. Σύγχρονες προσεγγίσεις* [The language question: contemporary approaches], Athens 2011, pp. 103-121, at p. 120: “17ος αι.: Νικηφόρος Ρωμανός” [Seventeenth century: Nikiforos Romanos].

³ Z. N. Tsirpanlis, *Τὸ Ἑλληνικὸ Κολλέγιο τῆς Ρώμης καὶ οἱ μαθητὲς του (1576-1700). Συμβολὴ στὴ μελέτῃ τῆς μορφωτικῆς πολιτικῆς τοῦ Βατικανοῦ* [The Greek College in Rome and its students (1576-1700): contribution to the study of the Vatican’s educational policy], Thessaloniki 1980, p. 387 (no. 219). See also Tsirpanlis, *Μακεδόνες σπουδαστές*, pp. 106, 159-161.

⁴ For the date see A. Fyrigos, “Catalogo cronologico degli alunni e dei convittori del Pont. Collegio Greco in Roma (1576-1640)”, *Bollettino della Badia Greca di Grottaferrata*, n.s., 33 (1979), pp. 9-56, 113-158, and 34 (1980), pp. 75-103, at 33, pp. 9-28, and *id.*, “Aggiunte e precisazioni per la datazione del cod. ACGr. 1 (ff. 6r-77v) (*Alias* la ‘Cronica’)”, *Bollettino della Badia Greca di Grottaferrata*, n.s., 37 (1983), pp. 75-86.

⁵ Tsirpanlis, *Μακεδόνες σπουδαστές*, p. 106, note 3: “Romano, monaco da Thesalonica; è stato d’ indole buona; doppo haver studiato humanità greca et latina, partì dal Collegio con licentia de’ superiori per indispositione; al presente vive cattolicamente trovandosi curato della chiesa greca di Palermo. È stato in Collegio quattro anni.” In a later chronicle of the Collegio Greco (*ibid.*, p. 106, note 4) we read: “Romano, monaco di Tessalonica, hebbe la cura parrocchiale della chiesa greca in Palermo.” See also Fyrigos, “Catalogo cronologico”, p. 154 (note 335).

a benefice).⁶ Six years later, in 1613, the same Romano Niceforo is named as the parish priest in Contessa Entellina, one of the Albanian communities in Sicily; it is not known how long he stayed there, but in a document of 1619 his successor is called Francesco Muscova (Φραγκίσκος Μοσχοβάς?).⁷

So, what can we say about the first of our three Romanoι Nikiforou? He hailed from Thessaloniki. He studied at the Collegio Greco in the first years of the seventeenth century. When he entered the Collegio Greco, he was already a *hieromonachos* (“monaco, sacerdote” in the petition), a monk ordained as a priest, which ordinarily, seeing that the minimum age for ordination to the priesthood is 30, would mean that he was born around the year 1570 at the latest. However, there are so many exceptions to this rule in the Orthodox world that it would be hazardous to use the minimum age of ordination as a decisive argument to establish his date of birth.⁸ More important than his age, however, is the fact that this hieromonk not only studied at the very Catholic Collegio Greco, but also served as a parish priest in the uniate communities of Palermo and Contessa Entellina. The conclusion can only be that he was a uniate himself, celebrating the mass according to the Greek rite, but subscribing to certain tenets of the Catholic creed, such as papal primacy and the notorious Filioque. At a certain point in time, after 1613 but certainly before 1619, our first Romanos Nikiforou, the hieromonk student in Rome and the uniate priest in Sicily, disappeared from sight. It is anyone’s guess what he may have done afterwards. However, it should be noted that the statement in the chronicle of the Collegio Greco, that Romanos of Thessaloniki was *now*, that is, in 1638, priest in Palermo, does not inspire much confidence: Romanos was priest in Palermo shortly after leaving the Collegio, not 30 years later. It is reasonable to assume that the chronicle copied information from an earlier source without changing the phrase “al presente” [at the moment, now].⁹

⁶ See M. Sciambra, “Clero di rito greco che ha servito la comunità greco-albanese di Palermo”, *Bollettino della Badia Greca di Grottaferrata*, n.s., 17 (1963), pp. 3-28, 99-146, and 18 (1964), pp. 3-35, 113-176, at 17, pp. 142-143.

⁷ See A. Schirò, *Guida illustrata delle colonie albanesi di Sicilia. Contessa Entellina*, Palermo 1923, p. 58.

⁸ See, for instance, Tsirpanlis, *Ελληνικό Κολλέγιο*, nos 205 (a hieromonk who is 28 years old) and 453 (another hieromonk, aged 18 years).

⁹ The entry for Κορτήσιος Βρανάς [Kortisios Vranas] in the chronicle constitutes a similar case: see Tsirpanlis, *Ελληνικό Κολλέγιο*, p. 125, note 1. Whereas Vranas died in 1605-1606, the chronicle states: “morse tre anni sono” [he died three years ago], leaving

II

The second life is that of a scholar who composed a grammar of vernacular Greek. This grammar has come down to us in a seventeenth-century manuscript, Par. gr. 2604 (olim Colbert 3663). As the author himself readily admitted, the grammar was rather disjointed and loosely organized and had a number of painful omissions, which is why, towards the end of his grammar, he implored his “lector clarissimus” [distinguished reader] not to publish the text as it was, but to wait for a revised version.¹⁰ It is unclear whether he kept his promise, but if he did, this revised version has unfortunately not survived. To make things worse, the manuscript does not preserve the autograph, but a copy made by a non-native speaker who apparently knew little Greek and struggled with the rules of Greek accentuation. To top it off, the modern editor presented this awful Greek as if it was what Romanos Nikiforou had actually written.¹¹ It is no surprise, then, that the great Krumbacher, in his review of this edition, deemed that Romanos was not a Greek, but a “poorly Hellenized Frank”;¹² and little wonder that Romanos Nikiforou’s grammar has been generally ignored, although it contains many valid observations on the vernacular of the early seventeenth century and especially on the idiom spoken in the region of Thessaloniki.¹³

What do we know of this Romanos Nikiforou? The title page informs us that the grammar was composed “per Patrem Romanum Nicephori

no doubt that the chronicler had access to earlier sources which he copied verbatim, one of which dated from 1608-1609 and contained information on Vranas. This could very well also be the source of the information on Romanos Nikiforou. For more examples where the chronicle of 1638 clearly copies earlier sources without changing the wording, see Fyrigos, “Aggiunte e precisazioni”, pp. 77-78.

¹⁰ J. Boyens (ed.), *Grammatica linguae graecae vulgaris communis omnibus Graecis ex qua alia artificialis deducitur eruditus et studiosis tantum per Patrem Romanum Nicephori Thessalonicensem, Macedonem, éditée d’après le ms 2604 (Fonds grec) de la B. N. de Paris*, Liège 1908, pp. 121-123.

¹¹ See, for instance, Boyens (ed.), *Grammatica*, p. 2: δεσπότης [sic], τοῦ μητροπολίτη vel ον [read: ον!], μαθητής [sic] and ποιήτης [sic].

¹² K. Krumbacher, [Review of Boyens, *Grammatica*], *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 19 (1910), pp. 209-210, at p. 209: “ein notdürftig gräzisierte Franke”.

¹³ One of the few modern scholars to refer to Romanos Nikiforou’s grammar is I. Manolesou, “Μεσαιωνική ελληνική και μεσαιωνικές γραμματικές” [Medieval Greek and medieval grammars], in G. Mavromatis (ed.), *Πρώιμη νεοελληνική δημόδης γραμματεία. Γλώσσα, παράδοση και ποιητική* [Early Modern Greek vernacular literature: language, tradition and poetics], *Neograeca Medii Aevi* VI, Ioannina, 29 September - 3 October 2005, forthcoming.

Thessalonicensem, Macedonem”: a Macedonian born in Thessaloniki and bearing the name of Romanus Nicephori, who was a “pater”. In the Catholic West a “pater” is usually a member of one of the many monastic orders who has been ordained as priest – in other words, it is the exact equivalent of what in the Orthodox East is called a *hieromonachos*. The word “pater” is sometimes used by extension to address an ordinary priest, but this is not very common.

On the basis of the information on the title page and two fleeting references to the Order of the Capuchins in the main text (I shall come back to this), the distinguished Du Cange inferred that Romanos Nikiforou was a Capuchin monk. This is what he has to say: “Romani Nicephori Thessalonicensis, Grammatica etc. Vixit hoc saeculo in Gallia, ex ordine Capucinatorum” [Grammar of Romanus Nicephori etc. He lived in this century in France and belonged to the Order of the Capuchins].¹⁴ The vague dating “hoc saeculo” clearly indicates that Du Cange (1610-1688) did not personally know this Romanos: as an experienced palaeographer he could tell that the manuscript, which he may have seen when Colbert was still alive (before 1683) or when it had already passed into the hands of his heirs, dated from the first half of the seventeenth century. As the grammar also contains a few references to Paris and Lyons, Du Cange guessed that “Romanus Nicephori”, the Capuchin monk, lived in France sometime before he himself became involved in public life. The information provided by Du Cange was copied by Fabricius,¹⁵ who was then copied by Zaviras,¹⁶ who, in his turn, was copied by Sathas¹⁷ – and this then became accepted wisdom, repeated time and again, without anyone taking the pains to check the sources. I particularly like the version of Sathas: “Ῥωμανὸς Νικηφόρος [...] ἐλθὼν εἰς Γαλλίαν ἐξώμοσε τὴν πατριὸν θρησκείαν καὶ κατετάχθη εἰς τὸ τάγμα τῶν Καπουσίνων [...]” [After coming to France, Romanos Nikiforos (sic) renounced his ancestral religion and joined the Capuchin Order].

¹⁴ C. du Fresne du Cange, *Glossarium ad scriptores mediae & infimae graecitatis duos in tomos digestum*, Lyons 1688, Vol. II: *Index auctorum*, p. 32.

¹⁵ J. A. Fabricius, *Bibliotheca graeca sive notitia scriptorum veterum Graecorum*, Hamburg 1721, Vol. X, p. 544.

¹⁶ G. P. Kremou (ed.), *Γ. Ι. Ζαβίρας, Νέα Ἑλλάς ἢ ἐλληνικὸν θέατρον* [G. I. Zaviras, New Hellas or the Greek theatre], Athens 1872, p. 522.

¹⁷ K. N. Sathas, *Νεοελληνική φιλολογία. Βιογραφίαι τῶν ἐν τοῖς γράμμασι διαλαμπάντων Ἑλλήνων* [Neohellenic philology: biographies of the Greeks who distinguished themselves in letters], Athens 1868, p. 406.

Another mistake that is repeated, without anyone having asked themselves whether there is any truth to it, is the date provided by the editor, Boyens, according to whom Romanos Nikiforou referred to the grammar of Simon Portius (1638) on page 58: “But there are some Italianized Greeks (a mixture of Greeks and Latins), who, borrowing the Italian collocation ‘sono stato’, have turned this into ἐστάθηκα in Greek; these people say: ἐστάθηκα εἰς τὴν Ῥώμην, *sono stato a Roma, j’ay esté à Rome*”.¹⁸ First of all, Portius was not the first grammarian to aver that the perfect of the verb εἶμαι [to be] is ἐστάθηκα: the same observation can already be found in the grammar of Girolamo Germano (1622).¹⁹ Secondly, Romanos simply pointed out that there are some people who, under the influence of Italian, say ἐστάθηκα εἰς τὴν Ῥώμην [I have been in Rome], whereas others say ἐπήγα εἰς τὴν Ῥώμην [I have been to Rome]. He was clearly not referring to grammars, but to linguistic phenomena he observed.²⁰ In other words, the traditional date for this grammar, “after 1638”, is not based on solid facts, but is pure guesswork by the editor.

There are two possible chronological clues. The first is found in the grammar itself (p. 30), where Romanos Nikiforou explicitly refers to the grammar of the Italian language by Caesar Oudin (1610; numerous reprints).²¹ So, Romanos’ grammar certainly dates after 1610. The second is that Du Cange, who frequently visited Paris from 1631 onwards, appears to have had no personal recollections of Romanos Nikiforou. Therefore, seeing that the young Du Cange failed to make the acquaintance of Romanos Nikiforou, one could argue that the latter had already left Paris before c. 1631 – however, as this is an argument *ex silentio*, I do not want to press the point.

In order to situate the grammarian in his time and place, there is no evidence to build on other than the grammar itself. Fortunately, this is a grammar with an attitude. For a grammarian, Romanos Nikiforou is unusually personal in his likes and dislikes and not shy of sharing his opinions on language and society. To begin with, he repeatedly emphasizes that there is a huge difference between mainland Greece and the islands in the way they speak

¹⁸ For the dating, see Boyens (ed.), *Grammatica*, pp. V, IX, note 1.

¹⁹ H. Pernot (ed.), *Girolamo Germano. Grammaire et vocabulaire du grec vulgaire publiés d’après l’édition de 1622*, Fontenay-sous-Bois 1907, p. 96. For Portius, see W. Meyer (ed.), *Grammatica linguae graecae vulgaris. Reproduction de l’édition de 1638*, Paris 1889, p. 41.

²⁰ Likewise, on page 62, he observes that some “graecolatini”, influenced by Italian, say: εἶμαι παγεμένος [I have gone], cf. “sono andato”.

²¹ C. Oudin, *Grammaire italienne, mise et expliquée en François*, Paris 1610.

their Greek – and he does not hide to which of the two geographical areas he belonged: “nos vero in continente” [but we on the mainland...] (p. 66); and “nos enim Graeci in continente” [because we Greeks of the mainland...] (p. 88). He also gives information on the dialect of his region: “ἔβγαλα ἀθάκια vel τσούρλους macedonice” [I have spots, or, as they say in Macedonia, zits] (p. 74) – the word τσούρλος is still used in the vicinity of Serres.²² Sometimes he is a bit snobbish: for instance, when he tells us (on p. 104) that the form γιανίσκω (instead of γαίνω) is “rather boorish” – the suffix -ίσκω is in fact typical of northern dialects (and, curiously enough, of Cypriot).²³ On page 108 we are told that the common folk say <φτ>, whereas clerics with some linguistic expertise know that it should be either <πτ> or <φθ>. Sometimes he does not seem to realize that certain linguistic features are typical of his own dialect, and not of mainstream Greek: for instance, when he tells us (on p. 123) that “a bit, a little, slightly” can be expressed by the prefixes ἀκρο- and μωρο- in compound verbs (for instance, ἀκροδιψῶ or μωροδιψῶ, “to be a bit thirsty”), ἀκρο- is all over the place, but μωρο- can only be found in Papasynadinos, a contemporary author from Serres.²⁴

It is abundantly clear from his grammar that Romanos Nikiforou had a talent for foreign languages. In general, he is fond of spotting similarities with Latin or the Romance languages: he shows an intimate knowledge of Latin, Italian, French and, to a lesser degree, Spanish (see, for instance, pp. 7, 12, 30, 32, 68, 85, 117 and 123). He may have picked up some of his linguistic expertise from grammars, such as the Italian grammar by Caesar Oudin to which he explicitly refers on page 30, but he will have learnt most of it in practice by talking to native speakers.

Not only did he have a talent for languages, he also had strong opinions on language and language acquisition. On pages 118 and 129, for instance, he explains that the “lingua particularis” [learnt Greek] is an artificial language.

²² See *To γλωσσικό ιδίωμα του Νέου Σουλίου Σερρών* [The language variety of Neo Souli at Serres], at <http://abnet.agrino.org/htmls/D/D017.html>.

²³ G. N. Chatzidakis, “Περί του σχηματισμού των ενεστωτικών θεμάτων εν τη νεωτέρα ελληνική” [On the formation of present-tense stems in Modern Greek], *Μεσαιωνικά και Νέα Ελληνικά* [Medieval and Modern Greek], 2 vols, Athens 1905-1907, Vol. I, pp. 299-301.

²⁴ For Papasynadinos and the prefix μωρο-, see E. Kriaras, *Λεξικό της μεσαιωνικής ελληνικής δημώδους γραμματείας, 1100-1699* [Dictionary of medieval Greek vernacular literature, 1100-1699], 17 vols, Thessaloniki 1969-2011, Vol. 11, pp. 187-190. The prefix can also be found in the work of the twelfth-century Constantinopolitan author Michael Glykas: μωρόυπνον, “after a little sleep”; see *ibid.*, p. 190.

The basis for language instruction should be the “lingua generalis” [the common language]: it is only when the pupil has mastered the grammatical rules of the vernacular that he should proceed with Ancient Greek. Please note that Romanos is not a demoticist *avant la lettre*: he does not advocate the use of the vernacular for literary purposes; he views the vernacular simply as a pedagogical tool, a stepping stone to reach higher. On pages 122-123 he criticizes the famous grammarian Theodoros Gazis for explaining the rules of Ancient Greek in highly ornate language: he even calls him an “asinus ornatus” [a pompous ass]. Just as the vernacular should be the basis for further language instruction, so too the language used to instruct pupils should be simple and straightforward. For Romanos Nikiforou, language was not a goal in itself, but served as a tool to communicate knowledge.

Language was one of the two pillars of Romanos Nikiforou’s existence. The other was clearly the Church. Romanos tends to give examples that are somewhat Church-related. For instance, the example given for τρέχω [to run] is “τρέχω εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν” [I run to the church] (p. 102). Although people may have good reasons for *running* to the church (rather than *going* or *walking* to it), I doubt whether there are many grammarians or lexicographers who would thus illustrate the use of τρέχω. Likewise, when he discusses the attributive use of the perfect passive participle on page 33, he gives two examples and both are of a religious nature, the first referring to confession and holy communion, and the second expressing the belief that God’s beloved ones will inherit heaven. On page 113, where he treats the usages of ψάλλω [to chant], he provides information on hymns as well as on church services and the obligation of laics to attend matins and vespers; for a particular meaning of the passive voice, ψαλλόμεσθε [we attend Mass], his explanation is that “the priests work for the people” [pro populo sacerdotes laborant]: in other words, the priests do all the work, whilst the parishioners just listen to the chants being performed for them. On page 68, while discussing the verb σεβαίνω [to enter], he once again allows himself to digress: laics are not allowed to “enter” the holy altar space and women are not welcome either, with the exception of deaconesses who have a special permission from the bishop. The discussion of λειτουργοῦμαι [to attend Mass, to receive holy communion] leads to a theological excursus on pages 92-93 in which Romanos, true to the teachings of the Orthodox Church, explains how man is purified through holy communion and, aglow with divine light, becomes “concorporeal with Christ” [σύσσωμοι Χριστοῦ]. In his discussion of λαμβάνω [to receive] on page 91, after giving the example “I receive something from the monks” [ἀπὸ τῶν καλογέρων], he incorrectly

explains that the word for monk in Greek means “good priest” and this is so because monks have both religious vocation and priesthood, whilst ordinary priests have only the latter: therefore, monks (read: hieromonks) are better than priests. In a long enumeration of ecclesiastical titles of the Eastern Church on pages 119-120, Romanos explains what a πνευματικός (πατήρ) is: a “spiritual father” is someone who can hear confession. Priests do not have this right, only “Basilian monks” [solis religiosus sancti Basilii], who have been ordained and have reached a certain age – if they are too young to hear confession, they are called hieromonks. While Romanos is certainly exaggerating in stating that ordinary priests are not entitled to hear confession, he is right in stressing the importance of the spiritual father in the Orthodox world. However, it is the cursory reference to “religiosi sancti Basilii” that is indicative of Romanos’ religious persuasions at the time of writing. While all Orthodox monks may be said to follow in the footsteps of St Basil, it is only the uniate ones who are wont to use the term. Although the uniate Order of St Basil was established only in 1631 in Ruthenian circles, the term “Basilian monk” was used long before that date to indicate monks who followed the Greek rite, but recognized the pope.²⁵

Apart from observations on language and Church-related matters that seem to betray the personal views of Romanos Nikiforou, there are numerous examples in his grammar that seem to suggest that he is referring to things he had witnessed in person or had heard about. On page 133, for instance, we come across the following sentence: “Today the *mezas logothetes* and the vicar of the archbishop of Thessaloniki made a bet to see who could drink the other under the table first.” Romanos may or may not have been present at this drinking match, and he may even have made it up. The important thing is that he gives the impression that he personally knew these two high prelates and was aware of their drinking bouts, which most probably took place in Constantinople. On page 106 we read: “I wish to refer this matter to the patriarch.” This does not necessarily mean that he had direct access to the patriarch, but it at least shows knowledge of the proper juridical procedures combined with a certain expectation that, if need be, he had the means to ensure that his case would be heard in Constantinople. There are two more references to Constantinople: on page 14 he explains that the Greeks refer to Constantinople as the City [ἡ Πόλις] and that the Turkish name “Stambol”

²⁵ See A. Fortescue, *The Uniate Eastern Churches: The Byzantine Rite in Italy, Sicily, Syria and Egypt*, London 1923, pp. 128-133.

derives from στήν Πόλιν;²⁶ and on page 108 he illustrates the use of φεύγω [to leave] with the following example: “I leave the City on account of the plague.”

There are also a number of references to France in the grammar of Romanos Nikiforou: “I passed through Lyons” and “I’m now on my way to Paris” (both on p. 72); “Petros (Pierre) said that he would be here in Paris at Easter” (p. 107); “Father Petros (Père Pierre) celebrated Mass today in the Notre-Dame” (p. 92). The first two examples seem to indicate how Romanos reached the French capital, and the last two seem to describe his life in Paris. On page 112 we read: “I enjoyed the water of the well of the Capuchin monks.” This is the “puits des Capuchins” in what is now called the Hôpital Cochin in Paris. Also, on page 14 Romanos Nikiforou expresses how fond he is of the Capuchins: “I foster a great love for the Capuchin monks.”

Contrary to what Du Cange thought, there is no reason to believe that Romanos Nikiforou was ever a Capuchin monk. That he thought they were lovely people and enjoyed drinking the water from their well does not necessarily mean that he was a Capuchin himself. The many references to the beliefs and liturgical practices of the Eastern Church, and the fact that these are presented as thoroughly Christian, strongly suggest that the author of the grammar was not a Catholic. On the other hand, he was apparently present when a certain Père Pierre celebrated Mass in the Notre-Dame and he obviously frequented the Capuchin monks in Paris. The fact that Romanos Nikiforou was not a Catholic himself, but was on good terms with the Catholics, strongly suggests that we are dealing with a uniate. As stated above, the oblique reference to “Basilian monks” already gives it away: no Orthodox and no Catholic would ever maintain that *only* Basilian monks have the right to hear confession.

What more can be said of this Basilian monk? First of all, he must have been ordained: he is called a “pater” on the title page, and there are a number of references to hieromonks and to celebrating Mass in his grammar, as discussed above. Secondly, this is a hieromonk with good connections: he seems to know the *megas logothetes* and the vicar of the archbishop of Thessaloniki, and he is confident that he can refer juridical cases to the patriarch. Thirdly, this hieromonk from Thessaloniki appears to have visited Constantinople in person. Fourthly, at the time of writing, he was based in Paris and had good relations with the local Capuchin monks. Last, this was a well-educated hieromonk, with ample knowledge of Latin, Italian, French and some Spanish and with strong opinions about language acquisition.

²⁶ E. G. Bourne, “The Derivation of Stamboul”, *The American Journal of Philology* 8 (1887), pp. 78-82, at p. 78.

III

It is time for a dramatic change of scenery as we move from France and the peaceful fount of the Capuchins to Germany in the midst of the Thirty Years' War. The champion of the Protestants, Gustavus II Adolphus of Sweden, has just crushed the troops of the Holy Roman Emperor at the Battle of Breitenfeld (1631) and as a result many parts of Germany that had been conquered by the hero of the Catholics, Albrecht von Wallenstein, were once again in the hands of the Protestants. One of the regions hardest hit by continuous warfare was Mecklenburg in the north of Germany, a duchy that had been given to Wallenstein as a reward for his victories; as this threatened the vital interests of Sweden, Gustavus Adolphus retaliated with great force. Rostock in particular had suffered greatly from all these adversities, and the excessive taxation imposed upon it by the Swedes exacerbated its economic and political crisis. It is here in Rostock, ravaged by the tides of war, that we find the third person by the name of Romanos Nikiforou – another piece of flotsam cast adrift in this tempest of religious intolerance and military madness.

On 22 December 1631²⁷ a certain 'Ρωμανὸς ὁ Νικηφόρου sent a letter to King Gustavus Adolphus from Rostock, where he was staying at the house of the mayor, Bernhard Kling;²⁸ this letter was accompanied by another letter written by Justus Zinzerling, a humanist scholar,²⁹ who was also staying at Kling's house with his family because his home had been ravaged by looting soldiers.³⁰ In his letter to Gustavus Adolphus, this Romanos Nikiforou

²⁷ The accompanying letter of Zinzerling is dated: "XII Decembr. 1632"; but as P. G. Zerlantis, "Ρωμανὸς Νικηφόρου καὶ Δανιὴλ Καστρησίου ἐπιστολαί" [The letters of Romanos Nikiforou and Daniil Kastriasiou], *Βυζαντικὰ* 2 (1911), pp. 281-296, at p. 283, and A. Boethius, "Romanus Nicephori och Gustaf Adolf", *Historisk Tidskrift* 32 (1912), pp. 296-303, at pp. 301 and 303, rightly noted, this is obviously a mistake because the Swedish chancellery confirmed the receipt of the two letters on 12/22 January 1632. As most Protestant countries initially did not accept the Gregorian calendar because it was the work of the Antichrist in Rome, "XII Decembr." is 22 December in the modern calendar.

²⁸ Bernhard Kling (1584-1648), born into a patrician family of Rostock, became *Ratsherr* [municipal councillor] in 1616 and *Bürgermeister* [mayor] in 1631.

²⁹ Justus Zinzerling (1580-1632) is best known for his *Itinerarium Galliae*, which was published under the pseudonym Jodocus Sincerus in Lyons in 1616.

³⁰ For the letter of Romanos Nikiforou in Latin, see Boyens (ed.), *Grammatica*, pp. VII-VIII. For both the letters in Latin, see Boethius, "Romanus Nicephori", pp. 300-303. For the Greek text of Romanos' letter, see B. Olsson, "Romanus Nicephori brev till Gustaf II Adolf", *Eranos* 32 (1934), pp. 131-136, at pp. 134-136. For the two letters in Latin plus the original version in Greek, see Zerlantis, "Ρωμανὸς Νικηφόρου", pp. 287-292, a publication that escaped the notice of Boethius and Olsson.

celebrated the king's glorious reign and expressed his wish that the king would liberate Greece from its cruel oppressors;³¹ ever since hearing of Gustavus Adolphus' military feats and victories, it had been his intention to approach him, but the perils and risks involved in such a journey had prevented him until now. In general Romanos Nikiforou's letter looks like one of those many requests for financial support made by destitute Greek intellectuals wandering across Europe in the early modern period.³² However, it does contain a rather unexpected claim. He alleges "to represent the whole of Greece" because he "had been sent 12 years before by Patriarch Timotheos to one of the rulers to negotiate our liberation"; unfortunately, the patriarch "has already died", and the ruler in question, "having met with adversity and worse, has dishonourably abandoned his plans".³³

At the very end of his letter, Romanos Nikiforou writes that Zinzerling in his accompanying letter will provide all the details. Indeed, Zinzerling's letter is far more interesting to the historian than the vagaries of Romanos

³¹ For similar invocations to liberate Greece, see V. Rotolo, *Il carme "Hellás" di Leone Allacci*, Palermo 1966, pp. 31-48, and M. I. Manousakas, "Εκκλησίες των Ελλήνων λογίων προς τους ηγεμόνες της Ευρώπης για την απελευθέρωση της Ελλάδος" [Appeals of Greek Renaissance scholars to the princes of Europe regarding the liberation of Greece], *Πρακτικά της Ακαδημίας Αθηνών* 59 (1984), pp. 194-249. For the political background to all these pleas, see G. Poumarède, *Pour en finir avec la Croisade. Mythes et réalités de la lutte contre les Turcs aux XVI^e et XVII^e siècles*, Paris 2004, and I. K. Chasiotis, "*Marchar contra Constantinopla*. Η Κωνσταντινούπολη στη σταυροφορική φιλολογία του 15ου, 16ου και 17ου αιώνα" [Constantinople in crusade literature of the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries], in E. Motos Guirao and M. Morfakidis (eds), *Constantinopla. 550 años de su caída*, Granada 2006, Vol. III, pp. 15-34.

³² See Zerlenti, "Ρωμανού Νικηφόρου", p. 287. Please note that Romanos was not the only one who hoped to receive a reward from Gustavus Adolphus: in his letter to the king, Zinzerling explained that he and Kling, the two hosts of Romanos Nikiforou, had covered his expenses until now and would like to be rewarded accordingly; moreover, there should be full compensation for the damages he had suffered (probably related to the looting of his house). See Boethius, "Romanus Nicephori", p. 303, and Zerlenti, "Ρωμανού Νικηφόρου", p. 292 (Zerlenti omits the last few lines, in which Justus Zinzerling refers to his own problems).

³³ Olsson, "Romanus Nicephori brev", p. 135, and Zerlenti, "Ρωμανού Νικηφόρου", pp. 289-290: "[...] καὶ ταῦτα μὲν ἐγὼ ὡς ἐκ προσώπου πάσης Ἑλλάδος ἱκετικῶς ἀναπληρῶν ὑπάρχω [...] ἀποσταλεις γὰρ πρὸ δώδεκα ἐτῶν πρὸς τινὰ τῶν ἀρχόντων ὑπὸ τοῦ Τιμοθέου πατριάρχου πρὸς τὸ πραγματεῦσασθαι τὰ περὶ τῆς ἡμετέρας ἐλευθερίας ἔγωγε μὲν ἀξίως καὶ ὡς ἔπρεπ' ἐπέβαινον, Θεῷ δὲ τὰ κρείττω προβεβουλευμένῳ, ὁ μὲν πέμψας ἤδη τὸν βίον ἐτελεύτησεν, ὁ δὲ δεινὰ καὶ πέρα δεινῶν πεπονθὼς ἀναξίως ἀπεσπάσθη τῶν ἑαυτοῦ, βουλῆς καὶ προκειμένου παντελῶς ἀποστερηθεὶς, ὡς αὐτὸ τὸ πέρας ἀπέδειξεν."

Nikiforou's encomiastic prose, as it provides the necessary background information.³⁴ According to Zinzerling, 12 years before (that is, in 1619) Romanos Nikiforou had been sent by Patriarch Timotheos on a secret mission to Charles Gonzaga, Duke of Nevers (1580-1637), who some years before had opened negotiations with the Greeks concerning plans to liberate them from the Turks;³⁵ Romanos' task had been to advise the Duke of Nevers how to proceed with as little bloodshed as possible. However, as the Duke of Nevers had not been given the financial support he had hoped for by the pope and the French king and had afterwards been involved in warfare against the Huguenots (1620-1621, 1625, 1627-1628) and the War of the Mantuan Succession (1628-1631), he had abandoned his plans. After the death of Patriarch Timotheos (1620), his successors, Kyrillos (Loukaris, intermittently patriarch between 1620 and 1638),³⁶ Symeon (Gregory?: Gregory IV, 1623) and Anthimos (1623), had not shown much enthusiasm for this matter because they had been let down by the Duke of Nevers and the members of the new religious order (the *Milice Chrétienne*, for which see below). Meanwhile, Romanos Nikiforou had stayed in Paris until this summer (the summer of 1631) and had earned his living by teaching Greek. After the glorious victories of Gustavus Adolphus, philhellene friends had encouraged Romanos to seek the help of the Swedish king in liberating the Greeks. If the king were interested, victory would be certain. Romanos was happy to go to Greece and make the necessary preparations with local people there; if not, he was willing to instruct others and wait for their return. Romanos says that there were more than 10,000 armed men ready for combat in the Peloponnese and that he is certain the Janissaries would defect because they are mostly Greeks. There are only three mountain passes that separate Macedonia from Thrace and once these had been taken, the enemy would be powerless; but if the king

³⁴ Boethius, "Romanus Nicephori", pp. 302-303, and Zerlentis, "Ρωμανού Νικηφόρου", pp. 290-292.

³⁵ For the Duke of Nevers and his wild plans, see St. I. Papadopoulos, *Η κίνηση του δούκα του Νεβέρ Καρόλου Γονζάγα για την απελευθέρωση των βαλκανικών λαών, 1603-1625* [The action of the Duke of Nevers, Charles Gonzaga, for the freedom of the Balkan peoples, 1603-1625], Thessaloniki 1966.

³⁶ As G. Hering, *Ökumenisches Patriarchat und europäische Politik, 1620-1638*, Wiesbaden 1968, p. 240, Greek transl. as *Οικουμενικό πατριαρχείο και ευρωπαϊκή πολιτική, 1620-1638*, Athens 1992, pp. 283-284, rightly points out, it is highly unlikely that Kyrillos Loukaris had anything to do with the revolutionary plans of Romanos Nikiforou. In fact, if Kyrillos Loukaris had been thinking of "crusades", it would have been against the pope and his allies, not the Turks.

would prefer to launch his attack from Bulgaria or Transylvania, Romanos could offer him useful information.

The letter of Justus Zinzerling also provides background information on this Romanos Nikiforou, the would-be liberator of the Greeks. He tells us that Romanos Nikiforou is married and over 50 years old. He calls him a former priest in Corinth and a scholar versed in theology, the Augustan Confession, and Church and secular history. He informs us that, as a guest of Kling's household, Romanos teaches Greek to the children of Kling and to his own little boy,³⁷ just as he used to teach Greek when he lived in Paris. Romanos also teaches French and Italian, languages that he speaks as a native; generally speaking, he has a talent for languages: he knows Turkish, Spanish, Arabic, Hebrew, Chaldaean and Syriac.³⁸

Romanos Nikiforou is also mentioned in two other Rostockian sources, both dating from 1632. In March 1632 "Romanus Nicephorus Corinthiacus Graecus" was entered into the matriculation records of the University of Rostock.³⁹ It is highly unlikely that this indicates that Romanos Nikiforou, already a quinquagenarian, started a second life as a student; foreigners who worked as private teachers and language instructors would enrol at German universities in order to enjoy certain academic privileges.⁴⁰ In early 1632 (between 26 January and 14 March) Agnes Hahne, the wife of Justus Zinzerling, died from the plague that had afflicted Rostock in the academic year 1631-1632.⁴¹ Her sad death at the age of 32 was lamented in two leaflets,

³⁷ The "little boy" is Johann Bernhard Zinzerling (1625-1669), who was to become professor of poetry at the University of Rostock in 1667.

³⁸ Boethius, "Romanus Nicephori", pp. 302-303, and Zerlenti, "Ρωμανού Νικηφόρου", pp. 291-292: "[...] Diverti hic cum familia, uti et cum viro Graeco Romano Nicephori ejusque coniuge [...] Romanus vero Parisiis substitit, et in hanc usque aetatem Graecam linguam docuit [...] Vir alioqui est probissime in Theologia, Augustanaque Confessione, Philosophia, Historia Ecclesiastica et prophana eruditus; pastor fuit Corinthi; quinquaginta annos iam excessit. Receptus est a Dno Consule Clingio hospitio, cujus filios uti et meum parvulum Graece, alios Gallice et Italice (quas linguas ut vernaculam callet) erudit. Turcicae praeterea linguae, Hispanicae et Arabicae non ignarus est: uti nec nescius Hebraicae, Chaldaicae et Syriacae [...]."

³⁹ A. Hofmeister, *Die Matrikel der Universität Rostock*, 5 vols, Rostock 1889-1912, Vol. III, p. 82.

⁴⁰ See M. Asche, *Von der reichen hansischen Bürgeruniversität zu armen mecklenburgischen Landeshochschule. Das regionale und soziale Besucherprofil der Universitäten Rostock und Bützow in der Frühen Neuzeit (1500-1800)*, Stuttgart 2000, pp. 337-338.

⁴¹ In his invitation to the funeral, *Ad Sacrum Exequiale quid [...] Justus Zinzerlingius [...] Agnetae Hahnen conjugii suae [...] expetit*, Rostock 1632, the rector of the University of

one by “mournful friends”,⁴² the other by Romanos Nikiforou and a certain Georg Schede.⁴³ On the title page of this extremely rare leaflet,⁴⁴ Romanos is called “Romanus Nicephori Corinthio-Graecus”; it contains an epitaph in elegiac distichs and pseudo-Homeric Greek by Romanos, who, once again, signs his work as “Ρωμανὸς ὁ Νικηφόρου”. Please note that in both Rostockian sources the former priest from Corinth is explicitly called a Corinthian (“Corinthiacus”, “Corinthio-Graecus”).

After early 1632 we lose track of this third Romanos Nikiforou. He may have died from the plague, as so many did in Rostock in 1631 and 1632.⁴⁵ However, it cannot be excluded that he attained a blessed old age, together with his wife, one of the many “who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs”.

IV

To recapitulate, there are three persons that bear the name of Romanos Nikiforou. The first is a student from Thessaloniki at the Collegio Greco in Rome, a hieromonk and a uniate, who afterwards became a priest in Palermo and Contessa Entellina. The second one is the grammarian from Thessaloniki, a uniate hieromonk living in Paris and frequenting the Capuchins. The third one is an Orthodox priest from Corinth who used to live in Paris before going to Rostock and seeking the help of Gustavus Adolphus for his revolutionary plans.

Whereas the identification of the first two is practically certain – how many uniate hieromonks from Thessaloniki by the name of Romanos Nikiforou

Rostock, Thomas Lindemann, recounts how many members of the academic community had previously died from the plague, among whom he mentions Heinrich Stallmeister, who died on 26 January 1632. Lindemann himself died on 14 March of the same year.

⁴² *Cippi ad tumulum [...] Agnetae Hahnen [...]*, erecti ab Amicis moestis et condolentibus, Rostock 1632.

⁴³ Romani Nicephori Corinthio-Graeci and M. Georgii Schedii, illustris Scholae Gustroviensis rectoris, *Musae Consolatoriae, ablegatae ad [...] Justum Zinzerlingium [...]* *Agnetae Haniae [...]* *obitum lugentem, una cum epitaphio*, Rostock 1631. The date on the title page is clearly incorrect: see notes 41 and 42 above. Georg Schede (1580-1650) was rector in Güstrow.

⁴⁴ The Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel has one copy: A 289.2 Quod. 13. For the reference, search “Hahne, Agnes” at <http://gso.gbv.de/DB>.

⁴⁵ O. Karrig, “Geschichtliches über das Auftreten der Pest in Mecklenburg”, *Archiv für Geschichte der Medizin* 5 (1911), pp. 436-446, mentions three major outbreaks of the bubonic plague in 1624, 1626 and 1638. It is not clear whether the massive deaths in 1631-1632 were caused by the same pestilence or another epidemic disease, such as typhoid, dysentery or cholera.

can there possibly have been? – it is the third one that poses a real problem. A married priest is not a hieromonk, an Orthodox priest with an interest in the Augustan Confession is not a uniate, and a Corinthian is usually not born in Thessaloniki. Still, there are striking similarities between numbers 2 and 3: while the grammarian lives in Paris and has an intimate knowledge of the Romance languages, the Rostockian revolutionary has just left Paris, where he used to teach, and speaks French and Italian like a native.

Suppose number 2 and number 3 are in fact one and the same Romanos Nikiforou, how do we account for the discrepancies? Possible answers are: he met the love of his life in Paris and gave up on celibacy; he thought it was better to hide his uniate past and show an interest in the Augustan Confession while in Rostock; he said he had worked as a priest in Corinth and his hosts thought that this meant he was a Corinthian. None of these answers, however plausible as such, are entirely satisfactory; more context is needed to be absolutely certain.

Zerlantis thought that Romanos Nikiforou was lying when he said that he had been sent on a secret mission to the West, because there is no proof whatsoever that the Patriarchate was involved in the wild plans of the Duke of Nevers.⁴⁶ Zerlantis is right, of course, but the problem is that conspiracies tend to leave little written record other than private letters and diaries, and that material evidence, such as there is, is usually destroyed afterwards. The plight of the Great Church in captivity would have been even more miserable if the Ottoman sultan had discovered that the patriarch was plotting against his rule.⁴⁷ However, if evidence is lacking for direct involvement of Patriarch Timotheos, the same cannot be said of members of the higher clergy in the Peloponnese. It is clear from various documents relating to the conspiracy that the Duke of Nevers and the five metropolitans of the Peloponnese (Lacedaemonia, Corinth, Monemvasia, Christianoupolis and Patras) were in regular contact. In 1611 the Duke of Nevers reports that he has been in negotiation with these metropolitans for the last two years; in late 1616 they send Petros Medikos to Paris to inquire where things stand; in 1617 a cleric close

⁴⁶ Zerlantis, “Ρωμανού Νικηφόρου”, pp. 284-287.

⁴⁷ I know of one exception: a letter by Patriarch Neophytos to the Spanish king (April 1609), in which he urges him to conquer Constantinople and liberate the Christians. For the text, see P. Bádenas, “Η διστακτική πολιτική της ισπανικής μοναρχίας στην Ανατολή” [The hesitant policies of the Spanish monarchy in the East], in *Βαλκάνια και Ανατολική Μεσόγειος, 12ος-17ος αιώνες. Πρακτικά του διεθνούς συμποσίου στη μνήμη Δ. Α. Ζακυθινού* [The Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean, twelfth - seventeenth centuries: acts of the international symposium in memory of D. A. Zakythinis], Athens 1998, pp. 11-28, at p. 21.

to the Duke of Nevers (Père Joseph?) sends a letter to the five metropolitans reassuring them that the Duke of Nevers is ready to liberate the Peloponnese; in the spring of 1618 delegates of the Duke of Nevers are in the Peloponnese to discuss the prospects of an armed revolt with the metropolitans; and two of them, the metropolitans of Lacedaemonia and Monemvasia, send letters of support to the Duke of Nevers in 1618.⁴⁸ Throughout this period there are messages from Neophytos, the Bishop of Mani, in support of the revolt, and the former metropolitan of Lacedaemonia, Chrysanthos Laskaris, clearly plays an important role as go-between between the Maniots and the Duke of Nevers.⁴⁹ In 1618 there are letters from the metropolitans of Ioannina and of Naupaktos and Arta to the pope and to the Duke of Nevers, in which they lend their support to the common cause of Christianity.⁵⁰ Although there is no incriminating evidence of this kind in the case of Patriarch Timotheos, there is a curious letter to the pope, written by Nektarios, Metropolitan of Christianoupolis, in 1615 on behalf of the patriarch, in which he (the patriarch) says that he personally recognizes the primacy of the pope, but cannot say so openly because the Turkish authorities would see this as foreign interference and act accordingly.⁵¹

Then there is the even more curious incident during a boat trip that Patriarch Timotheos, Anthimos, Metropolitan of Corinth, and Dionysios, Metropolitan of Lacedaemonia, made across the Sea of Marmara in late 1620: during this voyage Dionysios was murdered and Anthimos was believed to be implicated in the murder.⁵² A few months later Patriarch Timotheos died under suspicious circumstances: of poisoning, according to eyewitnesses.⁵³ I have no intention

⁴⁸ Papadopoulos, *Η κίνηση του δούκα του Νεβέρ*, pp. 46, 122-123, 124-125 and 128-129; for the letter of the Parisian cleric, see *ibid.*, pp. 249-250.

⁴⁹ Neophytos of Mani: *ibid.*, pp. 58-62 and 126; Chrysanthos Laskaris: *ibid.*, pp. 38, 52-53, 56-58 and 120-122.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁵¹ G. Hoffmann, "Griechische Patriarchen und Römische Papsten. Die Patriarchen Meletios Pegas, Neophytos II, Timotheos II", *Orientalia Christiana* XXV, no. 76 (1932), pp. 249-276, at pp. 258-259, and *id.*, "Apostolato dei Gesuiti nell' Oriente Greco, 1583-1773", *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 1 (1935), pp. 139-163, at p. 158.

⁵² T. A. Gritsopoulos, "Εκκλησιαστική ιστορία Κορινθίας" [Ecclesiastical history of Corinth], *Πελοποννησιακά* 9 (1972), pp. 5-356, at pp. 232-237, and *id.*, *Η εκκλησία της Πελοποννήσου μετά την Άλωση* [The Church in the Peloponnese after the Fall of Constantinople], Athens 1992, pp. 37-38.

⁵³ See P. G. Zerlenti, *Η πρώτη πατριαρχία του Κυρίλλου Λασκάρεως, ο θάνατος του Πατριάρχου Τιμοθέου, και Ιωάννου Θαλασσηνού αναγραφή των πατριαρχευσάντων έτεσι 1612-1707* [The first patriarchate of Kyrillos Laskaris, the death of Patriarch Timotheos,

of becoming the new Dan Brown, but there is something fishy about all this. Two years after writing a letter to the Duke of Nevers, in which he offers his help, Dionysios, Metropolitan of Lacedaemonia, is murdered. One year after Romanos Nikiforou had been sent on a secret mission to the same Duke of Nevers, his direct superior, Anthimos, Metropolitan of Corinth, is accused of being involved in this murder. Then Patriarch Timotheos, the one who, if we are to believe Romanos Nikiforou, had sent him on this mission, conveniently dies in the same year. This looks to me like a classic example of a cover-up. The reason why the Patriarchate felt it was time to put a lid on the whole affair is simply that by 1620 it had become abundantly clear to all and sundry that the Duke of Nevers was all talk and no action. Europe had become the scene of protracted warfare between Catholic and Protestant countries, and France was on the verge of a civil war between royalists and Huguenots. There would be no help from the West.

So, however sensational and utterly incredible the story of Romanos Nikiforou may sound, there is no good reason to question its veracity. If he is lying, as Zerlenti suggested he was, then we must at least acknowledge his talents as a superb con artist and admire him for his flair and dexterity in turning lies into half-truths and half-truths into certitudes. Yet I do not think he was lying. An interesting clue can be found in his grammar, on page 106, where he discusses φέρω and related compound verbs and illustrates the use of ἀναφέρω with the following example: ἐγὼ ἀναφέρω τὸ γένος μου εἰς τοὺς Παλαιολόγους [I trace back my lineage to the Palaiologans]. This clearly refers to the claims of Charles Gonzaga, Duke of Nevers, that he was entitled to the imperial throne of Byzantium as the last descendant of the Palaiologan dynasty because one of his ancestors was Theodore of Montferrat (1291-1338), son of Andronikos II.⁵⁴

V

Far more important, however, are the references to the Capuchin Order in the grammar. In the years that Romanos Nikiforou lived in Paris, where he wrote his grammar, the head of the Parisian Province of the Capuchin Order was Père Joseph, the notorious *éminence grise*. A devout Christian and a close collaborator of Cardinal Richelieu, he faithfully served two masters in his

and Ioannis Thalassinos' account of the patriarchs enthroned in the years 1612-1707], Athens 1921, pp. 13-21, and Hering, *Ökumenisches Patriarchat*, pp. 25-27, Greek transl. as *Οικουμενικό πατριαρχείο*, pp. 42-44.

⁵⁴ Papadopoulos, *Η κίνηση του δούκα του Νεβέρ*, pp. 14-15, 38, 130 and 207.

life: God and the king, Louis XIII *le Roi Très Chrétien*, and it is clear that for Père Joseph the interests of the heavenly and earthly kingdoms largely overlapped. In late 1615, when the Duke of Nevers dreamt of first liberating the Morea and then reconquering the lost throne of the Palaiologans, the two met – and the result was a grandiose plan whereby the Christian nations of Europe would unite, deliver troops for what was called the *Milice Chrétienne* and launch a crusade against the Turks.⁵⁵ The plan stirred the imagination of many, but remained ineffective in the end because the European nations mistrusted each other even more than they feared the Turks.⁵⁶ However, when Romanos Nikiforou was sent on his mission in 1619, only seasoned diplomats and well-informed observers will have realized that the whole idea of a pan-European crusade was unlikely to happen. So there can be little doubt that when he arrived in Paris, after what must have been a long and arduous journey, Romanos Nikiforou will have seen Père Joseph to discuss the possibilities of military action in the Peloponnese. It stands to reason that this penniless priest from Corinth, with no place to stay and no income, would have enjoyed the hospitality of the Capuchins. That is why he writes in his grammar: “I enjoyed the water of the well of the Capuchin monks” and “I foster a great love for the Capuchin monks.”

This is not the end of the story. In the 1620s Père Joseph changed his tactics.⁵⁷ Once he realized that his plans to send crusading forces to the East would never materialize into reality, he began to think of more peaceful methods of establishing the heavenly kingdom on Earth. Together with the newly founded Congregatio de Propaganda Fide (1622), he launched plans to send missionaries to all parts of the Levant, to spread the Word of God and proclaim the teachings of the Church of Rome.⁵⁸ Not only did Père Joseph

⁵⁵ For the *Milice Chrétienne* (officially founded in 1618, recognized by the pope in 1625, dismantled not long after 1628), see Papadopoulos, *Η κίνηση του δούκα του Νεβέρ*, pp. 148-189; B. Pierre, *Le père Joseph. L'éminence grise de Richelieu*, Paris 2007, pp. 129-159.

⁵⁶ See the cynical but justified observation by B. Nani, *Historia della republica Veneta*, Venice 1662, p. 46: “Ad altre corte commendato il zelo del pontefice, tutti offerendo e nessuno adempiendo, cadde prestamente il progetto in silenzio.”

⁵⁷ See B. Pierre, “Le père Joseph, l'Empire ottoman et la Méditerranée au début du XVII^e siècle”, *Cahiers de la Méditerranée* 71 (2005), at <http://cdlm.revues.org/index968.html>.

⁵⁸ P. Hilaire de Barenton, *La France catholique en Orient durant les trois derniers siècles d'après des documents inédits*, Paris 1902, pp. 49-206; C. da Terzorio, *Le missioni dei minori cappuccini. Sunto storico*, 10 vols, Rome 1913-1938, Vol. II, pp. 7-151; P. Ignazio da Seggiano, *L'opera dei Cappuccini per l'unione dei Cristiani nel Vicino Oriente durante il secolo XVII*, Rome 1962, pp. 53-101; P. Raoul de Sceaux, *Histoire des frères mineurs capucins de la Province de Paris (1601-1660)*, Blois n.d., Vol. III, pp. 11-93; Hering, *Ökumenisches*

deploy missionary activities on a truly grand scale, from Morocco to Persia and from Aleppo to Constantinople and the Greek islands, but his letters and other writings leave no doubt that he understood the importance of language acquisition. In virtually every letter to the missionaries and to the Congregatio de Propaganda Fide we read that the Gospel should be preached in the vernacular and that Capuchin monks should learn languages.⁵⁹ In 1626, in his first report to the Congregatio de Propaganda Fide that deals with the mission in Constantinople, he asserts that his monks will easily learn the vernacular because they know Ancient Greek.⁶⁰ In the second report, dating from 1627, he says that they preach in Italian, but will soon be able to preach in vernacular Greek.⁶¹ In a report from 1628, he avers that some of the brothers in Chios are able to communicate in basic Greek and with time will certainly improve their linguistic skills.⁶² Please note that after two years in the Levant the Capuchin monks were still struggling with the language and found it difficult to express themselves in Greek. It was only in 1633, in another report to the Congregatio de Propaganda Fide, that Père Joseph stated with some confidence that some of the missionaries were able to preach the gospel in the vernacular.⁶³

In an admonitory letter to missionaries (dating from 1629) he says that “The superiors of our houses will take great care in arranging instruction in the languages necessary for the success of the mission and will not cut back on funds they should be investing in hiring people to instruct them [their monks] and in the purchase of books for that purpose.”⁶⁴ These books that need to be bought for the purpose of language instruction are obviously grammars and dictionaries. However, in the 1620s Greek grammars and dictionaries were difficult to come by in France. The best buy was without any doubt Girolamo Germano’s grammar-cum-dictionary published in 1622 at the behest of the Jesuits, another monastic order that was active in the

Patriarchat, pp. 153-154, Greek transl. as *Οικουμενικό πατριαρχείο*, pp. 186-188; M. N. Roussos-Milidonis, *Φραγκισκανοί Καπουκίνοι. 400 χρόνια προσφορά στους Έλληνες, 1585-1995* [Franciscan Capuchins: 400 years of service to the Greeks, 1585-1995], Athens 1996, pp. 57-78.

⁵⁹ See M. de Vaumas (ed.), *Lettres et documents du Père Joseph de Paris concernant les missions étrangères, 1619-1638*, Lyons 1942. See also Ignazio da Seggiano, *L’opera dei Cappuccini*, pp. 143-158.

⁶⁰ Vaumas (ed.), *Lettres et documents*, p. 49 (no. 13).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 62 (no. 18); cf. p. 67 (no. 20).

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 102 (no. 36).

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 188 (no. 75).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 147 (no. 53).

Levant; but this book is very rare indeed and does not seem to have circulated widely.⁶⁵ Then there is the *Corona Preciosa*, a basic glossary of some 1500 words published in Venice in 1527,⁶⁶ and the dictionary of Johannes Meursius published in Leiden in 1610 (repr. 1614), which catered to an audience of classically schooled academics;⁶⁷ neither dictionary is particularly useful for the needs of missionaries.

Since the Capuchins desperately needed a grammar and a dictionary, it is reasonable to assume that they asked poor Romanos Nikiforou, stranded in Paris without any prospect of ever returning, to do them a favour and compose one. Although Romanos Nikiforou's grammar is not accompanied by a dictionary, it is worth noting that by far the largest part of his grammar is the section on anomalous verbs at the end, where he discusses in detail the various meanings and connotations of verbs, especially in combination with prefixes: for instance, πέφτω, ξεπέφτω, παραπέφτω, etc; this section is actually a sort of dictionary. Throughout the text of his grammar-cum-dictionary, Romanos Nikiforou addresses a "distinguished reader" in the second person singular: "you should know", "please notice", "I have forgotten to tell you", etc. In theory this could be a generic reader, but some of Romanos' utterances are extremely personal and suggest the warmth of an intimate friendship between writer and reader. Romanos also seems to know why this particular reader wished to peruse his grammar. On page 121 he warns his reader that the grammar still has many lacunae and deficiencies, but he reassures him that "even with the few grammatical explications [Romanos is offering him], you can easily understand the rest of the language when you will speak with

⁶⁵ G. Germano, *Vocabolario italiano e greco, nel quale si contiene come le voci italiane si dicano in greco volgare*, Rome 1622; repr. in Pernot (ed.), *Girolamo Germano*. See V. Rotolo, "Το νεοελληνικό λεξικό του Girolamo Germano" [The Modern Greek grammar of Girolamo Germano], *Επιστημονική Επετηρίς Φιλοσοφικής Σχολής Πανεπιστημίου Αθηνών* 30 (1992-1995), pp. 37-51.

⁶⁶ *Introductorio nuovo intitolato Corona Preciosa, per imparare, leggere, scrivere, parlare, & intendere la Lingua greca volgare & literale, & la lingua latina, & il volgare italico con molto facilità e prestezza senza precettore (cosa molto utile ad ogni condizione di persone o literate o non literate) compilato per lo ingenioso huomo Stephano da Sabio stampatore da libri greci & latini nella inclita Citta di Vineggia*, Venice 1527. See M. D. Lauxtermann, "Of Frogs and Hangmen: The Production and Reception of the *Corona Preciosa*", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 35 (2011), pp. 170-184.

⁶⁷ I. Meursii, *Glossarium graeco-barbarum in quo praeter vocabula quinque millia quadrigenta, officia atque dignitates Imperij Constantinop. tam in palatio, quam ecclesia aut militia, explicantur, & illustrantur. Editio altera, emendata, & circiter 1800 vocabulis aucta*, Leiden 1614.

the Greeks, because you already know the difficult parts” – in other words, at some point in the future his “distinguished reader” would be in a Greek-speaking environment, where he would need to know the language in order to communicate with the natives. On page 116 we even read which place exactly this “distinguished reader” was expected to visit in the near future: his destination was Constantinople. At the end of a passage where Romanos discusses a kind of watermelon that allegedly only grows in Greece and is called χειμωνικόν in Greek, he says: “you will eat it in Constantinople and the Turks call it *karpuz*” [quod genus melonis manducabis Constantinopoli et a Turcis vocatur *carpuz*].

The first Capuchin missionaries arrived in Constantinople on 17 July 1626; they were soon followed by reinforcements on 31 June and 12 December 1627.⁶⁸ By Christmas 1627 there were ten of them: one of them must have been the person for whom Romanos Nikiforou composed his grammar, and another one must have been the beginner student who made a copy of it for personal use, which is now the sole surviving manuscript. Since the grammar shows clear signs of having been produced in great haste, it is reasonable to assume that it was a last-minute assignment. Seeing that the first levy still laboured under the false impression that knowledge of Ancient Greek would enable them to communicate easily with the Constantinopolitans, I do not think they are the ones who asked Romanos Nikiforou to compose a grammar. Once the missionaries became accustomed to the linguistic realities of their new environment and realized that Plato, Isocrates and Sophocles teach many things, but not how to speak Greek, the need for a grammar must have been obvious.⁶⁹ So, my guess is that Romanos wrote his grammar for the second or the third batch of missionaries that went to Constantinople. In other words, his grammar is likely to date from the spring or the autumn of 1627.

As Romanos Nikiforou himself admitted on pages 121-123, his grammar was uneven, lacked structure and cohesion, and was not yet ready for publication. It is not known whether he reworked the text and produced an improved version, but if he did, it too did not see the light of publication. In the end, the grammar of Romanos Nikiforou lost out to that of Simon

⁶⁸ Roussos-Milidonis, *Φραγκισκανοί Καπουκίνοι*, pp. 60, 66.

⁶⁹ Both P. Bruno, “Ambassadeurs de France et Capucins français à Constantinople au XVII^e siècle, d’après le journal du P. Thomas de Paris”, *Études Franciscaines* 29 (1913), pp. 232-259, at p. 236, and Raoul de Sceaux, *Histoire des frères mineurs*, p. 55, quote contemporary sources indicating that the first group of Capuchins realized too late that their knowledge of Greek and Italian was simply not good enough.

Portius, another impoverished Greek intellectual in Paris, who had arrived there in 1632 and who, with the help of the papal nuncio and Leonardos Filaras, made the acquaintance of various members of the Parisian élite from 1634 onwards.⁷⁰ In 1636 he published a dictionary of Modern Greek, and in 1638 a grammar: both extol the virtues of Cardinal Richelieu in their introductions,⁷¹ but it is clear from a memorandum based on Portius' own words that the driving force of the enterprise was the Capuchins: read, Père Joseph.⁷² So, Richelieu provided the funds, but the real beneficiaries were the Capuchins, who still struggled with the rules of Greek and apparently thought that they were better off with a proper grammar than with the disorganized grammatical observations that Romanos Nikiforou had bequeathed them. Little did they know that Portius' grammar and dictionary were just a botch job, and a remarkably bold case of plagiarism at that: in fact, Portius drew extensively on Girolamo Germano's brilliant description of the Chiot dialect, which he more often than not copied verbatim.⁷³

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These are the three lives of Romanos Nikiforou, a marginal intellectual in the early seventeenth century, an inconsequential figure, a nobody at the fringes of history. The nobodies leave hardly any trace in our sources and their acts are mostly unhistoric, not recorded for posterity, not there. The only method of making their presence felt and redressing the balance in their favour is by using our imagination, seeing connections rather than differences, and weaving loose and variegated threads into patterns of meaning, intent and agency.

If there is one Romanos Nikiforou, and not three, his personal history can be reconstructed as follows: born c. 1575-1580 in or near Thessaloniki,⁷⁴ consecrated as a monk in the 1590s, ordained as a hieromonk in the late 1590s, a student at the Collegio Greco in Rome c. 1600/01-1604/5, a uniate parish priest in Palermo and Contessa Entellina c. 1605-after 1613, Orthodox priest in Corinth after 1613 and until 1619, sent on a secret mission to Charles

⁷⁰ See the personal recollections of Portius in P. Canart, *Les Vaticani Graeci*, 1487-1962. *Notes et documents pour l'histoire d'un fonds de manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Vaticane*, Vatican City 1979, pp. 255-258.

⁷¹ É. Legrand, *Bibliographie hellénique ou description raisonnée des ouvrages publiés par des Grecs au dix-septième siècle*, 5 vols, Paris 1894-1903, Vol. I, pp. 332-335 (no. 244) and pp. 392-394 (no. 272).

⁷² Canart, *Les Vaticani Graeci*, p. 258.

⁷³ Pernot (ed.), *Girolamo Germano*, pp. 26-34.

⁷⁴ According to Zinzerling, writing in 1631, Romanos Nikiforou was over 50 years old.

Gonzaga, Duke of Nevers, and Père Joseph in 1619, a private teacher of Greek and other languages in Paris from 1619 to 1631, wrote a grammar for the Capuchins c. 1627, married c. 1630,⁷⁵ moved to Rostock in late 1631, where he wrote a letter to Gustavus Adolphus, still active in Protestant circles in early 1632, date of death unknown.

As for the adjectives – uniate, Orthodox, Protestant – what do they tell us? Not much, I am afraid. There is no reason to assume that Romanos Nikiforou constantly changed his personal beliefs; he simply adjusted the way he expressed them to the social environment in which he happened to find himself. So, he was Orthodox in Orthodox circles, uniate in Catholic circles, sympathetic to Protestantism in Protestant circles. Romanos is your everyman; he is always off stage, he is never at the centre of things. As for the nouns and the verbs – the things he did – they show a shadowy character on the move, travelling from Thessaloniki to Rome and Sicily, then to Corinth (a kind of homecoming), on the road again to Paris and finally Rostock; a traveller in a world torn asunder by religious strife and intolerance on an unprecedented scale. Romanos Nikiforou is not really part of the action: he played a minor role in the planned uprising of the Peloponnese, he contributed modestly to the missionary activities of the Capuchins by writing a grammar for them, he flattered the ego of Gustavus Adolphus. If the world is indeed a stage, on which acts, historic and unhistoric and mythical, are performed to the delight and horror of mankind, we must conclude that Romanos Nikiforou had just a walk-on part – but what a stellar performance it was!

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⁷⁵ On the title page of his grammar, Romanos Nikiforou is called “pater”; it is anyhow highly unlikely that the Capuchins would have given him the assignment to write a grammar, if they had known he had betrayed the monastic vow of celibacy. One of the reasons for leaving Paris and going to Rostock might have been the scandal of his marriage.