

DIRK KRAUSMÜLLER

## Diorasis denied

*Opposition to clairvoyance in Byzantium from late Antiquity to the eleventh century*

Abstract: This article treats the phenomenon of clairvoyance, the ability to know the thoughts of others that set holy men apart from ordinary human beings who had to make inferences from a person's outward appearance. After a discussion of the various theories that Late Antique authors put forward in order to account for this phenomenon, it focuses on opposition to clairvoyance in seventh- to eleventh-century Byzantium. It identifies texts in which such opposition is expressed and seeks to explain why their authors took this stance.

In Late Antique hagiographical and spiritual literature there is widespread agreement that perfect Christians can know the thoughts of others. However, the explanations for this phenomenon differ greatly from each other. Some authors argue that human beings can acquire the ability to read thoughts by purifying themselves from passions whereas others declare that the requisite knowledge is imparted to them by the Holy Spirit, either on an ad-hoc basis or through permanent indwelling. Yet others envisage that saints draw inferences from outward signs, just like ordinary human beings do, but that divine assistance prevents them from coming to the wrong conclusions. Finally we find the curious theory that saints can see the 'true' bodies of others, which are an exact expression of the states of the invisible souls and thus cannot be misinterpreted. During the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries these views existed side by side and although there were disagreements there is little sense of sustained debate, let alone polemic. This situation, however, changed in the late sixth century. At that point the presbyter Timothy of Antioch and the anonymous author of a collection of Questions and Answers insisted that human beings can only ever read outward signs, and thereby implicitly ruled out any supernatural element. This point of view elicited indignant responses from others who defended the existence of such an element through recourse to the traditional concepts of purification and revelation. The next stage of the development took place in early ninth-century Constantinople and Bithynia. At that time the monks Theodore of Stoudios and Theosterictus of Medikion declared that saintly confessors rely on the interpretation of outward signs whereas the hagiographers of Peter of Atroa and Joannicius took it for granted that their heroes were mind-readers. The discussion ends with a text from the early eleventh century, the *Life of Athanasius the Athonite* by Athanasius of Panagios, where the notion that God shares his knowledge of human souls with holy men is rejected outright. The present article analyses the evidence and tries to explain why the various authors held their different views.

### LATE ANTIQUITY

Byzantine holy men were not completely withdrawn from society. They frequently interacted with other monks and laypeople who came to them in order to confess their sins and to seek spiritual advice.<sup>1</sup> Such interactions feature prominently in hagiographical literature. The author of the *Life of*

---

<sup>1</sup> On this topic cf. I. HAUSHERR, *La direction spirituelle en Orient autrefois (Orientalia Christiana Analecta 144)*. Rome 1955.

Theodore of Sykeon, for example, presents the saint as a popular spiritual father whom people would tell the secrets of their hearts. Significantly, however, he is not content with making this point for he then adds a further comment: ‘as regards those who hid the ulcers of their souls he told them some of the things that they had done’ (τῶν δὲ ἐπικρυπτόντων τὰ ἑαυτῶν ψυχικὰ ἔλκη προέλεγεν αὐτοῖς τινα τῶν αὐτοῖς πεπραγμένων).<sup>2</sup> This comment reflects the hagiographer’s belief that his hero knew the thoughts of his visitors and was not forced to rely on what they disclosed to him. Even a cursory glance at hagiographical and spiritual texts shows that this belief was widespread in Late Antiquity. However, one also notices that the various authors give quite different explanations.

For the fourth-century hermit Evagrius Ponticus and his followers the ability to read thoughts was linked to a stage in the ascent to the divinity. The monk who has purified his mind contemplates first visible beings, then invisible beings and finally the intellections of invisible beings.<sup>3</sup> At this last stage he gains a direct insight into the minds of other human beings and is able to read their thoughts.<sup>4</sup> For Evagrius the process of purification results in permanent self-transformation. Divine grace is an important facilitating factor but in the end it is the effort of the practitioner that makes the reading of thoughts possible. It activates powers of perception that are always potentially present in the human being. In the *Apophthegmata Patrum* the monk Doulas, an associate of Evagrius, recommends solitude and fasting ‘because they give sharp sight’ (ὄξυδορκίαν γὰρ παρέχουσι).<sup>5</sup>

A radically different theory is put forward in the *Vita Prima* of the fourth-century Egyptian abbot Pachomius. There it is acknowledged that ‘the ability of the saints to “see through”, I mean, to see the thoughts of the souls, is a great thing’ (μέγα τῶν ἁγίων τὸ διορατικόν, λέγω δὴ τὸ ἐνθυμήματα τῶν ψυχῶν ὁρᾶν). However, then it is emphasised that this is not an intrinsic ability of the seer: ‘for when the Lord who is in them and who explores all things reveals (sc. such things) to them they are clairvoyants, but when he does not reveal (sc. them) they are like all other human beings’ (ὅταν μὲν γὰρ ὁ ἐν αὐτοῖς κύριος καὶ τὰ πάντα ἐρευνῶν ἀποκαλύπτῃ τούτοις, διορατικοὶ εἰσι· μὴ ἀποκαλύπτοντος δέ, ὡς πάντες ἄνθρωποι εἰσι).<sup>6</sup> This theory, which rules out any human contribution, seems to have been widely known since it is also mentioned in the *Life of John the Hesychast* by the sixth-century Palestinian hagiographer Cyril of Scythopolis.<sup>7</sup> However, this does not mean that it was the only existing explanation. Cyril only has recourse to it because it allows him to explain why Sabas once did not know the true identity of a visitor. The apologetic tone of the passage shows clearly that Cyril envisaged readers who believed that true saints had to be permanently endowed with the Holy Spirit.

How extreme opinions could be can be seen from the *Life of the sixth-century stylite Symeon of the Wondrous Mountain*. Symeon’s hagiographer claims that the Holy Spirit had taken residence in the saint’s soul.<sup>8</sup> Two episodes reveal how he conceptualised the relationship between these two entities. In the account of a miracle he lets a visitor say that he did not confess his sins ‘because I thought

<sup>2</sup> George Eleusios, *Life of Theodore of Sykeon* 147 (ed. A.-J. FESTUGIÈRE, *Vie de Théodore de Sykéôn* [*Subsidia hagiographica* 48]. Brussels 1970, 115, 5–6).

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. Evagrius Ponticus, *Gnostic Chapters*, 1, 70 (ed. A. GUILLAUMONT, *Les six Centuries des Képhalaia gnostica d’Évagre le Pontique*. Édition critique de la version syriaque commune et édition d’une nouvelle version syriaque, intégrale, avec une double traduction française [PO 28]. Paris 1958, 50–51).

<sup>4</sup> See e.g. R. BEULAY, *L’enseignement spirituel de Jean de Dalyatha, mystique syro-oriental du VIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (*Theologie Historique* 83). Paris 1990, 358.

<sup>5</sup> *Apophthegmata Patrum*, Doulas 1 (PG 65, 161BC).

<sup>6</sup> *Vita prima of Pachomius* 48 (ed. F. HALKIN, *Le corpus athénien de saint Pachôme* [*Cahiers d’Orientalisme* 2]. Geneva 1982, 31, 9–13).

<sup>7</sup> *Cyril of Skythopolis, Life of John the Hesychast* 5 (ed. E. SCHWARTZ, *Kyrrillos von Skythopolis* [TU 49.2]. Leipzig 1939, 205, 8–12).

<sup>8</sup> *Life of Symeon* 118 (ed. P. VAN DEN VEN, *La vie ancienne de S. Syméon Stylite le Jeune* [521–592], I. Introduction et texte grec [*Subsidia hagiographica* 32]. Brussels 1962, 98).

I could remain hidden from your holy spirit' (νομίσας λανθάνειν τὸ ἅγιόν σου πνεῦμα);<sup>9</sup> and in the narration of Symeon's death he tells us that the saint 'gave up in great peace his holy spirit into the hands of the Lord' (ἀπέδωκεν ἐν εἰρήνῃ πολλῇ ἐν χερσὶ Κυρίου τὸ ἅγιον αὐτοῦ πνεῦμα).<sup>10</sup> In both cases Symeon's soul is not only given the name of the third person of the Trinity but also accorded its traditional epithet 'holy'. This gives the impression as if it has somehow been assimilated to the Holy Spirit. Though starting from a completely different conceptual framework Symeon's hagiographer thus seems to envisage a transformation that is no less radical than the one experienced by Evagrius' gnostic.

Despite all differences the two theories have one thing in common: they give the saints direct and certain knowledge of the thoughts of other human beings. This was an advantage that ordinary people did not possess. They were forced to observe the facial expressions and the behaviour of other persons and to make inferences from them about their inner states. The accuracy of such 'conjecture' (στοχασμός, εἰκασμός) varied according to the cleverness and experience of the practitioners.<sup>11</sup> However, in the end there was always the potential for error. This fact is stressed by Gregory of Nyssa who once declares that 'sense perception is an unreliable criterion for (sc. establishing) the truth of what is' (σφαλερὸν γὰρ κριτήριον τῆ τῶν ὄντων ἀληθεία ἢ αἴσθησις).<sup>12</sup> Significantly, many authors have a very dim view of the ability to read signs. They regard evil spirits as the most accomplished practitioners of all who continuously watch monks and deduce their mental states from what they see, in order to use this knowledge against them.<sup>13</sup>

The texts that we have discussed so far give the impression that the two ways of knowing were radically different from one another. However, in reality acts of clairvoyance were open to interpretation. In the Lausiac History Palladius tells us that Anthony once knew the identity and the thoughts of a visitor although nobody had told him. This knowledge is attributed to a divine revelation.<sup>14</sup> However, Palladius then states that 'it was dark' (σκοτίας οὐσης) when the visitor arrived.<sup>15</sup> This detail was most likely added to dispel any doubts of the readers that Anthony might just have guessed these things from studying the visitor's face. Indeed, the distinction between the powers of saints and of ordinary people was not always so neat. Occasionally saints are presented as consummate readers of outward signs who never err in their assessment because their normal faculties of perception are strengthened by the Holy Spirit. An example is found in the Apophthegmata Patrum where the fifth-century Palestinian abbot Gelasius is said to have rejected the overtures of a Monophysite visitor 'because from the behaviour of the man and through the wisdom that he had from God, he had grasped the rottenness of his character' (ἐκ τῆς τοῦ ἀνδρὸς καταστάσεως καὶ ἐκ τῆς προσοῦσης αὐτῶ θεόθεν συνέσεως τὸ διεφθαρμένον τῆς αὐτοῦ γνώμης καταλαβόν).<sup>16</sup>

More common is another theory, which finds its clearest expression in an apophthegm of Paul the Simple. There we are told that the saint had the gift 'to see each one how he was in his soul just as we see the faces of each other' (ὁρᾶν ἕκαστον ὁποῖός ἐστι τῆ ψυχῆ ὡσπερ ἡμεῖς βλέπομεν ἀλλήλων τὰ πρόσωπα). However, what Paul sees is not the thoughts themselves as becomes obvious from the

<sup>9</sup> Life of Symeon 216 (185 VAN DEN VEN).

<sup>10</sup> Life of Symeon 257 (223 VAN DEN VEN). This is an adaptation of Christ's last words in Luke 23:46.

<sup>11</sup> See e.g. Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 5, 23 [ed. J. BERNARDI, Grégoire de Nazianze, Discours 4–5. Contre Julien. Introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes [SC 309]. Paris, 1983, 336, 10–14].

<sup>12</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, Life of Gregory the Wonderworker (ed. G. HEIL, De vita Gregorii Thaumaturgi, in G. HEIL – J. P. CAVARNOS – O. LENDLE, Gregorii Nysseni Opera. Sermones I. Leiden 1990, 39, 19–23).

<sup>13</sup> John Climacus, Climax 1, 26a (PG 88, 641A, 1068B).

<sup>14</sup> Palladius, Lausiac History 21, 10 (ed. G. J. M. BARTELINK, Palladio, La Storia Lausiaca [Vite dei Santi 2]. Milan 1974, 112, 78–86).

<sup>15</sup> Palladius, Lausiac History 21, 10 (112, 79 BARTELINK).

<sup>16</sup> Apophthegma Patrum, Gelasius 4 (PG 65, 149C).

continuation of the story: ‘when all entered with a bright countenance and a shining face ... he saw that one was black and dusky’ (πάντων δὲ εἰσιόντων λαμπρᾷ τῇ ὄψει καὶ φαιδρῷ τῷ προσώπῳ ἓνα ... ὄρᾳ μέλανα καὶ ζοφώδη).<sup>17</sup> This is also a reading of faces but it is faces, which are not visible to others and which exactly reflect the inner state of the person, thus excluding any error. This notion is closely related to the theory of the spiritual senses where sight appears alongside hearing, smell, taste and touch.<sup>18</sup> From the sixth-century Life of Severus of Antioch, for example, we learn that one saint may recognise another from the smell of fragrance that emanates from him.<sup>19</sup>

It is obvious that these theories are quite different from each other. While some bring down holy men almost to the level of ordinary people others accord them truly superhuman powers. Which theory an author adopted was dependent not only on his personal preferences but also on the milieu in which he lived. This is very clear from the case of Pachomius. The Vita prima of this saint tells us that his ability to read thoughts was not uncontroversial. In the year 345 he was summoned before a synod of bishops and monks and asked to explain himself.<sup>20</sup> He did so in the following manner:

Ἐχαρίσατο ἡμῖν ὁ κύριος καὶ τοῦτο ἐπιγινώσκειν, ὅτε βούλεται, τίς αὐτῶν ὁ πορευόμενος καλῶς καὶ τίς ὁ ἐν ὑποκρίσει ὢν μοναχός. ἄφες τὸ χάρισμα τοῦ θεοῦ· φρόνιμοι ἄνθρωποι κατὰ κόσμον καὶ νοήμονες, εἴ γε ποιήσουσιν ὀλίγας ἡμέρας ἐν μέσῳ ἀνθρώπων, οὐκ ἐπιγινώσκουσιν αὐτῶν τὴν διάθεσιν, διακρίνοντες ἕκαστα τῶν περὶ αὐτοῦς;<sup>21</sup>

The Lord has given us the grace to learn this as well, when he wishes, who of them is on the right track and who only pretends to be a monk. But let us leave aside the grace of God. Clever and intelligent men in the world, when they spend a few days in the midst of other men, do they not learn their inner states, by judging each of the things that are around them?

In his speech Pachomius puts forward two arguments. Firstly, he claims that his powers are a gift of God over which he cannot dispose according to his own wishes; and secondly, he avers that what he does is not so different from the behaviour of laypeople who use their natural abilities of observation in order to gauge the inner states of others. Pachomius clearly believed that he could ward off criticism by stressing the absolute sovereignty of God and the ordinariness of his own behaviour. This suggests that of the theories we have discussed above, those found in the Vita prima of Pachomius and in the apophthegm of Gelasius would have raised the least objections from people who were averse to attributing superhuman powers to holy men. By contrast, one would expect the positions of Evagrius and of the hagiographer of Symeon of the Wondrous Mountain to have been more problematic. However, there is little evidence for controversy. We do know that Symeon had his detractors and that the followers of Evagrius met with hostility during the so-called Second Origenist Controversy.<sup>22</sup> Yet in these conflicts the question of whether it is possible to know the thoughts of others

<sup>17</sup> Apophthegmata Patrum, Paul the Simple (PG 65, 381D).

<sup>18</sup> See B. FRAIGNEAU-JULIEN, Les sens spirituels et la vision de Dieu selon Syméon le Nouveau Théologien (*Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale* 30). Paris 1985, 27–93.

<sup>19</sup> John of Beith-Aphthonia, Life of Severus (ed. M.-A. KUGENER, Vie de Sévère par Jean supérieur du monastère de Beith-Aphthonia. Texte syriaque publié, traduit et annoté [PO 2, 3]. Paris 1904, 226).

<sup>20</sup> D. BRAKKE, Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity. Harvard, Mass. 2006, 81; W. HARMLESS, Desert Christians: An Introduction into the Literature of Early Monasticism. New York 2004, 134.

<sup>21</sup> Vita prima of Pachomius 112 (73, 20–27 HALKIN).

<sup>22</sup> Life of Symeon 157, 224 (138–139, 194 VAN DEN VEN); D. HOMBERGEN, The Second Origenist Controversy. A New Perspective on Cyril of Scythopolis' Monastic Biographies as Historical Sources for Sixth-Century Origenism (*Studia Anselmiana* 132). Rome 2001.

seems to have played no role. This can only mean that after Pachomius' days this question was no longer a contentious issue. Indeed, by the sixth century the views that purification was conducive to clairvoyance and that clairvoyance could be a permanent gift from God had entered the mainstream. Hagiographers freely combined elements from the different theories and one does not always get the sense that they reflected deeply on their choices.<sup>23</sup> This was possible because they and their audiences were agreed that clairvoyance was one of the constitutive elements of the status of holy men.

#### FROM THE SIXTH TO THE EIGHTH CENTURY

The situation was starkly different in the period from the late sixth to the early eighth century, the so-called 'Dark Age'. This period, which saw the unravelling of the Late Roman order, was characterised by fierce controversies.<sup>24</sup> Thus, it comes as no surprise that the question of whether human beings can acquire knowledge of others by supernatural means also became a bone of contention.

The first evidence of an altercation dates to the late sixth century. It is found in two sermons on the Transfiguration, which the manuscripts attribute to the presbyter Timothy of Antioch and to Patriarch Anastasius I of Antioch (d. 599).<sup>25</sup> Timothy discusses at great length the appearance of the prophets Moses and Elijah to the left and the right of the transfigured Christ. Puzzled by the fact that Christ did not introduce these two figures to the Apostles, he poses the question: 'And from where did they gain the knowledge that it was Moses and Elijah?' (καὶ πόθεν αὐτοῖς ἡ γνῶσις ὅτι Μωσῆς ἦν καὶ Ἡλίας;); and then gives himself the answer: 'From the signs' (ἐκ τῶν τεκμηρίων), because for the Apostles' convenience Elijah would have stood on the chariot of fire and Moses would have carried the tables of the law.<sup>26</sup> This explanation met with an indignant response from Anastasius who exclaimed: 'That some ask whence and based on what signs the disciples recognised the prophets does not seem to me a subtle question nor one worth being investigated' (τὸ δὲ πυνθάνεσθαι τινὰς πόθεν ἢ πῶς καὶ ἐκ τίνων σημείων ἐπέγνωσαν οἱ μαθηταὶ τοὺς προφήτας οὐ μοι δοκεῖ κομπὸν ἐπερώτημα καὶ ζητήσεως ἄξιον εἶναι).<sup>27</sup> Anastasius asserts that the Apostles would, of course, have known the identities of the two figures and then explains that 'they had become more clear-sighted' (διορατικώτεροι γεγονότες) because the experience of the Transfiguration had transformed them, too, and because Christ had illuminated their minds.<sup>28</sup>

Anastasius' argument is thoroughly traditional. By contrast, Timothy's point of view seems to be without precedent. In his own time, however, he was not an isolated figure since a strikingly similar opinion is expressed in the Questions and Answers literature. The author of a now lost collection who most likely lived in the late sixth or early seventh century claimed that the resurrected will all look like Christ and that in the absence of distinguishing signs 'we will not recognise each other there but will be unrecognised as brothers by our brothers, as fathers by our sons, and as friends by our friends'

<sup>23</sup> In the hagiographical oeuvre of Cyril of Scythopolis, for example, we find evidence for all the views listed above: purification of the senses and clairvoyance; transitory revelation; permanent revelation; simple reading of outward signs; reading of outward signs with divine assistance; and seeing of the 'true' faces of others. See Life of Sabas 12 (95, 16 SCHWARTZ); Life of John the Hesychast 10 (208, 5–7 SCHWARTZ); Life of Euthymius 13 (23, 8 SCHWARTZ); Life of Abraamius (245, 9–11 SCHWARTZ); Life of Euthymius 29, 22, 24 (46, 1–2; 35, 1–25, 36, 18–19 SCHWARTZ).

<sup>24</sup> See e.g. D. OLSTER, *Roman Defeat, Christian Response and the Literary Construction of the Jew*. Philadelphia 1994.

<sup>25</sup> For a detailed discussion of the two texts see D. KRAUSMÜLLER, *Byzantine concepts of the resurrection I: Anastasius of Antioch*. Gouden Hoorn 5.1 (1996) 11–17; IDEM, *Byzantine concepts of the resurrection II: Timothy of Antioch*. Gouden Hoorn 5.2 (1997–1998) 11–26.

<sup>26</sup> Timothy of Antioch, *On the Cross and the Transfiguration* (PG 86, 261B–C).

<sup>27</sup> Anastasius of Antioch, *First Sermon on the Transfiguration* (PG 89, 1369B).

<sup>28</sup> Anastasius of Antioch, *First Sermon on the Transfiguration* (PG 89, 1368D–1369A).



(οὐκ ἐπιγινώσκομεν ἀλλήλους ἐκεῖ, ἀλλὰ ἀγνώριστοι ἀδελφοὶ ἀδελφοῖς καὶ πατέρες υἱοῖς καὶ φίλοι φίλοις καθεστήκαμεν).<sup>29</sup>

This theory, too, met with opposition. Anastasius of Sinai declared that while recognition by natural means may be impossible God's grace will reveal to us the identities of each other.<sup>30</sup> The same view is expressed in a sermon on the Deceased, which is attributed to John of Damascus: 'Yea, truly each one will recognise his neighbour, not through the shape of the body, but through the clairvoyant eye of the soul' (ναί, ὄντως ἕκαστος ἀναγνωριεῖ τὸν πλησίον αὐτοῦ, οὐ τῷ τοῦ σώματος σχήματι, ἀλλὰ τῷ διορατικῷ τῆς ψυχῆς ὄμματι).<sup>31</sup> The vehemence of the responses suggests that Timothy and the anonymous author of the Questions and Answers had questioned long-standing certainties. Significantly, both men do not even consider the possibility of supernaturally acquired knowledge. This is all the more startling as the Resurrection and the Transfiguration are two events where the supernatural is prevalent.

It is evident that such a conceptual framework also rules out clairvoyance. A collection of Questions and Answers from the seventh or eighth century, which is attributed to Athanasius of Alexandria, makes this link explicit. There we read that 'only God is a knower of hearts because not even the angels themselves know ... what is in the heart' (καρδιογνώστης μόνος ὁ Θεὸς ὑπάρχει· ἐπεὶ οὐδὲ αὐτοὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι τὰ ἐγκάρδια ... ἐπίστανται).<sup>32</sup> This statement must be interpreted in the light of an earlier passage where the author creates a nexus between the three invisible beings God, angel and human soul.<sup>33</sup> There he states that these beings cannot be seen by human eyes and only makes an exception for the Virgin Mary who was once able to see an angel, Gabriel, in his true nature.<sup>34</sup>

#### THE EARLY NINTH CENTURY

The evidence for opposition to clairvoyance that we have analysed so far dates to the period from the late sixth to the early eighth century. However, this opposition continued without break into the Iconoclast period. This can be seen from a sermon on the Angels by Theodore of Stoudios.<sup>35</sup> There Theodore declares that of all human beings only Mary was permitted to see 'the nature of an angel as it is' (φύσιν ἀγγελικὴν ὡς ἔστι). The striking similarity of this statement with the speculation of Pseudo-Athanasius leaves no doubt that Theodore is participating in an ongoing discourse. Because of the nature of his topic Theodore does not embark on a separate discussion of visions of the soul. However, the fact that he describes Gabriel's angelic nature as a 'soul flame' (φλόγα ψυχικὴν) suggests that he wished his statement to apply to human souls as well.<sup>36</sup> Accordingly, human beings other than Mary would not only not be able to see angels but would also be incapable of seeing souls. Thus it comes as no surprise that in his other writings Theodore refrains from affirming that the thoughts

<sup>29</sup> Pseudo-Athanasius, Questions and Answers 22 (PG 28, 609D). This theory is attributed to the common source of the two collections of Anastasius of Sinai and Pseudo-Athanasius in D. KRAUSMÜLLER, "At the resurrection we will not recognise one another": radical devaluation of social relations in the lost model of Anastasius' and Pseudo-Athanasius' Questions and Answers. *Byz* 83 (2013) 207–227. See also Anastasius, Questions and Answers, 19.11 (ed. J. A. MUNITIZ – M. RICHARD, *Anastasioi Sinaitae Questiones et Responsiones* [CCSG 59]. Turnhout 2006, 34, 95–107); and Ps-Athanasius, Questions and Answers 24 (PG 28, 612D–613A).

<sup>30</sup> Anastasius of Sinai, Questions and Answers 19.11 (34, 95–107 MUNITIZ – RICHARD).

<sup>31</sup> Ps-Damascene, On the Deceased 29 (PG 95, 2767D–2769A).

<sup>32</sup> Pseudo-Athanasius, Questions and Answers 100 (PG 28, 660A).

<sup>33</sup> Pseudo-Athanasius, Questions and Answers 27 (PG 28, 613C).

<sup>34</sup> Pseudo-Athanasius, Questions and Answers 28 (PG 28, 616A).

<sup>35</sup> For a more detailed discussion see D. KRAUSMÜLLER, The Flesh Cannot See the Word': "Nestorianising" Chalcedonians in the Seventh to Ninth Centuries AD. *Vigiliae Christianae* 67 (2013) 185–208.

<sup>36</sup> Theodore of Stoudios, On the Angels 9 (PG 99, 744B–C).

of human beings can be accessed by supernatural means. Significantly, the key term ‘clairvoyant’ (διορατικός) is used only once by Theodore and then only in an ironical sense: in one of his letters he makes fun of the recipient, pointing out that as a clairvoyant he should have a better grasp of the political developments.<sup>37</sup> A passage in one of his catecheses shows clearly that Theodore did not wish his monks to regard him as a reader of thoughts. There he points out that each member of the community can assess whether his own conduct is praiseworthy or not and then adds: ‘Besides I, too, guess from the external movements what is stored up inside’ (πλὴν ὅτι κἀγὼ τεκμαίρομαι ἐκ τῶν ἔξωθεν κινήματων καὶ τὰ ἐνδοθεν ἀποκείμενα).<sup>38</sup> This statement resembles most closely the scenario found in the apophthegm of Gelasius. However, unlike the earlier text it makes no reference to divine assistance. This could be explained by the fact that Theodore did not wish to appear prideful: as is well known in his catecheses he presents himself as a sinner and not as a holy man. However, the same reticence is found in Theodore’s hagiographical oeuvre. In his Encomium of Plato of Sakkoudion he does not accord his saintly uncle supernatural powers but rather characterises him as being ‘better at conjecturing’ (στοχαστικώτερος).<sup>39</sup>

\*\*\*

In the first half of the ninth century Theodore was not the only author who held such views. This is evident from the Life of Nicetas, the abbot of the Bithynian monastery of Medikion.<sup>40</sup> Nicetas’ hagiographer, Theosterictus, claims that the saint performed healings of diseases of the body ‘through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit’ (διὰ τῆς ἐνοικήσεως τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος).<sup>41</sup> However, when he then talks about healings of spiritual ailments he refrains from making an analogous statement:

Περὶ δὲ τῶν τῆς ψυχῆς νοσημάτων οἷος ἦν ἰατρὸς ὁ πατὴρ ἡμῶν Νικήτας ὁ ἀντιλέγων οὐδείς· καὶ γὰρ ἐξ αὐτῶν τῶν κινήματων τε καὶ ἔξεων ἐπεγίνωσκεν τοὺς ὑπὸ λογισμῶν ἢ παθῶν τυραννουμένους· καὶ εἰ συνέβη δέ τιτι πτώματι περιπεσεῖν – ἀγγέλων γὰρ ἐστὶν τὸ μὴ πίπτειν – καὶ ἔγνω τοῦτον διὰ τῆς σκυθρωπότητος καὶ τῆς τοῦ προσώπου ἀλλοιώσεως, προσκαλούμενος τοῦτον ἐν τῷ ἰδίῳ κελλίῳ κατ’ ἰδίαν διὰ τῆς ἐνθέου αὐτοῦ διδασκαλίας καὶ παρακλήσεως πάντα ἐξειπεῖν τὰ καθ’ ἑαυτὸν παρεσκεύασεν.<sup>42</sup>

As regards the illnesses of the soul nobody will deny what a great physician our Father Nicetas was because he recognised from the very movements and habits those who were dominated by sinful thoughts or passions. And when someone happened to suffer a fall – for not to fall is a quality of the angels – and he detected him because of his sullenness and the change of his face, he called him to himself in his own cell in private and made him confess everything about himself through his divinely inspired teaching and consolation.

This passage conveys a clear message: Nicetas is no reader of thoughts. His observations only tell him that a brother has trespassed. What the actual sin was he learns only during confession. This

<sup>37</sup> Theodore of Stoudios, Letters 448 (II.630, 11 FATOUROS).

<sup>38</sup> Theodore of Stoudios, Great Catechesis 42 (ed. J. COZZA-LUZI, S. P. N., Theodori Studitae Magna Catechesis [*Nova Patrum Bibliotheca* 9.2]. Rome 1888, 117, 17–19).

<sup>39</sup> Theodore of Studios, Encomium of Plato (PG 99, 816B).

<sup>40</sup> Theosterictus, Life of Nicetas of Medikion (ed. Acta Sanctorum, Aprilis, I: Dies 1–10, Paris 21866, xviii–xxvii). On author and text, cf. J. O. ROSENQVIST, A Philological Adventure. Editing the Life of St. Niketas of Medikion. *Acta Byzantina Fennica*, n.s. 1 (2002) 59–72.

<sup>41</sup> Theosterictus, Life of Nicetas of Medikion 17 (xxii AASS).

<sup>42</sup> Theosterictus. Life of Nicetas of Medikion 21 (xxii AASS).

suggests that Nicetas relies on his natural powers of perception, which he has honed through long years of experience. The similarity between this scenario and Theodore's description of his own behaviour is striking. But does it mean that Theosterictus rules out any divine contribution? At the beginning of the text Theosterictus distinguishes between hagiographers who know their heroes through the Holy Spirit and hagiographers who only know them 'by way of conjecture' (στοχαστικῶς).<sup>43</sup> This shows that he recognised the existence of supernatural ways of knowing another person's thoughts. Thus one could argue that this aspect is implicit in the account of Nicetas' activity as a confessor. Even so, however, it remains the fact that Theosterictus did nothing to emphasise the supernatural element, which he could easily have done by adopting one of the theories that had been current in Late Antiquity.

In order to establish the full significance of Theosterictus' reticence we need to consider the spiritual tradition in which the monks of Medikion stood. In an earlier part of the text we find a list of the saint's achievements, which corresponds to the chapter headings of the Climax.<sup>44</sup> Every contemporary reader would thus have realised that Theosterictus wished his saint to be judged by the criteria set out in this text. Yet John Climacus believed that a monk who has purified his heart can see or smell the inner qualities of another person.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, for John this ability was a marker of spiritual perfection:

Ὁ μὲν τελείως καθαρθεὶς αὐτὴν ἢ καὶ οὐκ αὐτὴν τὴν ψυχὴν ἐν ποίοις διάκειται τοῦ πλησίον ὄρᾷ, ὁ δὲ προκόπτων ἔτι διὰ τοῦ σώματος ταύτην τεκμαίρεται.<sup>46</sup>

He who is completely purified sees his neighbour's soul itself or also not (sc. the soul) itself in what condition it is whereas he who is advancing still guesses it from the body.

According to this conceptual framework Nicetas of Medikion would not be a saint at all but somebody who was still on the road to sainthood when death overtook him. Indeed, it is likely that John Climacus would not have thought much of Nicetas since he was very ambivalent about the ability to make inferences from outward signs. Once he defines an evil person as somebody who 'imagines that he can infer from utterances the sinful thoughts and from gestures what is in the heart' (ἐκ λόγων τοὺς λογισμοὺς καὶ ἐκ σχημάτων τὰ ἐγκάρδια λαμβάνειν φανταζόμενος).<sup>47</sup> Given the important role that the Climax played at Medikion there can be no doubt that the hagiographer was aware of John's position and that he rejected it outright. Indeed, it is telling that the chapter 'on well-discerning discernment' (περὶ διακρίσεως εὐδιακρίτου) in which John Climacus sets out his ideas on the topic has no counterpart in the list of Nicetas' achievements.<sup>48</sup>

\*\*\*

<sup>43</sup> Theosterictus, *Life of Nicetas of Medikion*, 2 (xix *AASS*).

<sup>44</sup> Compare Theosterictus, *Life of Nicetas of Medikion* 9 (xx *AASS*): οὐκ ἦν ἐν αὐτῷ θυμοῦ ἢ ὀργῆς ἢ μνησικακίας πάθος· οὐκ ἦν ἐν αὐτῷ μίσους ἢ καταλαλιᾶς ἢ κατακρίσεως ἐμφάνεια· οὐκ ἦν ἐν αὐτῷ πολυλογίας ἢ εὐτραπελίας ἢ ὄλως ἀργολογίας μνήμη, and the chapter headings *περὶ ἀοργησίας*, *περὶ μνησικακίας*, *περὶ καταλαλιᾶς* and *περὶ πολυλογίας* in the Climax, p. 88, 629–630). The other terms appear in the text of the respective chapters.

<sup>45</sup> John, *Climax* 26 (*PG* 88, 1029D).

<sup>46</sup> John, *Climax* 26 (*PG* 88, 1033C). The alternative that John mentions here probably refers to the 'true' body whose features reflect exactly the character of a person so that their reading is always correct. See above note 17.

<sup>47</sup> John, *Climax* 24 (*PG* 88, 984B).

<sup>48</sup> In this context it is worth noting that Theosterictus denied the possibility of a vision of God, see Theosterictus, *Life of Nicetas of Medikion* 16 (xxi *AASS*): καθαρὸς τῇ καρδίᾳ δι' ἧς καὶ ὄφθη θεῶ καὶ προσωμίλησεν. This is a paraphrase of Matthew 5:8: μακάριοι οἱ καθαροὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ ὅτι αὐτοὶ τὸν θεὸν ὄψονται, where 'seeing' is changed to 'being seen'. The edition has the meaningless ὄψε θεῶ. The correct reading can be established through comparison with the Church Slavonic translation, see D. E. AFINOGENOV, *Cerkoslavjanskij perevod "Žitiya Sv. Nikity Midikijskogo"*. Feosterikta i ego tekstologičeskoe značenie, in: *Žitie prepodobnogo otca našego Konstantina, čto iz Iudeev. Žitie sv. ispovednika Nikity igumena Midikijskogo*. Moscow 2001, 147–159, esp. 150: видень бысть.



Analysis of the writings of Theodore of Stoudios and of Theosterictus of Medikion has revealed that the opposition to clairvoyance, which we have detected in seventh-century texts, continued into the Second Iconoclasm. This does not mean, however, that the alternative had disappeared. When we turn to the contemporary Life of Peter of Atroa we enter a radically different world.<sup>49</sup> Peter, a famous ascetic and wonderworker, found a hagiographer in Sabas, a member of one of the communities that he had founded in Western Asia Minor. At one point in his narrative Sabas tells his audience that once during a common meal he was thinking that he should leave the community in order to evade an Arab incursion. This elicited the following response from the saint:

Ἔτι δὲ ἐμοῦ τοιαῦτα διαλογοζομένου κατ' ἐμαυτόν, ὁ μέγας εὐθὺς τότε Πέτρος πρὸς τοὺς συνδείπνους ἀδελφοὺς χαριέστατα ἔφησεν· Ἀδελφοί, ὁ ἀββᾶς Σάβας καταλιπεῖν ἡμᾶς βούλεται καὶ πρὸς τὰ ἴδια εἰς τὴν Πόλιν ἀπελθεῖν. Ἐμοῦ δὲ τοῦτο ψευδῶς ἐπὶ πάντων ἀρνησαμένου, αὐτῇ τῇ ὥρᾳ πάντα μοι ἐξεῖπεν τὰ ἐνθυμηθέντα.<sup>50</sup>

While I was still considering such things by myself, the great Peter in a charming manner then immediately said to the brothers who were eating with us: 'Brothers, the monk Sabas wants to leave us and go home to Constantinople.' When I deceitfully denied this in front of everybody he at that very hour told me all my thoughts.

There is no reason to doubt that Sabas' account reflects Peter's actual behaviour. The image that the saint projects of himself is in stark contrast to Theodore's claim that he knew his monks' inner states only from their appearance and behaviour. Significantly, this is not the only passage in the text where Peter is presented as a reader of minds. Sabas tells his audience several times that the saint knew the thoughts of his followers and of the people who came to visit him.<sup>51</sup> Sabas has not much to say about the ways in which Peter acquires his knowledge. Only once he explains that when the saint looked at members of his flock he saw their faces either 'light-like and exceedingly brilliant' (φωτοειδῆ καὶ ὑπέρλαμπρον) or 'dusky and unclean' (ζοφώδη καὶ ἀκάθαρτον) because the spirit transfigured them in such a way.<sup>52</sup> This is a theory that we have already come across in our survey of Late Antique beliefs: there we have seen that Paul the Simple was said to have the same gift. However, it clearly does not account for the fact that Peter has precise knowledge of the thoughts of others. Equally little do we hear about the extent to which Peter was in control of his gift. However, in this case we can make inferences from a related topic. Peter's monks believed that the saint had gained from God the privilege to determine the time of his own death. According to Sabas they said to themselves: 'He remains in the flesh as he wishes and will be liberated from this life when he wishes' (ὡς θέλει ἐν σαρκὶ περιέπεται καὶ ὅταν θέλῃ τοῦ βίου ἀπολυθῆσεται).<sup>53</sup> This suggests that they also believed Peter to be permanently endowed with supernatural powers of perception. It is evident that Peter is a saint in the mould of the 'extremist' Symeon of the Wondrous Mountain rather than in the mould of the 'moderate' Pachomius.

The frequent references to feats of clairvoyance show clearly that unlike Theosterictus, Sabas considered this ability to be an essential building block in the construction of sainthood. Indeed,

<sup>49</sup> V. LAURENT, *La vie merveilleuse de saint Pierre d'Atroa († 837) (Subsidia hagiographica 29)*. Brussels 1956.

<sup>50</sup> Sabas, *Life of Peter of Atroa* 48 (165, 13–18 LAURENT).

<sup>51</sup> Sabas, *Life of Peter of Atroa* 22, 73 (115, 1–7; 203, 7–21 LAURENT).

<sup>52</sup> Sabas, *Life of Peter of Atroa* 74 (205, 10–19 LAURENT).

<sup>53</sup> Sabas, *Life of Peter* 80 (213 LAURENT).

when he later rewrote the Life of the hermit Joannicius he added further stories of this kind to the original narrative.<sup>54</sup> The first Life of Joannicius, which was written by the monk Peter soon after the end of the Second Iconoclasm, is of even greater relevance for the discussion because it shows that the proponents of the two views clashed with each other.<sup>55</sup> In one episode the hagiographer describes a meeting of Joannicius with other champions of icon worship. During this meeting Joannicius told one of the visitors, Joseph of Kathara, to make preparations for his imminent death. This elicited the following reaction from the Stoudites who were also present:

Σκανδαλισθέντες οὖν ἐπὶ τούτῳ οἱ Στουδίται ... οὐ μικρῶς ἐν τοῖς διαλογισμοῖς κατεμέμφοτον τὸν ὄσιον, ἐπιλέγοντες καὶ τοῦτο ἐν τῇ διανοίᾳ: Τίς ἄρα γινώσκει τὸν ἐκάστου θάνατον πλὴν μόνου Θεοῦ; Γνοὺς οὖν ὁ ἅγιος τοὺς διαλογισμοὺς αὐτῶν ... προσκαλεῖται μὲν αὐτοὺς κατ' ἰδίαν καὶ τοὺς διαλογισμοὺς αὐτῶν ἐξειπῶν ἄγαν κατέπληξε καὶ ... πρὸς γῆν τούτους κατέκλινε τό· Ἡμαρτον καὶ τὴν συγχώρησιν ἐπιβόησαντες.<sup>56</sup>

Being scandalised by this, the Stoudites ... rebuked the saint not a little in their thoughts, saying this, too, in their minds: 'Who knows the death of each one apart from God alone?' Having understood their thoughts the saint ... asked them to step aside, and telling them their thoughts, he criticised them exceedingly and ... made them bow to the ground while they were shouting: 'I have sinned' and asking for forgiveness.

The main theme of this story is the question whether it is possible for human beings to know the mind of God. The hagiographer's claim that the Stoudites denied such a possibility undoubtedly reflects historical reality since it is in keeping with Theodore's emphasis on the incomprehensibility of God.<sup>57</sup> The fact that Joseph of Kathara died shortly afterwards is presented as proof that the Stoudites' views are mistaken.

There is, however, a second theme of almost equal importance. According to the hagiographer the Stoudites took care not to voice their criticism but were nevertheless found out by Joannicius who then rebuked them for their wickedness. The purpose of this narrative is obvious. By telling the Stoudites their thoughts Joannicius proves his ability to see into people's souls, which persuades them that he can also see into God's mind. Yet there may well be a further dimension. As we have seen earlier the Stoudites also denied that human beings could read thoughts. Thus one can argue that Joannicius' feat of clairvoyance was meant to prove in the first place that the reading of thoughts is possible, which could then serve as the basis for further-reaching claims.

This complex argument shows clearly that the devotees of holy men were not naive country bumpkins but quite capable of holding their own. Indeed, one can make a case that the monk Peter was aware of John Climacus' position and its rejection by Theosterictus.<sup>58</sup> In his version of the Life of Joannicius the saint has a companion named Eustratius, the later abbot of the Agauroi monastery, who also commissioned the text.<sup>59</sup> Both men are characterised in quite different ways. Whereas Joannicius senses hidden things 'with the clairvoyant eye of the heart' (τῷ ... διορατικῷ τῆς καρδίας ὀφθαλμῷ)

<sup>54</sup> Sabas, Life of Joannicius 5, 9 (ed. J. VAN DEN GHEYN, Acta Sanctorum Novembris II.1 [Brussels 1894] 332–383, esp. 337AB; 314A).

<sup>55</sup> Peter, Life of Joannicius 36 (ed. J. VAN DEN GHEYN, Acta Sanctorum Novembris II.1 [Brussels 1894], 384–435).

<sup>56</sup> Peter, Life of Joannicius 36 (405AB VAN DEN GHEYN).

<sup>57</sup> See e.g. Theodore of Studios, On the Angels 8 (PG 99, 744A).

<sup>58</sup> This would not be surprising since he used the Life of Nicetas as a literary model, cf. ROSENQVIST, Philological Adventure, 69–70.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. C. MANGO, The two lives of St. Ioannikios and the Bulgarians. *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 7 (1983) 393–404, esp. 393–394.

Eustratius uses his natural faculties: the hagiographer calls him ‘sharp’ (ἀγχίνους) and ‘prudent’ (ἐχέφρων).<sup>60</sup> Thus, he is capable of understanding Joannicius’ thoughts ‘from the words and signs and examples of the saint’ (ἐξ αὐτῶν τῶν λόγων καὶ σημείων καὶ ὑποδειγμάτων τοῦ ἁγίου).<sup>61</sup>

It is evident that this latter approach has a close parallel in the Life of Nicetas of Medikion where the saint also makes inferences from outward signs. I would argue that Peter created this parallel deliberately because he wished to put the deniers of supernatural powers in their place. From the context it is clear that Eustratius relies on signs because he is still an ordinary monk. Thus, it is implied that he will also become a clairvoyant when he reaches perfection.<sup>62</sup> People like Nicetas, however, never reach this level and are therefore not on a par with a real saint like Joannicius.

\*\*\*

The discussion so far has shown that in the early ninth century members of coenobitic communities and devotees of holy men held radically different views about visions of the soul and the reading of thoughts. Indeed, the polarisation was complete: of all the theories available the two milieus opted for the most extreme forms, either reducing the charismatic element to almost nothing or increasing it to an almost unprecedented degree. Why the latter group should have emphasised the miraculous dimension is not difficult to understand. They wished to establish the credentials of their heroes as holy men. By contrast, the motives of the former group are less obvious. Was the denial of supernatural powers of perception somehow linked to the coenobitic ideology? Here one may think of the twin ideals of moderation and conformity, which were at the heart of the coenobitic enterprise. These ideals are expressed most clearly in the context of asceticism. In his catecheses Theodore states that the common rule stipulates a carefully balanced dietary regime, which is mandatory for everybody, and that those who eat less damage their health and fall prey to the vices of vainglory and self-love.<sup>63</sup> In order to reinforce this view Theodore presents even saints as moderate fasters.<sup>64</sup> It is conceivable that claims to supernatural powers were also regarded as a threat to the coenobitic order. Monastic leaders would then have striven to remove all possible role models that might justify such claims. This would have meant that not only monks but also abbots needed to act like ordinary people and that they needed to be presented in this way in the narratives about their lives.

However, there was more at stake than the smooth running of monastic communities. We are in the presence of a coherent worldview that insists on the limitations of human nature and the clear distinction between God and creation and that reacts strongly against perceived transgressions. This worldview was not limited to coenobitic milieus. We have seen that in the late sixth and early seventh centuries the presbyter Timothy of Antioch and the anonymous author of a collection of Questions and Answers rejected clairvoyance in any shape and form and insisted that human beings, be they ever so holy, can only infer inner states from outward appearances. Yet these men were neither themselves monks nor did they primarily address monastic audiences. That the situation was no different during the Second Iconoclasm can be seen from the Life of George of Amastris by Ignatius the Deacon. There we find the following statement:

<sup>60</sup> Peter, Life of Joannicius 53, 14, 31 (414C, 391B, 402A VAN DEN GHEYN).

<sup>61</sup> Peter, Life of Joannicius 35 (402AB VAN DEN GHEYN).

<sup>62</sup> When Eustratius died as a saintly abbot and received his own life his hagiographer duly presented him as a reader of minds. See below note 77.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Theodore, Short Catechesis 55 (ed. E. AUVRAY, Sancti patris nostri et confessoris Theodori Studitis praepositi parva catechesis. Paris 1891, 197–201).

<sup>64</sup> Theodore of Stoudios, Encomium of Theophanes the Confessor 7 (ed. S. EFTHYMIADIS, Le panégyrique de S. Théophane le Confesseur par S. Théodore Stoudite [BHG 1792b]. Édition critique du texte intégral. *AnBoll* 111 [1993] 259–90, esp. 274, 2).

Ὡς γὰρ ἀγρότης ἀγρότην, καὶ γεωργὸς γεωργὸν εἰ βούλει, καὶ στρατιώτης ἐξ αὐτῆς ἐπιγινώσκει στρατιώτην τῆς ὄψεως, οὕτω κὰν τοῖς πνευματικοῖς ἀνδράσι πέφυκε γίνεσθαι· τεκμαίροντο γὰρ ἐκ τῆς φαινομένης ἰλαρότητος τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ἔνδον κατάστημα.<sup>65</sup>

Just as a rustic recognises a rustic and a peasant a peasant, if you like, and a soldier a soldier from the very sight, thus it normally also happens among spiritual men, for they guess from the apparent gladness the inner disposition of the soul.

Here the mutual recognition of holy men is robbed of any special significance through comparison with the most mundane encounters. This is in stark contrast to traditional hagiographical fare such as the famous anecdote about Ephraem the Syrian who is said immediately to have recognised the inner qualities of Basil of Caesarea because he saw fire coming out of his mouth.<sup>66</sup> However, it is entirely in keeping with the views of the monks of Medikion and Stoudios. This is highly significant because Ignatius was not a monk but a patriarchal deacon who became metropolitan of Nicaea. Moreover, he was an Iconoclast sympathiser. Indeed, his *Life of George of Amastris* is regarded as one of the few surviving examples of Iconoclast hagiography.<sup>67</sup>

This suggests that the debate about the reading of thoughts was conducted quite independently from the debate about the images. In this matter coenobitic monks with impeccable Iconophile credentials sided with the Iconoclasts and turned against contemporary holy men and their followers who had also taken up the Iconophile cause. There are indications that this affinity did not escape the notice of the hagiographers of holy men. In the *Life of Joannicius* by the monk Peter the story about the meeting with the Stoudites is immediately preceded by the narrative of an encounter of the saint with an Iconoclast relative who is said to have blasphemed ‘against the saints and our sacred habit’ (κατὰ τε τῶν ἁγίων καὶ τοῦ καθ’ ἡμᾶς ἱεροῦ σχήματος).<sup>68</sup> When we consider that the Stoudites are later characterised as people who are used to ‘move their poisonous tongue easily to the accusation of saints’ (τὴν ἰοβόλον γλῶσσαν εὐθετα πρὸς ἁγιοκατηγορίαν κινεῖν) it does not seem unlikely that the hagiographer constructed this sequence deliberately in order to heap further opprobrium on the Stoudites.<sup>69</sup>

At this point we must again ask: what made a person accept or reject the possibility of visions of the soul and the reading of thoughts? I would argue that social background played an important role. Theodore of Stoudios’ family belonged to the bureaucratic elite of the capital: both his father Photinus and his maternal uncle Plato had served in the central administration.<sup>70</sup> Nicephorus, the founder of the monastery of Medikion, was also a member of this group, as was Athanasius, the steward of Medikion during Nicetas’ time.<sup>71</sup> As a consequence these men had the same upbringing and educa-

<sup>65</sup> Ignatius the Deacon, *Life of George of Amastris* 12 (ed. V. G. VASIL’EVSKII, *Russko-Vizantijskija Isledovanija* II. St Petersburg 1893, 23, 4–7).

<sup>66</sup> *Life of Marcellus the Acoemete* 22 (ed. G. DAGRON, *La vie ancienne de Saint Marcel l’Acémète*. *AnBoll* 85 [1967] 271–321, esp. 305).

<sup>67</sup> Cf. I. ŠEVČENKO, *Hagiography of the Iconoclast Period*, in: *Iconoclasm*, ed. A. A. M. Bryer – J. Herrin. Birmingham 1977, 113–131; M.-F. AUZÉPY, *L’analyse littéraire et l’historien: l’exemple des vies de saints iconoclastes*. *BSI* 53 (1992) 57–67.

<sup>68</sup> Peter, *Life of Joannicius* 35 (403F–404A VAN DEN GHEYN).

<sup>69</sup> A similar case is found in the *Life of Peter of Atroa* 37 (145–147 LAURENT). There criticism of extreme asceticism is attributed to Iconoclast abbots but the context shows clearly that these abbots were Iconophiles. That the author can make this shift so easily suggests that Iconoclast abbots held similar views.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. L. BRUBAKER – J. HALDON, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, c. 680–850: A History*. Cambridge 2010, 654–655.

<sup>71</sup> *Life of Nicephorus of Medikion* 5 (ed. F. HALKIN, *La vie de saint Nicéphore, fondateur de Médikion en Bithynie* († 813). *AnBoll* 78 [1960] 396–400, esp. 405–6, 9–20 HALKIN); Theosterictus, *Life of Nicetas of Medikion* 11 (xx *AASS*). Unfortunately, nothing is known about the background of the hagiographer Theosterictus himself. However, his ability to express himself in writing suggests that he was also a member of the Constantinopolitan elite.

tion as the leading Iconoclasts of the time. This socialisation may have made them receptive to the notions of conformity and social control, which had informed elite mentality since the late seventh century as is evident from the disciplinary canons of the Council in Trullo.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, it may have induced them to favour strict coenobitic monasticism over the traditional template of the holy man. By contrast, Joannicius and Peter of Atroa were villagers who had received almost no education at all and whose understanding of monasticism was most likely shaped by local holy men.<sup>73</sup>

Of course, this does not mean that people's views were exclusively determined by their upbringing. Monastic socialisation also played an important role. Nicetas of Medikion was born in a small Bithynian town and served as deacon at the local church but then entered the monastery of Medikion where he became exposed to the mentality of the Constantinopolitan elite.<sup>74</sup> Sabas, the hagiographer of Peter of Atroa, took the opposite road. He came from Constantinople and most likely had acquired some literary skills before he joined his hero.<sup>75</sup> At this point one would like to know what made the two men choose these so different monastic settings. Unfortunately lack of evidence prevents us from answering this question.<sup>76</sup> This is a stark reminder of how limited is our understanding of the complex interplay of ideological and social factors that shaped the actions of individuals.

#### THE LATE NINTH AND TENTH CENTURIES

The texts that we have discussed so far were all written either during or immediately after the Second Iconoclasm. This raises the question: did the debate continue into the later period? Two texts from the late ninth and early tenth centuries show that both views still found proponents.

The hagiographer of Eustratius of the Agauroi presents the saint as a reader of thoughts. When Eustratius meets distressed people on the road he is immediately aware of their problems.<sup>77</sup> By contrast, the hagiographer of Euarestus of Kokorobion implicitly denies the existence of such an ability. When the saint asks to be admitted to the community of Stoudios the abbot Naucratius makes inferences about his character 'from ... the outward marks of the body' (ἐκ ... τῶν ἐξῶθεν τοῦ σώματος χαρακτῆρων).<sup>78</sup> Significantly, this is not the only instance in the text where a person uses this method. In an earlier episode the saint is assessed in exactly the same manner by the nobleman Bryainios whose household he wishes to enter. According to the hagiographer Bryainios immediately recognised the saint's good character 'because he had a mind that was naturally gifted and a brain that was capable of conjecturing such things' (ἦν γὰρ τὸν νοῦν μεγαλοφυῆς καὶ τὸν φρένα δεινὸς τῶν τοιούτων καταστοχάσασθαί).<sup>79</sup> Thus, the reader gets the impression that abbots behaved no differently from laymen and that correct use of one's natural faculties would give reliable results. The discrepancy between the two texts explains itself when we look at the milieus in which they were produced. The first text was written for the Agauroi monastery, which had had close links with the hermit Joannicius, whereas the second text originated in the community of Stoudios, which had been shaped by the abbot Theodore and his disciples.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. J. HALDON, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century. The Transformation of a Culture*. Cambridge 1997, 327–337.

<sup>73</sup> Peter, *Life of Joannicius* 4 (386 VAN DEN GHEYN); Sabas, *Life of Peter of Atroa* 2 (69–71 LAURENT).

<sup>74</sup> Theosterictus, *Life of Nicetas of Medikion* 5 (xix AASS).

<sup>75</sup> On Sabas, cf. LAURENT, *Vie merveilleuse*, 9–13.

<sup>76</sup> It may be significant that Nicetas first joined a hermit who then sent him on to Medikion.

<sup>77</sup> *Life of Eustratius of the Agauroi* 14 (ed. A. PAPADOPOULOS-KERAMEUS, *Ανάλεκτα ιεροσολυμιτικής σταχυολογίας* IV [St. Petersburg 1897, reprint Brussels 1963], 367–400, esp. 377, 29).

<sup>78</sup> *Life of Euarestus of Kokorobion* 8 (ed. C. VAN DE VORST, *La vie de s. Évariste, higoumène à Constantinople*. *AnBoll* 41 [1923] 287–325, esp. 302, 22–33).

<sup>79</sup> *Life of Euarestus of Kokorobion* 6 (300, 26–29 VAN DE VORST).



At this point one might conclude that the debate continued throughout the late ninth and tenth centuries. However, when we look at other hagiographical texts of the period a different picture emerges. We find no parallels for the stance taken by the author of the *Life of Euarestus*, not even in other hagiographical texts of Stoudite provenance.<sup>80</sup> By contrast, the views of Eustratius' hagiographer are shared by the authors of the *Lives of Constantine the Ex-Jew*, *Paul of Latros* and *Michael Maleinos*.<sup>81</sup> Significantly, none of these texts contain attacks of the alternative position. Thus one could argue that the controversy during the Second Iconoclasm ended with the victory of the devotees of holy men such as Joannicius and Peter of Atroa. However, this conclusion, too, may be in need of qualification because not all lives dating to this period contain scenes that show the saints as readers of thoughts.<sup>82</sup> The reasons for such reticence are difficult to ascertain. One might think that the authors of these *Lives* agreed with the Stoudites but were not willing to engage in an open controversy. However, the fact that they attribute to their heroes other supernatural powers makes it seem more likely that they simply were not particularly interested in the topic. If this is the case one can conclude that the debate had lost much of its urgency.

#### THE ELEVENTH CENTURY

We need to wait until the eleventh century to find a text that can be compared with the *Life of Nicetas of Medikion* in depth and sophistication. This text is *Vita A* of Athanasius the Athonite, which was written between the years 1000 and 1025 by the monk Athanasius of Panagios.<sup>83</sup> In an early part of the narrative the hagiographer states that Athanasius revealed to the abbot Michael Maleinos his wish to become a monk and that he immediately won him over. Then he explains Michael's unusual behaviour with the comment: 'Indeed, he was a great one and quick to conjecture what is not visible from what is visible' (πάντως δὲ μέγας ὢν καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν βλεπομένων τὰ μὴ βλεπόμενα τεκμηριῶσαι ταχύς).<sup>84</sup> No reference is made to any supernatural insight into Athanasius' soul. The narrative then continues with an account of Athanasius' first meeting with Nicephorus Phokas, the nephew of Michael Maleinos. There we find the following statement:

Ὁ δηλωθεὶς στρατηγός, δεινὸς ὢν ὡς τὰ μάλιστα ἦθος ἀνδρὸς καὶ βλέμμα καὶ βάδισμα καὶ τὴν ἄλλην ὅλην χαρακτηρισίαι κατάστασιν, ἤρετο τὸν μέγαν τίς τε εἶη καὶ πόθεν, καὶ ὅσα ἔδει τὸν τοιοῦτον περὶ τοιοῦτων ἔρεσθαι.<sup>85</sup>

The aforementioned general, being highly capable of gaining an understanding of a person from his disposition and look and gait and from everything else about him, asked the great one (sc. Michael) who he was and from where, and whatever else such a one would ask about such things.

<sup>80</sup> The texts include the *Lives of Blaise of Amorion*, *Theodore of Stoudios* and *Nicholas of Stoudios*.

<sup>81</sup> *Life of Constantine* 20 (ed. H. DELEHAYE, *Vita Constantini*. Acta Sanctorum Novembris IV [Brussels 1925] 633F); *Life of Michael Maleinos* 22 (ed. L. PETIT, *Vie de saint Michel Maléinos, suivie du traité ascétique de Basile Maléinos*. ROC 7 [1902] 543–592, esp. 565, 5–19); *Life of Paul of Latros* 32 (ed. H. DELEHAYE, *Vita s. Pauli junioris*, in: Th. Wiegand, *Milet. Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen und Untersuchungen seit dem Jahre 1899*, III.1: *Der Latmos*. Berlin 1913, 105–135, esp. 124, 20–32).

<sup>82</sup> Such episodes are absent from the *Life of Joseph the Hymnographer* (ed. A. PAPADOPOULOS-KERAMEUS, *Monumenta graeca et latina ad historiam Photii Patriarchae spectantia* II. St. Petersburg 1901, 1–14); the *Life of John of Galatia* (ed. M. VAN ESBROECK, *La Vie de Saint Jean higoumène de Saint-Serge par Joseph le Skevophylax*. OC 80 [1996], 153–166); and the *Life of Nicephorus of Miletus* (ed. H. DELEHAYE, *Vita s. Nicephori*, in: Wiegand, *Milet*, 157–171).

<sup>83</sup> Athanasius, *Vita A* of Athanasius the Athonite (ed. J. NORET, *Vitae duae antiquae sancti Athanasii Athonitae* [CCSG 9]. Turnhout – Leuven 1982, 1–124).

<sup>84</sup> Athanasius, *Vita A* of Athanasius the Athonite 20–21 (8–12, 10–15 NORET).

<sup>85</sup> Athanasius, *Vita A* of Athanasius the Athonite 22 (12, 11–15 NORET).

The similarity between the two passages is striking. Like his uncle, Nicephorus assesses Athanasius' character by observing his appearance. This similarity is highly significant because the two men's lives differed greatly from one another. Michael Maleinos was a monk who had gone through the whole monastic curriculum and acquired a saintly reputation whereas Nicephorus still lived in the world. This suggests to the reader that despite all differences Michael's behaviour is still indistinguishable from that of a discerning layman. Presenting abbots and laymen in this fashion is not without precedent. As we have seen a close parallel is found in the Life of Euarestus. However, the author of Vita A goes much further than Euarestus' hagiographer.

This becomes obvious when we turn to an episode that describes Athanasius' activities as an abbot. In this episode we are informed about the travails of a monk of Lavra who suffered from incontinence. The monk is eventually healed by Athanasius, and this miracle seems to be the reason why the story is told, in particular since it is inserted into a series of similar accounts. Yet a closer look reveals that the author had another agenda, namely to describe how Athanasius interacted with the members of his community. We are told that out of shame the monk concealed his affliction and that it was therefore 'unknown ... to the wise physician of such things' (ἄδηλον ... τῷ σοφῷ τῶν τοιούτων ἰατρῷ).<sup>86</sup> The monk eventually became so distraught that he decided to commit suicide. However, at this point God 'touched invisibly ... the mind of the wretch' (ἀφανῶς τῶν φρενῶν ... τοῦ δυστυχοῦς ἄπτεται) and made him confess to Athanasius what he had planned to do.<sup>87</sup> Nevertheless, he was still not prepared to disclose what drove him to take such a desperate step. In order to help him Athanasius 'who was wise in these matters' (σοφῶς ἦν τὰ τοιαῦτα) enumerated a number of possible causes: 'Is it that or that ... or this?' (μή τι τοῦτό ἐστιν; ἢ τοῦτο ... ἢ τόδε).<sup>88</sup> Yet none of these guesses hit the truth, which only came out when the following happened:

Τί οὖν; ἄπτεται καὶ πάλιν τῆς τοῦτου καρδίας ἀφανῶς ὁ πλάσας αὐτήν κατὰ μόνας καὶ μόνος τῶν ἀφανῶν γνώστης, καὶ δὴ κατανυγείς καὶ βύθιόν τι καὶ πικρὸν ἀνοιμώζας ... πᾶν ἀπογυμνοῖ τὸ τοῦ πάθους μυστήριον.<sup>89</sup>

What then? He who made the heart in a separate place and alone knows what is invisible again touches his (sc. the monk's) heart in an invisible manner, and being contrite and moaning deeply and bitterly ... he reveals the whole secret of his illness.

In this episode Athanasius appears as a spiritual father who is deeply concerned with the well-being of his monks. Indeed, the hagiographer takes particular care to present the saint as a seasoned practitioner of the art of confession who knows all the techniques needed to winkle out a person's thoughts. However, at the same time there is strong emphasis on the limitations of Athanasius' powers. The saint neither knows that the monk is in trouble nor does he find out what is wrong with him when they finally have a conversation. In each case the impasse is only overcome through a divine intervention, which induces the monk to speak about his problems. The manner in which these interventions are described is highly significant. The author twice uses the adverb ἀφανῶς, and he calls God μόνος τῶν ἀφανῶν γνώστης, which is clearly a reference to the well-known statement that God alone is a 'knower of hearts' (καρδιογνώστης). This explicitly rules out that Athanasius, or any other human being, could have direct access to another person's thoughts, or even be informed about them through a divine revelation.

<sup>86</sup> Athanasius, Vita A of Athanasius the Athonite 197 (95, 3–4 Noret).

<sup>87</sup> Athanasius, Vita A of Athanasius the Athonite 197 (95, 25–26 Noret).

<sup>88</sup> Athanasius, Vita A of Athanasius the Athonite 198 (96, 35–38 Noret).

<sup>89</sup> Athanasius, Vita A of Athanasius the Athonite 199 (96, 39–44 Noret).

It is evident that the author of *Vita A* held the same views as Theosterictus of Medikion, Ignatius the Deacon and Theodore of Stoudios. This raises the question: what prompted him to follow their lead? Earlier it was suggested that in the Second Iconoclasm two factors played an important role, elite mentality and the coenobitic ideology, which both put great emphasis on conformity and moderation. Can these factors also explain the stance of the author of *Vita A*? In the text he tells us that he lived at the monastery of Panagios, which in the early eleventh century was one of the foremost coenobitic houses in the capital.<sup>90</sup> Moreover, before he became a monk he had been a member of the Constantinopolitan elite. He says about himself that he had served in the imperial administration, and the high quality of his prose shows that he had received the best education available at the time.<sup>91</sup> Thus it can be argued that we simply have a repetition of an established pattern. However, then we still need to explain why similar statements are not found in tenth-century hagiography.

In the former case the explanation may be relatively straightforward. The surviving evidence suggests that strictly coenobitic monasticism went into a decline after the end of Iconoclasm and was only resuscitated in the late tenth century.<sup>92</sup> The preference for looser forms of community life would account for the fact that the denial of supernatural powers of perception played no role in hagiographical texts from the later ninth and tenth centuries. By contrast, it is much more difficult to establish whether there was a change in elite mentality because the evidence base is so slim.

Two texts from the tenth century illustrate the spectrum of views that could be held by members of the elite. The first of these texts is a commentary on the works of Gregory of Nazianzus by the metropolitan of Caesarea, Basil Minimus. In one of his speeches Gregory claimed that like a capable ‘diviner’ (μάντις) and ‘conjecturer’ (εἰκαστής) he had deduced from the behaviour of the young Julian what a bad emperor he would become.<sup>93</sup> In his commentary Basil presents the following interpretation: ‘This would as I believe also have been found out by a diviner and a good physiognomist; ... it was, however, also expressed by the Father in his very own way and was stated in a prophetic way’ (ὁ καὶ μάντις οἶμαι καὶ ἀσφαλῆς φυσιογνώμων ἐθήρασεν ἄν ... ἐκπέφρασται δὲ πάνυ οικείως καὶ τῷ πατρὶ καὶ προφητικῶς ταῦτα διηγόρευται).<sup>94</sup> This statement shows clearly that Basil regarded clairvoyance as an integral part of sanctity, despite the fact that he was highly educated and had most likely been a member of the patriarchal clergy.<sup>95</sup> The second text is the *Life of Luke of Hellas*, a famous ascetic and wonderworker. The identity of Luke’s hagiographer is unknown but the exceptionally high quality of the prose and the sophistication of the narrative leave no doubt that he, too, was a member of the elite.<sup>96</sup> At one point he tells his audience that a state official asked Luke to identify a thief ‘because he knew that the one who had perpetrated the theft would not remain hidden from him but would be caught by his inner eyes’ (ἦδει γὰρ ὅτι μὴ λάθοι αὐτὸν ὁ τὴν κλοπὴν ἐργασάμενος ἀλλὰ τοῖς ἔνδον αὐτοῦ ἀλώσεται ὀφθαλμοῖς). When Luke arrived at the house of the official he suddenly ‘raised ... his eyes and looked at somebody’ (διάρας ... τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς καὶ προσσχὼν τινι), called

<sup>90</sup> See D. KRAUSMÜLLER, The lost first *Life of Athanasius the Athonite* and its author Anthony, abbot of the Constantinopolitan monastery of Ta Panagiou, in: *Founders and Refounders of Byzantine Monasteries*. Papers of the fifth Belfast Byzantine International Colloquium, ed. M. Mullett. Belfast 2007, 63–86.

<sup>91</sup> See NORET’s introduction to his edition, chapter four: ‘L’auteur de la Vie A, Athanase de Panagiou’, cxxx–cxlv.

<sup>92</sup> This can be seen from the discussion about asceticism. See D. KRAUSMÜLLER, *From Competition to Conformity: Saints’ Lives, Typika, and the Byzantine Monastic Discourse of the Eleventh Century*, ed. M. Lauxtermann [forthcoming].

<sup>93</sup> See above note 12.

<sup>94</sup> Basil Minimus, *Scholia in Orationem II Contra Julianum* (PG 36, 1141AB).

<sup>95</sup> On the recruitment of metropolitans cf. B. MOULET, *Évêques, Pouvoir et Société à Byzance (VIIIe–XIe siècle)*. Paris 2010, 218.

<sup>96</sup> Unfortunately, this text has not yet been studied in depth. The fact that Luke is a provincial saint says nothing about the origin of his hagiographer.

him by name and asked him why he had stolen the money. Dumbfounded, the man then confessed the theft.<sup>97</sup> At first sight it seems that the author shared the views of Basil Minimus. However, the very theatricality of the narrative bespeaks a lack of seriousness.<sup>98</sup> The author appears to be playing with traditional topoi rather than voicing a strong personal opinion.

From our analysis it is clear that the author of Vita A deviates from both these views because he not only denies the possibility of clairvoyance but is also quite serious about this matter. It is likely that he was not an isolated figure because some of the monks who spearheaded the coenobitic revival were also members of the elite.<sup>99</sup> The rules that they produced show a strong preference for conformity.<sup>100</sup> Thus one can argue that we are in the presence of a further shift in the attitudes of at least part of the elite, which resulted in a mindset that strongly resembled the mentality of ninth-century figures such as Theodore of Stoudios and Theosterictus of Medikion.

### CONCLUSION

This article has focused on the phenomenon of clairvoyance, the ability to know the thoughts of others that set holy men apart from ordinary human beings who had to make inferences from a person's outward appearance. We have seen that this phenomenon is often mentioned in Late Antique hagiographical and spiritual literature but that widely differing explanations were given in order to account for it. Some authors stressed the importance of self-purification whereas others put more emphasis on divine revelation. Yet others argued that saints used their natural powers of observation but that divine assistance prevented them from making mistakes. Finally we encounter the theory that saints see the 'true' faces of others, which are reflections of the states of their souls and therefore preclude wrong interpretations. In Late Antiquity these views existed side by side and although there were disagreements there is little sense of a sustained debate. From the late sixth century onwards, however, the situation changed radically. At that point various authors insisted that human beings can only ever read outward signs and thereby implicitly ruled out the existence of a supernatural element. This conceptual framework was attacked by others who asserted that clairvoyance was possible either through purification or through revelation. Unfortunately, the fragmentary state of the evidence no longer permits us to establish why these authors chose their particular points of view. The situation is somewhat better for the early ninth century. In their writings Theodore of Stoudios and Theosterictus of Medikion present abbots as highly effective confessors but declare that they arrive at their conclusions through the interpretation of outward signs. By contrast, the hagiographers of Peter of Atroa and Joannicius claim that their heroes are clairvoyants because they are permanently endowed with the Holy Spirit. The views that the two groups held could not have been more different. Thus it comes as no surprise that they clashed with each other in person and sniped at each other in their writings. One possible reason for the reticence of Theodore and Theosterictus is the fact that both were coenobitic monks. As such they would have been beholden to the coenobitic ideal, which stressed

<sup>97</sup> Life of Luke of Hellas 53 (ed. D. Z. SOPHIANOS, Ὁ βίος τοῦ ὁσίου Λουκᾶ τοῦ Στεριώτη. Athens 1989, 189).

<sup>98</sup> In this he resembles Michael Psellos. In a hagiographical text Psellos claims that many saints appeared to his hero, cf. Life of Nicholas of the Horaia Pege (ed. P. GAUTIER, Éloge funèbre de Nicolas de la Belle Source [BHG 2313]. *Byzantina* 6 [1974] 11–69, esp. 53, 551–562). In his philosophical writings he all but rules out the possibility of such apparitions, cf. J. GOUILLARD, Léthargie des âmes et culte des saints: un plaidoyer inédit de Jean diacre et maître. *TM* 8 (1981) 171–186, esp. 183.

<sup>99</sup> One such figure was most likely Paul, the founder of the Evergetis monastery, cf. R. JORDAN – R. MORRIS, *The Hypotyposis of the Monastery of the Theotokos Evergetis, Constantinople (11th–12th Centuries)*. Introduction, Translation and Commentary. Farnham – Burlington 2012, 9.

<sup>100</sup> This theme was particularly prominent in the Panagios Typikon, which can be reconstructed from later adaptations, cf. D. KRAUSMÜLLER, On Contents and Structure of the Panagiou Typikon: A Contribution to the Early History of 'Extended' Monastic Rules. *BZ* 106 (2013) 39–64.

conformity and was loath to attribute to individuals exceptional abilities. However, this interpretation cannot be considered sufficient since the same views are expressed in the contemporary *Life of George of Amastris*. The author of this text, Ignatius, was not a monk but a member of the lay church. Theodore, Ignatius and possibly also Theosterictus had one thing in common: they were members of the highly educated Constantinopolitan elite. As far as we can tell this elite was obsessed with social control. Thus one can argue that they would have looked with distaste at the flamboyant behaviour of holy men like Peter of Atroa and Joannicius who were provincials of lower social status and little learning. Significantly, the controversy about the images played no role in this debate. Ignatius had sympathies for the Iconoclast cause and yet held the same views as the Iconophiles Theodore and Theosterictus. After the end of the Second Iconoclasm there is very little evidence for controversy and one gets the sense that the issue had lost much of its urgency. It only resurfaces in the early eleventh century when the author of *Vita A of Athanasius the Athonite* denied this saint any supernatural powers of perception and stressed that only God could know the minds of human beings. Like Theodore and Theosterictus, the author of *Vita A* was a coenobitic monk and a member of the Constantinopolitan elite, which may explain why he shared their point of view.