Monasticism and Kinship in Byzantine Hesychastic Hagiography

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We have joined ourselves to Christ, and there is no family connection on earth for those "who have their citizenship in heaven" (Phil 3:20).[1]

SHORTLY AFTER HIS LITERARY DEBUT on Mount Athos around 1332–1333 with the publication of the new *vita* of St Peter of Athos (*BHG* 1506), the hesychast theologian Gregory Palamas published and delivered a *logos* on the entrance into the Holy of Holies of the Theotokos.[2] In these first two hagiographical and homiletic compositions, Palamas embedded the first contours of his hesychast theology and styled St Peter and the Theotokos as prototypes of the hesychastic way of life.[3] In the *Homily* Palamas writes that "at an age when parents place children in the care of teachers and hand them

[1] Patriarch Athanasios I, *Rule* 6, transl. T. Miller, in J. Ph. Thomas et al. (eds.), *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents* (Washington 2000: *BMFD*) IV 1495–1504, at 1502. Translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

[2] *Homily* 53, delivered on 21 November 1333–1335: Gregory Palamas, *Συγγράμματα* VI *Ὁμιλίαι*, ed. B. Pseutonkas (Thessalonike 2015) 551–585. For an English translation see Ch. Veniamin, *Saint Gregory Palamas. The Homilies* (Waymart 2009) 414–444. On Palamas' literary debut see the account of his biographer, Philotheos Kokkinos, *Λόγος εἰς τὸν ἐν ἁγίοις πατέρα ἡμῶν Γρηγόριον ἀρχιεπίσκοπον Θεσσαλονίκης* 37, ed. D. Tsames, *Φιλοθέου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως τοῦ Κοκκίνου ἁγιολογικὰ ἔργα*. Α΄. *Θεσσαλονικεῖς ἅγιοι* (Thessalonike 1985) 468–469. See also P. K. Chrestou, *Γρηγορίου τοῦ Παλαμᾶ· Ἅπαντα τὰ Ἔργα* XI (Thessalonike 1986) 14.

[3] Cf. M. Mitrea, "'Old Wine in New Bottles'? Gregory Palamas' *Logos* on Saint Peter of Athos (*BHG* 1506)," *BMGS* 40 (2016) 243–263.

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over to schoolmasters, regardless of their own will, because they are so young," the Ever-Virgin Mary "was committed to God."[4] Palamas dwells at length on the ceremonial entry of the Virgin into the Temple, stressing her detachment from worldly matters and unreserved devotion to God:[5]

> The Mother of God was led up to God by her parents, not as a young girl, nor as a child, nor just slightly younger than that, but as a three-year-old who had been weaned and taken from her mother's breast only a day or two before … Immediately leaving everyone behind, her parents, nurses and contemporaries, she separated herself from the assembled company and went forward to the high priest, absolutely alone and full of joy … <and> affirmed with whatever gestures she could, and with childish murmurings, her wholehearted devotion to God.

Palamas further addresses his monastic audience, highlighting the extraordinary nature of this event and the Virgin's model disdain of worldly comforts and parental embraces. Although at the tender age of three, the Theotokos relinquishes parental warmth and security out of her love of God and chooses the Temple and its high priest instead of her familiar parental home.[6] "The Virgin," Palamas writes, "was also silently making an important statement to the onlookers, that she was not being unreasonable in choosing to live a hesychastic life (*hesychios bios*) in communion with no one."[7] Palamas then describes the hesychastic and divine way of life of the Virgin:

> Through the beauty of what she saw, she immediately cast her mind's eye to unseen beauties, and no longer counted anything

[4] *Hom.* 53.18, Pseutonkas 560.265–267, transl. Veniamin 422.

[5] *Hom.* 53.24–25, Pseutonkas 563.346–348, 368–372, Veniamin 424–425.

[6] *Hom.* 53.26, 30, Pseutonkas 564.373–379, 566.437–442, Veniamin 425, 427.

[7] *Hom.* 53.21, Pseutonkas 561.306–308 (οὐκ ἀπεικότως τὸν ἡσύχιον καὶ ἀκοινώνητον ἅπασιν αἱρεῖται βίον), Veniamin 423 (modified).

> on earth delightful … She lived, as though in paradise, in a place removed from the earth, as though in the courts of heaven … Obviously she saw only God, making God her delight and continually waiting on Him[8] … united her mind with its turning towards itself and attention, and with unceasing holy prayer … flew high above all created things, saw God's glory more clearly than Moses, and beheld divine grace … Partaking of this vision, she became … a radiant cloud of the truly living water, the dawn of the mystical day, and the fiery chariot of the Word.[9]

In this work, initially addressed to an Athonite monastic community (and later expanded), Palamas styles the Theotokos as a paragon of the hesychastic way of life, who could even in this life partake of the things to come. Moreover, he urges his audience to emulate her model, who was "the first and only person to forsake the world from infancy for the world's sake," so they may be able to have a foretaste of the life to come, join the angels, and become heavenly citizens already on earth.[10] The urging for a hesychastic way of life that facilitates the acquisition of these gifts transpires especially in Lives of saints, as illustrated for instance in the *Life of Maximos Kausokalybites* ("the Hutburner"), in which the holy man contends: "That is why I have always hastened into the wilderness, father [sc. Gregory of Sinai], and longed for spiritual tranquility: in order to find in abundance the fruit of prayer, which is divine love and rapture of the mind unto the Lord."[11]

Forsaking the world and giving up family ties, both existing (to spouses, parents, siblings, and other relatives) and future (through the vow of celibacy), was the cornerstone of monastic

[8] *Hom.* 53.46–47, Pseutonkas 574.691–693, 575.708–715, Veniamin 435.

[9] *Hom.* 53.59, Pseutonkas 582.905–906, 909–914, Veniamin 441–442.

[10] *Hom.* 53.50, Pseutonkas 577.754–757, Veniamin 436.

[11] F. Halkin, "Deux vies de S. Maxime le Kausokalybe ermite au Mont Athos (XIV^{e} s.)," *AnalBoll* 54 (1936) 38–112, edition at 65–109, here at 85.20–23 (ch. 15). Translation in R. P. H. Greenfield and A.-M. Talbot, *Holy Men of Mount Athos* (Cambridge [Mass.] 2016) 497.

vows in Byzantium.[12] Byzantine saints' Lives often portray (young) holy men and women who embark on a monastic trajectory by abruptly and even stealthily leaving their parental home, in keeping with the monastic ideal of relinquishing the world and their biological family, and dedicating themselves to Christ (cf. Mt 10:37, 19:27, Lk 14:26).[13] The practice of assuming a new monastic name, different from the baptismal name,[14] reinforced the severing of kinship ties and entry into a new spiritual community, which, especially in the case of coenobitic monasteries, functioned as a new family.[15]

[12] A.-M. Talbot, "The Byzantine Family and the Monastery," *DOP* 44 (1990) 119–129.

[13] On monks, monasteries, and Byzantine monasticism see A.-M. Talbot, "An Introduction to Byzantine Monasticism," *ICS* 12 (1987) 229–241; P. Charanis, "The Monk as an Element of Byzantine Society," *DOP* 25 (1971) 61–84; N. M. Vaporis (ed.), *Byzantine Saints and Monasteries* (Brookline [Mass.] 1985); R. Morris, *Monks and Laymen in Byzantium, 843–1118* (Cambridge 1995); A. Bryer et al. (eds.), *Mount Athos and Byzantine Monasticism* (Aldershort 1996); M. Kaplan (ed.), *Monastères, images, pouvoirs et société à Byzance* (Paris 2006); R. Benoit-Meggenis, *L'empereur et le moine: les relations du pouvoir impérial avec les monastères à Byzance (IX^{e}–XIII^{e} siècle)* (Lyon 2017); A.-M. Talbot, *Varieties of Monastic Experience in Byzantium, 800–1453* (Notre Dame 2019). See also R. P. H. Greenfield, "Children in Byzantine Monasteries: Innocent Hearts or Vessels in the Harbor of the Devil?" in A. Papaconstantinou et al. (eds.), *Becoming Byzantine: Children and Childhood in Byzantium* (Washington 2009) 253–282. The primary sources for the history of Byzantine monasticism are the documents preserved in the archives of the monasteries on Mount Athos, published in the collection *Archives de l'Athos*; the extant Byzantine monastic *typika* (foundation charters), collected and translated into English in the *BMFD*; as well as the Lives of saints.

[14] On *metonomasia* in Byzantium see A.-M. Talbot and S. McGrath, "Monastic Onomastics," in *Monastères* 89–118, esp. 96–97.

[15] For instance, in the *Life of Nikon Metanoeite* (*BHG* 1366), his fellow monks and the abbot lament and are greatly distressed by Nikon's departure from the monastery. The scene of the holy man's departure resembles emotionally charged descriptions of holy men fleeing their biological families: "the other brothers, having embraced the noble young man, melted into

However, although monasticism significantly altered the nature of family relationships, bonds of kinship were not completely severed in all cases.[16] As Talbot illustrates in her seminal article on "The Byzantine Family and the Monastery," while family ties were generally discouraged, late Byzantine monastic foundation documents or rules (the *typika*) included different (prescriptive) provisions (some stricter than others, also depending on the founder's lay or monastic extraction) on the amount and type of interaction monastics were allowed to retain with their biological families.[17] This suggests that the renunciation of

tears … But the old man, wailing loudly and sowing tears, so as even to moisten the ground, spoke thus passionately: 'Alas, my son, I am wretchedly cut in two at being separated from you' … the old man clung to him and hung about his neck and, dragging him down, scarcely allowed him to leave": D. F. Sullivan, *The Life of Saint Nikon* (Brookline [Mass.] 1987) 62–67.

[16] This is the case of convents, such as the nunnery of the Virgin of Sure Hope in Constantinople, founded in the fourteenth century by the aristocratic lady Theodora (Theodoule by her monastic name) Synadene, a niece of Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos (r. 1261–1282), where members of her family, including her daughter Euphrosyne, took monastic vows: *BMFD* IV 1522–1578.

[17] Talbot, *DOP* 44 (1990) 119–129. Unlike western (Latin) monasticism in the Middle Ages, Byzantine monastic life was not organized in separate orders (e.g. Franciscan, Dominican, Benedictine), but followed the *Rule* of St Basil of Caesarea. However, each monastery had a particular organization and precise guidelines instituted and prescribed by its founder(s) in the monastic foundation document. Such guidelines regulated, for instance, the election of the abbot, the administration and the liturgical life of the monastic community, the diet, daily discipline, and conduct of the monks or nuns, rules of enclosure, external relations, intellectual or artistic activities, etc. See *BMFD* I xi–xxxvii; C. Galatariotou, "Byzantine ktetorika typika: A Comparative Study," *RÉByz* 45 (1987) 77–138. The 1407 *typikon* for the Monastery of Charsianeites in Constantinople by Patriarch Matthew I illustrates the extreme requirement of foregoing all family ties (*BMFD* IV 1646–1647): "the [prospective monk] who comes to you must first renounce his money and property and family and social ties, and not be encumbered with any worldly evils … Moreover the monk should neither have private engagements, nor should he visit his blood relatives nor receive them if they

all family connections, as prescribed, for instance, by the Rule of Patriarch Athanasios I (1289–1293, 1303–1309) in 1303–1305, a *typikon*-reform meant for all the monasteries in the empire, was closer to an ideal than to actual practice.[18]

The extent and type of contact that monastics retained with family members varied with a number of factors, including the type of monasticism they pursued, their age, gender, and the location of their monastery or place(s) of asceticism. For instance, women (especially those of noble descent) who assumed the monastic habit late in life or in an urban setting are documented to have retained more contact with lay family members.[19] Urban coenobitic monasteries, such as those in Con-

come to visit … it is not right for a [man] who is crucified to the whole world for the sake of Christ to be still the servant of laymen." Other *typika* allowed family contact in certain situations. For instance, the *typikon* of Theodora Palaiologina for the convent of Lips in Constantinople (dated to 1294–1301), specifies that the nuns could visit their relatives only in extreme situations, chaperoned by elderly nuns, and had to return to the nunnery before sunset. Moreover, if a nun was extremely ill or even on her deathbed, her female relatives could only visit her during the day, without staying overnight (*BMFD* III 1254–1286).

[18] The author of this Rule prescribes that monks should detach from family connections and refrain from visiting friends and relatives. In T. Miller's translation, "It is necessary that you … shake from your soul every licentiousness of the flesh, luxury, vain honors, family connections, and [personal] friendship … Unless there is a pressing necessity, neither the superior nor those under him should leave the monastery, either because they are shackled by indifference or vain thinking or because they are thinking of visiting friends or relatives—we have joined ourselves to Christ, and there is no family connection on earth for those 'who have their citizenship in heaven' (Phil 3:20)" (*BMFD* IV 1495–1504, at 1500 and 1502).

[19] E.g. the twelfth-century *typikon* of Empress Eirene Doukaina Komnene, wife of Emperor Alexios I Komnenos (r. 1081–1118), for the convent of the Mother of God "Full of Grace" is more lenient with regard to relations with family members; thus, the female relatives of the nuns could visit them during daytime, a nun's mother could stay overnight if her daughter was ill, a nun could visit her dying parents in the company of two elderly nuns. In

stantinople, offered the most opportunities for family contact, while idiorrhythmic or vagrant asceticism made contact difficult because of geographical constraints (distant and deserted locations).[20] Additionally, families or kindred persons could adopt the monastic habit together, even at the same monastery, at times following in the footsteps of, or joining, a relative, such as a parent or sibling, who had previously taken monastic vows.[21] Members of the aristocracy even founded monasteries for the

R. Jordan's translation, "Even though it has been stated by the fathers in many places in the monastic regulations that monks do not have any family relationship on earth, yet because of human weakness we order that if a woman should visit the convent, the mother of a nun perhaps, or a sister, or a brother's wife, she will enter the convent with the permission of the superior, and when she has eaten with the nuns the food that has been set out, she will depart in the evening … but if it was to see someone sick with a serious disease, if she is the mother, she will stay in the convent and sit beside her sick daughter" (*BMFD* II 649–724, at 679). Female monasticism in Byzantium did not entail that nuns were exclusively living in urban centres, since evidence, such as monastic archives, donor inscriptions, and portraits in rural churches, shows female monasticism in rural and provincial areas. On nunneries in the countryside see S. E. J. Gerstel and A.-M. Talbot, "Nuns in the Byzantine Countryside," *Δέλτιον τῆς Χριστιανικῆς Ἀρχαιολογικῆς Ἑταιρείας* 27 (2006) 481–490; S. E. J. Gerstel, *Rural Lives and Landscapes in Late Byzantium: Art, Archaeology, and Ethnography* (New York 2015) 138–150; cf. A.-M. Talbot, "A Comparison of the Monastic Experience of Byzantine Men and Women," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 30 (1985) 1–20; D. Abrahamse, "Women's Monasticism in the Middle Byzantine Period," *ByzF* 9 (1985) 35–58.

[20] I adopt A. Bryer's definition of an urban monastery, "The Late Byzantine Monastery in Town and Countryside," *Studies in Church History* 16 (1979) 219–241, at 222.

[21] See Talbot, *ICS* 12 (1987) 235–236; cf. L. Garland, "'Till death do us part?' Family Life in Byzantine Monasteries," in B. Neil et al. (eds.), *Questions of Gender in Byzantine Society* (London 2013) 29–55. For instance, the whole family of Theodore the Stoudite took monastic vows: the men (Theodore, his father, paternal uncles, and two younger brothers) entered the Sakkoudion Monastery in Constantinople, while his mother and sister established a convent in their family house in the capital.

purpose of preserving bonds of kinship and strengthening their relatives' and descendants' sense of belonging to the family by offering them residence and privileged conditions.[22] Moreover, families of modest circumstances could also establish small monasteries on their own lands, which were "nothing more than the transformed family house."[23]

This article details another factor that may have influenced the extent and type of contact that monastics retained with their families in late Byzantium: the pursuit of a hesychastic way of life. At the end of an intense and acrimonious theological and socio-political controversy, hesychasm was vindicated and officially recognized in a series of Constantinopolitan synods.[24] One of the instrumental means employed for its promotion and societal acceptance was hagiographical discourse, which facilitated the translation of hesychast thought from theological and polemical writings (often lengthy and convoluted) into living models of hesychastic conduct and way of life. The composition of saints' Lives and miracle collections underwent a revival in late Byzantium. While most of the surviving hagiographical texts of the period eulogize holy men and women from the early Christian era (*metaphraseis* or, as Talbot put it,

[22] Galatariotou, *RÉByz* 45 (1987) 95–101.

[23] K. Smyrlis, "Small Family Foundations in Byzantium from the Eleventh to the Fourteenth Century," in M. Mullett (ed.), *Founders and Refounders of Byzantine Monasteries* (Belfast 2007) 107–120, here at 112.

[24] The bibliography on the hesychast debates is vast; see, for instance, J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Hesychasm: Historical, Theological and Social Problems* (London 1974); A. Rigo (ed.), *Gregorio Palamas e oltre. Studi e documenti sulle controversie teologiche del XIV secolo bizantino* (Florence 2004); A. Fyrigos, *Dalla controversia palamitica alla polemica esicastica* (Rome 2005); D. Krausmüller, "The Rise of Hesychasm," in M. Angold (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Christianity* V *Eastern Christianity* (Cambridge 2006) 101–126; N. Russell, "The Hesychast Controversy," in A. Kaldellis et al. (eds.), *The Cambridge Intellectual History of Byzantium* (Cambridge 2017) 494–508.

"old wine in new bottles"),[25] twenty percent are dedicated to contemporaneous figures, many of whom were associated with the hesychast spiritual movement. These include the leading figures of the hesychast controversy, such as Athanasios I of Constantinople and Gregory Palamas. The Lives of hesychast heroes are infused with elements such as descriptions of hesychastic experiences, visions of the divine light, participation in the life to come while still living, authorial asides on hesychast theology, invectives against the anti-hesychasts, and references to particular moments or figures of the hesychast debates.

Drawing upon late Byzantine hesychastic hagiography, especially the Lives of contemporaneous saints authored by Philotheos Kokkinos (ca. 1300–1378), this article offers an analysis of the literary representations of family relations in the context of hesychast monasticism. The study focuses on the varied strategies employed by holy men for managing their relationship with their families after donning the monastic habit and argues that the pursuit of a hesychastic way of life was highly consequential for the amount and type of interaction holy men retained with their families.

1. *Renouncing family ties*

Lives of Byzantine saints usually devote a section of varying length to their heroes' early life, which includes biographical details on their homeland, family, and education. Although this narrative section can be brief and permeated with *topoi*,[26] it describes the (mostly illustrious) ancestry of the heroes, extols the spiritual virtues of their parents, which they inculcate in

[25] A.-M. Talbot, "Old Wine in New Bottles: The Rewriting of Saints' Lives in the Palaeologan Period," in S. Curcic et al. (eds.), *The Twilight of Byzantium* (Princeton 1991) 15–26, and "Hagiography in Late Byzantium," in S. Efthymiadis (ed.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography* I *Periods and Places* (Farnham 2011) 176.

[26] On commonplaces in Byzantine hagiography see T. Pratsch, *Der hagiographische Topos: Griechische Heiligenviten in mittelbyzantinischer Zeit* (Berlin 2005).

their children, and presents their expectations about the future of their offspring. These expectations can frequently clash with the latter's desire to embrace the monastic life, especially in one-child families. Like the loss of an offspring to death, donning the monastic habit was "a disruptive influence on the family unit."[27] In one-child families, it endangered the perpetuation of the family line, while in families of meagre social and financial standing, it could leave parents bereft of the emotional and economic support they expected to reap in old age.[28] For instance, Niketas Stethatos writes in the *Life of Symeon the New Theologian* (*BHG* 1692) that the holy man's father tearfully urged his son to no avail to delay taking monastic vows so that he could attend him in his senescence: "My child, please do not leave me in my old age … when you know that you alone are the staff of my old age and the comfort of my soul; for I think that losing you will be the death of me."[29]

In another example, Theophanes of Vatopedi in his *vita* of Maximos Kausokalybites (*BHG* 1237) writes that the parents of his hero arranged for the marriage of their son, likely their only child, in order to thwart his monastic plans: [30]

[27] Talbot, *DOP* 44 (1990) 126.

[28] Cf. E. M. Davies, *From Womb to the Tomb: The Byzantine Life Course AD 518–1204* (diss. Birmingham 2013) 109.

[29] Niketas Stethatos, *The Life of Saint Symeon the New Theologian* 8, transl. R. P. H. Greenfield (Cambridge [Mass.] 2013) 22–25, here at 23; cf. Talbot, *DOP* 44 (1990) 120, 126. Cf. Maximos Neamonites' unpublished *Letter* 13 addressed to his son, in the fourteenth-century codex *Vat.Chisian.* R. IV. 12, ff. 171v.31–172v.3, in which Neamonites deplores the absence of his son, a monk, during his old age; on this letter see M. Mitrea, "A Late Byzantine πεπαιδευμένος: Maximos Neamonites and his Letter Collection," *JÖB* 64 (2014) 206–209.

[30] Halkin, *AnalBoll* 54 (1936) 68–69, transl. Greenfield and Talbot, *Holy Men* 451, 453. For other instances of parents who tried to sabotage their son's entry into monasticism, especially from early and middle Byzantine saints' Lives, see Davies, *From Womb to the Tomb* 106–107.

> [Maximos'] desire was forcing him to depart from the world and journey toward the contemplative life by taking the monastic habit … And so his parents hastened to make arrangements for his marriage, as is customary for those in the world to do, so that they might ensnare him and bind him to the world and keep their beloved child at hand and always in their sight; but they did not succeed in taking this action, since heavenly providence thwarted their plan.

In the *Life of Sabas the Younger of Vatopedi* (*BHG* 1606), his biographer and disciple, Philotheos Kokkinos, presents the holy man as an example of monastic renunciation of family bonds.[31] The only child of illustrious parents from Thessalonike, Sabas (Stephen by his baptismal name) stealthily flees to Mount Athos at the age of eighteen against the will of his parents. In customary fashion, his hagiographer describes how the holy man renounces the blood ties to and love of his parents in favor of spiritual bonds and the guidance of an elderly and rigorous Athonite father, near Karyes.[32] Kokkinos emphasizes particularly his hero's steadfast decision to never return to this *patris* or see his parents again after his departure:[33]

[31] On Kokkinos' life and works see D. A. Tsentikopoulos, *Φιλόθεος Κόκκινος. Βίος και έργο* (diss. Thessalonike 2001); on his *vitae* see M. Mitrea, *A Late-Byzantine Hagiographer: Philotheos Kokkinos and his Vitae of Contemporary Saints* (diss. Edinburgh 2018). Kokkinos was one of the most prolific late Byzantine hagiographers, who composed numerous *vitae* of saints of the early Christian era, and numerous ones of his contemporaries, including Gregory Palamas, Sabas the Younger, Isidore Boucheir, and Germanos Maroules. For the critical edition of Kokkinos' *vitae* see D. Tsames, *Φιλοθέου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως τοῦ Κοκκίνου ἁγιολογικὰ ἔργα. Α΄. Θεσσαλονικεῖς ἅγιοι* (Thessalonike 1985).

[32] Kokkinos, *Life of Sabas* 6–7 (Tsames 170–174).

[33] The ideal of renunciation of family ties is vividly illustrated in the *Life of Nikon Metanoeite* (*BHG* 1366). The holy man goes to extreme lengths, even swimming across a raging river, to avoid falling back into his father's hands, which he deemed "the greatest evils": D. F. Sullivan, *The Life of Saint Nikon* (Brookline [Mass.] 1987) 60–75 (chs. 12–16).

> Therefore, shortly after he reached adolescence, not valuing at all his homeland and his relatives and the notoriety and the affection of his parents, Sabas stealthily leaves his paternal house and city, taking nothing with him but Christ alone and the extraordinary love for Him.[34]

The young Sabas spends seven years on Athos, under the spiritual guidance of his master. Kokkinos describes in detail the hardships (including beatings) that his hero endures from the harsh character of his spiritual father, extoling at length his obedience and humility.[35] The hagiographer also emphasizes the spiritual bond between Sabas and his master: the holy man "regarded him [sc. his master] as the only father and best savior, after God, and loved him more than his parents, since in full earnest you [sc. Sabas] plainly preferred him before them."[36] In fact, this reflects the longstanding patristic emphasis on the superiority of spiritual kinship over kinship by blood.[37]

Sabas' resolution to avoid ever returning to his homeland faces a challenge when his spiritual father takes refuge in Thessalonike, because of the Catalan raids on Mount Athos around 1308.[38] This forces the holy man to choose between obedience

[34] *Life of Sabas* 6.5–9 (Tsames 170–171): Αὐτίκα γοῦν καὶ πατρίδα καὶ γένος καὶ περιφάνειαν καὶ τὸ τῶν γεννητόρων φίλτρον παρ' οὐδὲν θέμενος, μικρόν τι τὸν ἔφηβον ὑπερβάς, ἔξεισι λάθρᾳ καὶ τῆς οἰκίας τῆς πατρικῆς καὶ τῆς πόλεως, οὐδὲν ἔχων μεθ' ἑαυτοῦ εἰ μὴ τὸν Χριστὸν μόνον καὶ τοὺς πρὸς αὐτὸν ὑπερφυεῖς ἔρωτας.

[35] *Life of Sabas* 8–10 (Tsames 174–177).

[36] *Life of Sabas* 9.20–22 (Tsames 175): μόνον εἰδὼς καὶ πατέρα καὶ σωτῆρα μετὰ Θεὸν ἄριστον, φιλῶν μὲν ὑπὲρ τοὺς γεγεννηκότας ὃν καὶ σπουδῇ πάσῃ προφανῶς ἐκείνων προκέκρικας.

[37] Cf. Greg. Naz. *Ep.* 197 (*PG* 37.321C): κρείττων ἡ πνευματικὴ συγγένεια τῆς σωματικῆς.

[38] *Life of Sabas* 13 (Tsames 182–185); cf. J. S. Palmer, "The *Life of St. Sabas the Younger* as a Source for the History of the Catalan Grand Company," *Scripta Mediterranea* 18 (1997) 35–39. On the Catalan Company see

to his master, which entailed following him to his *patris* Thessalonike, and steadfastness in his initial decision to never see his parents again. Kokkinos probes the mind of his hero and presents his conflicting thoughts and hesitation about this decision:

> For, on the one hand, when he would look at his [spiritual] father and his spiritual affection and behests, he loved [the prospect of] the journey [to Thessalonike] … but, on the other hand, whenever he would turn his mind back to his homeland, companionship of acquaintances and comrades, attachment of his kinsmen, and, before all, to the paternal affection, which still bloomed and did not decrease at all with time … he desired to run away entirely from the road leading there.[39]

In a completing *analepsis* from the time of Sabas' flight from home as an adolescent, the hagiographer presents at length his parents' reaction to what he calls the "misfortunes" and the "tragedy" of losing their son.[40] Kokkinos conveys their lamentation and sorrow while they looked for Sabas in churches,

D. Jacoby, "The Catalan Company in the East: The Evolution of an Itinerant Army (1303–1311)," in G. I. Halfond (ed.), *The Medieval Way of War. Studies in Medieval Military History in Honor of Bernard S. Bachrach* (Farnham 2015) 153–182.

[39] *Life of Sabas* 14.14–20 (Tsames 185–186): ὅτε μὲν γὰρ πρὸς τὸν πατέρα καὶ τὸ πνευματικὸν φίλτρον καὶ τὰς ἐκεῖθεν ἐντολὰς ἴδοι, τὴν ἀποδημίαν ἠγάπα … ἐπειδὰν δὲ πάλιν ἐπὶ νοῦν τὴν πατρίδα λάβοι, συνήθων τε καὶ ἡλίκων ἑταιρίαν καὶ προσπάθειαν συγγενῶν καὶ πρὸ τούτων τὸ πατρικὸν φίλτρον, ἀκμάζον ἔτι καὶ τῷ χρόνῳ μηδόλως ἀπαμβλυνθέν … τὴν ἐκεῖσε φέρουσαν "ὅλῳ ποδὶ" φεύγειν ἠγάπα.

[40] *Life of Sabas* 14.21–23 (Tsames 186): Τίς γὰρ ἂν ἐξείποι λόγος τὰ τῶν πατέρων τοῦ σοφοῦ πάθη καὶ ὅσης τραγῳδίας τὰ κατ' αὐτοὺς διὰ τοῦτον αὐτὸν καὶ τὸ περὶ αὐτὸν φίλτρον ἐπέπληστο; Hagiographers allocate the largest amount of attention and narrative space to the reactions and opposition of parents to the departure for the monastic life of their only offspring. This is, for instance, the case of Sabas the Younger and Maximos Kausokalybites. In contrast, Kokkinos does not include details about parental opposition in the *vitae* of Germanos Maroules (the third oldest of eight children, four boys and four girls) and Isidore Boucheir (the oldest of ten children, five girls and five boys), both of whom came from large families.

caves, and other places he used to visit.[41] The hagiographer stresses that after Sabas' surreptitious departure, for his parents everything became "full of darkness and despondency and lamentations."[42] Given the importance of light in hesychast thought, Kokkinos' choice of imagery for conveying their state of mind after losing their son does not seem fortuitous and serves to reinforce and justify Sabas' decision to abandon them for the pursuit of the contemplative life.[43] Moreover, his parents' state of darkness stands in stark contrast to the numerous visions of the divine light that the holy man attains later in his life, which the hagiographer describes at length.

The tension and vacillations that Sabas experiences between monastic obedience to his spiritual father and his intent to renounce all bonds of kinship are resolved by divine providence.

[41] In his *typikon* for the Monastery of Charsianeites, Patriarch Matthew I similarly highlights his parents' distress and their efforts to derail his monastic plans (*BMFD* IV 1634): "My parents were sorely distressed and grieved at my words, overcome by their natural affection, as a result of which they 'left no stone unturned' … in the hope that they might weaken somewhat the intensity of my desire and my stubborn resolution." Cf. Talbot, *DOP* 44 (1990) 126.

[42] *Life of Sabas* 14.29–30 (Tsames 186): τοῖς δὲ γεγεννηκόσι σκότους καὶ ἀθυμίας ἦν τὰ πάντα μεστά, καὶ θρήνων.

[43] The *Life of Sabas* is replete with developed narratives of Sabas' visions of the divine light (e.g. chs. 34, 44, Tsames 225–228, 240–244); cf. Talbot, "Caves, Demons, and Holy Men," in O. Delouis et al. (eds.), *Le Saint, le moine et le paysan: Mélanges d'histoire byzantine offerts à Michel Kaplan* (Paris 2016) 707–718, at 714. Illustrative is the dialogue between Gregory of Sinai and Maximos Kausokalybites on the hesychastic prayer and experience of the divine light, which Theophanes recounts in his *vita* of the latter, ch. 15, Halkin 87.35–88.2, transl. Greenfield and Talbot 503: "and thus the holy light illuminates the mind with the illumination of divine knowledge. And the mind, when seized with the rapture of the divine light that never sets, is illuminated in the Spirit in this divine and exceptionally bright light. And it makes the heart calm, and grants ineffable joy and happiness to the one who attains such things in mind and reason and spirit." I thank the anonymous reviewers for reminding me about this passage.

After praying to God for help in reaching a decision, Sabas learns about new raids of the "Achaemenids" (the Ottomans) in Macedonia and on the outskirts of Thessalonike, which eliminates the option of following his spiritual master to the city. Thus, the holy man sets out for the Holy Land and escapes the threat of lapsing into the "binding shackles" of parental love.[44]

This decision marks the beginning of a twenty year-long journey as a wandering ascetic—which made Sabas the most widely-travelled holy man in late Byzantium[45]—using geographical distance and self-imposed solitude to seal his resolution of never getting in contact with his family. During this period, he pursues the hesychastic way of life, practicing a harsh regime of ascetic discipline, involving long periods of fasting, vigils, unceasing prayer of the heart, and mortification of his body. Kokkinos presents Sabas as a paragon of the ascetic and hesychastic life, who reaches several times the pinnacle of hesychastic experience through rapture and divine contemplation. In fact, the *Life of Sabas* is replete with hesychastic elements and references to hesychasm and was envisaged by Kokkinos as a hagiographical program and argument in favor of hesychasm. The strength of the hesychastic layers embedded in Sabas' *vita* arguably places it at the forefront of hesychastic hagiography in late Byzantium. Therefore, in casting Sabas as the preeminent model of the hesychastic way of life, Kokkinos places the renunciation of family ties as the foundation of his ascetic endeavors.

[44] *Life of Sabas* 14.23–24 (Tsames 186): τὸ πατρικὸν … φίλτρον καὶ τὰς ἐκεῖθεν δυσεκλύτους πέδας.

[45] Cf. D. M. Nicol, "*Instabilitas loci*: The Wanderlust of Late Byzantine Monks," *Studies in Church History* 22 (1985) 193–202, at 198–199; for a detailed analysis of Sabas' twenty-year vagrancy see M.-H. Congourdeau, "La Terre Sainte au XIV^{e} siècle: la *Vie de Sabas* de Vatopédi par Philothée Kokkinos," in B. Caseau et al. (eds.), *Pèlerinages et lieux saints dans l'antiquité et le moyen âge. Mélanges offerts à Pierre Maraval* (Paris 2006) 121–133.

Sabas' renunciation of worldly ties is weaponized against him and employed during his first contest with the devil as a device for derailing his spiritual progress.[46] Since the holy man was living at the time as a fool for Christ's sake in Cyprus and undertaking extreme asceticism, the devil questions the utility of his struggles and his adamant refusal to return to his parents and *patris*, pointing out that only one or two people have successfully pursued such a way of life, sc. the holy fools Symeon and Andrew. In the face of this lure, Sabas defends the path of holy foolery he has chosen, refutes the devil's call to slacken his asceticism, and renews his oath to never return to his homeland. In this scene, Kokkinos frames the temptation of family love as a liability and test, which his hero successfully resists through the complete and steadfast rejection of bonds of kinship as a self-enforced hardship in his pursuit of the hesychastic way of life and journey to spiritual perfection. The emphasis on the difficulties Sabas encounters in his decision to sever family ties and on his steadfastness in this regard is explained by his particular path of pursuing the hesychastic way of life. Kokkinos presents the holy man as an "angel in flesh" (*ensarkos angelos*), driven to attain spiritual perfection through unparalleled feats of asceticism. Additionally, the focus on Sabas' rupture of family ties may also be explained by Kokkinos' envisaged audience for this hagiographical account, which, like Palamas' compositions, surely included monks.

When analyzing examples of parental opposition to their offspring's decision to assume the monastic habit, Kokkinos' *Life of Gregory Palamas* (*BHG* 718) presents a special case. Both of Palamas' parents lived piously and devoted themselves to the monastic life in their later years, while also seeking to mold the spiritual development of their children in the same direction, as discussed below. His father, the senator Constantine Palamas,

[46] *Life of Sabas* 23 (Tsames 202–206).

depicted by Kokkinos as a deeply pious man, hesychast, and saint-like figure, takes monastic vows on his deathbed (under the name of Constantius), when Gregory is only seven years of age.[47] Kale, Gregory's mother, is also keen to enter monasticism after the loss of her husband, but spiritual fathers advise her to first acquit herself of her parental duties:[48]

> the mother was left with the children. They were still of a very tender age—for the oldest, the good Gregory, had not yet completed his seventh year—but she longed to be tonsured forthwith and abandoning her family and the world to live in solitude. But she was prevented from realizing this aim and desire for a while because, as was the custom, she took counsel from fathers and spiritual teachers. "You should not go off on your own way in this way," they said. "First you should attend to the needs of your children. It is best that you should organize your life with them in mind and see to their upbringing and education according to Christ's laws."

Although Palamas faces no opposition from his parents to his decision to dedicate himself to Christ, the emperor Andronikos II Palaiologos (r. 1282–1328) fulfills the role of dissenting parental figure in the narrative. He sponsors Palamas' *paideia* (as well as the education of Palamas' brothers),[49] takes pride in his accomplishments, and envisages a brilliant career for him at the imperial court. In Kokkinos' words, "the emperor was proud of him, rejoicing in him as an excellent young man and

[47] Kokkinos, *Life of Gregory Palamas* 8–9 (Tsames 435–436).

[48] *Life of Gregory Palamas* 9.4–13 (Tsames 436); transl. N. Russell, *Gregory Palamas. The Hesychast Controversy and the Debate with Islam. Documents relating to Gregory Palamas* (Liverpool 2020) 60.

[49] *Life of Gregory Palamas* 10.24–29 (Tsames 437); Russell, *Palamas* 61: "the emperor not only bestowed on them every other kind of care, that is to say, provisions of all kinds and allowances from the imperial treasury as well as money, which those who enjoyed imperial favour generally received, but he also frequently had them brought to the palace and granted them audience, showing them much favour and benevolence."

expecting great things of him when the time came for him to take counsel from him."[50] However, Gregory,[51]

> fixing his gaze on the heavenly emperor and the empire and senate that are incorrupt and ageless, dedicated himself entirely to this goal and project. He regarded all the rest as of little importance, or rather, hardly worth care or thought at all … Accordingly, he placed himself instead under monks, zealous fathers and teachers of virtue, especially the most distinguished and earnest of those who came down from the holy mountain of Athos.

Kokkinos depicts Emperor Andronikos as a father figure, as it were *in loco parentis*. In order to change the holy man's mind about taking monastic vows, the emperor uses promises of high functions, makes recourse to emotion through words and tears, and exaggerates the implications of Palamas' decision, deeming his departure as a "truncation" of his sovereignty:[52]

> Gregory was already thinking about withdrawing from the world and going to the famous mountain of Athos, for he desired to engage in more intense struggles and share in a more perfect and sublime way of life. The emperor, however, considered his departure as of no small damage to him but in fact a crucial loss and, so to speak, a truncation of his power. He therefore used every approach both verbally and by gifts, imperial honors and grand promises to keep Gregory by his side and prevent him by all possible means from withdrawing to the monastic life. But although he offered him altogether more than this—gifts and honors belonging to an earthly and corruptible kingdom that lead to human slavery—whatever they were, Gregory in no way preferred them to the Heavenly Kingdom and divine adoption … The emperor grudgingly gave in to the

[50] *Life of Gregory Palamas* 11.18–20 (Tsames 438), Russell 62.

[51] *Life of Gregory Palamas* 11.20–24, 28–31 (Tsames 438), Russell 62.

[52] *Life of Gregory Palamas* 13.1–11, 13–15 (Tsames 440), Russell 64 (modified).

> noble youth's persistence, showing in words and by his tears how deeply he felt and how unbearable he found the parting.

Therefore, Kokkinos presents the holy man's adoption of the monastic habit more as a rejection of worldly glory at the imperial court, than of family ties. Palamas rejects not only the professional (and implicitly financial) benefits by which the emperor tries to allure him, but also the safety the emperor, as a parental figure, as it were, would have offered him.

2. *Family ties recast*

If a lay family could oppose one's decision to take monastic vows and even convince a monastic to give up the solitary way of life, this danger seems to have been reduced or absent in the case of family members who took monastic vows together. Thus, instead of severing ties with their families, monastics could actively influence them to follow their example. The *Life of Gregory Palamas* offers a prime example, as both the holy man's parents, as well as his siblings (Makarios, Theodosios, Epicharis, and Theodote), together with "members of his household," donned the monastic habit.[53] This comes as no surprise, since Palamas' parents socialized their children from a very early age into this lifestyle by frequent meetings with hesychast spiritual fathers, one of whom was living in *hesychia* at the "monastery of the divine Phokas," located in Galata:[54]

[53] *Life of Gregory Palamas* 14.2–13 (Tsames 441), Russell 65: "Gregory did not simply seek his own advantage but … also that of others. He therefore first urged the members of his household, the women as well as the men, to abandon the world and take up the life of divine philosophy. Indeed, he persuaded his closest relations and the more loyal and intelligent of the servants to abandon the distractions of the world and of material reality and entering monasteries here in the capital to place themselves fully under the guidance of monks … he departed from his home and his native city … taking with him only his two male siblings."

[54] *Life of Gregory Palamas* 7.3–10 (Tsames 433–434), Russell 57–58 (modified).

> a zealous effort of Gregory's parents [was] every day to frequent the company of monks, teachers, and spiritual fathers not only on their own but also taking their children along as well, and not just those who were adolescents and already reasonably mature, but also those who were still very young and had only recently begun to speak and understand what was being said to them. Their idea was that from the very beginning of their lives their children's souls should be directly moulded and broadened by holy discourses and teachings.

At the age of twenty Palamas departs to Mount Athos together with his two brothers, while his mother and two sisters enter a convent in Constantinople. A twentieth-century fresco in the new metropolitan cathedral in Thessalonike depicts the monastic vocation of Palamas' family.

Kokkinos pays considerable attention to and follows closely not only the life course of the holy man, but also that of his parents and siblings. Palamas' father, Constantine, receives the greatest attention. In an extensive and almost hagiographical portrait (ca. 2000 words) Kokkinos depicts him as living a hesychastic way of life in the world and embodying the monastic ideal of detachment from family ties even before taking monastic vows. Although a member of the Constantinopolitan senate and trusted advisor to Emperor Andronikos II, he leads an intensely disciplined life, and is unmoved by emotion not only towards money, possessions, and worldly glory, but also in his interactions with his children. He displays little overt affection towards his children and does not kiss or laugh and play with them according to the habit of fathers, as Kokkinos notes underlining the societal expectations of fatherly behavior:[55]

> This high-minded man showed himself to be detached in a superlative degree not only from money and property and the glory that many play with and that plays with many, but also from his own affections, struggling through his love for Christ to

[55] *Life of Gregory Palamas* 6.1–9 (Tsames 432), Russell 56–57.

> overcome natural needs and the powerful bonds and relations that derive from them … he himself did not cling to his children with caresses and kisses even when they were still in the tender years of infancy, or laugh and play with them as is natural and usual with fathers.

Moreover, when one of his youngsters perishes prematurely, Constantine does not fall into the expected despair of a grieving parent. Instead, he thanks and praises God, offering emotional support to other grieving family members:[56]

> For one of his sons was afflicted by a serious illness and was approaching his end and appointed time … When he saw that the boy's life had come to an end and that he was departing for the true life, however, he immediately gave himself wholly to thanking God and singing hymns to him … As a result, when his friends came to console him, he consoled them instead and gave them appropriate instruction.

By lay standards, Constantine's reaction to the loss of his child appears puzzlingly detached and closer to one professed by monks, who were expected to withdraw from any emotional connection with their family. Indeed, this is the key to understanding Constantine's reaction. Thus, his emotional control is not an exercise of fatherly power and authority, but rather a profession of faith. As Kokkinos writes, Constantine feared that too great attachment to his children would make him question God in the event of their untimely death:[57]

> "So I avoid showing much intimacy and affection towards my children, on the grounds that if a separation should occur, that is to say, at God's behest, I should not appear to be a person totally unprepared and unready, a lover of children rather than of God."

Thus, Kokkinos constructs Constantine's attitude towards the death of his child in line with the Christian ideal delineated in

[56] *Life of Gregory Palamas* 6.24–26, 28–30, 33–34 (Tsames 433), Russell 57.

[57] *Life of Gregory Palamas* 6.14–18 (Tsames 433), Russell 57.

patristic literature, e.g. in St John Chrysostom's homilies, or the letters of consolation of St Basil of Caesarea and Theodore the Stoudite.[58]

Gregory Palamas' siblings remain close to him throughout his early monastic years. After five years on Athos, he moves together with his brothers to a newly founded *skete* on a mountain in the vicinity of Berrhoia, where he and other hesychast monks establish "a study-house (*phrontisterion*) of divine philosophy."[59] After their mother's demise, his two sisters also join him. Despite this proximity, Kokkinos conveys the fundamental change that occurs in the nature of their relationship. Palamas acts and is regarded by his siblings as their spiritual guide, instead of their blood relation.[60] Thus, before departing to God, Palamas' sister, Theodote, asks to receive the spiritual comfort offered by her "brother and father." By capturing these nuances in Palamas' relationship with his siblings, Kokkinos constructs for his hero the image of a hesychast spiritual leader, who promotes the hesychastic teaching and way of life.

Another of Kokkinos' hesychast heroes, Isidore Boucheir, also maintained close ties to his family. Unlike most holy men, who abandon the family home upon reaching adolescence, Isidore remained in his parents' house in Thessalonike until his mid-thirties, living an ascetic life, with vigilance of the mind (*nepsis*), simplicity, and moderation. During this time he worked as a *didaskalos* and served under Gerasimos, a disciple of Gregory of Sinai who lived in one of the monastic settlements of Thessalonike. Upon Gerasimos' demise Isidore finally leaves

[58] See for instance Basil of Caesarea, *Letters* 5, 206, 269, and 300; and Theodore the Stoudite's touching letter of condolence (no. 18) to the *spatharios* Staurakios on the death of his first-born infant son (G. Fatouros, *Theodori Studitae epistulae* [Berlin 1992] I 49–51).

[59] *Life of Gregory Palamas* 26.4–6 (Tsames 454).

[60] *Life of Gregory Palamas* 14, 26–29 (Tsames 441–442, 454–458), Russell 65, 79–81.

his parents' house and takes up residence with and leads the other monks of the settlement. After a while, the holy man also wishes to abandon his *patris* for Mount Athos. However, after a short while on the holy mountain, Gregory of Sinai urges him to live in the world, among monks and laymen, and be a model (*typos*) of moral conduct (*politeia*), thereby entrusting him with an urban hesychastic mandate:[61]

> O, my best friend, I wish that you stay neither in deserts nor in these mountains—for what reason?—but rather in the world and among those who live there, monks and those married, so that you would be for those and for all a model of the good way of life according to Christ and of every sort of virtue.

For the next ten years (ca. 1325–1335), Isidore carries out his urban hesychast apostolate in Thessalonike. Kokkinos portrays him as reviving the society of the city through his example of virtue and drawing many people towards the hesychastic lifestyle, enjoying particularly great influence among the upper classes. Moreover, Kokkinos depicts his hero as giving spiritual birth to his parents by convincing them to pursue the monastic way of life, and ultimately tonsuring them in their old age.[62] As in the case of Palamas, Kokkinos stresses Isidore's social outreach efforts, both during his years in Thessalonike and later as bishop-elect of Monemvasia and subsequently as patriarch of Constantinople, when he offered spiritual guidance, especially to members of the aristocracy, both men and women, as well as imperial figures, such as Helena Kantakouzene Palaiologina.[63]

However, a shared monastic status did not necessarily imply

[61] Kokkinos, *Life of Isidore Boucheir* 22.33–37 (Tsames 353): Οὐκ ἐν ἐρήμοις οὐδ' ἐν ὄρεσι τούτοις ἐβουλόμην ἔγωγε τέως, ὦ βέλτιστε, διατρίβειν σε—διατί γάρ;—ἀλλ' ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ μᾶλλον καὶ τοῖς ἐκεῖ ζῶσι, μονάζουσι καὶ κοινωνικοῖς, ἵν' ἐκείνοις ὁμοῦ πᾶσι τύπος εἴης τῆς κατὰ Χριστὸν ἀγαθῆς πολιτείας καὶ παντοδαπῆς ἀρετῆς.

[62] *Life of Isidore Boucheir* 2.35–48 (Tsames 332–333).

[63] E.g. *Life of Isidore Boucheir* 66 (Tsames 409–410).

a change in the nature of the affective relationship between family members. The much earlier (ninth-century) case of St Theodora of Thessalonike aptly illustrates this, as it took fifteen years of sharing the same cell under penance of silence for the holy woman to regard her daughter Theopiste as a sister rather than her offspring, in accordance with the monastic expectation.[64] For instance, the early-fifteenth-century testament and *typikon* of Neilos Damilas includes a provision that forbids any nun from offering her relatives or children money gained from her handiwork, out of a "passionate attachment" to them, thus reinforcing the monastic expectation of renunciation of emotional connection to family members.[65]

The *Life of Germanos Maroules* (*BHG* 2164) offers two other instances of family interaction that repay analysis. Germanos' family receives considerable attention in the holy man's *vita*, likely composed at the request of the aristocratic Maroules family of Thessalonike. Like Palamas, Germanos also witnesses from a young age his father's great zeal for prayers, vigils, and liturgical services, an urban hesychastic program in the world, as it were.[66] The first instance of family interaction exemplifies an ideal reversal of parent-child authority relations, after the child's adoption of the monastic life. Not long after becoming a monk on Athos, Germanos meets his family in his native city of Thessalonike, with the approval of his spiritual master and in a monastic setting (the monastery of St John the Baptist)[67] chosen

[64] *Life of Theodora of Thessalonike*, transl. A.-M. Talbot, *Holy Women of Byzantium: Ten Saints' Lives in English Translation* (Washington 1996) 159–237, at 187–190; see Talbot, *DOP* 44 (1990) 123; Garland, in *Questions of Gender* 32–33; Talbot, "Family Cults in Byzantium: The Case of St. Theodora of Thessalonike," in J. O. Rosenqvist (ed.), *Λειμών: Studies presented to Lennart Rydén* (Uppsala 1996) 49–69.

[65] *BMFD* IV 1461–1482, at 1471.

[66] Kokkinos, *Life of Germanos Maroules* 2.38–43, 6 (Tsames 99, 104–105).

[67] On this monastery see R. Janin, *Les églises et les monastères des grands centres*

by the master. Kokkinos reports the dialogue between Germanos and his biological father. The father asks his son for advice on matters related to material possessions, concerning two men who defrauded him of money and an inherited house. In an extensive reply (of ca. 470 words), which includes a high concentration of biblical quotations from St Paul's letters and the Gospels, Germanos advises and encourages his father not to set his heart on ephemeral material possessions.[68]

The second instance, found in a rather lengthy miracle account, illustrates the spiritual challenges raised by family contact. Germanos faces such a challenge when his nephew is gripped by a life-threatening fever while journeying to Athos with his father, Andronikos Maroules (Germanos' brother), to pay the holy man a visit. The child's severe condition causes Andronikos great psychological torment, masterfully conveyed by the hagiographer. The father suffers more than the suffering son, is overwhelmed by emotion and cries incessantly, especially as his child lacks the maternal arms and all the care, including the medical attention, he could be offered at home. As the condition of his son deteriorates rapidly, Andronikos desperately seeks recourse to Germanos, falling at his feet in supplication with strong emotion (*peripatheia*). However, despite the pleas of his brother and those of another monk (a relative of the family), Germanos does not swiftly deliver the child from the grip of a premature death. The sight of a suffering relative, especially a child, compounded by the emotional state of his brother, poses a difficult challenge to Germanos. Therefore, in order to convey a lack of emotional attachment towards his kin, the holy man argues that his nephew's death would in fact be worthier on the sacred soil of Athos. After this profession of emotional detachment in keeping with the monastic ideal,

byzantins (Paris 1975) 406.

[68] *Life of Germanos Maroules* 13–14 (Tsames 114–117).

Germanos does miraculously heal his nephew, in what is a rare hagiographical occurrence of a miracle performed for the benefit of family members.[69] Through the detailed and nuanced description of this episode, the hagiographer clearly fashions Germanos' attitude and behavior towards his family members as an example for the monastic audience the *vita* most likely targeted.[70]

Conclusions

Entering the monastic life entailed the obligation of renouncing blood ties to one's family for spiritual kinship to a monastic community and heavenly citizenship. Consequently, Byzantine hesychastic hagiography underscores the fundamental change that this decision brings to its heroes' relationship to their family. The hagiographical accounts discussed in this study portray different strategies for managing the relationship with family members by a monastic and holy man pursuing *hesychia*. These range from occasional contact in a monastic setting, according to general monastic rules or specific rules mandated by spiritual masters, as in Germanos Maroules' case, to a complete lack of family contact, as in that of Sabas the Younger. Gregory Palamas' *vita* illustrates the special case when family members remained in close proximity after their tonsure, capturing the qualitative change in the nature of their relationship, from kinship to a spiritual bond.

As argued in this article, these strategies vary with holy men's different ways of pursuing a hesychastic way of life. Family ties are a liability and challenge in Sabas' monastic career, as he pursues the harshest ascetic path to the contemplative life and Kokkinos presents him as the ultimate champion of the hesychastic way of life. Unlike Sabas, Germanos does not curtail family ties entirely while pursuing *hesychia* on Mount Athos.

[69] *Life of Germanos Maroules* 31–32 (Tsames 135–138).

[70] Cf. Mitrea, *A Late-Byzantine Hagiographer* 305.

However, his hagiographer illustrates how these ties may become problematic and challenging for his spiritual development. On the other hand, Isidore and Gregory Palamas maintain close relations with their families, the former while residing in Thessalonike and undertaking an urban hesychastic mandate and the latter after his siblings assume the monastic garment and gather under his spiritual guidance. Unlike Sabas and Germanos, who focus on their individual path towards *hesychia*, Isidore and Gregory Palamas engage with the social aspects of hesychasm. They serve as promoters of the hesychastic way of life within their communities, including their families, and enter the fray of the hesychast debates after rising to official positions in the Church hierarchy as patriarch of Constantinople and metropolitan of Thessalonike respectively. As the late Byzantine hesychastic Lives of saints analyzed here show, though difficult to achieve entirely, relinquishing bonds of kinship was an essential stepping-stone on the path towards *hesychia* and ultimately heavenly citizenship.[71]

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