

ERYTHEIA

REVISTA DE ESTUDIOS BIZANTINOS Y NEOGRIEGOS

39 - 2018



SEPARATA

ÍNDICE

A. CALAHORRA BARTOLOMÉ, El marfil de Tréveris: una iconografía clave en el contexto de la propaganda político-religiosa del Triunfo de la Ortodoxia .	9
D. KRAUSMÜLLER, Affirming and Undermining Saintly Status: On the Different Uses of the Parable of the Sowing Man in Theosterictus' <i>Life of Nicetas of Medikion</i> and Methodius' <i>Life of Theophanes of Agros</i>	55
D. KRAUSMÜLLER, A Patchwork Rule: The Machairas <i>Typikon</i> and Its Sources .	67
A. R. ÁVILA, La sátira de Teodoro Pródromo <i>Contra un viejo de barba larga</i> : una polémica sobre la sabiduría en la Bizancio del siglo XII	85
J. M. FLORISTÁN, El crisóbulo de Andrónico II Paleólogo en favor de Gregorio Meliseno (1296) [Dölger, <i>Reg.</i> 2189]	113
J. M. FLORISTÁN, El estamento nobiliario bizantino y su incorporación a la sociedad del Antiguo Régimen: los casos de las familias Sebasto y Meliseno-Comneno	143
S. CARBONELL MARTÍNEZ, Pronunciación hispano-erasmiana vs. pronunciación griega: razones didácticas y emocionales	181
D. M. MORFAKIDIS MOTOS, El diplomático Eduardo Badía y Ortiz de Zúñiga y su análisis sobre la construcción de la identidad nacional neohelénica (1869-1870)	195
M. Γ. ΣΕΡΓΗΣ, Καλινίτσα: ένα πανάρχαιο θρακικό δρώμενο. Η ερμηνεία των ασμάτων της και η κοινωνική τους λειτουργία	239
M. Γ. ΒΑΡΒΟΥΝΗΣ, Ελληνική λαϊκή λειτουργική ζωή και νεωτερικές αναπροσαρμογές	265
P. YANNOPOULOS, La présence étymologique et sémantique du grec classique et du grec byzantin dans le néogrec: Les cas des βάνουσος, λαίμαργος, σαρίκι	281
I. GÓMEZ LAGUNA-E. LEONTARIDI, Clasificación semántico-estructural de las preposiciones del griego moderno desde la perspectiva del análisis componencial	293

Affirming and Undermining Sainthood Status: On the Different Uses of the Parable of the Sowing Man in Theosterictus' *Life of Nicetas of Medikion* and Methodius' *Life of Theophanes of Agros**

Dirk KRAUSMÜLLER
Universität Wien
dirk.krausmueller@univie.ac.at

ABSTRACT: This article focuses on two biographies of abbots and confessors from the period of the Second Iconoclasm, the *Life of Nicetas of Medikion* by the monk Theosterictus and the *Life of Theophanes of Agros* by Methodius, the future patriarch of Constantinople. It argues that in these texts the parable of the sowing man is adapted in radically different ways. Theosterictus conveys a straightforward message that is even easier to understand than the Biblical original. Moreover, this message is unambiguously positive. By contrast, Methodius construes a text that is full of hidden clues, which reveal themselves only to the attentive reader. These clues suggest that the saintly credentials of the young Theophanes are not beyond doubt.

KEYWORDS: Parable of the Sower, Byzantine Hagiography, Patriarch Methodius, Theosterictus, *Life of Theophanes*, *Life of Nicetas of Medikion*.

RESUMEN: Este artículo analiza dos biografías de abades y confesores del periodo del Segundo Iconoclasmo, *La vida de Nicetas de Medicio* del monje Teostericto y *La vida de Teófanos de Agro* de Metodio, futuro patriarca de Constantinopla. Defiende que en estos textos la parábola del sembrador ha sido adaptada de formas muy diferentes. Teostericto transmite un mensaje directo que es más fácil de entender incluso que el original bíblico. Además, el mensaje es sin duda positivo. Por el contrario, Metodio construye un texto que está plagado de indicios ocultos que se hacen evidentes tan sólo a un

* This article is part of the project "Reassessing Ninth Century Philosophy. A Synchronic Approach to the Logical Traditions" (9 SALT) that has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No. 648298).

lector atento. Estos indicios nos inducen a pensar que las credenciales angelicales de Teófanos no quedan fuera de toda duda.

PALABRAS CLAVE: parábola del sembrador, hagiografía bizantina, patriarca Metodio, Teostericto, *Vida de Teófanos*, *Vida de Nicetas de Medicio*.

One of the most popular stories of the New Testament is the parable of the sowing man, which appears with slight variations in the three synoptic Gospels¹. There Christ distinguishes between four different scenarios: when the seed falls on the road, it is eaten by birds, when it falls on rocky ground or among weeds, it sprouts but immediately withers or gets smothered, and when it falls on the good earth, it matures and brings manifold fruit. In a second step Christ then explains that the seed is the word of God and that the different scenarios refer to four different groups of listeners: those who do not understand and are ensnared by the devil, those who understand but are not steadfast in times of oppression or are distracted by worldly cares, and those who stay the course and become perfect believers. In Byzantium this parable makes its appearance not only in sermons but also in hagiographical literature where it is used to characterise the behaviour of individuals. Authors of saints' lives claim that the three negative scenarios do not apply to their heroes, who were therefore able to attain spiritual perfection. Modern readers tend to skip such passages because they provide no historical information. However, it would be wrong to dismiss them as mere rhetorical set pieces because they afford us an insight into the intended functions of the texts and into the authors' attitudes towards their saints. This article focuses on two biographies of abbots and confessors from the period of the Second Iconoclasm, the *Life of Nicetas of Medikion* by the monk Theosterictus and the *Life of Theophanes of Agros* by Methodius, the future patriarch of Constantinople. It argues that in these texts the parable is adapted in radically different ways. Theosterictus conveys a straightforward message that is even easier to understand than the Biblical original. Moreover, this message is unambiguously positive. By contrast, Methodius construes a text that is full of hidden clues, which reveal themselves only to the attentive reader. These clues suggest that the saintly credentials of the young Theophanes are not beyond doubt.

¹ Mt 13, Mc 4, Lc 8.

I. THEOSTERICUS' *LIFE OF NICETAS OF MEDIKION*

After his death in 824 Nicetas, former abbot of the Bithynian monastery of Medikion and somewhat reluctant confessor of icon worship, found a hagiographer in the monk Theosterictus, a member of his old community². This text is very popular among modern historians because it provides a great deal of historical information about the period of Iconoclasm³. However, this does not mean that it only contains narratives. At times Theosterictus prefers to make his point through use of metaphors. The most elaborate of these passages describes the effects on the young Nicetas of the teachings of his spiritual father:

Ταῦτ' οὖν ἀκούων καὶ τούτοις ὅμοια οὐκ ἔσπειρεν αὐτὰ ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ ἧτοι ἐξ ἐπιπόλεως τῆς διανοίας καταπατεῖσθαι, καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἀερίων πετεινῶν τῆς πονηρίας αἴρεσθαι καὶ κατεσθίεσθαι· οὐδ' ἐπὶ τὰ πετρώδη τῆς λιθώδους, τουτέστιν ἀναισθήτου καὶ αὐχμηρᾶς, καρδίας ἵνα ἐν καιρῷ καύσωνος, ἧτοι πειρασμοῦ, ὡς οὐκ ἔχοντα ρίζαν ἀποξηραίνεται· οὐδ' ἐν μέσῳ τῶν ἀκανθῶν τῆς βιωτικῆς μερίμνης συμπνίγεσθαι ταύτας καὶ μὴ τελεσφορεῖν· ἀλλ' ἐν τῇ γῆ τῆς καρδίας αὐτοῦ τῇ ἀγαθῇ καὶ πύονι, ὅθεν καὶ ἐτελεσφόρησεν τῷ θεῷ ἐν τριάκοντα καὶ ἐν ἐξήκοντα καὶ ἐν ἑκατόν⁴.

«When he heard such things and similar things he did not sow them on the road, that is, on the surface of the mind, lest they be trampled on and picked up and devoured by the airborne birds of evil, nor on the rocky parts of the stony, that is, the unfeeling and parched, heart lest they be dried out in the season of the burning wind, that is, of temptation, because they have no root, nor in the midst of the thorns of the worries about this life, but on the good and fat earth of his heart, wherefore he also gave fruit to God thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold».

It is immediately evident that this passage is inspired by the parable of the sowing man. Theosterictus claims that the saint avoided the three negative scenarios described by Christ and that he thus acquired the desired saintly status. Comparison reveals that the text contains many direct borrowings from all three synoptic Gospels, which are conflated with each other. For example, the element ἐπὶ τὰ πετρώδη has a counterpart in Mc 5: 4, whereas the following ὡς οὐκ ἔχοντα ρίζαν is adapted from Mt 13: 6. Significantly, Theosterictus has not limited himself to reproducing the parable but has taken care to spell out the

² On author and text cf. Rosenqvist 2002.

³ Cf. Brubaker-Haldon 2001: 222.

⁴ Theosterictus, *Life of Nicetas of Medikion* (BHG 1342), 6, in: *AASS*, Aprilis I: Dies 1-10, Paris 1866: xix.

significance of each element through explanatory phrases that are either introduced by ἦτοι and τουτέστιν or added as genitive attributes. Some of these phrases are taken from Christ's subsequent interpretation –for example, τῆς βιωτικῆς μερίμνης is inspired by Lc 8:14– whereas others are new creations. This shows clearly that Theosterictus strove to create a text that was easy to understand and that left no room for ambiguity. Without doubt he was taking into account the needs of his primary audience, the community of Medikion. Later monastic rules suggest that the *Life of Nicetas* was read out during church services either in its entirety or in several instalments⁵. This form of delivery made it imperative that each passage could be taken in without too much thought because otherwise listeners would have lost track of the narrative thread, in particular if they had received only a rudimentary education⁶.

2. METHODIDIUS' *LIFE OF THEOPHANES OF AGROS*

In the same years that Theosterictus wrote his *Life of Nicetas*, another abbot and confessor, Theophanes of Agros, also found a hagiographer of note, Methodius, the leader of the Iconophile resistance and future patriarch of Constantinople⁷. Methodius tells his audience that in his youth Theophanes came under the influence of one of his servants, the goldsmith Prandius, who warned him against acquiring wealth and getting married and who advised him to become a monk and dedicate his life to God alone. The following passage spells out what effect Prandius' words had on the young aristocrat:

Ἐν τούτῳ τῆς συμβουλῆς καταληξάσης καὶ τὸ τοῦ λόγου σπέρμα τοῖς τῆς διανοίας τοῦ εὐλογίστου Θεοφάνους λαγόσιν ἐναποτιθεμένου τοῦ χριστοποθήτου Πρανδίου λόγου μὲν οὐκ ἐδεήθη τοῦ τὴν ἀπόκρισιν ἐξαπαιτοῦντος καὶ τὸν συνομιλοῦντα προσβεβαιοῦντος ὡς ἐν πολλοῖς πέφυκεν, ἔργου δὲ καὶ πράξεως τῶν ὀφειλομένων εἰς τοσοῦτον ἐφρόντισεν αὐτῆμερον ὁ νεώτερος ὡς ἐν αὐτῇ μὲν καὶ κατ' αὐτὴν τὴν ὥραν ἐκφῦναι τὴν βλάστην τοῦ καλοῦ σπέρματος, μηδένα δὲ καιρὸν μήτε μίαν ἡμέραν τῆς ἐπαυξήσεως παῦλαν εἰδέναι ἐαρίζοντι τάχα αὐτῷ πάντοτε πρὸς τὴν ἐφ' ὕψους ἀνάβασιν καὶ μήτε καύσωνί τινι ὀλιγωρίας μαραινέσθαι τοὺς τῆς προθυμίας ἀνθέρικας μήτε χειμῶνί ποτε συστολῆς καὶ ἐνδόσεως τὴν τῶν ριζῶν πλατύτητα ὑποκαίεσθαι, ἀλλ' ἐφ' ἐκάστης ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς

⁵ Cf. Krausmüller 2013: 290.

⁶ On orality and hagiography cf. Auzéry 1999: 5-6.

⁷ Cf. Efthymiadis 2011: 103-104. Cf. also Gouillard 1960: 36-38.

ὠρονομίας προφανῶς αὐξῆιν καὶ ἑαυτοῦ μείζονα γίνεσθαι· καὶ δείξει τὸ πέρασ τοῦ λόγου ὅπως οὐκ ἔστι μέχρι μέγας ἐγένετο καθὼ γέγραπται προβαίνων ὁ ὄσιος⁸.

«When thus the advice had ended and the beloved of Christ, Prandius, had put the seed of the word into the hollows of the mind of the prudent Theophanes, he did not stand in need of a word that demands a reply and gives further assurance to the person with whom one converses as it happens in most cases, but on that very day the youngster showed such great care for the required work and deed that at that and during that very hour the shoot of the good seed sprouted forth and never knew a time or day when it interrupted its growth – most likely because he was always in a spring-like state as regards the ascent towards the height – and [that] neither the spikes of his eagerness were withered through some burning wind of negligence nor the breadth of his roots was ever burned from below through a winter storm of contraction and subsidence, but he grew manifestly at every hour of day and night and became greater than himself; and the end of the speech (word) will show that the saint did not stand still until he had become great by going forward, as it is written».

This passage bears a marked resemblance to the section in the *Life of Nicetas of Medikion* that we have discussed so far. Here, too, Christian teachings that are listened to and then bring about changes in the listener are likened to a seed that is sown into the ground and then grows into a plant. Moreover, there is a clear reference to the text of the parable of the sowing man. The phrase καύσωνί τινι ὀλιγωρίας μαραίνεσθαι is inspired by ἐκαυματίσθη καὶ [...] ἐξηράνθη in Mt 13: 6, which describes the fate of the seed that falls on rocky ground, and thus constitutes a parallel for the sentence ἐν καιρῷ καύσωνος ἦτοι πειρασμοῦ [...] ἀποξηραίνεται in the *Life of Nicetas of Medikion*.

Yet this does not mean that the two texts are in all respects alike. Unlike his colleague Theosterictus, Methodius does not paraphrase the other scenarios mentioned in the Gospels. This gives the impression that he contented himself with adapting one detail and was not interested in reproducing the overall framework of the parable. This impression is, however, deceptive as becomes obvious when we focus on the last part of the passage.

There Methodius indicates that he is quoting from the Bible, and the elements ἑαυτοῦ μείζονα γίνεσθαι and μέχρι μέγας ἐγένετο can indeed be found in Gn 26: 13: «and the man was elevated and proceeding he became greater until he was very great» (καὶ ὑψώθη ὁ ἄνθρωπος καὶ προβαίνων μείζων ἐγένετο, ἕως οὗ μέγας ἐγένετο

⁸ Methodius, *Life of Theophanes* (BHG 1787z), 7, ed. Latyšev 1918: 5.22-6.2.

σφόδρα). In the text of Genesis this verse is preceded by the statement: «and Isaac sowed in that earth and found in that year hundredfold barley, and the Lord blessed him» (ἔσπειρεν δὲ Ἰσαὰκ ἐν τῇ γῆ ἐκείνῃ καὶ εὗρεν ἐν τῷ ἐνιαυτῷ ἐκείνῳ ἑκατοστεύουσαν κριθήν· εὐλόγησεν δὲ αὐτὸν κύριος). It is immediately evident that this statement closely resembles the words of the parable in Mt 13: 8: «others fell on the good earth and gave fruit, one a hundredfold, one sixtyfold and another thirtyfold» (ἄλλα δὲ ἔπεσεν ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν τὴν καλὴν καὶ ἔδίδου καρπὸν ἀναβαίνοντα καὶ αὐξάνοντα ὃ μὲν ἑκατὸν ὃ δὲ ἑξήκοντα ὃ δὲ τριάκοντα).

Thus we can conclude that Methodius' decision to make only one overt reference to the parable of the sowing man is part of a deliberate authorial strategy. Methodius anticipates that his audience will expect a full treatment of the parable and that they will be particularly baffled by the absence of the positive counterpart. By giving them roundabout clues he helps them to identify the missing element and thus to complete the picture.

There can be no doubt that Methodius is a very demanding author. He expects his audience not only to identify the reference to Gn 26: 13, but also to realise that Gn 26: 12 can serve as a substitute for Mt 13: 8. This raises questions about the function of the text. It seems impossible that even people with a good knowledge of the Bible would have been able to take these steps while listening to a continuous delivery in church or refectory. This suggests that unlike the *Life of Nicetas of Medikion*, the *Life of Theophanes of Agros* was meant to be read and discussed in small study groups.

Yet one must also ask what considerations prompted Methodius to replace the New Testament verse with a verse from Genesis. One reason was undoubtedly that before his entrance into a monastery Theophanes was known by the name of Isaac. Indeed, Methodius emphasises this fact in the preceding passage when he states that Prandius addressed his master not with his baptismal name Theophanes but as “Lord Isaac” (κύρι' Ἰσαάκιε)⁹. Thus one can argue that Methodius wished to establish a typological relationship between the two figures. This leads us to the next question: how did he conceive of this relationship?

The obvious starting point for further exploration is the book of Genesis. With his decision to quote Gn 26: 13 rather than the relevant verse Gn 26: 12 Methodius has already signalled to his readers that he wishes them to consider the whole passage. This passage, however, is quite different from its counterpart

⁹ Methodius, *Life of Theophanes*, 7, ed. Lатышев 1918: 5.6-8.

in the Gospels. It is not a parable but a historical account that describes Isaac's sojourn in the land of the Canaanite king Abimelech. Isaac's lifestyle is characterised in some detail. In Gn 26: 14 we read: «and he acquired sheep and cattle and many fields» (ἐγένετο δὲ αὐτῷ κτήνη προβάτων καὶ κτήνη βοῶν καὶ γεώργια πολλά), and in Gn 26: 8 we are told: «Abimelech [...] saw Isaac having sex with Rebecca his wife» (Ἀβιμελέχ [...] εἶδεν τὸν Ἰσαὰκ παίζοντα μετὰ Ῥεβέκκας τῆς γυναικὸς αὐτοῦ). These are two themes with which the audience is already familiar because Methodius has earlier identified the seed that sprouts in Theophanes with the advice that the slave Prandius gives him, namely not to care for «money and your many possessions» (τὰ χρήματα καὶ αἱ πολλάί σου κτήσεις) and not to marry and «be yoked to a woman» (γυναικὶ ζυγῆναι) because both detract from the worship of God. Thus the reader is confronted with a curious incongruence. If Theophanes becomes a second Isaac the process set in train by Prandius seems to result in the exact opposite of what had been intended.

In order to understand the significance of this incongruence we need to turn to an earlier passage in the text. There Methodius states his belief that the name, which one receives from one's parents, determines one's future behaviour and then points out that the saint's parents made a mistake. In order to make sure that their son became an aristocrat with a big family they should have called him Jacob, because the Biblical Jacob was a patriarch «through the multitude of his children and wives» (πολυπληθία παίδων καὶ γυναικῶν) and thus fulfilled God's promise to Abraham «in earthly seed» (ἐν σπέρματι γηγίνω)¹⁰. Since Methodius puts so much emphasis on the power of typological relations, one cannot but conclude that Theophanes' spiritual journey is a round trip that takes him back to his starting point: his attempt to dissociate himself from marriage and wealth results in his becoming married and a wealthy man.

To support such an interpretation one can point to the immediately following episodes. There we are told that despite his good intentions Theophanes yielded to the pressure of his mother and that in due course he inherited the wealth of his family and got married to an aristocratic girl¹¹. Thus one can argue that the reference to Gn 26: 8-14 is a veiled criticism of Theophanes' spinelessness.

* *
*

¹⁰ Methodius, *Life of Theophanes*, 4, ed. Latyšev 1918: 3.6-16.

¹¹ Methodius, *Life of Theophanes*, 9-11, ed. Latyšev 1918: 6.19-8.1.

The discussion so far raises the question: do other “missing” elements of the parable of the sowing man also play a role in the passage? The Biblical text juxtaposes the positive scenario with three negative alternatives, the seed that falls on the road, the seed that falls on the rock, and the seed that falls among thorns. As we have seen before Methodius adapts only the second option, insisting that the plant growing in Theophanes did not dry out in the summer heat. In Mt 13: 21 this option stands for the person who accepts the word «but when oppression or persecution arises because of the word immediately becomes scandalised» (γενομένης δὲ θλίψεως ἢ διωγμοῦ διὰ τὸν λόγον εὐθὺς σκανδαλίζεται).

When we look at the *Life of Theophanes* as a whole, Methodius’ choice may be considered fitting because in old age the saint remained steadfast during the Iconoclast persecution¹². However, there can be no doubt that in the immediate context the third option would have been more appropriate. In the Bible the thorns are interpreted as «the worry of this world and the deception of riches» (ἡ μέριμνα τοῦ αἰῶνος καὶ ἡ ἀπάτη τοῦ πλοῦτου), which suffocate the word. This interpretation has a close parallel in Prandius’ advice that Theophanes dissociate himself both from material possessions and from women. Indeed, one can argue that Methodius has deliberately emphasised this parallel by putting into Prandius’ mouth the question: «What is to you the distraction of possessions and the great riches» (εἰς τί δέ σοι ὁ περισπασμὸς τοῦ βίου καὶ ὁ πολὺς πλοῦτος) and a reference to 1 Ep. Cor. 7: 32-34 where Paul states that «he who has married worries about the things of the world» (ὁ δὲ γαμήσας μεριμνᾷ τὰ τοῦ κόσμου)¹³. A reader who has just learnt that Theophanes took Prandius’ advice will therefore expect Methodius to affirm that the seed did not fall among the thorns and was smothered¹⁴. This suggests strongly that the absence of a reference to thorns is significant. It leaves open the possibility that Theophanes’ seed was indeed surrounded by weeds and thus strengthens the impression that despite his good intentions the saint could not extricate himself from his social roles.

* *

*

¹² Methodius, *Life of Theophanes*, 46, ed. Latyšev 1918: 30.15-29.

¹³ Methodius, *Life of Theophanes*, 7, ed. Latyšev 1918: 5.9-10, 20-22.

¹⁴ For an analogous incongruence cf. Krausmüller 2009: 180-182.

So far we have focused on what Methodius does not say. However, we also need to have a closer look at the one statement that he does adapt from the parable: «so that neither the spikes of eagerness were withered through some hot wind of negligence nor the breadth of the roots were ever burned through winter of contraction and subsidence» (μήτε καύσωνί τινι ὀλιγωρίας μαραίνεσθαι τοὺς τῆς προθυμίας ἀνθήρικας μήτε χειμῶνί ποτε συστολῆς καὶ ἐνδόσεως τὴν τῶν ῥιζῶν πλατύτητα ὑποκαίεσθαι). As we have already seen this statement is inspired by Mt 13: 5-6. There we are told that the seed that fell on stony ground «immediately sprouted because it had not depth of earth but when the sun came up was burned and dried out because it had no root» (εὐθὺς ἐξανέτειλεν διὰ τὸ μὴ ἔχειν βάθος γῆς· ἡλίου δὲ ἀνατείλαντος ἐκαυματίσθη, καὶ διὰ τὸ μὴ ἔχειν ῥίζαν ἐξηράνθη).

Since this scenario characterises the person who cannot withstand persecution, one might conclude that by denying its applicability to Theophanes, Methodius for once makes a positive statement about the saint. However, a closer look reveals startling inconsistencies. Methodius's claim that no winter wind harmed «the breadth of the roots» (τὴν τῶν ῥιζῶν πλατύτητα) confounds the reader who expects instead a reference to “depth” (βάθος), because in the parable the parallel elements «because it had no depth of earth» (διὰ τὸ μὴ ἔχειν βάθος γῆς) and «because it had no root» (διὰ τὸ μὴ ἔχειν ῥίζαν) conjure up the positive image of a thick layer of soil into which plants can sink deep roots.

Since barley and the other types of grain all have long roots which can reach a depth of five metres, the reader will come to the conclusion that the plants could not develop as they should¹⁵. The most natural explanation for this deficiency is the shallowness of the layer of earth into which they are sown. Accordingly the reader will come to the conclusion that the ground in which Theophanes' plant is rooted is not the good earth but rather “the stony ground” (τὸ πετρῶδες). This is a startling discovery because the image employed by Methodius has negative connotations not just in the parable of the sowing man, but also elsewhere in the Bible. For example, in Sap. 4: 5 an evil man with many children is compared with a plant that grows leaves for a time but that will be uprooted before it bears fruit because «it will not give its roots into the depth» (οὐ δώσει ῥίζαν εἰς βάθος).

Further exploration of the passage reveals other incongruous features. As we have seen Methodius emphasises that Theophanes started his new life «on

¹⁵ Cf. Decker 2009: 97-107.

the same day» (αὐθήμερον) and that «the sprout of good seed germinated in the same [...] and at the same hour» (ἐν αὐτῇ [...] καὶ κατ' αὐτὴν τὴν ὥραν ἐκφῶναι τὴν βλάστην τοῦ καλοῦ σπέρματος). At first sight this looks like unqualified praise, meant to convey to the reader the extraordinary eagerness shown by the saint. However, comparison with the parable reveals that the statement is ambiguous. There it is the seed sown on stony ground that «sprouted immediately because it had no depth of earth» (εὐθέως ἐξανέτειλεν διὰ τὸ μὴ ἔχειν βάθος γῆς) and it is implied that the seed sown into the good earth takes much longer to germinate but develops sturdy plants.

References to other Biblical texts strengthen this negative connotation. A period of latency is also mentioned in Mc 4: 26-27 where the Kingdom of Heaven is compared with a sown seed that «sleeps and wakes up day and night and the seed sprouts» (καθεύδῃ καὶ ἐγείρηται νύκτα καὶ ἡμέραν καὶ ὁ σπόρος βλαστᾷ), a verse that provided the Biblical model for the elements τὴν βλάστην τοῦ καλοῦ σπέρματος and ἐφ' ἑκάστης ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς ὠρονομίας in Methodius' text.

Moreover, the juxtaposition implied in the parable of the sowing man has parallels in ancient texts where the short-lived Adonis gardens, seeds sown into shallow dishes that rise within days but wither immediately, are contrasted unfavourably with proper fields where the same process takes several months but results in a good harvest¹⁶. Epictetus, for example, addressed those who from one day to the next presented themselves as perfect cynics with the words: «man, first take exercise in the winter [...] thus is fruit brought about: the seed must be buried for some time and hidden for a while and grow so that it may bear fruit» (ἄνθρωπε χειμάσκησον πρῶτον ... οὕτως καρπὸς γίνεται· κατορυγῆναι δεῖ εἰς χρόνον τὸ σπέρμα κρυφῆναι κατὰ μικρὸν αὐξηθῆναι ἵνα τελεσφορήσῃ)¹⁷.

At this point one must ask: how can Methodius nevertheless claim that Theophane was affected neither by “summer wind” (καύσων) nor by “winter wind” (χειμών)? The answer is given in the immediately preceding sentence where we are told that saint «was always [...] in a spring-like state» (ἐαρίζοντι [...] πάντοτε). This is a clear departure from the scenario depicted in the parable of the sowing man where not only the plants that have grown on stony ground but also the plants that have grown on the good earth are exposed to the summer

¹⁶ Cf. Pl. *Phdr.* 276b.

¹⁷ Cf. Epict. IV 8, 34-36.

heat. The only difference is that the latter can withstand the heat because their roots can access the moisture in the deeper layers of soil. Thus the reader is forced to conclude that the unhampered growth of the seed within Theophanes is solely due to the fact that it is never exposed to adverse conditions. In fact, one may even consider the possibility that Methodius wished to conjure up the image of a hothouse plant.

The analysis of the *Life of Theophanes* has focused on three elements of the parable: the fruit-bearing seed, the seed that falls among thorns, and the seed that falls on rocky ground. The first scenario is not explicitly mentioned in the text but is nevertheless present through the roundabout reference to Genesis, the second scenario is completely absent but is required by the context, and the third scenario is spelt out but differs significantly from its Biblical model. It is very likely that the text contains further incongruent features. For example, Methodius' claim that «the spikes of eagerness» (τοὺς τῆς προθυμίας ἀνθέρικας) were not withered strikes one as odd, not only because the beard of the ear is chaff but also because it is a part of the plant that must dry out when the plant is to bear fruit. Here one would have expected a reference to the ear itself instead. Nevertheless, the elements discussed should be sufficient to show that Methodius employed a range of complex strategies in order to cast doubt on Theophanes' saintly credentials during the early part of his life.

3. CONCLUSION

This article has offered an interpretation of two passages in two Byzantine hagiographical texts, the *Life of Nicetas of Medikion* and the *Life of Theophanes of Agros*, which were written during the same years by men who may well have known each other. Both passages are superficially similar because they contain adaptations of the parable of the sowing man. However, a closer look reveals radical differences. Whereas Nicetas' hagiographer Theosterictus wrote a text that is straightforward and easy to grasp, Methodius, the author of the second text, created a complex web of clues and deliberate inconsistencies, which result in ambiguity. Analysis of these differences helps us better to understand the intended functions of the texts. Theosterictus clearly envisaged only one setting, oral delivery during church services, and thus took care that his message was conveyed in the simplest manner possible. By contrast, Methodius seems to have written for two different audiences. Those who listened to it during public

recitals would come away with a vague impression that the saint had been praised whereas those who studied it more carefully in private settings would realise that seemingly positive statements cast doubt on Theophanes' credentials as a saint. Only through further study will it become possible to establish how widespread these two approaches were in Byzantine hagiographical literature.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- AUZÉPY, M.-F. (1999), *L'Hagiographie et l'Iconoclisme Byzantin*, London-N. York: Routledge [Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs, 5].
- BRUBAKER, L.-HALDON, J. (2001), *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era (ca. 680-850). The Sources. An Annotated Survey*, London-N. York: Routledge [Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs, 7].
- DECKER, M. (2009), *Tilling the Hateful Earth. Agricultural Production and Trade in the Late Antique East*, Oxford: UP.
- EFTHYMIADIS, S. (2011), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography, I: Periods and Places*, Farnham-Burlington: Ashgate.
- GOUILLARD, J. (1960), «Une œuvre inédite du patriarche Méthode: la *Vie d'Euthyme de Sardes*», *BZ* 53, 36-46.
- KRAUSMÜLLER, D. (2009), «Being, Seeming and Becoming: Patriarch Methodius on Divine Impersonation of Angels and Souls and the Origenist Alternative», *Byzantion* 79, 168-207.
- (2013), «*Vitae B, C and A of Theodore the Stoudite: their Interrelation, Dates, Authors and Significance for the History of the Stoudios Monastery in the Tenth Century*», *An. Boll.* 131, 280-298.
- LATYŠEV, V. V. (ed.) (1918), *Methodii Patriarchae Constantinopolitani Vita S. Theophanis Confessoris* (Zapiski rossijskoj akademii nauk, viii. ser. po istorikofilologi eskomu otdeleniju, 13.4), Petrograd.
- ROSENQVIST, J. O. (2002), «A Philological Adventure. Editing the *Life of St. Niketas of Medikion*», *Acta Byzantina Fennica*, n.s., 1, 59-72.

Discusiones y reseñas

- C. G. CONTICELLO, *La Théologie byzantine et sa tradition I/1 (VIe-VIIe s.)* (por M. LÓPEZ SALVÁ), 325.— Maria Rosaria ACQUAFREDDA, *Un documento inesplorato: il pinax della Biblioteca di Fozio* (por Á. IBÁÑEZ CHACÓN), 329.— *Theodori Metochitae Carmina*, ed. Ioannis D. POLEMIS; *Theodore Metochites. Poems*, introduction, translation and notes by Ioannis D. POLEMIS (por P. BÁDENAS DE LA PEÑA), 331.— *Itineraria Orientis: Miguel CORTÉS ARRESE, Constantinopla. Viajes fantásticos a la capital del mundo; Voces de El Cairo* (por P. BÁDENAS DE LA PEÑA), 337.— B. HUGHES, *Estambul. La ciudad de los tres nombres* (por M. CORTÉS ARRESE), 345.— *Urbs Beata Ierusalem. Los viajes a Tierra Santa en los siglos XVI y XVII* (por M. CORTÉS ARRESE), 348.— *Gelasius of Caesarea. Ecclesiastical History. The Extant Fragments*, with an Appendix containing the Fragments from Dogmatic Writings (por José M. FLORISTÁN), 351.— *The letters of Theodoros Hyrtakenos*. Greek text, translation and commentary by A. KARPOZILOS and G. FATOUROS (por José M. FLORISTÁN), 355.— G. VESPIGNANI, *La memoria negata. L'Europa e Bisanzio* (por José M. FLORISTÁN), 357.— Álvaro GARCÍA MARÍN, *Historias del vampiro griego* (por J. ÁNGEL Y ESPINÓS), 360.— Eusebi AYENSA PRAT, *Στις εσχατιές της θάλασσας: Ισπανοελληνικές λαογραφικές συγκριτικές μελέτες* (por M. G. VARVUNIS), 368.— F. J. ORTOLÁ SALAS-E. AYENSA PRAT-E. LATORRE BROTO-A. GARCÍA MARÍN-A. DEL CAMPO ECHEVARRÍA (eds.), *Pedro Bádenas de la Peña. Έτσι σοφός πού έγινες (Sabio como te has vuelto). Selección de artículos* (por José SIMÓN PALMER), 372.— Κωνσταντίνος ΚΥΡΙΑΚΟΣ, *Επιθυμίες και Πολιτική. Η Queen Ιστορία του Ελληνικού Κινηματογράφου (1924-2016)* (por A. VALVERDE GARCÍA), 374.— Costas MAVRUDÍS, *La inmortalidad de los perros*, pról. de V. Fernández González, trad. de Á. Pérez González (por J. R. DEL CANTO NIETO), 376.— Ana CAPSIR, *Mil viajes a Ítaca. Una visión personal sobre Grecia* (por J. R. DEL CANTO NIETO), 379.— Pedro BÁDENAS DE LA PEÑA, *Cavafis. Selección de prosas* (por Fco. Javier ORTOLÁ SALAS), 382.— Dimitris TZIOVAS (ed.), *Greece in Crisis. The Cultural Politics of Austerity* (por H. GONZÁLEZ-VAQUERIZO), 385.—