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Nikephoros Gregoras' Vita of St. Michael the Synkellos

*Rewriting Techniques and Reconstruction of the Iconoclast Past
in a 14th cent. hagiographical Metaphrasis*

Abstract: Nikephoros Gregoras' metaphrasis of the Vita of St. Michael the Synkellos (*BHG* 1297), if compared with its immediate source *BHG* 1296, sheds new light on Gregoras' metaphrastic approaches and literary concepts. A comparative analysis allows to distinguish the following metaphrastic techniques introduced to meet the aesthetic demands of the learned Palaiologan audience: simplification of plot-motifs, usage of additional sources, compositional changes, psychologization, dramatization, and stylistic reworking. Reducing nonessential plot lines and eliminating secondary characters, Gregoras enriched the narration with vivid depictions of emotions, dramatic dialogues, sophisticated metaphors, and classical allusions, and thus inevitably albeit unintentionally distorted the historical memory of the iconoclast controversy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Hagiographical sources are crucially important for reconstruction of the history of the iconoclast controversy in Byzantium. Brubaker and Haldon¹ list ca. 100 texts belonging to different hagiographical subgenres that may contribute to the study of iconoclasm either directly (both casting light on isolated historical episodes and clarifying more profound institutional changes and processes) or indirectly (helping to grasp the intellectual atmosphere of the period – in case of a text composed during the iconoclast controversy but dealing with an earlier saint). The traditional historical methodology requires a thorough evaluation of sources based, among others, on a chronological principle: the closer chronologically a certain Vita is to its protagonist, the more valuable as a source of historical pieces of evidence it is considered. Consequently, the most remote sources are deemed the least trustworthy and reliable. Though the described approach may be highly productive in certain areas of study², it still inevitably ignores later metaphrasis³ in case their source-vitae are extant. Nevertheless, regardless of whether these may prove helpful in revealing the actual history of the epoch, they can positively shed light on its perception in later periods, thus clarifying the mutual processes of distortion and preservation of historical memory in Byzantium⁴.

¹ L. BRUBAKER – J. HALDON, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era (ca. 680–850): The Sources: An Annotated Survey (Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs 7)*. Aldershot 2001, 206–231.

² Cf. a brilliant application of this method by I. ŠEVČENKO, *Hagiography of the Iconoclast Period*, in: *Iconoclasm. Papers Given on the 9th Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, March 1975*, ed. A. Bryer – J. Herrin. Birmingham 1977, 113–131.

³ On the notion of metaphrasis see A.-M. TALBOT, *Old Wine in New Bottles: The Rewriting of Saints' Lives in the Palaeologan Period*, in: *The Twilight of Byzantium*, ed. S. Ćurčić – D. Mouriki. Princeton 1991, 15–26; *Metaphrasis: Redactions and Audiences in Middle Byzantine Hagiography*, ed. Ch. Høgel. Oslo 1996; CH. HØGEL, *Symeon Metaphrastes: Rewriting and Canonization*. Copenhagen 2002; M. HINTERBERGER, *Hagiographische Metaphrasen: Ein möglicher Weg der Annäherung an die Literarästhetik der frühen Palaiologenzeit*, in: *Imitatio – aemulatio – variatio. Akten des internationalen wissenschaftlichen Symposiums zur byzantinischen Sprache und Literatur, Wien, 22.–25. Oktober 2008*, hrsg. von A. Rhoby – E. Schiffer (*Veröffentlichungen zur Byzanzforschung* 21). Wien 2010, 137–151; S. A. PASCHALIDES, *Παρατηρήσεις στις Μεταφράσεις τῶν Βυζαντινῶν ἁγιολογικῶν κειμένων*, in: *En agiois: eidika themata byzantines kai metabyzantines agiologias*. Thessaloniki 2011, 75–88.

⁴ Cf. a 'rehabilitation' of the Palaiologan metaphrasis in A.-M. TALBOT, *Metaphrasis in the Early Palaiologan Period: The Miracula of Kosmas and Damian by Maximos the Deacon*, in: *Oi eroes tes orthodoxes ekklesias: Oi neoi agioi, 8os–16os aionas*, ed. E. Kountoura-Galake. Athens 2004, 227–237, here 229–230.

Further I'm going to present a philological analysis of a 14th cent. Vita in comparison with its late 9th cent. prototype. After a brief introduction of the sources I will proceed to 1) describe the main metaphrasis-techniques employed by the late hagiographer, and 2) speculate on how the late hagiographer perceived and depicted the iconoclast past of Byzantium.

THE VITAE:

1. The source-vita Βίος καὶ πολιτεία καὶ ἀγῶνες τοῦ ὁσίου πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ ὁμολογητοῦ Μιχαὴλ πρεσβυτέρου καὶ συγκέλλου γεγονότος πόλεως Ἱεροσολύμων (*BHG* 1296)⁵ was composed by an anonymous author in the 2nd half of the 9th cent.⁶ It is therefore the earliest of the sources constituting the ample dossier hagiographique⁷ of St. Michael the Synkellos (*PmbZ I* 5059) and the saintly brothers Theodoros (*PmbZ I* 7526) and Theophanes (*PmbZ I* 8093) Graptoi⁸. Vita A has enjoyed much scholarly attention over the years⁹ and has recently received an exhaustive commentary by C. Sode¹⁰.
2. The 14th cent. metaphrasis Βίος καὶ πολιτεία καὶ ἄθλησις τοῦ ὁσίου πατρὸς ἡμῶν Μιχαὴλ τοῦ Συγκέλλου (*BHG* 1297)¹¹ was composed by a prominent Byzantine intellectual, anti-hesychast polemicist and historian Nikephoros Gregoras (*PLP* 4443)¹² at the Chora monastery of which Michael the Synkellos was abbot in AD 843–846. In the final section of Vita B Gregoras constantly employs the demonstrative pronoun ἦδε referring to the monastery: ἐποπτεύεις ἄνωθεν τὴν ἱερὰν τὴνδε μάνδραν σου (Vita B 279, 2–3); εὐρῶν γὰρ σου τὴν ἱερὰν τὴνδε μάνδραν (279, 22); τὴν δ' ἱερὰν σὴν τὴνδε μάνδραν εἶς ὁμοίως περιφρουρῶν (279, 29). The text came into being between 1321 and March 1332¹³, i.e. between the completion of the restoration of the Chora carried out by Gregoras' teacher Theodoros Metochites (*PLP* 17982) and Metochites' death¹⁴ (the exact date will be discussed towards the end of the article). Unfortunately, Vita B is as a rule considered unreliable as a source of solid histor-

⁵ The Life of Michael the Synkellos. Text, translation and commentary by M. B. CUNNINGHAM (*Belfast Byzantine Texts and Translations* 1). Belfast 1991, 44–129. Hereinafter referred to as Vita A.

⁶ Most scholars follow ŠEVČENKO, *Hagiography* 116 in dating it before AD 867: BRUBAKER – HALDON, *Iconoclast Era* 221. The arguments in favor of this date are not fully convincing: C. SODE, Jerusalem – Konstantinopel – Rom: Die Viten des Michael Synkellos und der Brüder Theodoros und Theophanes Graptoi (*Altertumswissenschaftliches Kolloquium* 4). Stuttgart 2001, 146–147. The way the Filioque-controversy is presented suggests a date not earlier than the 2nd Photios' patriarchate (877–886) or even later – the early 10th cent.: *ibidem* 258; EADEM, Creating New Saints: The Case of Michael the Synkellos and Theodore and Theophanes Graptoi, in: *Oi eroes tes orthodoxes ekklesias 177–189*, here 188–189.

⁷ *BHG* 1296–1297, 1745z–1746, 1793.

⁸ According to SODE, *Creating New Saints* 188, the earliest text is *BHG* 1745z, a late 9th cent. Theodoros Graptos' Encomium by Theophanes of Caesarea.

⁹ Beginning with E. VON DOBSCHÜTZ, *Methodios und die Studiten: Strömungen und Gegenströmungen in der Hagiographie des 9. Jahrhunderts*. *BZ* 18 (1909) 41–105.

¹⁰ SODE, Jerusalem – Konstantinopel – Rom 145–258.

¹¹ F. I. ŠMIT, *Kachrié-Džami: Istorija monastyrja Chory, arhitektura mečeti, mozaiki narfikov* [*IRAİK* 11]. Sofia 1906, 260–279. Hereinafter referred to as Vita B.

¹² A list of Gregoras' hagiographical works see in Nikephoros Gregoras, *Rhomäische Geschichte (Historia Rhomaike)*. Übersetzt und erläutert von J. L. VAN DIETEN (*Bibliothek der griechischen Literatur* 4). Stuttgart 1973, I 56–58. See also M. HINTERBERGER, *Les Vies des Saints du XI^e siècle en tant que biographie historique: L'œuvre de Nicéphore Grégoras*, in: *Les Vies des Saints à Byzance: Genre littéraire ou biographie historique? Actes du II^e colloque international philologique «ER-MHNEIA»*, Paris, 6–8 juin 2002, ed. P. Odorico – P. A. Agapitos (*Dossiers Byzantins* 4). Paris 2004, 281–301; I. PARASKEVOPOULOU, *Το αγιολογικό και ομλητικό έργο του Νικηφόρου Γρηγορά (Byzantina keimena kai meletes* 59). Thessaloniki 2013.

¹³ HINTERBERGER, *Hagiographische Metaphrasen* 149.

¹⁴ On Metochites' testimonies concerning the renovation see ŠMIT, *Kachrié-Džami* 41–42; I. ŠEVČENKO, *Theodore Metochites, the Chora, and the Intellectual Trends of his Time*, in: *The Kariye Djami: Studies in the Art of the Kariye Djami and Its Intellectual Background*, ed. P. A. Underwood. Princeton 1975, 17–91; R. G. OUSTERHOUT, *The Architecture of the Kariye Camii in Istanbul (DOS 25)*. Washington, D.C. 1987, 32–36; J. M. FEATHERSTONE, *Metochites' Poems and the Chora*, in: *The Kariye Camii reconsidered*, ed. H. A. Klein – R. G. Ousterhout – B. Pitarakis. Istanbul 2011, 213–237.

ical data and is therefore deliberately neglected even by the most thorough scholars dealing with Michael the Synkellos and the brothers Graptoi¹⁵.

The first striking observation on the texts concerns their relative size: Vita A amounts ca. 70.000 characters (without spaces), whereas Vita B ca. 40.000 characters (without spaces) making the proportion 1,75. I.e. the rewriting is about 1,75 times less extensive than the original text. But these absolute figures are delusive because the proportion varies considerably from chapter to chapter. The borderline is the beginning of Michael's mission from Jerusalem described in Cap. 6 of Vita A. We leave aside the problem of historical background, dates, and underlying motives of this journey. Vita A and Vita B give different explanations¹⁶. As Sode argues¹⁷, Michael came to Constantinople in May 814 not accompanied by anyone and neither the Filioque-controversy, nor the revival of iconoclasm listed among the motives of his journey in Vita A could hardly have been the real cause of his pilgrimage¹⁸. According to Auzépy, Michael and the Graptoi brothers left Jerusalem in 813 because of a conflict with the patriarch Thomas of Jerusalem¹⁹.

If one compares the relative size of the description of events before and after Michael's departure in both texts, he will achieve the following figures:

	Vita A	Vita B	Proportion
before Michael's departure	Cap. 1–5 (44, 4 – 54, 24) ca. 9.000 characters	(260, 1 – 269, 2) ca. 17.500 characters	0,51
after Michael's departure	Cap. 6–39 (54, 25 – 128, 31) ca. 61.000 characters	(269, 3 – 279, 32) ca. 22.500 characters	2,71

In Gregoras' version the events preceding Michael's departure are described twice as more detailed than in Vita A, whereas the later events are narrated 2,7 times less amply. The inner proportion is also significant: Cap. 1–5 of Vita A comprise ca. 13% of the whole text, whereas the correspondent section in Vita B constitutes ca. 43%. General considerations suggest that rewriting the source-Vita Gregoras paid much more attention to the formative period of Michael's life (parentage, childhood, education, tonsure) than to his later achievements against iconoclasts, where he was more inclined to oppress certain details and eliminate secondary plot lines. I hope that further analysis will provide a more sophisticated explanation of this peculiar proportion and shed light on Gregoras' idea of metaphor, as well as his literary and historical principles.

2. REWRITING TECHNIQUES

A general decrease in the quantity of text in Vita B in comparison with that of Vita A results in certain omissions and simplifications.

¹⁵ SODE, Jerusalem – Konstantinopel – Rom 37; EADEM, Creating New Saints 178. Some observations on style and structure of Vita B and its relationship with Vita A may be found in TALBOT, Old Wine in New Bottles 21; EADEM, Hagiography in Late Byzantium (1204–1453), in: The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography. Vol. 1: Periods and Places, ed. S. Efthymiadis. Farnham 2011, 181; PARASKEVOPOULOU, Το αγιολογικό και ομιλητικό έργο 138–146; HINTERBERGER, Hagiographische Metaphrasen 148–150.

¹⁶ See 3. (Re-)Constructiong the iconoclast Past, below.

¹⁷ SODE, Jerusalem – Konstantinopel – Rom 187–206.

¹⁸ “Keiner der in der Vita des Michael Synkellos genannten Gründe für eine Reise des Michael (und seine Gefährten) nach Konstantinopel beziehungsweise Rom entspricht der Wahrheit” (*ibidem* 206); “Die Gründe, die die Vita für den Aufbruch Michaels (und seiner Gefährten) aus Jerusalem nennt, sind alle fiktiv” (*ibidem* 256). Cf. EADEM, Creating New Saints 184–188.

¹⁹ M.-F. AUZÉPY, De la Palestine à Constantinople (VIIIe–IXe siècles): Étienne le Sabaïte et Jean Damascène. *TM* 12 (1994) 183–218, here 209–211. CUNNINGHAM, The Life of Michael the Synkellos 12–13 accepts a date during the reign of Michael I (811–813).

Generally, the details excluded by Gregoras are primarily geographical, prosopographical, and chronological indications insignificant for the main plot line. To give but a few examples:

- the ‘Persian’ ancestry of Michael (Vita A 44, 16),
- the church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem where Michael was baptized and then appointed anagnostes (Vita A 46, 12; 46, 21; 46, 23),
- the patriarch Thomas of Jerusalem who ordained Michael and later appointed his synkellos (Vita A 50, 27; 54, 13),
- Theodoros’ and Theophanes’ age when they first came to the Laura of St. Sabas (25 and 22 years respectively) (Vita A 52, 17–18),
- the monastery of the Spoudaioi built by the patriarch Elias of Jerusalem (Vita A 54, 17–19),
- locations (Seleukeia, Diospolis) Michael passed on his journey to Constantinople (Vita A 60, 10–13),
- Chrysotriclinium as a place of audience with Leo V (Vita A 62, 16),
- the Phiale prison as a place of Michael’s first confinement (Vita A 68, 4),
- the Praitiorion prison as a place of Michael’s confinement under Theophilos (Vita A 72, 29),
- the Christmas lent as a time of God’s revelation to Michael concerning his death (Vita A 118, 12–13),
- the exact date of Michael’s death (19th December) (Vita A 127, 10)
- relics in the Chora monastery (of St. Theophanes Confessor, the patriarch Germanos of Constantinople, martyr Babylas), the church of the martyr Anthimos as a part of the Chora complex (Vita A 124, 16–126, 9)²⁰.

These omissions are easily explained. It will be remembered that Gregoras intended his work to be read by highly educated Constantinopolitan audience that had no particular interest in e.g. topographical accuracy in describing Jerusalem. The exact names of the halls within the Great Palace (in decay during the Palaiologan period) were also of minor interest. Neither could Gregoras ignore the changes that the Chora had undergone since the mid–9th cent. Indicative for Gregoras’ approach is how he treated Cap. 37 of Vita A (Michael’s final prayers at the Chora). He found this chapter to be full of outdated architectural and historical data: during the years of decay, the monastery lost the relics of St. Babylas²¹ (if there actually ever were any²²) and of St. Germanos (transferred to Bort-les-Organes in France after 1204)²³. Instead of modernizing (replacing the relics mentioned in Vita A with those present in the early 14th cent.) or inserting explanatory historical remarks (to account for the discrepancy between the data provided by Vita A and the actual state of affairs)²⁴, Gregoras chose to omit the chapter completely – he made Michael die immediately after his departure from the imperial palace where he had bidden farewell to the empress Theodora and her son Michael III²⁵.

²⁰ Cf. a list of omissions in PARASKEVOPOULOU, Το αγιολογικό και ομιλητικό έργο 143–144.

²¹ ŠMIT, Kachrić-Džami 34.

²² R. JANIN, Les églises et les monastères [de Constantinople] (*La géographie ecclésiastique de l’Empire Byzantin* 1/3). Paris ²1969, 536.

²³ *PmbZ* I 2298; D. STEIN, Germanos I. (715–730) in: *Die Patriarchen der ikonoklastischen Zeit: Germanos I. – Methodios I. (715–847)*, ed. R.-J. Lilie (*Berliner Byzantinistische Studien* 5). Frankfurt/M. – Berlin – Bern 1999, 5–21, here 16. These relics are also mentioned by the anonymous hagiographer in Cap. 28–29 (Vita A 108, 23–27), this reference is omitted by Gregoras as well.

²⁴ Such a technique was employed by Gregoras in the Vita of the empress Theophano (*BHG* 1795) composed in late 1341 / early 1342 or late 1346 / early 1347: HINTERBERGER, Les Vies des Saints 289–290; PARASKEVOPOULOU, Το αγιολογικό και ομιλητικό έργο 95–96.

²⁵ Cf. a similar method employed by Maximos the Deacon in his version of the Miracula of St. Kosmas and Damianos: TALBOT, Metaphrasis in the Early Palaiologan Period 232.

Such minor omissions are more frequent within the introductory part of Vita B. Subsequently Gregoras omits whole chapters: Vita B lacks correspondent sections to Cap. 17–24 and Cap. 29–31 of Vita A (74, 21–100, 4; 108, 25–114, 21). As a result, the famous story about the Graptoi's branding with iconoclast verses is completely excluded from Gregoras' narrative. Gregoras could not fail to realize that his source was not a common Vita praising one protagonist saint, but rather a proto-Vita able to develop either in Michael's, or in Graptoi's Vita. Consequently, he had to separate and exclude their plot line closely intertwined with that of Michael. Having introduced them briefly in the opening sections (Vita B 267, 18–268, 19), henceforth he thoroughly eliminated almost every mention of their activities. Neither did Gregoras ever mention St. Ioannikios the Great who, at least according to Vita A, played an important role in the election of the first orthodox patriarch Methodios (Vita A 102, 19–104, 12).

The author of Vita A has no particular interest in psychological characteristics and emotions of his heroes: his comments are scant and even Michael is portrayed only with hagiographical clichés.

Gregoras, on the contrary, is always ready to provide a convincing psychological motivation for whatever step taken by his heroes. E.g. Gregoras notes that, adopting a more harsh iconoclast policy in comparison with that of his predecessor Michael II, the emperor Theophilos “criticized his great neglect and coldness in regard to the sacred” (πολλὴν ἐκείνου καταγνοῦς ἀμέλειαν καὶ περὶ τὸ σέβας ψυχρότητα: Vita B 274, 4–5).

Gregoras is deeply concerned with his heroes' emotions. In Cap. 34 (Michael foretells his approaching death) the anonymous author of Vita A simply states that Michael's disciples “were all filled with grief and many tears, as they could not bear their state of orphanhood” (λύπης ἐπληρώθησαν πάντες καὶ δακρύων πολλῶν, τὴν ὀρφανίαν αὐτῶν μὴ φέροντες: Vita A 120, 9–10²⁶). Gregoras uses this scene not only to exercise in rhetoric, but also to provide a theoretical observation on human nature:

Ἐκεῖνοι δὲ φορητὸν οὐκ ἔχοντες οὐδαμῶς τὸ τῆς ζημίας ἠγήσασθαι, κλαυθμοῖς, ὡς εἶχον καὶ θρήνοις ἐκόπτοντο καὶ ἠύχοντο τὰ τοῦ Νεῖλου ρέυματα δακρύων αὐτοῖς, εἰ οἷόν τε, γενέσθαι φορὰν, ἴν' οὕτω δυνηθεῖεν ἴσως ἐξιῶσαι τῷ μεγέθει τοῦ πάθους τὸν θρήνον. Σιγᾶν δὲ σφόδρα παραινοῦντος τοῦ ἀγίου καὶ τὸ δάκρυον δῆθεν ἀναστέλλειν ἐθέλοντος, μᾶλλον ἐκεῖνοι πρὸς μείζους τὰς ἀνίας ἀνεφλέγοντο: πάσχει γὰρ παραπλήσια τῷ τὴν ἐκπνοὴν ἐπισχεθέντι παρ' ὀτουοῦν, εἴ τις τὴν τοῦ κλαυθμοῦ φορὰν κωλύμασιν ἀβουλήτοις ἀνακόπτοιτο (Vita B 276, 22–28).

Completely unable to cope with their loss, [the monks], as they were, began to weep and lament praying that the streams of the Nile might transform, if possible, into a flow of their tears and thus, perhaps, make the lament equal to the magnitude of their grief. As the saint much urged them to be quiet and wanted, so to say, to restrain the tear, they sank into a bitter sadness: in fact, if an unwanted obstacle restrains one's flow of tears, he suffers the same as one who is prevented by somebody to breathe out.

Every brief remark of the earlier hagiographer concerning Michael's feelings transforms into a detailed psychological sketch. After Michael's father's death the saint had to take care of his family. In this regard the author of Vita A says only that “Michael was greatly concerned about how he might provide for his mother and his sisters” (ἦν αὐτῷ οὐ μικρὰ φροντίς τὸ πῶς διοικήσῃ τὴν αὐτοῦ μητέρα καὶ τὰς αὐτοῦ ἀδελφάς: Vita A 48, 13–14). Gregoras' version is more rich in details:

Οὐκοῦν ἀλλ' ἐν τούτοις χρεῖαν μὲν τῇ μητρὶ, ὀρφανίαν δὲ ταῖς ἀδελφαῖς ἄωρον ἐπήνεγκε φθάσας ὁ θάνατος, αὐτῷ δὲ διαδοχὴν οἰκίας καὶ φροντίδων καὶ περισπασμῶν βιωτικῶν.

²⁶ Here and below I follow the translation of Vita A by M. B. Cunningham.

Ἄλλὰ τί ἔδει τότε ποιεῖν τὸν γενναῖον πρὸς οὕτως ἀήθη καὶ ἀπροσδόκητον συμφορῶν ἔφοδον, σφόδρα ἐναντιουμένην τῷ θείῳ ἐκείνου σκοπῷ; Ἦσχαλλεν, ἐδυσφόρει, πολὺς ἦν πρὸς ἀνίας. Ἐδαπάνη τούτων τὸ συμβᾶν καὶ ὑπώρυπτεν αὐτῷ τοὺς θεμελίους τῆς καλῆς ἀναβάσεως, ἣν ἀνέβαινε τῇ τῶν ἐντολῶν πρακτικῇ. Οὐδὲ γὰρ ὅτι μὴ τέλειον ἀπετάξατο, οὐδ' ὅτι μὴ ἐν ἐρήμοις διέτριβεν, ἤδη καὶ κόσμῳ προσετέθηκε· οὐδὲ γὰρ εἴκουσιν αἱ γνώμαι ταῖς σωματικαῖς περιγραφαῖς ἀεὶ. Ἄλλὰ σῶματι μὲν ὠμίλει θορύβοις, τὴν δὲ γνώμην ζῆλος ἐρημίας κατεβίβρωσκε καὶ ἀναχωρήσεως ἀνθεῖλκον ἔρωτες (Vita B 263, 34 – 264, 8).

But at that time the death came and brought widowhood to his mother, untimely orphanhood to his sisters, and to him – inheritance of the house, worries, and worldly distractions. What indeed had the righteous man to do then, facing such unfamiliar and unexpected attack of misfortunes that contradicted greatly with his divine intention? He was distressed, vexed, and much troubled. What had happened gnawed at him and undermined the foundations of his pious ascension that he was accomplishing by keeping the commandments. Not only didn't he fully retire, not only didn't he live in a desert, but he had even more clung to the world. Indeed, our feelings not always yield to physical circumstances. His body was plunged into commotions, but a passion for a desert and a desire to become a hermit were consuming his soul.

Writing about Michael's childhood and initial decision to devote himself to God, Gregoras makes use of a judicial metaphor and describes his hero's ethical choice as a product of logical reasoning and purely intellectual procedures. When Michael came of age when “the mind is already shaping” (τὰ τῆς διανοίας ἤδη πῆγνυται) and one has to choose between what is good and what is evil, the boy

... δικαστήριον ἴσθησι λογισμῶν καὶ τὸν ἐν ἀκμαζούσῃ τῇ ἡλικίᾳ πολὺν ἑαυτοῦ νοῦν καθάπερ τινὰ δικαστὴν προβάλλεται καὶ τούτῳ πᾶσαν τὴν τῶν πραγμάτων κρίσιν ἐπιτρέπει καὶ διαιρήσας σοφῶς καὶ ἐπιστημόνως συνορᾷ καὶ ἰδίᾳ καθ' ἕκαστα, καὶ κοινῇ πρὸς ἄλληλα· ἐπιστατεῖ, πολυπραγμονεῖ· τί μὲν εἰσὶ, τί δὲ ἔσονται διερευνᾷ, καὶ ὅθεν τὰ τῆς συμπήξεως καὶ πῆ τὰ τοῦ τέλους (Vita B 263, 15–19).

... summoned his thoughts to the court and appointed his mind – it was as of a gray-haired man, although he was in the prime of life – to be a judge and entrusted it with every decision. Having made a wise and prudent analysis, he examines every single object separately and all objects at once in their mutual relationship. He observes from above, makes inquiries and poses questions: what does exist now? what will come into being in future? where did the universe come from? where will it go in the end?

This intellectualistic approach in Vita B, however, goes alongside with a close attention to the emotional side of human relationships. Gregoras' main concern is *φιλία* (friendship). Describing the severities of the Praitiorion prison where Michael was confined during the reign of Theophilus, the author of Vita A mentions that the guard didn't allow anyone to talk to Michael or assist him in his bodily needs (Vita A 72, 30 – 74, 3). Gregoras stresses that this was the most severe hardship:

Τὸ πάντων δ' ἔσχατον, ὅτι καὶ πᾶσαν αὐτῷ προσαγορείαν ἀπέκλεισαν οὐτινοσοῦν, φθονήσαντος καὶ τῆς ἐντεῦθεν παραμυθίας τοῦ βασιλέως τῷ μάρτυρι· φέρει γὰρ οὐ μικρὰν τινα παραψυχὴν ἐν τοῖς τοιούτοις τῷ πάσχοντι καὶ παρουσία φίλων, τῇ συλλαλίᾳ καθάπερ ὕδατι τὴν τῆς ὀδύνης φλόγῳσιν κατασβεννύουσα (Vita B 274, 20–24).

The worst of all was that he was deprived of every kind of communication with whomsoever, as the emperor was greedy of the martyr to have even this consolation. Indeed, the presence of friends in such circumstances brings to a sufferer considerable comfort because a conversation extinguishes the fire of misery like water.

A good example of how Gregoras understands *φιλία* presents a close friendship between Michael and the patriarch Methodios. In the earlier hagiographer's interpretation the news of Michael's approaching death made Methodios sad, but didn't cause deep sorrow: the patriarch "was filled with grief, for he greatly loved and revered the blessed man" (Vita A 122, 9–10). In Gregoras' description this blow was "mightier than any sword" (ξίφους παντός χαλεπωτέραν), as the souls of the saints "imprinted into themselves a great love towards each other" (πολὺν ἑκάτερα τὸν πόθον ἀλλήλων εἰς ἑαυτὰς ἀναμαζάμεναι):

Αἰφνίδιος ὁ τοῦ χωρισμοῦ καιρὸς ἐπελθὼν καθάπερ τις θύελλα ῥήξιν ἐνεποίει βαρείαν καί, ἴν' εἶπω, τομὴν δύο πραγμάτων εἰς ἓν ἅπαξ συνελθόντων εἶδος καὶ ἄρμοσθέντων καινῇ τιμῇ συνελεύσει καὶ ἁρμονίᾳ τοῦ πνεύματος (Vita B 277, 7–10).

The moment of parting came unexpected: like a tempest, it brought terrible destruction and, so to say, split into two parts what had once been brought into unity and arranged by an unheard connection and spiritual bond.

Writing about everyone's grief because of Michael's approaching death, Gregoras inserts one more theoretical reflection on the human nature:

Τὸ γὰρ ποθούμενον τοιάνδε τινὰ ἔχει τὴν σχέσιν πρὸς τὸ ποθοῦν· ἂν μὲν παρῆ, δίδωσιν ἀπόλαυσιν καὶ ῥαστώνην, ὅσῃν εἰκός, τῷ ποθοῦντι· ἂν δὲ μὴ παρῆ μὲν, μένη δ' ὅμως ἐν ἐλπίσιν ἢ αὐτοῦ παρουσία, ψυχαγωγεῖ μὲν πως καὶ οὕτω, πλὴν μετριῶς, ταλαντευομένου τοῦ παθητικοῦ τῆς ψυχῆς τῷ ἀμφιβόλῳ τοῦ πράγματος, εἰ ἐπιτύχοι τῆς ἐφέσεως καὶ εἰ μή, καὶ νῦν μὲν πρὸς εὐθυμίας, νῦν δὲ πρὸς ἀνίας ῥέποντος· ἂν δὲ τελέως ἀπ' ἐλπίδος γίνηται, ὅλους εὐθὺς ἀναφλέγει πυρσοὺς λύπης καὶ ὅλα καρδίας ἐγείρει κέντρα (Vita B 278, 1–7).

The desired has the following relation towards the desiring: if present, it brings due delight and pleasure; if absent but its coming is still hoped, it reassures to some extent, albeit weakly, as the emotional part of the soul resides in the uncertainty whether it will achieve it or not, and alternately inclines towards joy or sadness; but if there is no hope at all, it kindles all fires of sorrow at once and stimulates all emotions of the heart.

It is evident that Gregoras' techniques of *schematization* and *psychologization* are mutually complementary. While the earlier hagiographer cared about the reliability of his text and tried to recall every possible detail – no matter how relevant for the narrative as a whole it was (this approach resulted in various inner contradictions within Vita A), – Gregoras was more careful and selective in portraying his heroes. He was hardly concerned with their biographical data and allowed himself to omit certain names, toponyms, dates, and other minutiae replacing them with (occasionally pseudoscientific²⁷) descriptions of the heroes' emotional state and way of reasoning. The opening chapters dealing with Michael's birth, childhood, and education are the most telling. If one evaluates them on the basis of factual information provided, Gregoras, in comparison with the anonymous author of Vita A, tells his audience almost nothing. On the other hand, regarding the protagonist's character, views, and patterns of thinking, Michael as a reader sees him in Cap. 6 of Vita A as a thing-in-itself without any inner development. Gregoras' Michael is completely different: to the time of his departure from Jerusalem, the reader has already lived through his psychological crises and witnessed him make several hard ethical decisions²⁸.

²⁷ HINTERBERGER, *Hagiographische Metaphrasen* 150.

²⁸ Vita B 263, 12–27; 263, 34 – 264, 14; 266, 1–6; 266, 27–28.

It is noteworthy that this tendency (to give priority to one's inner motivations and emotional state rather than to his actions) manifests itself in other Vitae composed by Gregoras. This is the case of the Vita of the empress Theophano where the author explicitly states that a hagiographer "should pay more attention to the intentions rather than to the deeds" (οὐ γὰρ τοσοῦτον τοῖς πεπραγμένοις, ὅσον ταῖς προαιρέσεσι προσέχειν)²⁹. Being a specimen of Gregoras' early hagiographical writing, Vita B lacks such downright statements about the author's literary principles³⁰, but this must not lead us to the conclusion that to the time of composition of Vita B Gregoras had not yet developed such principles at all.

Another way of increasing the quantity of text is the most evident technique – a rhetorization. The stylistic level of the early texts subject to metaphrasis couldn't meet the expectations of a learned Palaiologan audience, consequently metaphraseis were adorned with classical allusions and sophisticated metaphors. As for the first, in Vita B Gregoras quotes or paraphrases Plato's "Laws", Euripides' "The Phoenician Women" and "Hippolytus"³¹, and Pindar's 6th "Olympian ode"³². Gregoras' imagery is quite ordinary (saints as athletes³³, a sea of mundane unrest and the fear of God as an anchor³⁴, brethren of a monastery as a flock and an abbot as a shepherd³⁵, a saint as a warrior³⁶), but in comparison with Vita A the metaphoric periods are much more extensive and elaborate. To give but a few examples:

1. Ἐξέσται γὰρ καὶ αὐτοῖς, κατὰ τοὺς ζωγράφους, συμμιγνύντας καὶ κεραυνύντας τὰ ἑαυτῶν κατὰ δύναμιν ἢθη πρὸς τὸ βέλτιστον, ὡς ἐξ ἀρχετύπου γραφῆς πάνυ τοι εὐφυῶς ἡσηκμένης, ταῖς ἑαυτῶν ἐγχαράττειν ψυχαῖς ἀκιβδήλους τῆς ἀρετῆς τὰς εἰκόνας καὶ φαύλων ἔξεων ἀβαφεῖς τὸ παράπαν καὶ ἀμιγεῖς (Vita B 261, 23–27).

Indeed, they (*scil.* the pious readers of the Vita) will also be able, like painters, combining and mixing their own features in a better way, as best they can, – as if looking at an ingeniously painted prototype picture – to impress into their souls the unfeigned images of virtue, not at all mixed and mingled with ignoble strivings³⁷.

2. ...καὶ ὡςπερ τις λιπαρὰ γῆ τὸν θεῖον ἐκείνον ἐδέχετο σπόρον, ὃν ὁ εὐαγγελικὸς ἐκείνος σπορευὺς σπεῖρειν ἐξῆλθε. Τὸν γε μὴν ῥέοντα καὶ μὴ μένοντα πλοῦτον αὐτῆς, ζιζανίου λόγον ἐπέχοντα πρὸς

²⁹ Quoted after HINTERBERGER, *Les Vies des Saints* 285. The discussion of this approach (possible references to Plutarch and similar techniques in Gregoras' historical writing) see *ibidem* 285–286.

³⁰ We may note en passant that, in comparison with Vita B, in later Vitae Gregoras is more willing to name his patrons-addressees (*ibidem* 283–284, 294–295) and eagerly criticizes his predecessors (IDEM, *Die Konstantinsvita im späten Byzanz: Vorläufige Ergebnisse einer Gegenüberstellung palaiologenzzeitlicher Metaphrasen. Graeco-latina Brunensia* 16/2 [2011] 41–59, here 54).

³¹ PARASKEVOPOULOU, *Το αγιολογικό και ομιλητικό έργο* 170–171.

³² Cf.: ἀκίνδυνοι δ' ἀρεταὶ οὔτε παρ' ἀνδράσιν οὔτ' ἐν ναυσὶ κοίλαις τίμιαι (Pindar, *Olympian ode VI*, 9–11) and ἀκίνδυνοι γάρ, φησιν, ἀρεταὶ παρ' οὐδενὶ τίμιαι (Vita B 261, 32–33).

³³ Vita B 260, 13–261, 2; 276, 6–12. Gregoras appreciated this metaphor and repeated almost *verbatim* the first passage in the Logos on St. Demetrios, Georgios and Theodoros: I. PARASKEVOPOULOU, *An Unpublished Discourse of Nikephoros Gregoras on Saints Demetrios, George and Theodore (BHG 2427): A Critical Edition. Parekbolai* 2 (2012) 49–76, here 60 *in apparatus*. A distinguishing feature of Gregoras' style is that he constantly reuses certain expressions in compositions belonging to different genres and periods: HINTERBERGER, *Die Konstantinsvita* 55.

³⁴ Vita B 263, 29–33.

³⁵ Vita B 266, 14–17.

³⁶ Vita B 269, 32–35.

³⁷ Cf. Vita B 263, 7–11. Note a surprising proximity to the iconoclast 'ethical doctrine' (saints' virtues are their 'living icons'). According to ŠEVČENKO, *Hagiography* 120–121, such imagery should be rather expected in a 'non-Iconodule' (if not iconoclast) Vita.

τὸν πνευματικόν τε καὶ ἀληθῆ σῖτον, αὐτῆ, σοφῶς διοικονομήσασα, πρὸς ἀγαθοῦ σπέρματος μετενήνοχε φύσιν εἰς πενήτων γαστέρας διασκορπίσασα, καθάπερ ἀρότρῳ τῷ λιμῷ τευνομένας εἰς βάθος ... (Vita B 264, 27–32).

... like fruitful soil, [Michael's mother] took in the divine seed that the evangelical sower went out to sow (Luke 8:5). As for her transient and ephemeral wealth interfering like a weed with the true spiritual crop, she took a wise step and converted it into a good seed scattering it among the paupers' stomachs deeply cut by the plow of hunger ...

A particular method of psychologization is *dramatization*³⁸ employed by Gregoras in the scene of Michael's encounter with the iconoclast emperor Leo V. According to Vita A (62, 14–28), Michael and his disciples were accepted by Leo V in the Chrysotriclinium in presence of the senate. They were interrogated about the purpose of their arrival and answered that they were acting on behalf of the patriarch Thomas of Jerusalem and had come to deliver a letter of admonition to the emperor³⁹. Then Michael read out the letter containing certain theological arguments in favor of icon veneration (Vita A 64, 1 – 66, 30), but the emperor didn't repent. On the contrary, he anathematized Thomas of Jerusalem and his synod, commanded to beat the saints, and threw them into the Phiale prison (Vita A 68, 1–13). The anonymous hagiographer organizes this episode as a narration framing an epenthetic fragment. In this epenthetic section the protagonist (Michael) reproduces a monologue composed by another character and doesn't give his interlocutor (Leo V) any opportunity to intervene. Thus, with no psychological details in the narrative part either, the scene as a whole is deprived of dramatic tension.

Gregoras – aiming to transform this encounter into a turning point of the whole story – applies a completely different literary technique. He doesn't mention any letter and makes Michael engage in a proper theological debate with Leo V⁴⁰. The *mise-en-scène* reminds of the *topoi* of early *Passiones*⁴¹: while in Vita A Michael and his companions “come into” (εἰσελθόντες) the Palace, in Vita B Michael “is brought” (ἄγεται) by the guardians; Leo V is sitting as a judge “on a high tribune” (ἐφ' ὑψηλοῦ βήματος); Michael comes “ready to contend for a prize for the sake of piety” (τὸν τῆς εὐσεβείας ἀγωνιούμενος ἄθλον). Apparently, the audience is depicted not as a diplomatic meeting, but as a trial.

Having presented the *dramatis personae* (Vita B 270, 18–23), Gregoras proceeds to rehearse their dialogue. Leo V and Michael not only exchange theological arguments, but also flatter (271, 3–7), threaten (272, 18–20) and insult each other. Michael claims that his adversary doesn't understand the sayings of the prophets he is quoting and compares him with those who “due to a stomach malfunction, get harm from food able to bring them health of humors” (τὴν τῶν τροφῶν εὐχυμίαν εἰς τοῦναντίον παρέτρεψαν στομάχου φαυλότητι: 271, 23–24). Gregoras notices the tiniest shades of his heroes' emotions and makes interesting physiognomic remarks:

³⁸ Similar techniques (preference towards direct speech, a dialogue that “se lit comme une scène théâtrale” etc.) in Gregoras' Vita of Theophano are explained by HINTERBERGER, *Les Vies des Saints* 288–289 as *ethopoia*.

³⁹ SODE, *Jerusalem – Konstantinopel – Rom* 213 doubts the authenticity of the letter.

⁴⁰ A similar theological discussion between a saint and Leo V may be found in Cap. 40–47 of the Vita of the patriarch Nikephoros of Constantinople: *Nicephori archiepiscopi Constantinopolitani Opuscula historica*, ed. C. DE BOOR. Leipzig 1880, 169–188.

⁴¹ The author of the Vita of St. Stephanos the Younger was the first to apply a *Passio*-scheme to a Vita of a contemporary (i.e. living under the rule of a Christian emperor) saint: M.-F. AUZÉPY, *L'hagiographie et l'iconoclasme Byzantin: Le cas de la Vie d'Étienne le Jeune (Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs 5)*. Aldershot – Brookfield 1999, 25–29. This Vita served as a source of inspiration for many 9th cent. hagiographers, including the anonymous author of Vita A (*ibidem* 191–197).

Ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς τόπον διδοὺς τῷ θυμῷ, ἐπέιχεν ἔτι τὴν ἐπεξέλευσιν, ἴσως τι προσδοκῶν ἀνύσειν ὦν ἐπὶ νοὺν εἶχεν. Ὑπέφαινε δὲ ὁμῶς ἐπὶ τῆς ὄψεως τὰ τοῦ θυμοῦ σύμβολα. Καὶ ἠπαλύνοντο μὲν οἱ λόγοι αὐτοῦ ὑπὲρ ἔλαιον, ἰὸς δ' ἀσπίδων ὑπὸ τὰ χεῖλη αὐτοῦ ἦν ὑφεδρεῦων (Vita B 272, 4–7).

The emperor allowed himself to get angry, but for the time being postponed the punishment, perhaps expecting to achieve something he had in his mind. Nevertheless, the signs of rage were reflecting on his face. And the words of his mouth were smoother than butter (Psalms 55:21), but the poison of asps was hiding under his lips (Romans 3:13).

It is noteworthy that the author of Vita A doesn't completely exclude from his story such essential structural element of Passio as dramatic agon. In fact, Cap. 19–23 (Graptoi's resistance to the emperor Theophilos) meet all necessary criteria to be considered an exemplary Passio: they include a formal questioning (Vita A 84, 1–2; 84, 16–18), a beating (84, 3–11; 90, 8–24), a comparison with the Christ's trial (84, 13–14), a temptation (90, 16–31), a humiliation (94, 7–11). This agon, however, concerns the Graptoi brothers, but not the formal protagonist (Michael remains in prison and is not interrogated by Theophilos). As a result, the compositional structure of Vita A seems loose and unbalanced: as the main character doesn't take part in the most dramatic and tense episode, the reader can't grasp where the climax of the narrative is intended to be. Gregoras couldn't tolerate such carelessness and preferred to combine several episodes: the participants (Michael and Leo V) and the chronology (several days after the arrival from Jerusalem) of the audience were taken from Cap. 10–11 of Vita A; specific arguments used by Leo V were borrowed from Cap. 13⁴²; the dramatic effects and the atmosphere of agon remind of Cap. 19–23.

Composing Vita B, Gregoras from time to time abandons Vita A and turns to complementary sources. This technique is twofold: Gregoras either makes an accurate reference to a certain source he is familiar with, without actually quoting or paraphrasing it, or on the contrary, gives additional pieces of information absent in Vita A without clearly indicating their provenance.

The introductory chapter on Theodoros and Theophanes Graptoi may serve as an example of the first method: Gregoras explicitly states that he was familiar with other texts of their dossier. He says that he won't pursue the subject of their spiritual achievements because “one can learn about them from a more detailed account others have composed” (ἔξεστι μανθάνειν ἐξ ὧν πλατυκώτερον εἰρήκασιν ἕτεροι: Vita B 268, 19). By this he demonstrates that he is well acquainted with their story and could have easily supplied the narrative with further details, but deliberately chooses not to do so, intending to devote the whole Vita to Michael only. This “more detailed account” can be either *BHG* 1745z (a late 9th cent. Encomium of Theodoros Graptos by Theophanes of Caesarea⁴³), or *BHG* 1746 (a 10th cent. Metaphrastic Vita of Theodoros Graptos⁴⁴), or *BHG* 1793 (a late 13th cent. Vita of the Brothers Graptoi by Theodora Raoulaina⁴⁵). These texts have a very complicated mutual relationship:

⁴² An unnamed iconoclast (Vita A 68, 26–70, 4) and Leo V in Gregoras' version (Vita B 271, 15–19) both claim that icons are idols and quote Psalms 115:5: They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not.

⁴³ J. M. FEATHERSTONE, The Praise of Theodore Graptos by Theophanes of Caesarea. *AnBoll* 98 (1980) 93–150, here 104–150. The author is identified with Theophanes attested as bishop of Caesarea in 886 (*ibidem* 94–97) or between 880 and 902/903 (SODE, Jerusalem – Konstantinopel – Rom 52).

⁴⁴ Symeon Metaphrastes, Sancti patris nostri et confessoris Theodori Grapti vita et conversatio. *PG* 116, 653–684. An attempt to date this Vita to the mid 9th cent. (AUZÉPY, De la Palestine à Constantinople 207, n. 175) is not convincing (SODE, Jerusalem – Konstantinopel – Rom 95–96).

⁴⁵ A. PAPAPOPOULOS-KERAMEUS, Ἀνάλεκτα Ἱεροσολυμιτικῆς Σταχυολογίας, St. Petersburg 1897, IV 185–223. This Vita was composed by Theodora (exiled by Michael VIII Palaiologos because of her antiunionist position) between 1277 and 1282: F. RIZZO NERVO, Teodora Raoulaina: Tra agiografia e politica, in: ΣΥΝΔΕΣΜΟΣ. Studi in onore di Rosario Anastasi. Catania 1991, I 147–161, here 152; HINTERBERGER, Hagiographische Metaphrasen 139–141; TALBOT, Hagiography in Late Byzantium 177.

e. g., Theodora Raoulaina presumably made use of both Metaphrastic and Theophanes' versions⁴⁶. Consequently, it's hardly possible to determine precisely which text Gregoras is referring here to.

In all probability, he speaks of the Metaphrastic redaction. In Cap. 32 (= 3rd Dogmatical oration) of the "Historia Rhomaïke" composed in Summer/Autumn 1356⁴⁷, Gregoras once again remembers the Graptoi brothers, quotes Symeon's Vita⁴⁸ and mentions its author:

... καὶ πρῶτος μὲν ὁ πάσας σχεδὸν τὰς τῶν ἐξόχων ἁγίων μνήμας δι' αἰῶνος ἀκοαῖς εὐσεβῶν παραπέμψας, καὶ πᾶσαν πανήγυριν τοῖς οἰκειοῖς λόγοις κοσμήσας τε καὶ πνευματικῆς ἐμπεπληκῶς εὐφροσύνης, μεταφραστῆς Συμεῶν ἐκεῖνα λεγέτω ...⁴⁹

... let first speak Symeon Metaphrastes who provided forever the ears of the pious with memories of nearly all prominent saints and by suitable orations adorned and filled with spiritual glee every feast ...

Beyond any doubt, Gregoras was well acquainted with certain Symeon's works much earlier. In 1340s he praised him in the Vita of Theophano⁵⁰, while in the Logos on St. Merkourios (*BHG* 1277, ca. 1322–1327, i.e. roughly contemporary with Vita B) he used as primary sources not only the Metaphrastic version of Merkourios' Vita (*BHG* 1276), but also Symeon's Passio of St. Artemios (*BHG* 172)⁵¹.

On the other hand, Gregoras' knowledge of Raoulaina's biography seems to be very poor. In *Historia Rhomaïke* he mentions her only twice⁵², in both cases paraphrasing Georgios Pachymeres⁵³, and seems to know nothing of her literary activity, except of the fact that she was "fond of learning" (φιλόλογος) and enjoyed greatly the company of the former patriarch Gregorios II Kyprios after his abdication in 1289. Still, there is certain proximity between Vita B and the Raoulaina's version limited to similar expressions⁵⁴ and usage of the same proverbs⁵⁵.

It seems plausible also that the Metaphrastic version served as a source for the chapter of Vita B dealing with the murder of Leo V in December 820 and the subsequent ascension of Michael II. In comparison with the description of events in Vita A, Gregoras adds two details. First, he specifies the way Leo V died: he was slaughtered "by a bloodthirsty sword" (μιαιφονίας μαχαίρα: Vita B 273, 11), while the earlier hagiographer says only that "the tyrant had died and passed into eternal punishment" (Vita A 72, 9). Second, in Gregoras' interpretation, the new emperor was a moderate iconoclast and "didn't rage in the same manner against the pious, but let the things remain as he had found them" (οὐχ ὁμοίως καὶ κατὰ τῶν εὐσεβούντων ἐμαίνετο, ἀλλ', ὡς εὔρε τέως τὰ πράγματα ἔχοντα, τούτοις

⁴⁶ RIZZO NERVO, Teodora Raoulaina 154–155; HINTERBERGER, Hagiographische Metaphrasen 139.

⁴⁷ Nikephoros Gregoras, Rhomäische Geschichte (*Historia Rhomaïke*). Übersetzt und erläutert von Fr. TINNEFELD (*Bibliothek der griechischen Literatur* 66). Stuttgart 2007, VI 86.

⁴⁸ For textual parallels see *ibidem* VI 95–96.

⁴⁹ Gregoras, *Historia* XXXII 15 (ed. I. BEKKER, Nicephori Gregorae Byzantina historia [*CSHB* 27]. Bonn 1855, III 384, 20 – 385, 2).

⁵⁰ E. KURTZ, Zwei griechische Texte über die Hl. Theophano, die Gemahlin Kaisers Leo VI (*Zapiski Imperatorskoj Akademii Nauk* VIII/3.2). St. Petersburg 1898, 40, 34 – 41, 2.

⁵¹ PARASKEVOPOULOU, Το αγιολογικό και ομιλητικό έργο 128–137.

⁵² Gregoras, *Historia* VI 1, VI 4 (ed. L. SCHOPEN, Nicephori Gregorae Byzantina historia [*CSHB* 25]. Bonn 1829, I 167, 17–21, 178, 21–24).

⁵³ Pachymeres VII 31, VIII 10 (ed. A. FAILLER, Georges Pachymères, Relations historiques [*CFHB* 24/3]. Paris 1999, III 97, 32–99, 8, 151, 7–10). On Gregoras' dependence on Pachymeres in the first chapters of "Historia Rhomaïke" see VAN DIETEN, Nikephoros Gregoras I 41–42.

⁵⁴ Cf. Vita B 270, 15–16 and Theodora Raoulaina 20 (205, 24–27 PAPAPOPOULOS-KERAMEUS).

⁵⁵ Speaking of Michael's early years, both Gregoras and Raoulaina employ the expression "δαλὸς πρὸς τὸ... / εἰς πῦρ": Vita B 262, 29 = Theodora Raoulaina 4 (189, 2 PAPAPOPOULOS-KERAMEUS).

οὕτω καὶ αὐτὸς ἐχρήτο: Vita B 273, 14–15), without any attempts to convince either side of the conflict. The earlier author believed that Michael II was “full of the same heretical and God-opposing opinion” (Vita A 72, 9) as the previous emperor. The Metaphrastic version and the Encomium contain both elements⁵⁶, but the first one is closer to Vita B where Michael II releases Michael the Synkellos from prison and sends him to mount Olympos in Bithynia: Metaphrastes mentions the brothers’ Graptoi recall from exile, while Theophanes of Caesarea keeps silent about it⁵⁷.

On the other hand, it’s possible that Gregoras was also familiar with the Encomium by Theophanes of Caesarea. Retelling the dialogue between Michael and Leo V⁵⁸, he doesn’t base his account on any particular episode of Vita A, but employs certain motives present in the Encomium, but pertaining to the Graptoi’s audience with the emperor Theophilos⁵⁹. First, both audiences are qualified as θεάτρον⁶⁰; second, certain theological arguments in favor of icon veneration put forward by Graptoi in the Encomium and Michael in Vita B have much in common (icons are not idols, as their prototypes are of different nature: those of idols either inexistent at all or evil, those of icons – alive and good⁶¹); third, both emperors claim that icon veneration, being – under certain reservations – acceptable theoretically, actually leads to abusive pagan practices⁶².

To conclude, Gregoras undoubtedly had access to one or more texts of the Graptoi’s dossier. He didn’t quote them *verbatim*, but in case his main source (Vita A) did not yield essential information or simply did not coincide with his own vision of the events, was apt to borrow certain motives. This approach differs to some extent from that employed in his later hagiographical texts. First, Gregoras does not state explicitly that his purpose is to reveal the historical truth by purifying it from later biased additions and returning to more reliable ancient sources (as is the case of his Logos on Constantine the Great⁶³). Second, Gregoras’ prefers not to overload his text with explanatory historical remarks and digressions and thus does not feel necessary to turn to additional historiographical sources (as is the case of the Vita of Theophano⁶⁴). Most likely Gregoras’ source was the Metaphrastic version. Obviously, he was familiar with it in 1350⁶⁵, but it’s impossible to determine whether he got acquainted with it before or during the composition of Vita B, or sometime during ca. 30 years that separate Vita B and the relevant chapters of “Historia Rhomaïke”. Still we can’t exclude the possibility of his familiarity with the Encomium, but it’s highly unlikely that he made use of Raoulaina’s version⁶⁵.

3. (RE-)CONSTRUCTING THE ICONOCLAST PAST

Praising Michael as a champion of icon veneration, the anonymous author of Vita A didn’t fail to mention his involvement in two other controversies he believed the Church of Jerusalem was facing

⁵⁶ Laudatio Theodori 24 (129–130 FEATHERSTONE); Symeon Metaphrastes, Theodori Grapti vita 665^c–668^a. The version of Theodora Raoulaina doesn’t contain the second motive: Theodora Raoulaina 20 (205, 13–20 PAPADOPOULOS-KERAMEUS). In her view, Michael II was not the mildest, but the most villainous and treacherous of the three iconoclast emperors: RIZZO NERVO, Teodora Raoulaina 158–160.

⁵⁷ SODE, Jerusalem – Konstantinopel – Rom 79–80. A description of Michael’s reign as a period of religious uncertainty is a common place in the 9th cent. hagiography: *PmbZ I* 4990.

⁵⁸ Vita B 270, 18–272, 34.

⁵⁹ Laudatio Theodori 27–34 (133–142 FEATHERSTONE)

⁶⁰ Laudatio Theodori 27 (133 FEATHERSTONE); Vita B 270, 19.

⁶¹ Laudatio Theodori 28 (134–135 FEATHERSTONE); Vita B 271, 20–272, 3.

⁶² Laudatio Theodori 31 (137 FEATHERSTONE); Vita B 272, 7–10.

⁶³ HINTERBERGER, Die Konstantinsvita 54–55.

⁶⁴ IDEM, Les Vies des Saints 293.

⁶⁵ Other complementary sources of Vita B are of minor importance. It’s interesting, although, that Gregoras seems to have made a special research of his hero’s life, as he mentions Michael’s philological legacy: Vita B 265, 3–7; SODE, Jerusalem – Konstantinopel – Rom 285–287.

at the beginning of the 9th cent.: a conflict with the Western church on the case of Filioque-addition to the Nicene Creed, and an aggravation of confrontation with Arabs in Palestine. Both conflicts were listed among the motives for Michael's departure from Jerusalem. For a compositional complexity and obscurity of Cap. 6 of Vita A resulting in irreconcilable chronological contradictions⁶⁶ may account the fact that the author sought to conceal some suspicious details of the story⁶⁷.

Nevertheless, it's possible to reconstruct the inner logic of the narrative. The hagiographer meant to demonstrate that the real cause of Michael's journey was that the path of spiritual perfection he had chosen necessarily presupposed a further step (after askesis at the Laura of St. Sabas and in a cave) – a pilgrimage. The significance of this reason is stressed by a ring composition: it is presented twice – at the very beginning and at the very end of the chapter:

Εἶχεν δὲ ἐκ πολλοῦ τοῦ χρόνου ὁ πανόσιος καὶ μέγας Μιχαὴλ ἔφεσιν καὶ ἦν δεόμενος τοῦ Θεοῦ νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας, ὥστε εἰ ἄρεστον αὐτῷ ἔστιν, ἀξιωθῆναι αὐτὸν τῆς προσκυνήσεως τῶν ἁγίων λειψάνων τῶν κορυφαίων ἀποστόλων Πέτρου καὶ Παύλου, τῶν μαρτυρησάντων ἐν τῇ μεγίστῃ τῶν πόλεων Ῥώμῃ ἐπὶ Νέρωνος τοῦ ἐν αὐτῇ ἀσεβῶς βασιλεύσαντος (Vita A 54, 25–30).

For a long time the all-holy, great Michael had longed and was beseeching God by night and day that should please Him, he might be deemed worthy of venerating the holy relics of the chief apostles Peter and Paul, who were martyred in the very great city of Rome under Nero who had impiously ruled there.

Ἔμελλεν γὰρ ἐκεῖθεν (*scil.* from Constantinople) τὴν πορείαν ποιεῖσθαι ὁ μέγας Μιχαὴλ, κατερχόμενος πρὸς τὸν ἐν ἁγίοις πάπαν ἐν τῇ μεγάλῃ τῶν πόλεων Ῥώμῃ, ὅπως ἐν ἀπολαύσει γένηται καὶ τῶν ἐν τῇ θεοστέπτῳ καὶ βασιλίδι τῶν πόλεων τοῦ Θεοῦ εὐκτηρίων οἴκων (Vita A 58, 16–19).

For the great Michael was to make the journey from Constantinople, going on from there to the pope of blessed memory in the great city of Rome, so that he might benefit from the churches of God in the God-crowned imperial city as well.

This motivation is quite expected and justified within the framework of a hagiographical narrative, where all events of the protagonist's life are seen as steps on a path to spiritual perfection and sainthood. But a more formal excuse is also needed: the history of humanity governed by God's providence must give the future saint an opportunity to acquire sainthood. Vita A presents two formal motives-opportunities of such a kind: the Filioque-controversy (Vita A 54, 30–56, 28) and the growth of taxes imposed by Arabs (Vita A 56, 29–58, 1). It's noteworthy that these motives are of equal value for the hagiographer: it was “for these two reasons” (τούτων ἕνεκεν τῶν δύο αἰτιῶν) that Michael was commissioned to travel to Rome, the goal of his mission being expressed by a parallel final clause: ὅπως καὶ τοὺς κακῶς δογματίσαντας περὶ τοῦ θείου συμβόλου καταπαύση καὶ περὶ τῆς χρηματικῆς ζημίας ... ἀπαγγείλῃ (Vita A 56, 4–6). The revival of iconoclasm, on the contrary, is presented only as a secondary cause: it is listed last and introduced by “that they might also manage to ...” (ἴσως ἰσχύσωσι καὶ ...). The wording makes this motive stick out as heterogeneous; apparently, it was added artificially for purely polemical purposes⁶⁸.

⁶⁶ Michael departed from Jerusalem entrusted with an anti-iconoclastic letter addressed to the patriarch Theodotos of Constantinople (Vita A 58, 10–11) and arrived in Constantinople in May of the 7th indiction (62, 5), i.e. in May 814, when the patriarchal see of Constantinople was still occupied by Nikephoros (Theodotos ascended the patriarchal throne on April 1, 815). For a possible explanation see SODE, Jerusalem–Konstantinopel–Rom 202–208.

⁶⁷ AUZÉPY, De la Palestine à Constantinople 210–211.

⁶⁸ CUNNINGHAM, The Life of Michael the Synkellos 12–13: “The answer perhaps lies in the author's polemical stance in writing the Life. Since he is about to describe the saints' defense of the faith under the iconoclast emperors, it is natural to suggest that the saints undertook their fateful journey to Constantinople for this reason”.

Thus, the hierarchy of motives presented in Vita A is the following one: an obligatory spiritual motive at the top (pilgrimage), two formal historical motives afterwards (Filioque, Arabs), and at last a complementary motive (iconoclasm). One may also note that the roots of the three disasters threatening the Church are personal. There are certain figures (without any connection between them) standing behind the Filioque-conflict (τινες ἐκ τοῦ ἔθνους τῶν Φράγγων), the tax increase (παρὰ τῶν ἀθέων Ἀγαρηνῶν), and the revival of iconoclasm (τὸν ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει πατριαρχοῦντα Θεόδοτον ... καὶ τὸν βασιλέα Λέοντα). The simultaneous emergence of these threats is a mere coincidence with no common evil will behind it.

Of these four motives of the earlier Vita A Gregoras retains only the last one: he mentions neither Arabs, nor Pope, nor Michael's desire for pilgrimage⁶⁹. The only reason for Michael's departure is iconoclasm. But this iconoclasm has little to do with the one described by the earlier author.

First, it penetrates into the world due to an evil plan of the Devil⁷⁰, while Leo V serves only as an instrument:

Ὁ κοινὸς τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ τῆς ἀληθείας ἐχθρὸς, ὁ πλούσιος τὴν ἐπιβουλὴν καὶ τὴν κακίαν ἄσπονδος, ἄνωθεν ἀεὶ τῷ τῶν χριστιανῶν πολεμῶν γένει, οὐδ' ἐν τούτοις ἠρέμησε τοῖς καιροῖς τὸ ἑαυτοῦ ποιῶν, ἀλλὰ χεμιῶνα κακίας αὐθις ἐγείρει ... (Vita B 269, 3–5).

A common foe of good and truth, rich in contrivance and implacable in wickedness, who has been waging war against the race of Christians from ancient times, couldn't keep silent even at those times, but adhering to his habit raised a storm of evil anew ...

Second, Gregoras, unlike his predecessor, doesn't fail to note that iconoclasm introduced by Leo V was a second edition of a previously condemned doctrine: the impious emperor "employing all means, kindles anew the fire that has died out recently" (τὴν πρὸ μικροῦ μαρνανθεῖσαν τῆς εἰκονομαχίας φλόγῳσιν ὄλαις αὐθις μηχαναῖς ὑπανάπτει: Vita B 269, 9–10). In the correspondent section, the earlier hagiographer showed no interest to the first iconoclasm, he mentioned only the new leaders – the patriarch Theodotos and Leo V. It is worth noting that among other sources belonging to Michael's and Graptoi's dossier only the Metaphrastic Vita contains an allusion to the first stage of iconoclasm: the newly appointed patriarch Theodotos "dares to renew a long time dead heretic teaching about the venerable icons" (τὴν πάλαι τεθνηκυῖαν αἴρεσιν περὶ τὰς σεπτὰς εἰκόνας ἀναστήναι φιλονεικῶν)⁷¹. A discrepancy between Gregoras' πρὸ μικροῦ and Metaphrastes' πάλαι both pertaining to the period between Nicaenum II (787) and 815 may be indicative for their perception of time.

Third, Gregoras does not specify how the news about the newly adopted ecclesiastical policy reached Palestine. He only says that "these facts became known also to the Church of Jerusalem" (γίνεται δὴ οὖν τὰυτα καὶ τῇ τῶν Ἱεροσολύμων ἐκκλησίᾳ γνώριμα: Vita B 269, 22), whereas the earlier author had to invent a chronologically impossible⁷² letter from Theodoros Studites (Vita A 58, 20–25).

Fourth, Theodoros Studites is not the only historical figure mentioned in Cap. 6 of Vita A to disappear in Gregoras' story of Michael's mission: the same fate awaited the iconoclast patriarch Theodotos. The earlier hagiographer ascribed the revival of iconoclasm both to ecclesiastical and secular

⁶⁹ PARASKEVOPOULOU, Το αγιολογικὸ καὶ ομιλητικὸ ἔργο 144–146.

⁷⁰ This motive is employed by Theophanes of Caesarea and in the Metaphrastic version as well: Laudatio Theodori 15 (121–122 FEATHERSTONE); Symeon Metaphrastes, Theodori Grapti vita 660^a–661^b.

⁷¹ Symeon Metaphrastes, Theodori Grapti vita 661^c. Theophanes of Caesarea says only that Leo V "again" (πάλιν) destroys the beauty of the holy icons: Laudatio Theodori 17 (123 FEATHERSTONE).

⁷² SODE, Jerusalem – Konstantinopel – Rom 204, 207–208.

authorities. Consequently, in Cap. 6–7 the iconoclast emperor Leo V was always accompanied by Theodotos:

...συνείδον καὶ πρὸς τὸν ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει πατριαρχοῦντα Θεόδοτον τοῦνομα, ὄντα ἕξαρχον τῆς τῶν εἰκονοκαυστῶν αἰρέσεως, καὶ πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα Λέοντα, τῷ γένει Ἀρμένιον, ἐπιστολὴν ἀποσταλῆναι ... (Vita A 58, 10–13).

... and they also resolved to send a letter to the patriarch of Constantinople, Theodotos by name, who was leader of the heresy of image-burners, and to the emperor Leo of Armenian descent ...

Ταύτης ἕνεκα τῆς αἰτίας τὴν ἐπιστολὴν ἐποίησαντο πρὸς τὸν προλεχθέντα Θεόδοτον πατριάρχην, μᾶλλον δὲ φατριάρχην, καὶ τὸν ἄνακτα Λέοντα ... (Vita A 58, 25–27).

For this reason, they composed a letter to the aforesaid patriarch or rather “factionarch” Theodotos and to the ruler Leo ...

As we see, in both cases Theodotos comes first. It's him and not the emperor, who is granted such epithets as the “leader of the heresy”. Other sources may pay Theodotos less attention. Still, commencing the story of the iconoclast revival all hagiographers do mention him either directly or indirectly. Theophanes of Caesarea and Theodora Raoulaina don't provide the name of the newly appointed patriarch, but mention the deposition of Nikephoros⁷³; Symeon Metaphrastes adds that the new patriarch was a “hireling” (μισθωτός) and an “usurper's accomplice and companion in impiety” (ὁμόφρων τῷ τυράννῳ καὶ σύμψυχος τὴν ἀσέβειαν)⁷⁴.

Gregoras is the only one to keep complete silence about Theodotos' role in the newly proclaimed iconoclast policy. In his interpretation, iconoclasm is an undertaking of purely imperial origin: it is renewed by “Leo impiously standing at the helm of the Roman state” (ὁ τῆς Ῥωμαϊκῆς ἀρχῆς οὐκ εὐαγῶς τοὺς οἶακας ἰθύνων Λέων: Vita B 269, 8). Michael's mission has only one addressee, his task being to “negotiate with the emperor” (διαπρεσβεύσασθαι πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα: Vita B 269, 25–26). This accusation of iconoclasm brought upon the imperial power is stressed by a vivid description of punishments inflicted on Leo's adversaries. This description ends with a general conclusion: “... to put it briefly, they endured everything that the imagination of evil rulers is used to employ for measuring the crimes” (συνελόντι φάναι πάντα ἔπασχον, οἷς οἶδε μετρεῖν τὰς εὐθύνas πονηρῶν ἀρχόντων ἐπίνοια: Vita B 269,13–14). Such political charges – nearly absent in Vita A – are more close to the accusation of τυραννία in Theophanes' of Caesarea Encomium and the Metaphrastic redaction, where Leo's ascension to the throne is described as an act of usurpation (τυράννῳ χειρὶ τῶν σκήπτρων ἀντελαμβάνετο⁷⁵). It should be noted that Gregoras' conviction that iconoclasm is a *sui generis* imperial heresy is also evident in the Vita of the patriarch Antonios II⁷⁶. In a brief excursus on the history of the second iconoclasm he does not mention the Constantinopolitan church hierarchs, but ascribes the initiative to the emperor:

Λέοντι γὰρ τῷ ἐξ Ἀρμενίων τηρικαῦτα τῆς Ῥωμαϊκῆς ἀρχῆς τὰ σκήπτρα διέποντι ἔργον ἐπιμελέστατον ἐγεγόνει τὸν τῆς εἰκονομαχίας κλύδωνα πρὸς μεγίστην ἀνενεγκεῖν καὶ περιφανῆ τὴν ἐπίδοσιν ...⁷⁷
Leo the Armenian, who at that time was holding the scepter of the Roman state, desperately wanted to inflate the most violent and notorious storm of iconoclasm ...

⁷³ Laudatio Theodori 17 (123 FEATHERSTONE); Theodora Raoulaina 11 (196, 10–12 PAPADOPOULOS-KERAMEUS).

⁷⁴ Symeon Metaphrastes, Theodori Grapti vita 661^c.

⁷⁵ Laudatio Theodori 17 (123 FEATHERSTONE). Cf. Symeon Metaphrastes, Theodori Grapti vita 661^b.

⁷⁶ Composed in 1340s, the exact dating is problematic: PARASKEVOPOULOU, Το αγιολογικό και ομιλητικό έργο 60–61.

⁷⁷ Vita Antonii 3 (ed. P. L. M. LEONE, La Vita Antonii Cauleae di Niceforo Gregora. *Nicolaus* 11 [1983] 3–50, here 23).

Taking into consideration a substantial chronological gap between the two texts, we may well assume that such similarity is not a mere coincidence, but Gregoras' articulated position providing an insight into his political philosophy.

Fifth, a simplification of Michael's mission significantly changes his psychological portrait. While in Cap. 6–7 of Vita A he was described as a diplomat entrusted with the mission of talking to the Pope not only about theological, but also about financial matters, in Vita B he is a saintly warrior. In Vita A Michael begins his journey not knowing that he will never reach his final destination, he doesn't suspect that his pilgrimage will end in Constantinople, and he will be forced to defend icon veneration. In Vita B he realizes that he is going to fight:

... ἔξεισι, στρατηγὸς ἄριστος εἶπεν ἂν τις στρατιάς ἀρίστης ἐξηγούμενος. Καὶ πολλοὺς τῶν εὐσεβούντων ἔτι καὶ τῶν ὅσοι τῆς εὐθείας ἐξηνέχθησαν στηρίζων τε καὶ τὸ εὐσεβὲς καθηγούμενος διήει, ὡσπερ ἐξ ἀποστάσεως ληιζόμενος τὰ τοῦ ἐχθροῦ ὀχυρώματα καὶ λαμπροῖς τοῖς ἀκροβολισμοῖς κατ'αὐτοῦ χρώμενος (Vita B 269, 32–35).

He starts – a brilliant general leading a brilliant army, as one could say. So he traveled supporting and edifying in piety many pious and even those who had strayed from the straight path, as if ravaging from distance the foe's fortifications and hitting him with excellent arrows.

To conclude, Gregoras transforms a complex and multilayered, albeit self-contradictory narrative of Vita A into a simple story of Devil's attack on the Church⁷⁸ and Michael's heroic resistance, eliminating all secondary plot lines and unnecessary characters. The omissions are by no means random, they reflect Gregoras' vision of the whole iconoclast controversy in Byzantium as a duel of the guardian of orthodoxy Michael the Synkellos and the iconoclast emperor Leo V.

Quite expectedly, nearly all personages of Vita A may be grouped into two categories: iconoclasts and iconophiles.

The first group includes:

- 5 iconoclast emperors – Leo V, Michael II, Theophilos, Leo III (8th cent.)⁷⁹ and Constantine V (8th cent.)
- 2 iconoclast patriarchs – Theodotos Kassiteras, Ioannes Grammatikos.

The second group consists of:

- the protagonist Michael the Synkellos
- saints Theodoros and Theophanes Graptoi, Ioannikios
- 3 orthodox patriarchs – Methodios of Constantinople, Thomas of Jerusalem, Germanos of Constantinople (8th cent.)
- the empress Theodora and Michael III⁸⁰.

⁷⁸ Note that Theodora Raoulaina retains two motives for Michael's journey (iconoclasm and Filioque), but like Gregoras presents them not as a coincidence, but as a carrying out of a twofold villainous Devil's plan: Theodora Raoulaina 11–13 (196, 3–198, 20 PAPAPOPOULOS-KERAMEUS). The Second Rome (Constantinople) easier succumbed to the iconoclast heresy, while the First appeared to be more vulnerable to the Filioque-addition: "The seeder of every kind of evil has arranged a manifold deceit, he instilled in the city of Constantine a rejection of the venerable icons, while in Rome – a distortion of the divine Creed" (Καὶ ὁ μὲν τῆς κακίας ἀπάσης σπορεὺς ποικίλον τὸν ὄλισθον ἐτεχνάσατο, καὶ τῆ μὲν Κωνσταντίνου τὴν τῶν σεπτῶν εἰκόνων ἀθέτησιν, τῆ Ῥώμῃ δὲ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ συμβόλου παρατροπὴν ὑποτίθεται: *ibidem* 197, 29–198, 3). Cf. RIZZO NERVO, Teodora Raoulaina 156–157.

⁷⁹ Not mentioned by name. He is described as "the first heresiarch named after a wild beast" (Vita A 108, 14–15).

⁸⁰ I don't include several characters of minor importance: the unnamed patriarch of Jerusalem (Theodoros I?) who baptized Michael (Vita A 46, 13), the monk Job who accompanied Michael on his way from Jerusalem (Vita A 60, 7–9), the askretis Stephen and spatharios Kallonas converted by Michael (Vita A 74, 21–76, 18).

Simplifying, the plot of Vita A is based upon an ideological and political conflict of the first group with the second. Michael, being the most important figure of the iconophile party, receives, nevertheless, strong support from other iconophiles. They supply him with theological argumentation (Thomas of Jerusalem), share tortures and imprisonment (Graptoi), or simply adhere to icon veneration and demonstrate that the victory of iconoclasts is by no means complete (Methodios, Ioannikios). Their adversaries are numerous too: every impious emperor has his own ecclesiastical counterpart, a wicked advisor-heresiarch (Theodotos for Leo V and Ioannes Grammatikos for Theophilos). Moreover, in the hagiographer's view, the 9th cent. conflict reflects the one of the 8th cent., when Germanos of Constantinople was exiled by Leo III and "the most orthodox ruler Artabasdos" banished by Constantine V (Vita A 108, 10–24)⁸¹.

In Gregoras' version, the relationship between the main characters is quite different. The iconoclast party consists only of the three successive emperors Leo V, Michael II and Theophilos (thus making the iconoclast heresy an imperial *καινοτομία*), while the iconophile one – of Michael, Graptoi (who don't actually participate in any anti-iconoclastic activities⁸²), Methodios, Theodora and Michael III.

The central episode of Vita B (the dialogue between Michael and Leo V) is depicted as a key episode of the whole iconoclast controversy. For Michael and Leo V this meeting is neither a theological debate, nor a common trial. It's rather a duel, and its outcome is crucial for the fate of the whole iconoclast policy. While in Vita A Leo V felt only irritation learning about Michael's approach to Constantinople (Vita A 62, 3), in Vita B he feels fear, and the saint's coming is compared to a storm:

“Ο γε μὴν βασιλεὺς ἐταράττετο τοῦ μεγάλου τὴν ἐνδημίαν ἀκούων. Καὶ ὡσπερ ἂν εἰ βροντῆς ἤσθάνετο τινος ἄρτι ῥαγείσης ἐξ ἑώας καὶ δεινὸν μὲν τέως ἠχούσης, ζεούσης δ' ἔτι καὶ σφοδρότερον, οἷον ἀπειλούσης ἀφήσειν τὸν κτύπον, ὥστε καὶ πᾶσαν περιλαβεῖν ἀκοήν ... (Vita B 270, 1–5).

The emperor, indeed, was frightened at the news of the saint's arrival. It was as if he had just heard a powerful echo of a thunder from the East, and it was still audible and boiled even more violently and threatened to issue a sound able to reach every ear ...

Too much was at stake in this debate: Leo V “considered one and the same thing to defeat him (*scil.* Michael) and the whole pious flock” (ταὐτὸν γὰρ ἐνόμιζε τοῦτόν τε ἐλεῖν καὶ ἅμα πᾶν τὸ τῶν εὐσεβῶν σύστημα: Vita B 270, 15–16). For Gregoras, the most terrible period of the iconoclast persecutions ends with Leo V's death: Michael meets personally neither with Michael II, nor with Theophilos. The triumph of orthodoxy in 843 is barely mentioned (Vita B 276, 3–6; 277, 34), whereas the earlier hagiographer not only thoroughly describes the restoration of orthodoxy (Vita A 100, 7–102, 9), but also stresses that even afterwards iconoclasm was still posing a serious threat (Vita A 118, 25–28; 120, 26–28; 122, 24–25).

Even more striking is that Gregoras assigns to Michael certain achievements belonging (at least according to Vita A) to other members of the iconophile party. The earlier version contains a special chapter dealing with the personality of St. Ioannikios: it was he who, after Michael's refusal to become a new patriarch, proposed Methodios as an appropriate candidate for the Constantinopolitan

⁸¹ On Artabasdos' religious policy see P. SPECK, Artabasdos, der rechtgläubige Vorkämpfer der göttlichen Lehren: Untersuchungen zur Revolte des Artabasdos und ihrer Darstellung in der byzantinischen Historiographie (*Poikila byzantina* 2). Bonn 1981; L. BRUBAKER – J. HALDON, Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era (ca. 680–850): A History. Cambridge 2011, 158–159, 176–178.

⁸² After a brief description of their education by Michael in Palestine, they are mentioned only twice: Vita B 270, 22–23; 273, 6–7.

see (Vita A 102, 22–104, 12). In Gregoras' interpretation, it was Michael's advice that assured Methodios' election: it happened "due to the saint's aid and diligence which he showed with everyone and more than anyone else" (πολλῇ συνδρομῇ καὶ σπουδῇ τοῦ μεγάλου, ἦν εἰσηνέγκατο καὶ αὐτὸς πρό γε πάντων καὶ μετὰ πάντων: Vita B 275, 18–19). The achievements of the patriarch Thomas of Jerusalem are neglected too: during the audience with Leo V, in Vita A Michael reads Thomas' letter and thus retranslates the official position of the patriarchate of Jerusalem. Theological arguments and biblical allusions presented by Michael are prepared in advance and do not actually belong to him, while in Vita B Gregoras says nothing about the letter and thus depicts Michael as a skilled theologian and polemicist able to think up in no time an irrefutable theological argument.

4. CONCLUSION

In order to find a suitable explanation for the metaphrastic changes introduced by Gregoras we should reexamine the controversial question of dating and purpose of Vita B. The only solid *termini* are those indicated above: *terminus post quem* – early spring 1321 (completion of the Chora restoration)⁸³, *terminus ante quem* – 13 March 1332 (Metochites' death)⁸⁴. In the final section of Vita B, which is an invocatio to the saint, Gregoras explicitly says that the restoration has already been carried out:

Καὶ καθηρηκῶς ἅπαν, ὅσον τῆς παλαιότητος ἦν λείψανον, ἐξ αὐτῶν κρηπίδων καὶ μήκει πλάτος προσθεῖς καὶ πλάτει μῆκος καὶ τούτοις ἅπαν κάλλος κερασάμενος πολλῶ πλέον, ἢ πρότερον εἶχε κατασκευῆς, ἀπέφηνε κρείττω (Vita B 279, 24–26).

He (*scil.* Theodoros Metochites) demolished to the ground everything that remained from the past, combined length with width and width with length, added every possible glory, and finally made the construction much more beautiful than before.

Gregoras praises Metochites for piety (φιλόθεος), nobility (εὐγένεια), wisdom (σοφία) comparable with that of Ancient Greeks, and due contempt to ephemeral wealth (Vita B 279, 18–22). Still, he is certainly not portrayed as deceased, e.g. he is not referred to as μακάριος.

The indicated period splits into two: 1321–1328 and 1328–1332, the turning point being Metochites' fall from grace and exile to Didymoteichos in May 1328⁸⁵. Taking into consideration the lack of any direct references, we should base our reasoning on more subtle features of the text. Who is its author? An enthusiastic and devoted disciple eulogizing his teacher, an almighty functionary and wealthy ktetor who has just completed his artistic chef-d'oeuvre? Or a friend separated from his old tutor – now in disgrace – and entrusted with the mission of guarding the most valuable Chora's possession – the books⁸⁶? The first option is more plausible: Gregoras' tone is rather panegyric than elegiac, he does not mention Metochites' disgrace and describes the restoration works as just finished (τῆσδε τῆς νέας κατασκευῆς — Vita B 279, 14; τῶ παρόντι — Vita B 279, 22).

Determining the date more precisely we may also rule out the first half of the year 1326, since at that time Gregoras was entrusted with a diplomatic mission to the Serbian king and was not actually present in Constantinople for several months⁸⁷. The year 1327 is not likely to be an appropriate period

⁸³ Gregoras, *Historia* VIII 5 (I 303 SCHOPEN).

⁸⁴ *PLP* 17982.

⁸⁵ On Gregoras' life during this period see PARASKEVOPOULOU, Το αγιολογικό και ομιλητικό έργο 28–30.

⁸⁶ On Metochites' banishment, correspondence with Gregoras, and return to the monastery in 1330 see ŠEVČENKO, Theodore Metochites 33–37.

⁸⁷ H.-V. BEYER, Eine Chronologie der Lebensgeschichte des Nikephoros Gregoras. *JÖB* 27 (1978) 127–155, here 132–133.

for composition of Vita B too: there are no direct references to the final stage of the civil war between Andronikos II and Andronikos III when Metochites' position was already becoming very unstable⁸⁸. Such references would have been highly probable since other Gregoras' hagiographical compositions abound with political hints and allusions and were even employed as a means of propaganda against his religious adversaries⁸⁹.

The tone of Vita B suggests that it was composed during the relatively peaceful period of 1321–1326 on the instigation of the Chora's brethren in order to promote the veneration of its saint-abbot⁹⁰ whose relics were still extant and worshipped⁹¹, but who had not yet been glorified in a proper way, whereas his companions, the Graptoi brothers, had been eulogized by Symeon Metaphrastes and other prominent church writers. Another equally important task was to celebrate the renovation of the monastery recently carried out by its ktetor Theodoros Metochites.

Thus Vita B is one of the earliest Gregoras' hagiographical compositions⁹² and as such gives us an opportunity to have an insight into a workshop of a young literatus entrusted with an important task of retelling a rich in details and highly informative, but heterogeneous and self-contradictory text with loose structure that should have seemed to him (and to his sponsors as well) not a proper Vita or Encomium of a single saint, but a proto-Vita containing the germs of two (or even three) independent cults. The weak points of Vita A in Gregoras' eyes are obvious: it claims to have a protagonist, but the hagiographer easily abandons him to devote eight successive chapters to other characters (Cap. 17–24 dealing with the brothers Graptoi); the story abounds with outdated pieces of information and unnecessary repetitions, whereas some episodes seem to have been narrated twice⁹³. Consequently, Gregoras made three obligatory steps to transform this text into a composition satisfying all requirements of a proper *Vita et certamen*:

- to praise one protagonist (Michael the Synkellos) and vituperate one anti-hero (Leo V) transforming their encounter into a turning point of the story,
- to eliminate all plot lines and characters (first of all, the brothers Graptoi) that may distract from the main character and the main conflict,
- to omit unnecessary or outdated factual details replacing them with psychological characteristics, depictions of emotions and dramatic dialogues.

As a result, on the one hand, the new story was well balanced and enjoyed a firm compositional structure and a clear system of characters (protagonist – anti-hero – secondary characters – unnamed episodic personages), while on the other hand, it became much simpler and more predictable.

The transformation of a proto-Vita of Michael the Synkellos and the Graptoi brothers (it should have seemed to Gregoras to bear the title of Michael's Vita only by accident!) into a proper *Vita et certamen* of Michael is close to the transformation of the Vita of Constantine the Great (*BHG* 364) into an Encomium carried out by Gregoras in late 1341 – early 1342. Gregoras' approach is one and

⁸⁸ ŠEVČENKO, Theodore Metochites 30.

⁸⁹ PARASKEVOPOULOU, Το αγιολογικό και ομιλητικό έργο 94–96; HINTERBERGER, Les Vies des Saints 293–294; IDEM, Die Konstantinsvita 47–48.

⁹⁰ On Michael's activities as hegoumenos see Vita A 114, 22–116, 29; Vita B 275, 20–35.

⁹¹ TALBOT, Old Wine in New Bottles 21.

⁹² It is impossible to date with any precision certain Gregoras' Vitae, but those that can be dated are written after 1328: PARASKEVOPOULOU, Το αγιολογικό και ομιλητικό έργο 165; The Logos on St. Merkourios may also be of early provenance: *ibidem* 136–137.

⁹³ SODE, Jerusalem – Konstantinopel – Rom 151; R.-J. LILIE – C. LUDWIG – TH. PRATSCH – I. ROCHOW, Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit. 1. Abteilung (641–867): Prolegomena. Berlin 1998, 93.

the same: simplification of the system of characters, rhetorization, elevation of the stylistic level, and neglect towards exact chronology⁹⁴. Still, Gregoras obviously didn't think of this process in such terms, since he didn't change the title of Vita B into Λόγος or Βίος καὶ ἐγκώμιον⁹⁵.

On the other hand, the author of Vita B was not a historian yet: he did not feel necessary to turn to any complementary ancient sources and compare different accounts of the events in order to establish the historical truth⁹⁶. Moreover, it seems that Gregoras' aesthetic principles – let alone the conditions of his commission – were influencing the way he represented the historical reality (or what he thought to be historical reality): if a proper Vita must have only one climax, the persecutions of Theophilos cannot be as severe as those of Leo V; if a proper Vita must have only one conflict, the mission from Jerusalem must have nothing to do neither with Arabs, nor with the Pope; if the rules of composition require only one anti-hero, every mention of the iconoclast patriarchs must be excluded and the heresy of iconoclasm must acquire a purely imperial origin. Thus, the demands of literary aesthetics modified and distorted the historical memory of the iconoclast period.

⁹⁴ HINTERBERGER, Die Konstantinsvita 48–50.

⁹⁵ As was the case of his Logos on Constantine: *ibidem* 49.

⁹⁶ *Ibidem* 54–55.